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UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, SAN DIEGO
CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, SAN MARCOS

Pursuing the Doctoral Degree:
A Symbolic Interpretation of First-Generation
African American/Black and Hispanic Doctoral Students

A dissertation proposal submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements
for the degree Doctor of Education

in

Educational Leadership

by

Karina M. Viaud

Committee in Charge:

California State University, San Marcos

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University of California, San Diego

Professor Frances Contreras
Professor Mica Pollock

2014

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Chair

University of California, San Diego
California State University, San Marcos

2014

DEDICATION

At times, writing the dissertation felt lonely. I am thankful for my faith in and relationship with God. When I thought I could not do it any longer, I turned to Him. I dedicate this endeavor to many people. First, I dedicate my dissertation to my family whom always asked “How is school? Tell me where you are with your book. You have done well for yourself.” My parents, Arnold F. Viaud and Gislene Lahens, and my siblings Emile, Stan, Sasha and Jennifer have shown unwavering support throughout this entire journey.

I dedicate this endeavor to my friends Alejandra, Amber, Danene, DeAnna, Ebonie, Fatima, Grace, Jobbethem, Johnny, Julie, Lisa, Maria, Robin, Sina and many more. All of you helped and encouraged me in your own special way. Thank you to my writing buddies Kacey, Nahid, Pam, Sharifa, Sheena, Toni, and Tracey. For several months, we spent many consecutive weekends at the library writing together. Your commitment in our success was an invaluable source of support.

I dedicate this project to Renda and Regina. As a small office of three people, your support, flexibility and hard work made full-time work and full-time school a little bit more possible. Thank you for being a great pair of women to work and laugh with.

I dedicate reaching the end of this project to my committee, a group of strong intelligent women, and more importantly to Dr. Patricia Prado-Olmos. Your care, attention, availability, and support were central to keeping me going. You could not have been a better chair and advisor. I consider you a mentor and hope our journey is only beginning.

EPIGRAPH

“It is not the answer that enlightens, but the question.”

Eugene Ionesco

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VITA

1999	Bachelor of Arts, Bridgewater State University
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2002-2007	Coordinator of Student Activities, University of California, San Diego John Muir College
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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Pursuing the Doctoral Degree:
A Symbolic Interpretation of First-Generation
African American/Black and Hispanic Doctoral Students

by

Karina M. Viaud

Doctor of Education in Educational Leadership

University of California, San Diego, 2014
California State University, San Marcos, 2014

Professor Patricia Prado-Olmos, Chair

There is a national concern for the successful completion of the doctoral degree in graduate programs that needs attention because approximately half of doctoral students earn the degree and the other half of doctoral students do not attain the degree. Furthermore, the completion rate for a doctoral degree is much lower for African Americans/Blacks and Hispanics whom are largely represented as first-generation. First-generation African Americans/Blacks and Hispanics have been reported as less likely to pursue a doctoral degree, and their experiences in the doctoral program have been less documented. The literature review reviews characteristics of recipients and non-recipients of the doctoral degree, enrollment status in graduate school, and experiences of those enrollees. Seen in this light, first-generation African Americans/Blacks and Hispanics—documented as less likely to enroll in graduate school and even less likely to be recipients of the doctoral degree—are viewed as being disadvantaged by virtue of the characteristics they hold upon entering the program, which influences the doctoral experience. However, this dissertation set forth to view this population’s experience influenced by specific interactions emphasizing their racial/ethnic and first-generation identities. The theories of symbolic interactionism, resilience and practice assisted in conceptualizing the participants’ doctoral experiences. The study was a qualitative narrative inquiry in which experiences turned into stories were told by four first-generation African Americans/Blacks and Hispanics pursuing their doctoral degree in Education. As seen through their eyes, participants interpreted their experiences from a symbolic interactionism perspective related to the interrelationships between their own behavior and the educational environment. In other words, participants analyzed how interactions

that occurred in a particular place and time shaped their experience as first-generation doctoral students of color. The author's interest was not to compare African Americans/Blacks with Hispanics in pursuit of the doctoral degree. Rather, the interest rested with getting to know shared and divergent experiences among the participants to understand their journey in pursuit of the doctoral degree.

Chapter 1

Introduction of the Study

“It seems logical, then, that the stories were a way for mothers to convey to their children that the current circumstance in which they lived—poverty—was not one in which they needed to remain” (Gándara, 1995, p. 55).

This quote comes from a study of 50 Ph.D., M.D., or J.D. first-generation Latinos/Latinas who grew up in a household that valued education despite their families’ low social conditions. The reality in which the participants’ grew up did not pre-determine their lives; rather, reality was reconstructed through the telling of family stories, support, and interactions. The quote questions whether or not higher education can replicate a similar culture of success for students holding the first-generation status and whose personal background has been frequently viewed as a barrier toward educational attainment.

Although, the first-generation student population has slowly and only recently caught the attention of higher education researchers, and some institutions are unfamiliar with the term first-generation (Davis, 2010), researchers have contributed to the body of knowledge of the first-generation population in higher education, including minority first-generation students. . The definition of first-generation varies. First-generation has been defined as those whose parents have no more than a high school education (Inkelas, Daver, Vogt, & Leonard, 2007), did not go to college (Inkelas et al., 2007; Terenzini, Springer, Yaeger, Pascarella, & Nora, 1996); or have some college experience but did not earn a college degree (Engle, Bermeo, & O’Brien, 2006). Similarly, the Higher Education Act of 1965 defines first-generation as a person whose two parents did not complete a baccalaureate degree, or the person regularly resided with and received

support from only one parent and that only such parent did not complete a baccalaureate degree (www.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ope/trio/triohea.pdf, retrieved May 1, 2013). In short, the first-generation status is the person who is first in their immediate family to graduate from college.

Current scholarly and empirical research identifies first-generation students as less likely to access and persist in postsecondary education. The first-generation status is more likely to be held by a student of color (i.e., African American/Black, Hispanic, Native American, Asian/Pacific Island) than by a White student, thereby indicating a strong intersection with race/ethnicity. Since fewer first-generation students of color graduate from college; fewer are likely to pursue a post baccalaureate degree—including a doctoral degree.

First-generation doctoral students of color travel a difficult pathway to the doctoral program. I equate their educational pathway to a “leaky faucet” –those who make it, barely leak through the end of the faucet one drop slowly following the other. Then, there are those who don’t make it through, are instead lost in the pipeline, and therefore never reach the end of that faucet. The difficult journey to the doctoral program has a lot to do with getting to and through college. Although first-generation students have made gains in college access from 1970 to 2005, they still significantly lag in attaining the bachelor degree (Engle & Tinto, 2008). The bachelor degree presents the gateway to graduate school. First-generation students are overrepresented in the most disadvantaged racial, income, and gender groups (Martin Lohfink & Paulsen, 2005), possess characteristics that put them statistically at risk of leaving college without a degree (Chen & Carroll, 2005; Engle & Tinto, 2008) and are as likely to face the same

obstacles experienced in getting to and through college as entering and completing a graduate degree (i.e., lack of information, money, and support) (Barnett, 2008; Engle, 2007; Vuong, Brown-Welty & Tracz, 2010). Even though first-generation students of color reach graduate school, they are very much underrepresented at this level of education.

First-generation students enroll in doctoral programs at a lower rate than non-first-generation students, 2.6% vs. 5.7%, respectively (Engle & Tinto, 2008; Nunez & Cuccaro-Alamin, 1998). Parent's level of education has a substantial influence on who enrolls in first professional (e.g. J.D., M.B.A.) and doctoral programs. Those students with parents with a bachelor degree or higher, are more than three times likely to enroll in first professional or doctoral programs than their peers whose parents have a high school education or less (Reid, 2012). Moreover, first-generation students who earned a bachelor degree in 1993 were surveyed 10 years later. While they aspired as much as their more advantaged peers, they were found less likely to earn a graduate degree at all levels. In fact, in 2003, 3% of first-generation students with a bachelor degree *enrolled* in a Ph.D. program compared to 7% of non-first-generation students. By that same year, 1% of first-generation *attained* a Ph.D. degree compared to 3% of non-first-generation (Engle & Tinto, 2008) indicating that first-generation students are less likely to finish a Ph.D. program. Although small, first-generation students of color ultimately gain the doctoral degree. But, at what cost?

Statement of the Problem

While enrollment of first-generation doctoral students of color needs attention, their experience leading to retention equally needs to be addressed or they will remain a

“marginalized population...destined to be underrepresented at the doctoral level”

(Barness King, 2011, p.13) and even more underrepresented as doctoral degree attainers.

In pursuit of the degree, their inherited reality of being first-generation and a person of color collide with experiences that construct a new reality, a reality different from what they experienced before the doctoral program. Barbara Lovitts (1996) says, “Attrition has less to do with what students bring to the university than with what happens to them after they have been admitted” (p. 1). Consequently, the challenge to attain the degree by this population may not solely rest within the student, but rather within the interactions between the student and the educational environment. As we strive for an age of inclusion in higher education, there exist educational practices that hinder or support the experiences of first-generation African American/Black and Hispanic doctoral students. In this light, the study sought to investigate experiences—specifically interactions with and reactions to peers and faculty—that took place once the student began the program in an effort to paint a clear picture of their journey to and through a doctoral program. In the following section, I discuss the purpose for exploring the lived experiences of first-generation doctoral students of color.

Purpose of the Study and Research Questions

The experience of students in doctoral programs has been researched, but research on the experience of first-generation low income doctoral students has been slow moving in part because of the traditional mindsets that attrition is a healthy component of doctoral education (Barness King, 2011), and practices of admitting a homogeneous doctoral student body still exist, rendering faculty to recruit students who look like them (Weidman, Twale, & Stein, 2001). In other words, those who can survive the life and

rigor of a doctoral program are those who belong and fit in the doctoral program. There is a great need to understand first-generation doctoral students of color's lack of integration into the doctoral program that lead to their desire to leave prior to the completion of the program (Witkowsky, 2010). There is also a great need to understand unique experiences within this population. The latter implores educators not to assume that similar characteristics equate to similar experiences.

The study explored, documented, and analyzed the experiences of first-generation doctoral students of color to discover experiences related to a culture of possibility produced during the time of their enrollment in the doctoral program. The culture of possibility is a term coined by Patricia Gándara (1995) in her book *Over the Ivy Walls: The Education Mobility of Low-Income Chicanos* which captured the role families of first-generation doctoral students took to transform their disadvantaged lives into a life of promise and investment for their child regardless of their own education and income disparities. Simply put, the families were able to create a "blue print" for their child to see, feel, experience a home that expressed "you can make a better life for yourself, a life much different from ours". I use the term "produce" because I'm intrigued by educational environments and practices that create a culture of success for first-generation doctoral students of color. Pollock (2008) contended that achievement patterns are produced in part as educators react to students' behaviors and students react to educators, and particularly as educators reward some behaviors and punish others. Therefore, I believe, under this analysis, interactions occurring between educators and students become the focus of the students' experience. Furthermore, the locations in which interactions occur also help understand the students' experience.

The studied population shared one common denominator, the first-generation status. No other person in their immediate family unit has a college degree nor do they have college experiences. Thus, the participant is the first in their family to have earned a college degree. Despite the similar characteristic, each first-generation person experienced the doctoral program independent from one another based on their own personal interpretation and meaning within the context of the educational environment. This means that there is diversity within this group that deserved equal attention because each person socialized into the doctoral program differently from the other, decides whether and how to apply cultural guidelines for behavior in specific situations, and their experience is based on shared meanings which are always shifting and being produced through social interaction (Jacob & Jordan, 1993).

Therefore, the study sought to answer these questions:

What are the experiences of first-generation doctoral students of color during their educational journey toward degree completion? More specifically, the study examined:

(1) In what ways do first-generation doctoral students of color find their experiences shaped by the educational environment while working towards degree completion?

(2) How do first-generation doctoral students of color shape the educational environment in which they are pursuing their doctoral degree?

This study examined sets of behavior produced in a reciprocal relationship with a system; the doctoral system. I explored how the experiences of first-generation doctoral students of color were shaped by the environment and how the context of the environment changed by the participants' reactions to the environment. The study placed

the first-generation African American/Black and Hispanic student as the primary investigator of his/her environment and as an active member of their own experience in pursuit of the degree.

Next, an explanation of the socialization process of doctoral students needs some attention. The socialization process is not the focus of this study because it primarily addresses norms and values of a culture a person seeks to adopt to gain membership as opposed to focusing on specific experiences shaped by the environment and behaviors reshaping the environment. But past studies used the socialization process to explain ways in which doctoral students, and other populations, learned and navigated new professional roles while in the program (or environment).

Socialization in Higher Education

A review of socialization in higher education serves as the “glue” to understand how doctoral students come to navigate the educational environment of their professional program. Socialization is the process through which an individual learns to adopt values, skills, attitudes, norms, and knowledge needed for membership in a given society, group, or organization (Tierney, 1997; Van Maanen, 1984; Weidman, Twale, & Stein 2001). And if institutions are changing to reflect the changing global trends, needs of increasingly diverse student populations; new technologies; and societal demands for the education of highly skilled professionals (Gardner, 2010; Thornton & Nardi, 1975; Tierney, 1997; Weidman et al., 2001), students’ socialization in those environments should also be changing over time. Not only are doctoral programs currently faced with educating a very diverse 21st century student population within an increasingly changing society, they are also challenged by their own environmental context. In other words,

doctoral programs must be aware that no two graduate and professional schools are identical and no two students experience graduate or professional school in the same way (Weidman, et al., 2001). Part-time vs. full-time, and younger vs. older doctoral students' perception of their socialization process has to be taken into account (Gardner, 2010). Similarly, Tierney (1997) asserted two questions in his research. What are the implications for an organization that views all of its new recruits from a similar perspective? And, if we agree that the organizational culture itself has problems, then how might we reconfigure socialization processes? It would be thoughtless to assume that every student and the culture are mutually exclusive; that the student's background and the educational culture have nothing to do with one another. Tierney's second question implies changing the educational culture to better consider the student's influence on the environment.

As a result of reviewing the socialization process of doctoral students in higher education, we can begin to conceptualize the different journeys experienced by different groups; specifically first-generation doctoral students of color, as well as the different experiences within this specific population.

Methods Overview

The study is a qualitative research inquiry framed by the methodological lens of symbolic interactionism, and conceptualized by the theories of resilience and practice. The lenses and theories created a framework to understand some of the experiences of first-generation doctoral students of color in the context of an educational environment.

Qualitative Approach

A qualitative approach explores meaning, tries to make sense of what is observed, unveils a deeper understanding of peoples' experience, describes problematic moments, affords to seek how social experiences are created and given meaning (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000), and looks beyond every day ordinary ways of life to understand those every day activities' organization and meaning (Esterberg, 2002). The social world is intertwined with complexities and interpretations that can be explained, enhanced, observed and validated by those who *live it* every day. Given the definition of qualitative research and the study's goal to explore experiences of first-generation doctoral students of color, a qualitative research method was the best approach to collect information. As inhabitants of their own world, participants brought insight and voice to their educational journey in pursuit of a doctoral degree.

Symbolic Interactionism

The study examined experiences of first-generation doctoral students of color in an educational setting using a theoretical framework of symbolic interactionism, defined as having three main focal ideas: (a) humans act toward things based on the meanings those things have for them, (b) the meaning of things arise out of social interaction, and (c) meanings are created through a process of interpretation. Symbolic interactionism theory has been used to explain the socialization of graduate and professional students as always evaluating themselves, faculty, peers, and program expectations (Weidman, Twale, & Stein, 2001) to provide a way to explain how their membership is gained in the environment. Symbolic interactionism looks at the integration of self into society (LeCompte, Priessler, & Tesch, 1993), and helps figure out how to shape their self to a

context shaping them. This theoretical lens framed first-generation doctoral students of color interpretations of their integration into the doctoral community.

Resilience Theory

Resilience is found in the concentric relationship of the environment, personal and family support that help buffer adverse situations present in a person's life (Benard, 2003; Brown, D'Emidio-Caston, & Benard, 2001; Ungar, 2008). First-generation doctoral students are overrepresented in the most disadvantaged racial, income and gender groups; are marginalized and underrepresented in doctoral programs. In a sense, first-generation doctoral students of color are by definition resilient, because they have maneuvered through an ever-leaking and narrowing educational pipeline. But, the fact that some students are resilient in the face of adverse experiences should not discount particular social and political structures put in place that hinder a person's ability to overcome risk factors (i.e. poverty) (Benard, 2003). Burley, Barnard-Brak, Marbley, and Deason (2010), Campa (2010), Ceja (2004), Meyer, Licklider, and Wiersema (2009) are among researchers in higher education who have argued that resilience theory excludes experiences influenced by specific culturally diverse populations. So, even though resilience is innate, the theory itself often says that as long as *any* person is resilient, success is inevitable. When considered inclusive of culturally diverse population, resilience theory captures unique experiences of marginalized groups—like first-generation, minorities—to understand resilient behaviors *needed* to manage difficult interactions; interactions less likely to be experienced by non-first-generation, non-minority students.

Practice Theory

What behaviors reshapes context and how does context shape behavior? “Modern practice theory seeks to explain the relationship(s) between human action and ‘system’.

Questions concerning these relationships may go in either direction—the impact of the system on practice and the impact of practice on the system,” (Ortner, 1984, p.148). The status of first-generation has been defined as at-risk and disadvantaged due to student characteristics including being academically unprepared to pursue and persist in higher education. These habitual concepts have created a disability lens suggesting that the “problem” creating few first-generation doctoral students of color lies inside their selves; this frame has become a dominant way of looking at first-generation students of color and their pursuit to a higher education. Practice theory, put to use in exploring first-generation doctoral students of color, can seek to consider “how practice reproduces the system and how the system may be changed by practice” (Ortner, 1984, p. 149). Similarly, Mehan (1993, 1993) believes that the process of examining events closely helps reveal social structure in the making, which was found in his study that sought to explore how a student is labeled as having a learning disability by the school’s sequence of “organizationally predictable interactional events” (p. 246). As Jules Henry wrote, additionally “[students] everywhere have been trained to fit culture as it exists, and to the end that they should not fail to fit” (Henry, 1963, p. 320). In this study and in today’s diverse, complex society, it is unwise to expect any student at any educational level to fit in a given culture without regard that the student’s personal background can influence the environment. Therefore, patterns of interactions can be unveiled through a deep cultural analysis to better examine the set of players intertwined in these interactions (Pollock, 2008). Ultimately, practice theory helped me examined the experience of first-generation

doctoral students of color gets shaped by the environment, and the environment itself then is reshaped by practice.

Research Methodology

The study collected data by conducting two open-ended, semi-structured and unstructured interviews. Each was no more than two hours in length. Open-ended semi-structured questions are often the sole source of data for qualitative research (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006) and are also called in-depth interviews (Esterberg, 2002). In-depth interviews ensure that the same general area of information is collected, provide focus and a degree of freedom (Valenzuela & Shrivastava, 2007), and are very helpful in looking at a topic in detail or in constructing a theory (Esterberg, 2002). In the unstructured interviews, also the second interview, participants reviewed the transcription from the first-interview, and shared any details that emerged since the first interview. In addition to the interviews as a source of gathering information, participants kept a journal of their experience in the program for a minimum of one month. The journal entries were conducted using an online tool called Google documents. In this fashion, I was involved in a journaling experience that was engaging and in real time, and unplanned discussions that arised from the ability to view the participants' journal entry was another form of collecting data (Jacob & Jordan, 1993). The journal and the interviews were analyzed to discover themes embedded in the participant's doctoral program journey.

Significance of the Study

The first-generation category has been prominent for only 25 years, and higher education administrators are now communicating the term to the general public. Simultaneously, the first-generation population is underserved in the sense that a well-

articulated and efficient practice to help them earn college degrees has not been presented (Davis, 2010). The first-generation status is also very much intersected with racial/ethnic and income backgrounds. Many first-generation students are students of color, so it is important to understand how race/ethnicity functions with the first-generation status (Ward, Siegel, & Davenport, 2012). The first-generation status, however, is also an invisible characteristic unlike the more visible characteristics (i.e., race/ethnicity). As a Black first-generation doctoral student, I have never been asked by my peers neither by my professors if I am the first in my family to graduate from college. The very fact that it is invisible may not lead someone to inquire about the status. It is this invisible characteristic that encouraged me to investigate the educational experiences of doctoral students of color focusing on the first-generation status.

This study sought to clarify behaviors that occurred in the context of the doctoral program that influenced this population's experience. By exploring when, who, how, or what shapes educational cultures; administrators in doctoral programs must pause and ask "What is going on here?" First-generation is a status held due to parents' lack of a college degree that has been shown to impact the likelihood of the student to enroll at any level in higher education. But since first-generation doctoral students of color pursue a doctoral degree, I wondered what is happening during the doctoral journey that leads first-generation doctoral students of color to either graduate from or discontinue the program. Specifically, I wondered what kinds of interactions and with who led first-generation doctoral students to reconsider enrollment in the doctoral program. In short, the study welcomes educators to question and investigate the educational environment, those engaged within it, and the role their awareness plays in creating an inclusive educational

experience that contributes to this population's success. And because the participants acted as primary investigators of their own educational environment, the study also inquired about their responsibility to react to the program's practices perceived as inconsistent with their learning and professional growth.

Organization of the Study

Chapter one discussed initial literature on first-generation students' educational journey to a bachelor degree—the gateway to graduate school. It also provided a rationale for investigating this population's lived experiences in an educational setting while pursuing the doctoral degree, addressed challenges that exist as this population enrolls in the doctoral program, and conceptualized the study through the theories of symbolic interactionism, resilience, and practice. Chapter two consists of the current body of knowledge on first-generation doctoral students of color including what is currently known about doctoral programs. Chapter three describes the study's approach to investigate this population's lived experiences in the doctoral program through a particular methodology and design. Chapter four is the results chapter. It consists of experiences of four first-generation doctoral students of color and illustrates both shared and divergent experiences amongst the participants. Finally, chapter five discusses the findings, reviews the theoretical framework and the research questions, offers implications, and final thoughts.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

Access to and persistence in higher education of all undergraduate students is a popular topic of discussion and, with persisting momentum, has been a challenge for educators for many years. Doctoral programs are also facing challenges with student persistence and degree attainment; and this challenge has recently caught the attention of educators and institutions. Little is known about the factors that affect graduate students' persistence and doctoral degree completion (Baldwin, 2009, Barnett, 2008; Golde, 2005; Robole, 2011). Less documented are experiences of minority doctoral students, namely first-generation doctoral students, (Adams, 2011; Gardner & Holley, 2011; Nettles, 1990 Orr, 2011; Reid, 2012) those whose parents' highest level of education is high school. There is a lot to learn about factors contributing to the high attrition rate of all doctoral students including that of first-generation doctoral students of color, an already small representation of enrolled students compared to non-first-generation, non-minority students.

The literature review identifies what is currently known about doctoral students' enrollment, experiences, and degree conferring, including first-generation doctoral students of color. It also describes the methodology and conceptual frameworks used to pull together an analysis of the lived experiences of first-generation doctoral students of color.

A Brief Landscape of Doctoral Students

Before diving into what is already known about first-generation doctoral students of color, a brief overview of the overall landscape of doctoral education in the United

States puts into perspective the current knowledge of doctoral student enrollment and degree attainment. A brief statistical description is provided.

Doctoral Degrees Awarded

Post-baccalaureate program enrollment (master's and doctoral programs) increased between 1983-2010, and it is projected to increase through 2021 from 1.6 million to 2.9 million (NCES Indicator 11-2012). The largest doctoral enrollment was in fields of social sciences, physical sciences and education (Bell, 2008). In 2009-2010, approximately 158,558 terminal degrees (Ph.D., Ed.D., M.D., D.D.S., and law) were awarded from all U.S. degree-granting institutions from public, private not-for-profit and private for-profit. For example, Health Professions and Related Programs (57,746), Legal Professions and Studies (44,626), and Education (9,233) were among the top three fields to have awarded the terminal degree. Health Professions and Related Programs increased steadily since 1970 in degree conferring. Legal Professions and Studies experienced a slight decline between academic years 1980-1981 and 1981-1982, and also from 1995-1996 to 2000-2001. Since then, the field has increasingly awarded the terminal degree. But since 1970, there has been less of a steady trend in the field of Education. Almost each year presented either an increase or a decline in degree conferring.

On the other spectrum of degrees awarded, fields of study conferring less than 100 recipients (i.e., Communication Technologies, Engineering Technologies, Liberal Arts and Sciences, and Library Science) and fields of study conferring low to mid 200's recipients (i.e., Architect; Ethnic, Cultural and Group Studies; and Parks and Recreation) also experienced an increase in the 1970's to mid 1980's, but in the last few years, the number of conferred graduates fluctuated (U.S. Department of Education, NCES, &

HEGIS, 2011). Altogether, conferring of the doctoral degree in Ph.D., Ed.D., M.D., D.D.S., and law have increased steadily in most fields of study.

The National Science Foundation (2011), which used data from the Survey of Earned Degrees (SED) reported that in the year 2010; 48,069 doctoral degrees were awarded in science and engineering (i.e., Agricultural and Computer Sciences, Chemical and Civil Engineering) and non-science and engineering (i.e., Education, Health, Humanities) compared to 49,554 awarded the previous year—the first decline of 1,485 doctoral degrees since 2002 (excluding M.D., D.D.S., J.D. and PsyD). One explanation for this decline, as reported by the National Science Foundation (2011), is due to the reclassification of 77 Doctorate in Education degree programs from research doctorate to professional doctorate in 2010. SED has not collected data from graduates earning degrees from reclassified Doctorate in Education programs since that year. Consequently, this left an unknown number of individuals who graduated with doctorates in the 77 reclassified Doctorate in Education programs, affecting the reporting number of all doctorates awarded in Education as lower than it would be had these doctorates participated in the 2010 SED survey. Other fields also experienced a decline but smaller than Education. Despite this reclassification, Education remained the largest field in which the degree was awarded in the non-science and engineering category.

While data reporting instruments are used to show statistical information about awards granted to doctoral students, researchers have explained the doctoral education gap in different ways. They reported the overall degree attainment of doctoral students is a grave concern in this nation (Gardner, 2010; Golde, 2005; Lovitts & Nelson, 2000). The researchers further noted that doctoral students who do not attain the terminal degree may

be due to the American education system, and specifically to the culture of the program and the department. Approximately 50% of doctoral students leave without their degree (Lovitts & Nelson, 2000, Reid, 2012; Robole, 2011; Witkowsky, 2010), at least 40% of doctoral students who begin the degree fail to complete the program (Golde, 2005), and 54% of doctoral students earn a doctoral degree over a 10-year period (Barness King, 2011). The preceding information addressed the national doctoral student population. For African American/Black and Hispanic doctoral students attainment, rates to attain the doctoral degree is much lower, and in most cases nearly unattainable.

Degrees Awarded to Doctoral Students of Color

Minority recipients of the doctoral degree have increased. From 2005 to 2010, minorities with a doctorate degree in science and engineering increased from 21.8% to 23.7%. It is unclear if the 2.9% increase represents the total number of degrees. Hispanics accounted as the second largest minority group to receive a doctoral degree in the science and engineering doctoral category (after Asians), and Blacks accounted as the largest minority group to be recipients of a doctoral degree in non-science and engineering categories followed by Asians and then Hispanics (National Science Foundation, 2011). Within a decade's time, the U.S. Department, NCES, IPEDS (2011) reported an increase of doctoral degrees earned among Blacks by 60% and among Hispanics by 47% between the years of 1999-2000 to 2009-2010. Members of racial/ethnic groups earning the doctoral degree are reported to be growing faster than White recipients (National Science Foundation, 2010).

Doctoral degrees earned by African Americans/Blacks and Hispanics may have increased, but when the number of minority recipients are disaggregated and compared to

White doctoral recipients, a view of a substantial attainment gap between the two groups causes a concern about how this gap came to exist. Going back to the top three fields of study reviewed in the previous section, Health Professions and Related Programs; Legal Professions and Studies; and Education awarded the most degrees to White, Black, Hispanic and other racial groups during the academic years of 2008-2009 and 2009-2010. But, there are tremendous gaps in both academic years between White doctoral recipients and all racial groups. In 2008-2009, White doctoral recipients were respectively awarded 38,114; 33,195; and 5,852 degrees in Health Professions and Related Programs, Legal Professions and Studies, and Education. Black doctoral recipients were awarded 3,228; 3,175; and 1,585 degrees in Health Professions and Related Programs, Legal Professions and Studies, and Education respectively. Finally, Hispanic doctoral recipients were awarded 2,389; 2,964; and 540 degrees in Health Professions and Related Programs, Legal Professions and Studies, and Education respectively. The latter—540—is 1/3 less compared to Black doctoral recipients and 10% less than White doctoral recipients among the top three fields of study. As shown in Table 1, the following year presented an increase in all three fields of study as well as within all three racial/ethnic groups with the exception of a decline—540 down to 489 conferred degrees—within the Hispanic population receiving a doctoral degree in Education. Even among the lowest degree conferring fields of study listed in the previous section, White recipients of the doctoral degree dominated over the number of African Americans/Blacks, Hispanics and other racial/ethnic group recipients. The report shows an increase of attaining the doctoral degree for African Americans/Blacks and Hispanics, but their attainment is incomparable to White students gaining the same degree.

Furthermore, the distribution of doctoral degrees earned by Latinos/as across disciplines are uneven and are earned twice as much in the fields of social sciences, humanities and education (Contreras & Gándara, 2006; Rai, 2000). In 2009, African Americans/Blacks and Hispanics were largely represented in Social Sciences—specifically in the subfields of Political Science and Public Administration, and Sociology. African Americans/Blacks and Hispanics are secondly represented in the field of Psychology, but mostly in the nonclinical versus clinical and general Psychology (National Science Foundation, National Center for Science and Engineering Statistics, Survey of Graduate Students and Post doctorates in Science and Engineering, 2009). In other words, doctoral students of color earned most of the degrees in “soft sciences” rather than the “hard sciences.”

Doctoral Degrees Awarded by Gender

A characteristic to consider as we explore the pursuit of the doctoral degree is gender. Post baccalaureate enrollment (master’s and doctoral programs) has increased for women comprising more than half of enrollment, and in 2010 reaching 59% of post baccalaureate enrollment. Women are projected to remain the leading gender in post baccalaureate programs enrollment and represent 61% (versus 39% males) of the nation’s enrollment (Bell, 2011; U.S. Department of Higher Education, NCES, HEGIS, & IPEDS, Spring 2011).

Women are also gaining ground in the number of conferred doctoral degrees. In 2009-2010, women received 52% of the doctoral degrees; specifically they earned 81,953 vs. 76,605 of the 158,558 doctoral degrees conferred (Bell, 2011; U.S. Department of Education, NCES, IPEDS, 2011). From 2004 to 2009, women have increasingly received

the doctoral degree in both science and engineering, and non-science and engineering, but from 2009 to 2010 women and men as doctoral degree recipients of science and engineering, and non-science and engineering declined (National Science Foundation, 2011). The National Science Foundation also reported that over a period of five years (2005-2010), women as doctoral recipients still increased in science and engineering, and earned the majority of non-science and engineering doctoral degrees in the same time period. At each education level, there are differences in educational attainment by gender with women surpassing men (U.S. Department of Commerce, Census Bureau, & CPS, 2011), but enrollment and degree attainment by gender in relation to race/ethnicity also showed a disconcerting gap. First, we look at enrollment by gender and race/ethnicity, followed by degree attainment by gender and race/ethnicity.

In the first decade of 2000, post baccalaureate enrollment in programs (master's and doctoral) increased for all racial groups including White graduate students, and nearly doubled for both African Americans/Blacks and Hispanics. Specifically, enrollment of Black women increased from 123,000 in 2000 to 256,000 in 2010 versus Black men from 58,000 to 106,000. Enrollment of Hispanic women increased from 66,000 in 2000 to 123,000 in 2010 versus Hispanic men from 45,000 to 75,000. While progress has been made in the enrollment of African American/Black and Hispanic women and men, they are still trailing far behind the enrollment of White women graduate students representing 854,000 in 2000 and 1,080,000 in 2010; and White men representing 625,000 in 2000 and 745,000 in 2010 (U.S. Department of Higher Education, NCES, HEGIS, & IPEDS, Spring 2011). Therefore, gender inequality in degree enrollment is present in a few ways. First, White women enrolled more than

White men, and enrolled more than all men and women of other racial groups. Second, in 2010, Black women enrolled about 50% more than Black men and Hispanic women, and almost three times more than Hispanic men. Third, Hispanic women enrolled more than Hispanic men; Hispanics are falling behind African Americans/Blacks; and significantly behind White women and White men graduate enrollees. The preceding report indicates little progress on the education journey of Hispanics (Contreras & Gándara, 2006) within the decade. Next, we take a look at degrees conferred by gender and race/ethnicity.

According to data from the U.S Department of Education, NCES, IPEDS (2011) which list the top three fields mentioned earlier, women received more degrees in the fields of Health Professions and Related Studies followed by Education in 2010. In Health Professions and Related Studies—the largest field of study to award the doctoral degree—White women were recipients of the degree by approximately 8-9%, while Black and Hispanic recipients barely made up 2% of total degrees granted to women. Education, the third largest field of study awarded, followed a similar path in degrees awarded as Health Professions and Related Studies. In both fields of study, more Black women than Hispanic women received degrees. Men were largely recipients in the field Legal Profession and Studies in which White men gained more than half of the total degrees awarded to men. Black and Hispanic men trailed far behind as recipients in the same field. However, more Hispanic men and women than Black men and women were recipients of the doctoral degree in engineering and biological and biomedical sciences. In addition, research continues to show African Americans/Blacks and Hispanics as underrepresented populations in higher education at the doctoral level. But these disparities become even more troublesome when Hispanics are reported as the fastest

growing population in the nation, and yet are largely underrepresented in the nation's higher education pipeline (Chapa & De La Rosa, 2006; Contreras & Gándara, 2006; Rai, 2000). The Black population in higher education also faces a rife undertake of attaining the doctoral degree. Among the Black population, women have made greater gains in getting the degree than men (Contreras & Gándara, 2006; Rai, 2000). Overall, improvements were reported in enrollment in doctoral programs and degree attainment. But there are significant gaps that place White doctoral degree seekers and minority seekers on opposite ends of the spectrum. A review of the literature on the experience of doctoral students follows which brings insight to what happens to them after being enrolled.

Doctoral Experience

The experience of doctoral students can be explored in a number of ways to gain an understanding of the doctoral journey. One study looked at self-identified well-doctoral students to understand positive approaches doctoral students upheld in their academic pursuits. That is, the study examined ways doctoral students promoted a holistic wellness and how the institution helped in sustaining wellness (Witkowsky, 2010). Doctoral students have also been examined to understand factors that influence degree completion versus reaching the all-but-dissertation stage, also known as ABD (Barnett, 2008). Another study involved the impact relationship and attitude have on persistence to the degree (Robole, 2011). The studies are a few concerned about the low national persistence of doctoral students and were interested in factors that contributed to persistence of doctoral students by respectively looking at the student self, ways the

doctoral community supports students, and the relationship-attitude dynamic of persisting in the doctoral program.

According to the researchers (Barnett, 2008, Robole, 2011; Witkowsky, 2010), personal and work challenges led students to either continue or discontinue in the program. Using a six dimensional wellness wheel, well-doctoral participants discussed wellness as a process of making a decision and being self-aware of what was working and what was not working. The well-doctoral participants were still struggling but adopted ways to exercise wellness that included interconnected and interdependence of physical, social, emotional, spiritual, financial, and intellectual components. Well-doctoral participants described their experience of achieving and maintaining wellness. The focus lied with internal abilities to adjust to the program environment in order to persist in the program.

Barnett (2008) studied the experiences of degree-completing students and non-degree-completing students, also known as all but dissertation. Degree completers affirmed the importance of having a sense of belonging in the community that positively influenced academic integration, while ABDs (all but dissertation students) described negative experiences that contributed to feeling excluded from the community (Barnett, 2008). Degree completers described support from and interaction with peers that enhanced academic integration, while ABDs felt isolated and distant from the academic community. Degree completers received family and employer support, and negotiated family expectations. On the other hand, ABDs financial concerns and inability to reduce responsibilities negatively affected the program experience. While the study showed differences between the two populations—degree completers and ABDs—it is unclear how

much time passed between the start of the study and when participants were institutionally identified as degree completers or ABD. Therefore, the impact ABDs bring to the study could also be attributed to feelings of isolation that grew stronger over time. Unlike the above study that focused on the “in-person” strength to meet the demands of the doctoral program, this study portrayed doctoral students’ interactions with the community of the program as strategies to continue or discontinue in the program.

Robole (2011) examined the relationship-attitude dynamic and its potential on persistence of doctoral students. Doctoral students encountered numerous challenges such as time constraints, caring, emotional and physical support, emotions, inner circle, and school and working relationships. In spite of the challenges and support found within these encounters, doctoral students with a strong internal locus of control perceived themselves as being in control of all aspects of their lives, and determined their success (or lack thereof) based on their skill, ability, and efforts. (Robole, 2011). In other words, they saw themselves as persevering in the doctoral program. Doctoral students who perceived relationship-attitude as roadblocks were operating from an external locus of control, and blamed unfortunate or fortunate circumstances onto others or other things. They were found as less likely to persist in the program than those who perceived themselves as persevering. The study addressed both the doctoral student’s interpersonal and intrapersonal relationships in relation to persistence in the program.

The preceding studies illustrated experiences of doctoral student as life changing and included adopting strategies to persist in the doctoral program. The studies’ focus was an overall understanding of the doctoral journey by exploring factors that lead to or disrupt persistence within the program. However, the studies viewed individuals

uniformly leaving little to no room for differences in individuals (Gardner, 2008) or between groups. So, when personal and non-negotiable characteristics are included in the interpretation of findings, we learn that culturally diverse doctoral students (i.e., students of color and first-generation) experience a different journey.

Doctoral Experience of African American/Black and Hispanic Students

The following studies demonstrate students of color experiencing a difficult time adjusting to the doctoral program. Much of this difficulty sheds light on students of color experiencing maladjustment at predominantly white institutions and/or their adjustment is misaligned with the institution's environment. Ingram (2007) and Deboyes (2009) explored the doctoral experiences of African American students at predominantly white institutions (PWI). The purpose of Ingram's study was to understand the motivation of African American males to persist in the doctoral program. Deboyes researched African American males' and females' sense of trust felt in the doctoral program's ability to cultivate an inclusive environment.

Both researchers reported very similar maladjustments encountered by participants during the program. The participants in Ingram's (2007) study experienced financial and academic challenges in an environment that lack diversity and deemed culturally insensitive. These experiences reminded them they were minorities. They also charged themselves to provide multicultural perspective because the classroom experience tremendously lacked that perspective. Doctoral students who were further along in the program provided support to students who did not receive support from family and friends. A supportive relationship with faculty was also important. Deboyes (2009) found that particular factors had a significant impact on students' development

sense of trust. The findings of the research were similar to Ingram (2007) but the study also found that participants needed to have a strong sense of blackness, needed to keep their cultural core intact; and needed to be visible in the classroom for meaningful exchange. Ingram and Deboyes succeeded in identifying different experiences felt by African American doctoral students at a PWI.

In another study, doctoral students were interviewed to discuss their perception of support and services while pursuing the degree. The majority of participants considered the doctoral program to be effective and suitable, and felt well prepared to conduct their research. Support services, and the doctoral supervision were sufficient and appropriate. But, doctoral students from the College of Education perceived their experiences to be predominantly negative compared to those in other colleges, and African American/Black doctoral students exhibited a more negative perception of the doctoral program—mainly through supervision—than White doctoral students. A possible explanation for this negative perception was the lack of a diverse faculty at an institution highly enrolled by culturally diverse students, which consequently created a weaker connection between African American/Black doctoral students and the predominantly white faculty committee (Boulder, 2010). Faculties of color are more inclined to mentor a diverse student body because of their comfort level to address diversity issues and their ability to validate students of color (Contreras & Gándara, 2006). Similar to Ingram (2007) and Deboyes (2009), this study reported African American/Black doctoral students experiencing disconnections in the program based on their racial identity. Still, building relationships with and supporting doctoral students' research is an important contribution

that faculty can provide to students (Contreras & Gándara, 2006; Nettles, 1990) and this should be every faculty member's purpose.

One large state university was characterized as White centered, Ivory Tower and Eurocentric by two of eight African American and Hispanic doctoral students when interviewed about the socialization process into the academic environment. Their experience revealed that an inclusive culture and curricula would open the elite space to a more racially diverse student body, alleviate classroom disconnectedness, discontinue the lack of faculty guidance, and gain an understanding of unspoken rules (Orr, 2011).

Latina doctoral students also shared a challenging academic socialization experience at a PWI within a culture they deemed unfit for their cultural differences and experiences.

One Latina doctoral student said, "You cannot avoid being changed by the doctorate process, even if you try to resist the academic socialization to the fullest extent. And I've both been changed for the good and the bad." Despite the challenge of fitting in, this Latina doctoral student managed to find the "good" in the middle of a very difficult culture. This perspective is similar to Deboyes' (2009) study where African American/Black participants remarked that keeping their blackness and their cultural core intact were important to assess the sense of trust in the doctoral program's environment.

González (2006) found that Latina doctoral students walked within the walls of a culturally indifferent atmosphere, juggled the demands of the program with family responsibilities, and struggled to receive support. They resisted assimilating into the program by creating networks with other academics with similar feelings about the doctoral socialization process conflicting with their culture and academic purpose, found their voice by gaining intellectual and social confidence, build cross-race alliances for

moral and intellectual support, and adapted activist scholar models to voice concerns about injustice and racism. Not all could voice themselves. Others lost their voice and consequently lost avenues to express concerns, which led to marginalization and isolation. One Latina said this about her academic socialization, “[it was like] giving up your ethnicity is the price you pay to become an academic.”

Up to the point of reaching the doors of the doctoral program, African American/Black and Hispanic doctoral students have been supported by family and friends, employers, and particular educational programs. Once they began the doctoral program, a harsh reality of integrating into the program was ultimately revealed. There seemed to be an “ongoing negotiation of staying the course” (Reid, 2012) by doctoral students of color when challenged by the culture of the program. In these studies, doctoral students of color were asked to integrate into a culture and adopt norms very different from their culturally background.

With an overview of the experience of doctoral students of color at PWIs, we transition to a brief overview of the socialization process to put into perspective what it means to socialize into a new environment.

Socialization in Higher Education

The socialization concept is deeply rooted in the development of role acquisition defined as internal and external interactions between individuals, and the attitudes and beliefs that shape role acquisition (Thornton & Nardi, 1975). The socialization process of graduate students has been defined as the graduate student entering the program with a set of beliefs and values, being exposed to and assessing normative pressures of the culture of the program, and making adjustments to maintain initial values and aspirations

(Weidman, Twale, & Stein, 2001). Weidman, Twale, and Stein criticized this framework of socialization as a linear process that focused on the transfer of a social role when it should include the identification with and commitment to a professional role that is both normatively and individually defined. This led to a transformation of the framework that kept the initial stages of role acquisition to socialization—created by Thornton and Nardi (1975)—and advocated for a contemporary approach inclusive of different types of students, academic and professional fields, and anticipated career outcomes (Weidman et al., 2001). The researchers contended that the socialization process is complex, and comprised of different levels of socializing that can be analyzed at the group and at the individual levels.

The socialization concept is a common framework through which to view the doctoral student experience (Gardner, 2010). The socialization process is challenged by complex graduate students' backgrounds and by the structure of the chosen discipline within higher education (Gardner, 2009; Weidman et al., 2001). Programs where underrepresentation of graduate students of color is clearly evident ought to ask “what are the implications when a man or a woman, an Anglo-American, African American, or Latino, a physically challenged or able-bodied individual undergoes socialization” (Tierney, 1997, p.7). In other words, the socialization process is influenced by graduate students characteristically vastly different from one another as they enter a doctoral program together, and program administrators are implored to consider such influences in the program culture. These implications can be further inspected as researchers begin to examine institutions and organizations as unique sets of ceremonies, rites and traditions (Tierney, 1988) and when there is belief that the student population influences

perspectives of the socialization process (Gardner, 2010). Therefore, the graduate student experiences in a program, inclusive or exclusive of their personal characteristics, is dependent on the understanding the program, the department, and the university is willing to show base on his or her diverse background.

Although studies exploring experiences of doctoral students and minority doctoral students do not always come from a socialization perspective, the findings still captured ways these doctoral students integrated or socialized themselves differently based on visible characteristics (i.e., the color of the skin, gender, temporarily able-bodied, personal and professional support, and experiences). The same cannot be said of first-generation status. First-generation—the status of being the first in the immediate family to graduate from college—is an invisible characteristic that is not frequently expressed. In this instance, the status is an added layer to students of color already marginalized in an academic setting. Ward, Siegel and Davenport (2012) asserted, “it is important to understand how a student’s race and ethnicity function in combination with first-generation status as well as how this combination impacts learning” (p. 76). So, as we aim to understand the pursuit to the doctoral degree, the literature review considered the socialization process to help explain studies capturing doctoral students’ experiences, which are connected to multiple layers of characteristics students possess—particularly first-generation.

Introduction to the Focus of the Study

Moving forward, the focus of the study begins with a definition of the first-generation status, a statistical overview of first-generation doctoral students of color pursuing the degree, current experiences of this population primarily as African

American/Black and Hispanic, and a review of models of persistence. Together, they set the stage for gaining an understanding of African Americans/Blacks and Hispanics whom are also the first to have a college degree and pursuing the doctoral degree.

Defining First-Generation Status

First-generation status has been defined in several ways. As mentioned in chapter one, first-generation individuals are those whose parents have a high school education or less and did not begin a postsecondary degree (Chen & Carroll, 2005; Inkelas, Daver, Vogt, & Leonard, 2007; Terenzini, Springer, Yaeger, Pascarella, & Nora, 1996) or did not earn a college degree (Engle, Bermeo, & O'Brien, 2006). The latter may suggest some college experience. Those students with parents with some college experience were found to be more likely to persist in college than those whose parents had never started college (Chen & Carroll, 2005; Inkelas, 2006). The Higher Education Act of 1965 defines an individual where both parents did not complete a baccalaureate degree, or regularly resided with and received support from only one parent and only such parent did not complete a baccalaureate degree (www.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ope/trio/triohea.pdf, retrieved May 1, 2013). For the purpose of the study, the participants were those with parents with a high school diploma or less.

Research suggests that first-generation and non-first-generation college students greatly differ in pre-college characteristics. First-generation college students are, demographically, more likely to be of Hispanic or Black origins, come from lower socioeconomic status (Chen & Carroll, 2005; NCES n.d.; Terenzini et al., 1996), be older and be women with dependents. They are also likely to delay entry to college after high school, and attend college part-time in order to work full-time while enrolled. Pre-college

characteristics are presumed to influence course-taking patterns, and formal and informal out-of-classroom experiences during college, which in turn also shape educational outcomes (Engle & Tinto, 2008; NCES n.d.; Terenzini, et al., 1996). First-generation have been reported to receive less encouragement from family, friends, and high school counselors to attend college, are less likely to interact with peers, and talk with teachers while in high school. And, first-generation students are overrepresented in the most disadvantaged racial, income, and gender groups (Martin Lohfink & Paulsen, 2005). Based on this report, the journey to and through college for this population is murky and shows little promise they will gain a higher education degree.

Since 1971, African Americans and Hispanics overwhelmingly represented the first-generation status while White students maintained the lowest representation. Higher Education Research Institute (2005) reported that 22.6% of African Americans and 38.2% of Hispanics were first-generation while 13.2% of White students were first-generation (as cited by Horwedel, 2008). Recently, first-generation college students account for approximately 9.3 million or 51% of undergraduates and are regarded as less likely to earn a bachelor degree (Pascarella, et al, 2004; Ward, Siegel & Davenport, 2012). However, the increase of diverse students accessing higher education is partly attributed to first-generation college students (Pascarella, Pierson, Wolniak, & Terenzini, 2004). This wave of first-generation college population entering postsecondary education is unparalleled to the representation of the student body at the doctoral level. Four to five years, even as far as ten years after postsecondary school, first-generation are less likely to enroll in graduate school (Engle & Tinto, 2008; Pascarella, et al., 2004). First-generation college students graduate with a postsecondary degree (NCES n.d.; Engle,

Bermeo, & O'Brien, 2006) and aspire to continue their education beyond the baccalaureate (Engle & Tinto, 2008). Overall, first-generation—more likely to be a person of color—is a population that travels a narrow pipeline to the highest degree in higher education; the doctoral degree.

Degrees Awarded to First-Generation African American/Black and Hispanic Doctoral Students

Parental education background has only been reported since 1963 (NSFSED, 2011). In 2008, data indicated that doctorate recipients' fathers' and mothers' level of education slightly differed. Twenty-seven percent of doctorate recipients' fathers and 35% of mothers earned no more than a high school diploma. Conversely, over 26% of doctorate recipients indicated that their fathers and mothers earned a baccalaureate degree. More women doctorate recipients reported their mother earning an advanced degree than men doctorate recipients reported about their mother. On the other hand, 32% of women doctorate recipients reported their mothers as having a high school degree and 37% of men doctorate recipients reported the same. Here, men doctorate degree recipients are reported as more likely to be first-generation than women. But, fathers of both women and men doctorate degree recipients showed very little difference.

The percentages of first-generation status among African Americans/Blacks, Hispanics and other racial groups are higher than their White counterparts (Gardner, 2009) and are overrepresented in the most disadvantaged low-income and gender groups (Martin Lohfink & Paulsen, 2005). Black, Hispanic, and other racial doctorate recipients' parents were less likely to have exceeded an education beyond high school and were far less likely than parents of White, Asian, and multiracial doctorate recipients to have

attained a baccalaureate or advanced degree (NSFSED, 2011). Although small, the first-generation population is growing and changing the demographic of doctoral education (Gardner, 2009). This should alert educators to be increasingly aware of this population's growing attendance in doctoral programs.

Educational Experience of First-Generation African American/Black and Hispanic Doctoral Students

First-generation African Americans/Blacks and Hispanics have been studied to learn about the journey to obtain the doctoral degree. Although non-exhaustive, the studies showed this population goes through a tough time that challenges personal characteristics—characteristics that are non-negotiable. Non-negotiable characteristics are inherited, for example racial/ethnic and socioeconomic, that influence a person's education experience especially in an environment different from those characteristics. African-Americans/Blacks and Hispanics were studied to explore factors leading to pursue the doctoral degree (Adams, 2011) and persisting factors specific to McNair scholars (Barness King, 2011). The McNair program is a TRIO program and the students are often first-generation African-American/Black and Hispanic. Black women were examined to learn about their experiences at a predominantly white institution (PWI) through the interrelationships of race, culture, gender, while also examining individual and institutional factors (Morris, 2007). Stiemke (2012) studied the intersection of race, gender, class and its impact on women of color in an Ed.D. Education Leadership program. Latinas were examined to gain a sense of resilience while in the doctoral program (Fuerth, 2008). Each study was investigated from various perspectives (i.e., critical race theory, feminist theory, critical leadership, resilience) and the findings

aligned across the studies. The themes were climate of the doctoral program, support, relationship, upward mobility, individual factors, and advice. The themes are described below based on each study's reported findings.

Climate of the doctoral program. Participants felt they had to assess the climate of the department for social and academic opportunities, endured a rigorous dissertation, and actively sought alternative support structures that included other students from similar backgrounds or individuals on campus that understood the culture within the department (Barness King 2011; Morris, 2007). Participants also needed to create a safe space in the program to avoid fear of retaliation (Barness King 2011). Faculty was described as having a lack of leadership to address cultural insensitivity in the program, a concern that led participants to feel unprepared to become leaders themselves (Stiemke, 2012).

Support. Participants discussed being encouraged and supported by professional and personal mentors, and family members to pursue the degree. Support from academic advisors and faculty was important. Finally, financial support was also essential to remain in the program (Adams, 2011; Barness King, 2011; Fuerth, 2008; Morris, 2007; Stiemke, 2012).

Relationship. Some participants expressed not having a lot of time which affected developing social relationships, engaging in extracurricular activities, or taking advantage of programs and services offered on campus (Adams, 2011). Relationship was also described as having advisor-advisee relationship (Barness King, 2011; Morris 2007), and for others a more in-depth advisor-advisee relationship (Stiemke, 2012) helped to better develop a sense of belonging in the program.

Upward mobility or advancement. Studies about the upward mobility of Latinos in higher education often stemmed from stories told by families and families that encouraged making a life much different than theirs. Therefore, the findings are consistent with African Americans' and Latinas' expression of reasons for pursuing the doctoral degree which are for a better career and a better life for their family (Adams, 2011; Fuerth, 2008).

Individual factors. Participants relied on themselves to challenge the culture, build personal motivation to persist while they endured a sense of invisibility in the program (Morris, 2007). Participants had to exhibit social competence, sense of purpose, and problem-solving skills to stay on course in the program (Fuerth, 2008).

Advice. Participants encouraged prospective doctoral students to have a mentor, maintain cultural heritage, stay on track to college to get the doctoral degree, become resourceful, and be prepared (Fuerth, 2008).

In addition to the findings, each study revealed something unique that deserves some attention. The findings of Adams' (2011) and Fuerth's (2008) studies correspond to the importance of considering environmental and motivational factors influencing completion of the doctoral program (Morehouse & Dawkins, 2006). Barnes King (2011) concluded that the successful completion of McNair doctoral students depended on their ability to effectively gain membership into the department or program culture, a culture that showed little indication of a true desire to alter and embrace culturally different students. Stiemke (2012) brings to light cultural competence and sensitivity as imperative to rising education leaders; however, participants were led by faculty with inadequate leadership to address culturally insensitive comments. For these reasons, it is important to

have a diverse faculty representation to assist in creating solid connections among a diverse student body.

Finally, the oldest study of all those listed is Gándara (1995), a study about the educational mobility of low-income first-generation Chicanos going to Ivy League colleges and universities. In relationship to the other studies, this study served as an example of adjustments made at home and while participants were in secondary school to prepare for college. Gándara's work addressed factors that prepared Chicanos/as to pursue a doctoral degree despite their family's low social mobility. The findings focused on a culture of possibility created in the home of first-generation Chicano/a students. The culture of possibility was the blue print for their success and it was delivered by the home's influence, shared family stories, and school experiences. Her earlier work, *Passing-through the eye of the needle: High achieving Chicanas* (1982), also addressed Chicanas' achievements of holding professional and research degrees despite their families' limited financial resources. Chicanas were successful because a culture of possibility was created by the family's emotional support, expectations, and earlier school experiences. In some ways, the preceding studies illustrated findings of making it through the program despite adverse situations. For many, a culture of possibility was trumped by an overall sense of culture insensitivity. Consequently, a culture of impossibility or unlikeliness summed up an education climate in which most of the participants endured.

In most of the studies, the first-generation status was not a specific criterion researchers examined, but by virtue of the population's racial background of either African American/Black or Hispanic, the first-generation status was a common

characteristic held by the participants. As previously noted, this invisible characteristic is more likely to be shared among doctoral students of color, and simultaneously contributes to the body of knowledge of first-generation doctoral students of color. It seemed, also, the first-generation status is a de facto intertwined with challenges experienced in the doctoral program. Still, a greater understanding of the multiple layers these doctoral students experience needs to be pursued and purposefully inquired about as specific experiences occur to deepen self-reflective moments, and the degree these moments shift in interaction with others and the environment.

Models of Persistence

“A major factor in persistence is the degree to which students feel both psychologically and socially connected to their institution once they enter the environment. This is particularly relevant for first-generation students many of whom do not know what to expect...” (Ward, Siegel & Davenport, 2012, p. 65).

Doctoral students have to connect to the environment. Doctoral students who do not connect with the environment in which they are pursuing the degree experience a lack of total integration into the culture of the program and become less likely to persist to the degree. The Student Integration Model for dropping out of college described the student's and the institution's combined commitment to academically and socially integrate in the school culture (Tinto, 1975). If there is a disconnection on the part of the student or the institution, persistence of the student is less likely to happen. Later, the model was criticized when Tinto (1982) identified four areas limiting the model, one of which is the differences in education careers that marked the experiences of students of different gender, race, and social status backgrounds (McCubbin, 2003). The student integration model, and other prevalent persistence models developed in the 1970's, targeted

traditional, residential college age students (McCubbin, 2003; Salinas & Llanes, 2003) excluding students with diverse backgrounds. Another well-known model is the I-E-O model. Astin's (1991) I-E-O model asserts that in order to understand what leads toward the outcomes of college (the "O" of the model), then the environment in which the student operates during college (the "E" of the model) and the characteristics and experiences students bring into college (the "I" or input of the model) need to be considered (Pryor & Hurtado, 2012). The Student Integration Model (Tinto, 1975, 1982) and the I-E-O Model (Astin, 1991) for student persistence "recognize that students enter college with a number of characteristics, experiences, and commitments including levels of academic preparedness, parental educational attainment and aspirations for their student, socioeconomic levels, and aspirations for learning and degree attainment" (Thayer, 2000, p. 2). The models were applied to undergraduate populations; however, Lovitts and Nelson (2000) argued the lack of persistence is rooted in the organizational structure of graduate school, and in the structure and culture of the larger process of graduate education. Feelings of integration and satisfaction are crucial to understanding the factors affecting persistence throughout those degree programs and overall socialization experiences of doctoral students (Kowalik, 1989; Washburn-Moses, 2007), especially those of students of color whom—through the studies previously mentioned—experience disconnections leading to a poorer integration into the graduate community.

Conceptual Frameworks

The conceptual frameworks encompass symbolic interactionism, resilience theory, and practice theory. A description of each theory, its use in various studies and an

explanation of how the conceptual frameworks were used in this study are covered in this section of chapter two.

Symbolic Interactionism

Symbolic interactionism brings together a community of scholars who see the value in human interaction and the emergence of meanings within each interaction and with objects in the context of the environment.

“It welcomes all those who give primacy in their research to the direct observation of these processes, whether in material or virtual worlds, and to discipline inference from such observations, supplement as appropriate by more or less structured conversations (interviews) with the ordinary people who engage in the awesome task of constructing an orderly world. It understands that those conversations are, in themselves, part of that process of construction and can never be taken as giving simple, direct, and unmediated access to the thinking, reasoning, motives, intentions, or values of our informants” (Dingman, DeGloma, & Newmahr, 2012, p. 4).

George Herbert Mead (1934) is the major contributor to symbolic interactionism (SI), but Herbert Blumer (1969), Mead’s student, published Mead’s work after his death and was the first to use the term symbolic interactionism (Aksan, Kisac, Aydin, & Demirbukem, 2009; Dingwall, DeGloma, & Newmahr, 2012; Emirgabyer & Maynard, 2012). Mead believed that symbols developed the mind and are used for thinking and communication, and focused on how people interact daily by means of symbolic interaction. Meanwhile, Blumer believed that humans interacted in two ways: meanings attributed to objects, events, and phenomenon; and meaning is a physical attachment imposed on events and objects by humans (Aksan et al., 2009). Everett Hughes—an

American sociologist whose work covered ethnic relations, work and occupations, and methodological fieldwork is mentioned as a great influence in the development of SI and should be credited just as much as Blumer (Dingwall et al., 2012). Riesman (1983), in his article *The Legacy of Everett Hughes*, captured Hughes' influence and said, "If sociology is to maintain its links to social reality through the interaction of fieldworkers with interviewees and through unobtrusive observation, we will need to encourage more sociologists to follow the example of Everett Hughes" (p.6).

Symbolic interactionism (SI) is defined as the interactional accomplishment of meaning (Maynard, 2012), provides a key to unlock some of the complexities of these meanings and associated processes (Belgrave, Celaya, Gurses, Boutwell, & Fernandez, 2012), and is the "elimination of subject-object dichotomy...the analysis of the constructed nature of social meaning and reality" (LeCompte, Preissle, & Tesch, 1993, p. 128). SI helps to investigate major questions and topics such as: (a) what meaning do humans attach to behavior patterns and objects in their world? (b) how do varying interpretations of meaning, expectations, and motivations affect human behavior? (c) how does the process of constructing meaning take place? (d) what symbols or rituals do humans create to structure their interaction? The major concepts of SI are self, self-concept, mind, symbols, meaning, interaction, role, actor, role taking, role expectations, construction of reality, scripts, text, and communication. SI signifies that the person and the object are not exclusive from one another, rather the person is influenced by the objects and the meaning associated with that object.

SI has been used as a conceptual framework for a variety of studies. Vries (2012) examined lived experiences of transpeople in relation to changing, experiencing, and

performing multiple intersecting identities. In this study, transpeople (or transgender) are defined as individuals born male, but identify as women regardless of whether or not they have undergone hormone therapy and/or surgery. The participants were Black, Latino/a, Asian-American, South East Asian, bi/multi-racial, or White. Vries (2012) was interested in how transpeople identity works-the process of creating meanings they attributed to themselves and others, and discovered: (a) the influence of others' changing perceptions of the participants' multiple identities in relation to their gendered social identity, and (b) participants' interactions with others changed social visibility to the extent to which they were acknowledged by others. The researcher also noted that "cultural identities reflect 'symbolic codes' that contain images of the rights, responsibilities and normative expectations of people in the world, and of the expected affective responses to these people" (p. 60). At the conclusion of the study, Vries (2012) showed how meanings others attach to interconnections of race, social class, gender, and sexuality vary by combination, shape interaction, and that certain "singular" social identities are more salient for individuals, depending on the interaction.

SI was used to investigate social meanings gay men associate with gender, family structure, sexuality, and race/ethnicity as they define their parenting selves. Specifically, the study understood simultaneously liberating and challenging aspects of participating in a family structure lacking established guidelines or rules about behavior and identity (Berkowitz, 2012). As a result, the study revealed gay men—as active or potential parents—were influenced by normative familial ideology, felt implicated by dominant constructs associated with (hetero)sexuality; gender; family; and parenting, and defined their roles and behaviors with a maternal instinct belief (i.e., the role of soccer mom and biological

clock). The participants of the study came from a wide range of diverse backgrounds including racial/ethnic, income, education, religion, age, and profession. Thus, their unique experiences were magnified and explained through an interactionist lens how gay men made meaning of their social worlds and constructed their identities (Berkowitz, 2012). In both studies, the results magnified how the participants tried to make sense of their social world, addressed an urgency to expose and understand the relationship between self and the environment, dissected each interaction, and in turn individualized each experience.

SI was also used to investigate the social political context of everyday lives and the interactions between students and faculty within a classroom at a Miami university. The overarching theme, *controversy in action*, brought to light how the participants negotiated meanings of political controversy in the classroom through day-to-day, faculty-student interaction, building on, or working around, taken-for-granted assumptions about what we are doing, why we are doing it, and how we should be doing it (Belgrave, Celaya, Gurses, Boutwell, & Fernandez, 2012). The study investigated raw experiences of participants, amplified day-to-day interactions in the classroom that are often left untouched, and in turn validated that meaning is constructed as opposed to being inherent. The researchers go on to say that SI helped unlock the complexities of meanings and the associated processes.

Researchers utilized a humanistic approach when examining a society that is becoming hybrid, blending, and mixing all the differences; consequently a dichotomist view [of self and society] is less favorable for examining inequalities (Toscano, 2012). This logic supports and captures the essence of the studies covered in SI. In other words,

SI captures a particular interest that enhances the current understanding of what is happening, how it is happening, and what meaning these happenings bring to those involved in interactions. Therefore, the role of SI framed meaning in interactions and how first-generation African American/Black and Hispanic doctoral student's identities were constructed in interactions.

Resilience Theory

Developed in the 20th century and first known as “invulnerability”, the concept of resilience is fundamental in the way people view and work with youths (Brown, D’Emidio-Caston, & Benard, 2001; Luthar, Cicchetti, & Becker, 2000). The seminal work on risk and resilience by Werner and Smith (1982, 1992, 2001) followed, through adulthood, the life of 700 children growing up with risk factors. They found the majority of the participants to be living a healthy lifestyle (i.e., stable jobs, happy marriages, and satisfied relationships). Only a handful of the participants were struggling with serious health problems including low self-esteem, violence, drugs, and domestic problems. The findings of the study led resilience researchers to frame the concept from an optimistic perspective because risk factors (i.e., poverty) account for a lower percentage of negative outcomes while *protective factors* account for a higher percentage of positive outcomes in high-risk populations (Benard, 2003; Luthar, et al., 2000). Protective factors include opportunity and support that buffer adversity and enable development to proceed (Benard, 2003). However, Cowen, Work, and Wyman (1997) contended that *identifying* protective factors is not enough when conducting research. That is, empirical research has to understand the process of how protective factors contribute to the theory of resilience (Luthar, 1999) or overcoming adversity.

Resilience happens in times of adversity (Luther, et al., 2000; Seccome, 2004; Unger, 2008), but has also been misunderstood (Benard, 2003) as a trait that an individual either has or does not have. Future researchers are [encouraged] to use the “term ‘resilience’ which describes a [person’s] competence despite adversity, as opposed to ‘resiliency’ which provides a misleading connotation of a discrete personal attribute” (Luthar et al., 2000, p. 546). Resilience is innate, normal and can be developed within each person (Benard, 2003; Brown, D’Emidio-Caston, & Benard, 2001; Luthar, et al., 2000; Ungar, 2008). Resilience occurs in the life of any person and should not be explored solely with populations living with risk factors (Benard, 2003). Risk factors are cushioned by *environmental protectors* which encompass the capacity for a person to build a healthy life style and utilize personal strengths, and are in turn developed by family and community characteristics, and family and community beliefs adjust to implement life trajectories for this person (Benard, 2003; Brown et al., 2001; Ungar, 2008). In this instance, the concept of “it takes a village” helps to capture how resilience buffers adversity with the help of a community of caring people.

Nonetheless, the concept of others’ “resilience” despite adversity is Eurocentric (Ungar, 2008) and consequently excludes other populations. Resilience viewed as Eurocentric focuses on the western cultures and experiences of White or Anglo-Americans and omits those who do not identify as such. In other words, a resilient Hispanic male and a resilient White male may face similar adversities with both having family support, but the environment (i.e., school) may support each male differently, causing one male to be successful and not the other. Therefore, “resilience should never be used to justify social and political inaction on the grounds that *somehow* ‘most kids

make it'. In the face of growing poverty, abuse, violence and other threats to children's development, the somehow can no longer depend on the luck of the draw" (Benard, 2003, p.10) or, for that fact, other inequities such as racial, gender and disability. Researchers in higher education who conceptualized resilience argued that resilience theory excludes culturally different populations (Burley, Barnard-Brak, Marbley, & Deason, 2010; Campa, 2010; Ceja, 2004; Meyer, Licklider, & Wiersema, 2009). Resilience theory captures unique experiences of marginalized groups—among which are first-generation minorities—to understand resilient behaviors developed in an educational environment.

For example, critical resilience was the framework for a study that examined academic challenges and re-entry challenges at a community college for Mexican undergraduate students who were from working-class backgrounds, first-generation, English learners, ages 19-41, and born in the U.S. or Mexico. Researchers using critical resilience considered the complexity in meaning and coherence in the participants' experience and the cultural values and circumstance of each participant (Campa, 2010). The findings revealed that "cultural capital came in the form of knowledge, academic and emotional support necessary to navigate within and between many multiple intersections and barriers of higher education" (Campa, 2010, p. 446). At the conclusion, the study implored families and educators to create conditions that empower Latino students to achieve excellence and uplift communities as important steps toward social equity.

Another study revealed experiences of Black first-generation women on their way to college, and eventually earning a graduate degree (i.e., M.A., Ph.D., J.D., and M.S.W.). Nineteen Black first-generation women representing three different cohorts, 1950s; 1960s and 1970s; and 1980s, exercised resilient behaviors to navigate a prejudiced

educational environment. The participants overcame social injustice by seeking individual sponsors, intimate relations, and informal ties for making sense of college admission and cost. They also relied on institutional college counseling mechanisms (although passively) in high school. Once on campus, they collectively engaged in political movements to assist with psychological challenges induced by the campus' negative climate. They also sought campus-based African American study groups that were informally organized, including support from Black professors or graduate students. Finally, they reported relying on a single family member or peer for support (O'Connor, 2002).

Being resilient helped a group of 20 first-generation doctoral students navigate the pipeline toward and persistence in graduate school. While most were White women between the ages of 23-58, resiliency coupled with getting to "know the rules" of the graduate program and the feeling of living in two worlds, the world of home and the world of school, were major contributors to staying the course (Gardner & Holley, 2011). The preceding studies focused primarily on challenging experiences of marginalized groups—those who differ by race or ethnic, class and gender—within an educational community. Earlier, being resilient was described as participants' personal strengths (i.e., seeking informal relationships with an African American study group), family support (i.e., family encouragement), and environmental support (i.e., college counseling) working together to create a positive impact in the face of adversity. Participants in the study became resilient when the environment was misaligned or resistant to a person with a diverse background, yet being resilient was essential to stay in the environment.

Critical resilience, as previously mentioned in Campa's study (2010), captured not only personal, family and environmental factors of overcoming adversity; it also considered the complexity in the lives of participants in a particular structure. Similarly, Seccombe (2004) argued:

The widely held view of resiliency as an individual disposition, family trait, or community phenomenon is insufficient. Using a structuralist approach, I suggest that resiliency cannot be understood or improved in significant ways by merely focusing on these individual-level factors. Instead, careful attention must be paid to the structural deficiencies in our society and to the social policies that families need in order to become stronger, more competent, and better functioning in adverse situations. Poverty is a *social problem*, not merely a personal one, and meaningful solutions and ways of coping must be structural in nature. (Seccombe, 2004, p.385)

In order to extend resilience research and gain a better understanding of the multiple levels of influence, a structural-organizational perspective considers historical and current influences of the development process of resilience (Luthar et al., 2000). In other words, resilience theory takes into account the role of human interaction; the emergence of meaning within each interaction; and the meaning of subject-object relationship to understand the process of opportunity and supportive factors. Furthermore, this study used resilience theory to capture the need to be resilient in an educational environment and how being resilient was necessary to the experience of first-generation African American/Black or Hispanic doctoral students.

Practice Theory

In education, what is normal behavior? What is predictable behavior? Where do normal or predictable behaviors occur and how are they interpreted? Specifically, what familiar or everyday behaviors, categories, labels, explanations, and processes in education need to be looked at closely in order to denaturalize them in the interest of students, faculty, and others (Pollock, 2012)? The study of anthropology looks into making the “normal” behaviors strange to dissect, and see beyond its normalcy and look for meaning. As part of the field of anthropology, practice theory is conceptualized as the study of all forms of human action as shaped by context and reshaping context (Ortner, 1984; Rosaldo, 1984). Practice theory demands a “thick description” of a particular behavior’s meanings as shaped in its full context (Geertz, 1973), and a deep cultural analysis of lives shaped through interactions, allowing us to imagine alternative interactions and specific shifts in opportunity context (Pollock, 2008). In this dissertation, practice theory has helped explore the interrelated relationship of system (i.e., classroom) and everyday behavior that *made* the lived experiences of first-generation doctoral students of color, and their interpretation of and reaction to such interrelated relationship. Practice theory considers two questions. How does system shape practice and how does practice shape system?

How does system shape practice? An inquisitive examination of a system gets to the core of what is not happening that should be happening. This kind of examination has shifted from what can be seen, felt and done, to what inhibits from seeing, feeling and doing; critically questions “why this one and not that one”; and what alternatives are disabling people from seeing (Ortner, 1984). Mehan (1993) conducted the case study of Shane, an elementary student whose school *made* him become a learning-disabled

student. The purpose of the study was to find how “the clarity of social facts such as ‘intelligence’, ‘deviance’, ‘health’ or ‘illness’ are produced from the ambiguity of everyday life” (p. 243). The study showed that “social facts of the school system are constructed in the practical work of educators in their person-to-person and person-to-text interaction” (p. 245). In the analysis, Mehan explored a “way of showing how routine practices of educators as they carry out their daily work constructed a ‘handicap’ student by tracing one student’s case through the special education referral system—the referral, educational testing, and placement testing” (p. 245).

Three major findings led to the system shaping practices that eventually made Shane a learning-disabled student. The first is *institutional construction of identities* which is educators’ work as being repetitive and routine bureaucratic practices that structure students’ educational trajectories as either educational opportunities or educational missed-opportunities. Second is *language as constitutive activity*. Shane was naturalized as a learning-disabled student by each educator’s language and disposition (i.e., psychologist, teacher, and parent). The psychologist talked about Shane from a formalized, authoritative, and psychological perspective. The teacher talked from a socio-cultural perspective (i.e., how Shane performs daily in the classroom), and the parent talked from a historical perspective (i.e. how Shane does his homework and interacts at home). Third, *prevalence of the psychological idiom* dominated in the decision-making situation suggesting a relationship between what happens in a mundane everyday social situation and an important aspect of social structure. So, the voices of the teacher and of the parent, two voices that expressed a more consistent direct observation of Shane, were shadowed by the psychologist’s voice that is authoritative and spoke from an indirect

observation of Shane's academic performance. In this study, Shane's school (i.e., the system) is structurally defined by everyday language and interactions (i.e., practice) that assisted in labeling him as having a learning disability. Unchallenged routine behaviors and unchallenged consensus among a team of educators inevitably discounted any other possibilities for understanding Shane's academic performance, thus producing a learning-disabled student.

Positioning, the focus of another study, was the single act of behavior investigated within a group of elementary students' reading activity. McDermott, Gospodinoff, and Aron (1978) claimed that context is a behavior that is formulated and organized by members of a group in four different concerted ways: in words or gestures; in form or position to respond to what's going on; through rules people use to direct a conversation; and by holding members accountable for continuing in ways consistent with the context. Together, the four facets of context can lead a group of people to pay attention to their behaviors and how they came to organize the context. So, McDermott et al. (1978) looked at concerted acts within a single behavior in an effort to be consistent in an environment. They used the example of a teacher leading a group reading. A teacher directs a student to look at his book which verbally formulates what the student needs to do. The teacher says, "sit-up and face your desk", setting rules and postural behavior. These become indicators for the other students to follow to be consistent with the context of group reading. The student responds to the teacher and positions himself to join in the reading assignment, and in turn further sets behavioral markers for the other students. McDermott et al. concluded that it is necessary to determine the adequacy of any description of the form and content of a concerted behavior in terms of whether it is

formulated, posturally positioned, or oriented and used to hold members accountable for certain ways of proceeding. Similarly, Geertz (1973) described this as a “‘thick description’ of a particular behavior as holding great significance within a structure is necessary for a deep analysis of what’s going on” (p.7).

How does practice shape a system? In order to explore this question, there are two considerations Ortner (1984) revealed. The first is how practice reproduces the system. Second is how the system may be changed by practice. Frake (1975) explored cultural rituals of entering a Yakan House, inhabited by Yakan Philippine Muslims in the island of Basilan. Frake investigated the social interaction between the outsider (i.e., the guest) and the householder (i.e., the Yakan owner of the house) through a set of hierarchical rules to penetrate the house and to move within the physical space of the house. The researcher reported the Yakan house is not just a space, it is a structured sequence of settings where social events are differentiated by the outsider’s position, the positions the outsider moved through to get there (i.e., from the porch to the foot zone of the house), and the manner in which they made those moves. Second, formality is a dimension defining social events that occurred in the house marked by the degree of penetration required for the outsider to reach their setting. Third, formality is a dimension of social events in all cultures, but there are differences not only in the number of differentiations of degree of formality but also in the way different kinds of events are positioned on this scale.

Frake also reported rituals to enter the Yakan house shifted when: certain signals were demonstrated by either the householder or the outsider; when usual guests arrived at the Yakan house it called for immediate entrance; and when unscheduled guests with

particular status arrived, they too, were immediately welcome to enter the house. While “daily routines of householders freely pass without [upholding] rituals, it was the *ambiguous* [visits] where house entrance etiquette became a way of defining formality...and not simply a reflection of *predetermined* formality where moves became complex and their outcomes informative” (Frake, 1975, p. 224). This means that ambiguous visits—visits with rules and rituals—unveiled new experiences resulting in “seeing” house-entrance in a different way, whereas predetermined visits which were typified by every day, traditional rules kept visiting experiences the same, unchanged, and uninformative.

Using the exchange theory, Rosaldo (1984) explored the Ilongot population in Luzon, Philippines and the process of grieving over the ritual of a headhunter’s rage. The headhunter’s rage is not the focus of the study; rather it is the role rituals played in everyday living. Some would agree that rituals are a way of exploring and learning the history in a given culture. But, “do rituals always reveal cultural depth? Cultural depth does not always equal to cultural elaboration and rituals do not encapsulate deep cultural wisdom” (Rosaldo, 1984, p.20). Rituals are long-standing acts consistent in a culture resulting, more often than not, in anticipated outcomes.

Frake’s and Rosaldo’s work bring insight to educational rituals (i.e., teaching students, and student recruitment) that create and sustain a certain culture or status. “Rituals are a form of practice, and to study the reproduction of consciousness in the processes of ritual behavior is to study at least one way in which practice reproduces the system, and ways in which educators are shaped by and endorse rituals” (Geertz, 1973; Ortner, 1984, p. 154). Culture is unique, complex, and multifaceted (Jacob & Jordan,

1993), and going deeper requires pressing for actual, accurate information about the everyday interactions among the people (Pollock, 2008).

These studies are rooted from an anthropology pedagogy which require months, more often, years of observing people who live *it* every day in a particular culture. It is through these observations-with the researcher also serving as the observer-that practice theory plays a critical role in investigating patterns and sets of behavior in people in a culture. In this study, participants were positioned as the primary investigator of their own environment to unpack their experience as first-generation African American/Black and Hispanic doctoral students. As primary investigators pursuing the doctoral degree, practice theory framed actions that created a certain culture and action that recreated the culture for the underrepresented population.

Summary of Conceptual Frameworks

African American/Black and Hispanic first-generation doctoral students examined ways being resilient in the face of difficult situations was necessary to their experience in the doctoral program. Practice theory emphasized any behavior (including resilient behaviors) by looking at specific interactions that reminded, shaped or reshaped the student's experience as first-generation doctoral student of color. An examination of the student's reaction to and influence on the environment were examined in order to keep the integrity of the interrelated relationship of behavior shaped by the environment and simultaneously the environment reshaped by behavior. While resilient theory and practice theory focused on the person's own behavior and their reaction to others as it may shape the environment, symbolic interactionism focused on the meaning attached to things and relationships. The first-generation doctoral student of color tried to make sense of his or

her world in the doctoral program by reflecting on their day-to-day, raw experiences and dissected meanings attached to these interactions. In some way, the conceptual framework functions to first critically examine what is happening in the environment before placing meaning to the experience. The conceptual framework captured the first-generation doctoral student of color to symbolically interpret their experience through the reciprocal relationship of behavior with the doctoral program environment. Figure 1 is an illustration of the function of the conceptual frameworks.

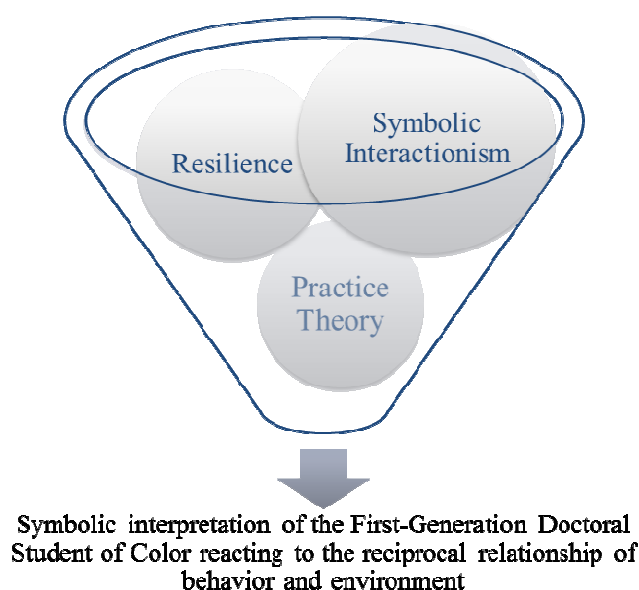


Figure 1: Conceptual framework of symbolic interactionism, resilience theory and practice theory

Chapter 3 Methodology

Review of the Study

The study investigated the lived experiences of first-generation doctoral students of color through the reciprocal relationship of behavior and environment wherein one influences the other. Participants told stories of specific meaningful relationships that occurred in the broad environment of the doctoral program and shared their reaction to specific interactions in an effort to make sense of their experience during the course of the doctoral program. Even though the population was first-generation and persons of color, the study discovered distinct experiences among each doctoral student.

As previously mentioned in chapter one, the main questions of the study are: What are the experiences of first-generation African American/Black and Hispanic doctoral students during their educational journey toward degree completion? Specifically, the study examined:

(1) In what ways do first-generation doctoral students of color find their experiences shaped by the educational environment while working towards degree completion?

(2) How do first-generation doctoral students of color shape the educational environment in which they are pursuing their doctoral degree?

In these exploratory research questions, behavior and environment are interlinked to gain an understanding of the doctoral student's experience. The active engagement of behavior and environment were investigated through a qualitative study using symbolic

interactionism, resilience theory and practice theory as methodological lenses and theories.

Qualitative Research and Methodology Approach

A qualitative approach to this study was best suited to explore the nature of the questions based on the participants' views (Creswell, 2008), and “provided alternatives for describing, interpreting, and explaining the social world and the operation of educational phenomena...[and] contributed to the authentic portrayal of a complex, multifaceted human society” (LeCompte, Preissle, & Tesch, 1993, p. 28). Qualitative research relied on the participants as the author of the story and the researcher as the consumer of that story. Symbolic interactionism, resilience theory and practice theory are the methodological lenses and theories for exploring meaningful interactions between human and object within an environment, consider the reality in social interactions and see the participant and the environment influencing one another. This method captured lived experiences of first-generation doctoral students of color in specific settings within an educational environment.

Context

Research Site

The research site is a four-year university located in Southern California. The university has a full-time enrollment of a little under 7,800 students including undergraduate, paralegal, graduate and law students. The School of Education is the second oldest department at the university, while the university is one of the youngest among its neighboring campuses.

The Ph.D. Leadership Studies program is one of four programs in the School of Education and offers five specializations including a Higher Education Leadership specialization, precisely the context in which the participants were gaining the degree. The program has a strong international focus driving a strong international student population in the Ph.D. Leadership Studies program. In the last five academic years, African Americans/Blacks and Hispanics received significantly less degrees from the Leadership Studies Ph.D. and Ed.D. doctoral programs than White students. The program is predominantly attended by White doctoral students, taught by a faculty that resembles the majority of the doctoral student population, both of which are a reflection of the entire medium size campus. The doctoral program does not keep a record of admitted students identified as first-generation status. Therefore, it is unknown how many apply and enroll in the doctoral program.

Participants

I recruited participants using a purposeful homogeneous method to meet specific characteristics which were first-generation, African American/Black, and Hispanic. Because first-generation doctoral students of color are underrepresented at the doctoral level, it became apparent that a snowball recruitment method was necessary. A snowball recruitment means I asked for recommendations of doctoral students fitting the intended characteristics under investigation. Ultimately, I recruited and interviewed four first-generation doctoral students of color enrolled in the same Ph.D. program.

On the recruitment form, participants self-identified as a first-generation college graduate described as neither of their parents holding a four-year college degree. Participants also self-identified as either African American/Black or Hispanic. As a

result, the study investigated the lived experiences of four doctoral students who volunteered; three males and one female. Two males were African American/Black and African. The other male identified as biracial; Mexican American and White. The one female in the study identified as Latina.

At the onset of the study, participants represented each year of the doctoral program and had more than one semester of doctoral experience. Despite the difficulty to recruit these doctoral students, collectively they represented an array of different personalities, and personal and professional experiences adding richness and complexity to the study.

Design of the Study

Narrative Inquiry

Narrative research uncovers the story of participants as it happens within the context of everyday life, and promotes the voice of participants that is normally not heard (Creswell, 2008). Narrative inquiry allows the researcher to explore an educational problem by understanding the participants' experiences as they narrate them (Creswell, 2008) and investigates ways they experience the world (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). Accordingly, the study investigated educational experiences of an underrepresented population in an education setting and highlighted each participant's experience. To meet this intent, a narrative inquiry was well suited for the study. Participants were involved in interviews and journal writing to give a rich description of their experience as first-generation doctoral students of color enrolled in the same Ph.D. Leadership Studies program.

Method

Interviews. Interviews provide an exchange of information between two people. Interviews are a practical form of collecting data (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990; Creswell, 2008) and are at the heart of social science research (Esterberg, 2002). Interviews are helpful in learning in-depth information around a topic and describe the meaning of central themes in the participant's life experience (Valenzuela & Shrivastava, 2007). Interviews give one-on-one attention to the participant during the entire process and time is dedicated to learn about their experiences. Participants in this study were interviewed twice and participated in journal writing over a period of three months.

First interview. The first interview was open-ended and semi-structured. Each participant engaged in a face-to-face, one-hour minimum interview consisting of ten questions. The goal was to learn about each of their experiences in the doctoral program focusing on specific interactions with others that were significant and consequently shaped the experience.

Second interview. The second interview was scheduled about one month after the first interview. In this interview, I reviewed the transcription from the first interview and participants adjusted or confirmed any part of the transcript. During this interview, we—the participant and I—re-engaged in an active conversation unveiling more information about the participant's experiences in the doctoral program.

Journal writing. Journal writing was the second form of data collection for this study. Journaling is a tool for collecting data and assists participants to draw reflection that may be occurring in a specific space (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990; Creswell, 2008). Each participant documented experiences about class activities, and classmate and faculty interactions to help think about what was currently happening in the space (i.e.,

classroom, faculty office, the dean's office). The participant closely detailed how their behavior and someone's practice (i.e., a faculty or classmate) came together in a given environment to make sense of that particular experience.

Journaling began immediately after the first interview. Journaling persisted for about three months using Google Documents, a technology tool that allowed participant to "bring" me into the journaling world. A document was created specifically for each participant and I directed the participant to use the assigned platform to journal. The participants were not able to see each other's journals. The Google Documents tool allowed both—the participant and I—to read and write on a single-shared document at the same time. Additionally, reflections from the journal were at times discussed during the second interview.

This interactive, dynamic experience allowed me to immediately prompt the participant to "say more" rendering him or her to further clarify their thoughts. This unique interaction fulfilled the notion that in narrative inquiry the researcher and the participant collaborate, and the researcher actively engages the participant as the story unfolds (Clandinin, 2006; Connelly & Clandinin, 1990; Creswell, 1998). As told by each participant, data from the interviews and journal writing brought richness to the study.

Narrative Analysis

Narrative analysis is an examination of how people construct their self-account (Burck, 2005). Restorying is the process of gathering and analyzing data, looking for key elements and then begin the writing process to retell the story from the narrative inquirer's interpretation (Creswell, 2008). Table 2 illustrates the Three Dimensional Space Narrative Structure defined as interaction, continuity and situation providing

guidance for restorying (Clandinin, 2006; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Creswell, 2008). For the purpose of the study, the table provided a bigger picture of the participants' stories by gauging the people involved in their experiences that occurred in the present and the past, and by listening to how these experiences determined future experiences. Because the stories represented the present, past and future, they were naturally linked together which were central in learning about the participants' background.

Table 2: Three Dimensional Space Narrative Structure

<u>Interaction</u>		Past	<u>Continuity</u>		<u>Situation</u>
Personal	Social		Present	Future	Place
Internal conditions, feelings, hopes, aesthetics, reactions, moral, dispositions	Existential conditions in the environment with other people and their intentions, purposes, assumptions and points of view	Remembered stories and experiences from earlier times	Current stories and experiences relating to actions of an event	Implied and possible experiences and plot lines	Context, time and place situated in a physical landscape or in a setting bounded by characters' intentions, purposes and different points of view

Note. Adapted from Clandinin and Connelly (2000) cited by Creswell, J. W., 2008, *Educational research: Planning, conducting, and evaluating quantitative and qualitative research*, p.521 Copyright by Sage Publications.

Data collection and data analysis were reviewed simultaneously. During data collection, I analyzed and tested emerging themes against subsequent data. In qualitative research, data collection and analysis are conduits for an inductive strategy where coding begins and themes emerge (Creswell, 2008; Esterberg, 2002). An explanation of the interview and journal analysis, including the technique for memoing, is presented in the next section.

Analysis of interviews. A total of eight interviews, two per participant, were recorded and transcribed. Each transcription was closely examined to capture the participant's experience. In order to do that, I conducted two coding techniques to gather major themes of interaction, continuity and situation—the three components of the Three Dimensional Space Narrative Structure. Capturing major themes is very important to understand the experiences of the participant (Creswell, 2008) including similar and different experiences. The first coding was in vivo coding, which means “in that which is lived”. In vivo coding required capturing sayings or comments by placing quotation marks around significant experiences. These experiences were targeted based on the participant's inspiration to share them. Pattern coding was the second technique used. When common quotes or experiences fell into the same path, pattern coding was helpful in grouping them into themes, sets or constructs. The coding process was a long process requiring patience and, as cited by Saldaña (2013) good thinking.

Analysis of journal writing. Journals were analyzed similarly to the interviews and supported themes that emerged from the interviews. Journal writing was the only medium where participants discussed being resilient in the program. In this regard, journal writing was crucial in understanding how and when being resilient emerged during the course of the doctoral program.

Memoing. Memoing is a technique that adds to the credibility and trustworthiness of qualitative research and evolves as the research proceeds (Groenewald, 2010). There was a lot of data captured through interviews and journals. The data was abundantly rich but it was also overwhelming making it difficult to make sense of it all. For this reason, I wrote memos to reflect on and make connections with the data to achieve a deeper

understanding of the participant's experience. I jotted down notes, questions and ideas to expand the data presented in interviews and journals. Doing so provided more insight and developed the dialogue during the second interview and during journal writing. Writing memos was also helpful to intercept any personally held biases or values that may have interfered with data interpretation.

Limitations

Generalization

Narrative inquiry is specific to the participant's experience in a particular time and place. Therefore, generalization cannot be adopted to describe the experiences of all first-generation doctoral students of color in all doctoral programs. Additionally, the structure for narrative inquiry was framed by a three dimensional space of inquiry which includes interaction, time and space. In other words, the participant told their story based on personal and social interactions related to a particular time (i.e., past, present, future) within a certain context or place. Participants were African American and Hispanic, male and female, with different professional experiences and some were parents, others were not. These differences make a difference in the way their experiences are interpreted. As a result of the study as narrative inquiry, participants of this study cannot be generalized by experiences of students pursuing a doctoral degree in Education and with those sharing the same characteristics. In fact, narrative inquiry is based on capturing stories unique to the participant to better understand the depth of that experience.

Positionality and Reflexivity

Positionality and reflexivity are human traits that are expected to play a critical role in the researcher's own experience. As humans researching humans to gain a better

understanding of life around a specific topic, it is nearly impossible to maintain a polished objective view. As a researcher, my position is likely to influence the study because I identified as first-generation and a person of color, and furthermore, I “lived” the very topic the study investigated. I had to be aware of my position as a researcher, and needed to report the truest form of the study’s analysis.

On the other hand, the researcher and the participant worked collaboratively where the two created a shared narrative construction and reconstruction through inquiry (Clandinin, 2006; Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). I was involved in the world of the participant during the narrative inquiry process, and then left that world in order to retell the participant’s story in the most truthful, meaningful way. Positionality became a living reminder of “self-checking” during the research process by distinguishing what is subjective versus objective view. My position as first-generation doctoral student of color is bounded by views, beliefs and biases that shaped the way I interpreted the study (Creswell, 2008). As the participants were sharing their story, I related to many of the things they said while I also did not relate to other experiences. My personal background and experience became evident throughout the study. As a result, my position and reflexivity were reminders that this was not my story, it was their story.

Chapter 4

Results

The study explored lived experiences of four African American/Black and Hispanic first-generation students in the doctoral program. The doctoral students gave insight to raw, day-to-day experiences often left untouched. This exploration was made possible by placing doctoral students as the primary investigator of the environment and becoming an active participant in their own experience. The study's two research questions were:

(1) In what ways do first-generation doctoral students of color find their experiences shaped by the educational environment while working towards degree completion?

(2) How do first-generation doctoral students of color shape the educational environment in which they are pursuing the doctoral degree?

Through the conceptual framework of symbolic interactionism, resilience theory and practice theory, I conducted interviews and supported participants in journal writing to explore the research questions. Therefore, the results presented derived from several months of interviews and journal writing. The study design was a narrative inquiry which gave voice to a population not usually heard. This chapter reintroduces the conceptual framework of the study, discusses the doctoral students' identities as first-generation and persons of color, explores the first and second research questions, followed by a description of their resilience, and concludes with a summary of the chapter. Altogether, this chapter narrates some of the experiences of four doctoral students of color who are

first-generation graduate students; the first in their immediate family to earn a college degree and enter a doctoral degree program.

Review of the Conceptual Frameworks

Together symbolic interactionism, resilience theory and practice theory formed the conceptual framework and provided a way to look at and interpret the study. Symbolic interactionism asks researchers to seek meaning in interactions to explore how interactions helped students construct their “selves” in the doctoral program. I used resilience theory to examine behaviors exhibited in the doctoral program that buffered adverse experiences. Resilient behaviors, by way of personal and professional experiences, emerged as graduate students discussed their experiences which were part of my curiosity. Practice theory is two-fold. Practice theory focused on the interconnected relationship of the doctoral programs’ practice shaping the students’ experience and the students’ experience reshaping the doctoral program. The second research question relied on the doctoral students’ ability to communicate how, if at all, their response or reaction to particular experiences reshaped the doctoral program. With this conceptual framework, I learned about doctoral students’ day-to-day experience nestled in meaningful interactions during the reciprocal relationship between behavior and the educational environment. That is, the two, the person and the environment, are one—a person is not seen separate from the environment in which they are placed in, rather they are seen together. Examples of doctoral students’ daily experiences included meeting with the academic advisor, conversing with classmates in or out of the classroom, engaging in group activities and working as graduate assistants. As a result, I was interested in specific examples of interactions that occurred in the doctoral environment

and asked the graduate students to dissect these interactions to find meaning in them. In sum, the conceptual framework assisted first-generation African American/Black and Hispanic doctoral students to discuss meaningful interactions, interpret these interactions, and make sense of their “selves” in these interactions within the context of the doctoral program.

Narrative Analysis Results

Data Sources: Interviews and Journals

During the period of several months, four first-generation doctoral students of color shared their experiences while pursuing the degree. They engaged in two interviews. The first interview included ten questions and was on average an hour and half in length. I inquired about their personal identities as first-generation and persons of color as well as how, if at all, their identities shaped their experience in the doctoral program. Appendix D lists the questions asked during the first interview. Approximately four to six weeks later, doctoral students engaged in a second interview guided by the content of the first interview and sometimes by the content of the journal, at which point I asked clarifying questions. The length of time for the second interview was equal to, and at times, longer than the first interview. Appendix E lists examples of interview questions I asked and answers the participant provided during the interview. After the completion of the first interview, participants began to write journals about the doctoral experience. Participants were encouraged to journal at free will, but for the most part, they were reminded to visit their journal platform and prompted to answer a few questions. Journaling continued for nearly three months. Table 3 lists questions asked of all participants, of which not all questions were addressed by participants. The following

data and analysis draw mostly from the interviews to tell the story of participants navigating the Ph.D. Leadership Studies program.

Introduction of Findings

Through four main themes, the chapter represents and discusses the experiences of doctoral African American/Black and Hispanic students whom are all first in their family to have gained a college degree. The doctoral students differently interpreted and reacted to the four emerged themes making their experiences somewhat unique from one another.

The first theme is *first-generation status: an unspoken identity*. The participants talked about first-generation status as being rarely discussed which made personal interpretation difficult to put into words as it related to the doctoral experience. The *role of language* was the second theme. Language was interpreted in four distinct ways, yet related to participants' cultural background. Specifically, language was a representation of the participants' home culture and facilitated the degree to which they integrated into the doctoral program. The third theme was *participation in classroom conversations*. Participants discussed how they balanced expectations to be involved in and disengaged from classroom conversations on topics of race, gender, socioeconomic status, religion and sexual orientation. The last theme was *supporters as agents of information and opportunities*. All participants exclaimed being supported by one or several persons and were given a variety of opportunities.

The findings also illustrated four different experiences with individual reactions to the experience that reshaped a policy or a practice in the doctoral environment. The varied experiences included a reaction to the course evaluation; professors' grading and

teaching practices; defining financial support; and uncovering determinants for staying in the program. The findings demonstrated that a change in practice was due to a unique position of the doctoral student and the relationship the doctoral student had with one or more administrators.

Being resilient became evident through personal and professional experiences, characteristics they held, and how they understood themselves as they fought against or avoided difficult interactions deemed unique to their experiences as first-generation African American/Black and Hispanic. They individually shared what they had to do in order to make the program just a little bit more meaningful and doable. The strategies they adopted included finding a balanced space, relying on oneself, being mentored, and establishing a connection to avoid future misunderstandings.

Participants

The participants were doctoral students from the same institution seeking a Ph.D. degree in Leadership Studies. As might be expected in a doctoral program, each participant was progressing at a different pace through the program. During the first interview, participants were given the option to select a pseudonym. When the option was deferred, I selected one for them. Table 4 represents a profile of the participants.

Cesar. Cesar was an international student from a remote village in Africa. He was approached and recruited by a representative of the doctoral program during a conference in England. As a former faculty in his home country, Cesar was an experienced scholar whose work is published in several journals including the Journal of Educational Action Research, Higher Education Quarterly, Teaching Education, and Critical Education

Policy Studies. At the time of the study, Cesar was in his second year of the Ph.D. Leadership Studies program.

Montserrat. Monserrat was an alumna of the University of California in the southern region of the state and gained her credentials at the same institution she is pursuing the doctoral degree. While pursuing her credentials, a law professor encouraged her to pursue a doctoral degree. Monserrat serves as an elementary principal where the majority of the teachers are Hispanic and the students are English learners. At the time of the study, Monserrat was completing her fourth year in the Ph.D. Leadership Studies program.

Reyes. Reyes began the Ph.D. Leadership Studies program shortly after he received his master's degree. During the master's program, Reyes befriended someone who was at the time pursuing his doctoral degree from the same program where Reyes is currently enrolled. Their relationship and the focus of the program were responsible for Reyes' decision to attend this particular doctoral program. At the time of the study, Reyes was at the end of his third year and a graduate assistant in the division of Student Affairs.

Brendan. During the study, Brendan had concluded the first year in the Ph.D. Leadership Studies program. He was also a recipient of the bachelor and master's degrees from the same institution he is pursuing the doctoral degree. This two-time alumnus served in the military for several years, is a teacher at a middle school and his partner is steps away from defending her dissertation from the same doctoral program. Brendan was persuaded to pursue the degree by mentors who are Ph.D. degree holders, his partner's current doctoral degree quest, and the administrative career position he seeks to gain.

Identities as First-Generation and Students of Color

Even though they shared the same characteristics, the identities as first-generation and student of color were intimately upheld in different ways. Cesar, Monserrat, Reyes and Brendan expressed what it meant to be first-generation and a person of color as doctoral students, and consequently gave a description of how they independently saw themselves.

Each participant was familiar with the first-generation identity and clearly spoke about it. Being first-generation was interpreted in four different ways. For Cesar, it meant family always discussed the importance of education; for Monserrat it meant breaking the cycle of families who were not college educated which also meant enduring a lonely road in education; for Reyes it meant being reminded of parents' knowledge of and support through higher education looked slightly different from other students; and for Brendan, it meant previous experience in higher education made the experience at the doctoral level a little less confusing. Participants' interpretation of the first-generation identity came from talking about their family or while remembering some aspect of their earlier years in higher education. These divergent interpretations of the first-generation identity provided insight into their journey up to this point in higher education. Consequently, participants shared a pattern in that they were familiar with and understood their identity as first-generation.

The participants could not describe the identities of first-generation and student of color together even though the statement was, "Tell me about your personal identities as first-generation student of color." As students of color in a predominantly White institution, they spoke from a place of being one of the few students of color. As one of

the few, Cesar expressed the need to connect with those who resembled him, and Reyes dissected what it meant to be both halves—Mexican-American and White. Monserrat and Brendan recognized the doctoral program as having fewer students of color and as being one of the few students of color. What follows are four different interpretations of the first-generation identity separate from four divergent interpretations of their racial identities. The analysis came from the first and second interviews where they were asked to describe their personal identities as first-generation and student of color. Figure 2 illustrates the participants' interpretation of their identities as first-generation and student of color.

Cesar. Cesar attended a college over 300 miles away from his home village in Africa. His parents were illiterate and unfamiliar with higher education. Still, Cesar noted that his father strongly believed in the value of education. In the first interview, Cesar shared:

I'm the first in my family to go to college/university...My father always used to talk about education, the value of education. He believed in going to school. Apart from my family's investing in my education, I also invested in my education. My personal effort was very really important.

It seemed Cesar was surrounded by the importance of getting an education even though his parents did not pursue a similar path. His father talked about school, doing well in school and studying hard. Because of his father, the home environment emphasized nothing more than to go to school and be educated. Cesar believed in his father's vision. So, to do well in school, Cesar focused on his energy and resources. He reported that his father's and his personal efforts were "really the two things which made me focus on my studies".

Cesar self-identified as African American on the recruitment profile sheet for the study. During the entire first interview, the questions inquired about his experience as African-American. However, I needed to be sure that I captured his identity properly due to the way he answered questions in the first interview. It was important to make this clear to accurately describe Cesar's journey in the doctoral program. At the start of the second interview, I asked:

OK, the first question I have for you is, how do you identify? Do you identify as African American or African?

Cesar responded:

I think African. Because I'm going to become American, so I think the proper word is to identify me as African.

Cesar's foundation of self was deeply rooted in his ethnicity, race and language accent. Ethnicity, race and language accent were critical in adjusting to the program environment both socially and academically. Cesar's identities were even more prominent in the predominantly White American doctoral program. He consciously made connections with those who resembled him. He purposely approached other Africans to be close to his identities:

These are really very important. This notion of identity is very important. You always look forward to something which is very close to you. For example in any setting, in every occasion, you try to connect with people who are very close to you.

Being someone from Africa, the nearest person for me is here in the United States, either someone who is from Africa or someone who has descendants of Africa. I try to connect with someone who had this connection, African connection. The idea of race, ethnicity or whatever, it's really very important. I try to connect with someone from Africa or descendants of Africa.

It's not because we have the same color, or whatever. I always think the geography or the history makes us very close, shares the same identity, have the same identity and the same love. You can easily get along well with all those people. I always think more ...safer zone we're with this people other than with other people.

Cesar is from Africa, is dark-skinned and speaks formal English. The three most prevalent identities—ethnicity, race and language—were challenged in the doctoral program environment. As a new student in the doctoral program and in an effort to maintain parts of his identities, Cesar sought to connect with those with similar ethnic/racial background, Black and African or African American doctoral students. Connecting with those who physically resembled him was an attempt to integrate into the doctoral program environment. Cesar was sifting through a population of doctoral students predominantly dissimilar to him to connect with a population so few in numbers.

Montserrat. Monserrat was breaking cycles at multiple levels in her life, including in her family and community. She is married with two young children. She completed two degrees—a bachelor and a master's—and was pursuing a doctoral degree. She also owned a house. More importantly, she was breaking the cycle of poverty. In the first interview, she noted “If you're first-generation that means you come from an impoverished background.” But, while she was breaking the cycle of poverty, Monserrat noted the road up the educational ladder as very lonely by first describing her mother's outlook on the doctoral journey:

Their parents [classmates] are coming to see their defense for proposals and my mom is, ‘Why are you still in school? You're still in school? What are you doing? Doctorate, are you going to be a doctor, like medicine? I thought you were in education.’ There are a lot of those kinds of questions. The way it's played out for me is more of like the parental support, the parental understanding; the family understanding is very different. I went to a couple of proposals and parents were there. I

wouldn't invite my mom; a) she wouldn't understand because of language; and b) She wouldn't understand because of the concept of 'I don't understand how you're a doctor without having a medical degree.'

Continuing with the first interview, Monserrat remembered this moment in college because it remained true as a doctoral student. She said:

There is not a lot of diversity in my group. The other two Latinos have dropped out. There is no African-Americans. There's a Chinese guy. I don't feel like I've made many friends. I am friends with them on Facebook and they're going out and doing stuff, and I'm like, not only was I not invited, but I don't really participate.

I don't know if I can attribute that to me being Latina, but I also know that I don't work on campus. So I get to class and then promptly leave because I do have a family to go to, and sometimes they do things where I'm like, 'I'm working. I know you guys don't work, but I'm working.' I think that's a big divide more for me than anything else. I'm working full-time. I have a family to go home to. You all don't, and that has shaped very different experiences, I think...

Again, if I go back to my bachelor's degree, guess who had to work full-time. I did. My college experience has always been sort of a lonely place because I've always had to work full-time. I can't afford having my father paying for school. I can't afford to just say I'm going to be a research student or anything like that. That's mostly how it's shaped itself in the Doc Program.

During the second interview, I reviewed the lonely feeling she described and its relationship to her identities. She remembered the following story from college which also held true as part of the doctoral journey:

My God. I wish I knew who it was because I would love to talk to that person as an adult. I was feeling really bad at 18. Again, I'm living in a dorm as the only Latina. I'm struggling with classes where I've always been a straight A student and I'm working full time for the first time in my life. Not looking like anybody, not all of those things. I asked for help. I asked for a counselor. I got a session. I went. He was the worst [f-word]... I don't know what I expected. Let me tell you that. I guess I expected someone to tell me it was going to be okay. [He] was so not helpful. I never went back. I actually left. Sorry. It still hurts. There's no help to say, 'Hey, we're all feeling this way.' I don't even recall what he said. I just remember thinking, 'God, you're so [f-word] cold. You're not

even trying to get into this here.’ As a teenager, I’m thinking, ‘I don’t want to be here anymore.’ That goes back to the whole resilience of you’re in college and you want to finish college but no one ever told me this is how this could feel. That feeling comes up into our classes of, ‘Hey, guess what? You’re the only [one] again working full time.’ Sorry, it just triggered that memory of being vulnerable in front of this man [the counselor]. I think what I needed wasn’t counseling. It was someone to tell me it’s going to be okay.

Montserrat’s lonely journey was strongly related to her identities as first-generation doctoral student of color and is a running theme within her journey and in this study. It was related to parental understanding (or lack thereof) and working full-time. As a full-time employee, Monserrat was rarely on campus to interact with classmates and faculty. Working full-time was a responsibility she had to maintain during her entire tenure in higher education. This responsibility was non-negotiable and made it difficult to maximize her experience in the doctoral program.

Reyes. The first-generation identity was an unfamiliar term to Reyes until recently which explained a weak connection to the identity. But, as he reflected on his high school and college years, he became aware of the identity’s limitation. This limitation was evident when classmates discussed ways parents helped them to and through school. In the first interview, he shared:

It didn’t occur to me that I was first-generation until I was in my master’s program. It became evident to me that there is not a lot about the college experience that they [my parents] are aware of. In instances where I’ve heard other people talk about their parents going to school, it occurred to me that, ‘Wow, they believe my parents helped me figure it out.’

Reyes is biracial. He is Mexican American and White. He looks White and has been perceived as only White even though he self-identified as both Mexican American and White. Because of his skin color as being white and perceived by others as White,

Reyes was aware that he passed as White. Passing as White meant that his physical appearance was unquestionable as being White. When Reyes revealed his identities as both Mexican-American and White, an expression of surprise was clearly uttered by others which helped confirm he was perceived as White and thus was passing as White. Nonetheless, Reyes' biracial identity made him feel "in-between" which is difficult to explain even though he portrayed a keen awareness of the complexities of being both races. In the first-interview, Reyes shared:

Now, more because I think I'm aware of it, I feel so in-between because I'm biracial. As I become more aware of it ... What am I trying to say? It's been interesting to unpack what that means and why I'm doing my dissertation research on it. What does it mean that I look White? Some people assume that I'm White. What does that mean in terms of the privilege that I have? Even though I'm not White, I have access to White privilege if I want because I can pass. Am I a person of color though? I don't identify as a person of color, but being biracial means that you're somewhat a person of color. It's confusing. I don't think it will ever be easy to figure out, but there are certainly times where I feel like, 'Wow, I feel really White', or, 'Wow, I don't feel White.' It does seem to be focused around, whether or not I'm White; not necessarily whether or not I'm Mexican or Mexican American. I think a lot of that has to do with not being able to speak Spanish.

Similar to Cesar and Monserrat, and as we will see with Brendan, Reyes understood the first-generation identity through his parents' knowledge of and support through higher education. Reyes is bi-racial which made him distinguished from the other participants and his awareness as Mexican American and White was a sign of reflecting what his identities mean to him and how others see him during certain moments.

Brendan. Brendan described his journey to college as "a one-man show" who had to figure it out en route to college. Along the way, he learned to find mentors to guide him properly. Finding people who already knew the system (or the environment) was an

important step when getting acquainted with the new environment. The doctoral program was no different. As a doctoral student, his identity as first-generation is described as “I know what’s up” and in turn does not consider himself first-generation anymore. In the first-interview, Brendan said:

So, this is my third degree. I don't see myself as first generation anymore. I had to do so much work on my... I don't want to say on my own because I had a lot of people...I asked a lot of questions and then I got a lot of help. But I had to ask those questions because I didn't have anyone to ask them for me initially as I was getting my bachelor's degree, applying to college and trying to figure all that stuff out. There was nobody to help me. My family couldn't [help me]. They wanted to help but they didn't know what to do so I had to find help and ask all the right questions. I already knew that I had to get information. I already knew, ‘Man, I got to find people that I know that know already what to do or at least what not to do.’ It was almost like I'd already been trained on how to...I already knew how to survive. I already knew how to get through college, I already knew what I had to do to make it work. But picking the program, paying for it, making sure I'm not wasting my time, that was really more of my focus [in the doctoral program]. I almost felt like I had...I'm not first generation. I already know what's up. I already know what to do so...

Often, those who are first-generation are not as knowledgeable about the higher education culture as well as those with parents with a college degree. The way the college environment is navigated is very different between first-generation and non-first-generation students. The former is likely to feel a little bit more lost because parents were not able to share their college experiences while the latter is prepared to encounter the college environment by virtue of their parents’ college experiences. With that said, Brendan spoke from a time when he did not know the college environment and had to ask questions to be as prepared as possible to enter and get through college. As a doctoral student, he did not feel as unaware as he once was, thus as “knowing what’s up” he was less inclined to identify as first-generation in this particular reflection.

Brendan identified as Black and his experiences in education have always been as the only Black guy in the room, meetings and other professional settings. In the first interview, he shared, “Every school I’ve gone to, every training I’ve gone to, everything I’ve done there’s very few Black people so it’s a standard now, it’s an expectation.” It is through interactions with others and others’ reaction toward him that reminded Brendan of his Blackness. Because Brendan is familiar with the school, he expected to be one of the few Black men in the doctoral program. In the first interview, Brendan shared:

I forgot I was Black. I haven’t sat in a room and said, ‘Oh man, I’m the only Black person here’ in a long time because I assume that that’s the case. It’s not even an issue for me anymore, it’s an issue for everybody else... ‘Oh man, what’s the Black guy going to say or do?’ I could care less.

When I asked if this applied in the classroom, he replied:

Any class room, any room, work or...Because it's always been that case, it’s always since I left and went to college, I’ve always been the only black person or one of a handful.

Even at [name of school] now. I wouldn't call it tons of black people but there's more than ever before and it's still like a handful. Everybody knows each other so that's a sign. ‘Oh, I know...You were...’ You start recognizing the same person. Where are the rest of them? There's only a few of you, even though you see the same people at times. For me, I accept it in terms of, ‘All right. I'm going to be alone in terms of race, in terms of being the black man in the room. Okay, I got it. I'm the one but am I going to let it rule the situation, or am I going to take advantage of it or am I going to do what I do and let everybody else worry about it.’

My purpose is to get my degree and to learn and evolve and grow from each situation so but I've learned that over life. I have, it's not just college and work. I was in the army. I was an officer, so there's just as few African Americans there.

Being in here for three degrees, I already know. I could take stock and look back and know that at the most, there would be two black people in the class, maybe three or four in a program. I already know that I have to know going in that I'm the only one or one of a few and not let it be a

limiting factor of me excelling or be scared of the situation or whatever.

Similarly to Monserrat, Brendan was aware of the program's overall racial make-up which emphasized his racial identity as being one of the few. Specific to Brendan, he mentally prepared himself that he will be among the only or one of the few persons of color in class, including the entire doctoral program, because it has been his experience during most of his adult life.

As a group, participants illustrated a strong self-awareness of their first-generation status by listing previous academic experiences associated with being so new and unaware of higher education. However, at the doctoral level, they did not feel as new to higher education, they seemed to feel prepared to tackle experiences that came with being a doctoral student in higher education. The participants were also strongly aware of their racial background especially within a predominantly white program. They did so by defining their selves as being of the few or only person of color in a predominantly white institution. Therefore, the first-generation status is remembered, but not forgotten. And their racial identity was intensified as they described the doctoral program's racial make-up.

Addressing the First Research Question

The first research question is, in what ways do first-generation doctoral students of color find their experience shaped by the educational environment while working toward degree completion? To answer this question, as well as the second research question, I performed two types of coding. The first coding method is in vivo coding, which means "in that which is lived". Each participant told their story and was given a voice when quotation marks were placed around words and sentences that stood out in

the transcript. I looked for words and sentences that were important to and inspired by the participant (Saldaña, 2013). I also looked for words and sentences that were communicated frequently. For example, Monserrat told her story from a place of feeling lonely that became a running theme in her experience.

The second coding is pattern coding. Pattern coding was helpful in grouping common experiences among doctoral students into themes, sets or constructs (Saldaña, 2013). By the time the third participant was interviewed, themes began to emerge and I proceeded by inquiring about them to see how much they resonated with each doctoral experience. For example, participants shared that their first-generation status was not inquired about, not discussed, and did not come up in conversations. This led to the first theme as the first-generation status as being an unspoken identity. Together, in vivo coding and pattern coding focused on the participants' experiences, permitted to deeply reflect on salient experiences unique to each participant, and looked for common experiences undergone by all or most of them.

As a result, four consistent themes emerged while exploring the first research question on how first-generation doctoral students of color find their experience shaped by the educational environment while working toward degree completion. The chapter is organized to address each theme. The themes were relevant to the participants and were discussed in some fashion making them consistent among each participant and shaping their experiences. But, there were some differences in the way each theme was interpreted and participants also described divergent reactions to interactions. Figures 3 through to 8 illustrate each theme and are included in the chapter. The following explains

the themes relevant to the doctoral students' experience as first-generation and persons of color.

First-Generation Status: An Unspoken Identity

This invisible characteristic is rarely inquired about or detected but exists among a cohort of doctoral students. Participants reflected on experiences in the doctoral program reminding them of or shaping their status as first-generation students. All participants discussed the status was not inquired or talked about by those in the doctoral program or by themselves as first-generation doctoral students of color. But, participants showed dissimilar interactions experienced in the program.

Cesar and Reyes interpreted and reacted to the identity similarly in that they both were aware of the identity but the identity was not salient. They also revealed their identity as first-generation when they reflected on intimate moments, and agreed that when this identity was shared with others, it created awareness of an unknown community.

Brendan and Monserrat each had unique experiences. Brendan's experience was a served as a reminder of his status, a status he did not relate to very strongly. His reaction was to keep this part of himself to himself. Monserrat's experience, although not as directly related to the first-generations status, was a reminder of her overall education journey as being one of the few Latina first-generation students. She, too, concealed her identity at the time of the experience. Brendan and Monserrat felt uncomfortable to share the identity, in part because the experience happened in class with all of their cohort-mates. As a result of their experiences, the first-generation status is an unspoken identity by both the environment and the participants. Because of this, the first-generation identity

is hidden from the community even though it exists within the community. Figure 3 illustrates the first-generation status as an unspoken identity.

Cesar. During the first interview, Cesar had difficulty thinking about specific examples of interactions that occurred in the doctoral program reminding him of his status as first-generation. Instead, he talked about the personal meaning it held for him.

Cesar shared:

How do those things relate to my educational background as a first-generation student? I don't know, but I always feel proud of being a first-generation student because I always compare myself with other students. I say, 'Okay. My friend is, my colleagues, whatever, come from backgrounds where either their parents are educated or economically well to do, or whatever. I am from first-generation background.'

Even if I perform based on these students, whatever, I always feel, 'Okay, because these students have a good background.' Maybe in terms of performance, in terms of comparing myself with the other students, the background, [it] puts me in a better situation in terms of at least [psychologically].

It gives you some kind of psychological confidence because we always compare ourselves with others. We [first-generation] say we had bad background, these people have good backgrounds. It's okay if we perform this way or that way. That's how I can compare myself with other students.

When asked what he meant by "good backgrounds and bad backgrounds", he said:

When I say bad background, it's that social, economic and political origin of somebody. When I say bad, it doesn't mean culturally wrong. We all are right in terms of cultural origin. We differ in terms of the inputs, the quality of education we had at the beginning. Some students are from educational or economic backgrounds where they were able to go to a good school, good teachers. Others are from schools where there were not resources, were not good teachers, whatever. That's what I mean by bad or good. That means culturally superior or inferior background.

To make sure I understood Cesar clearly, I stated, "Conditions were different". He answered, "Yes, sure. Yes, the social origin of people."

Later in the first interview, I asked about particular ways the environment of the program reacted to, treated or reminded him of his first-generation. Again, he reflected on what the identity personally meant to him, and to him it did not matter that he is first-generation because he is proud of what he had accomplished. Cesar shared:

I'm not sure. My background, so we can divide my background. My social origin is really, as I told you – I'm a first-generation African American college student. I believe I had a very strong academic background. I was able to do research, publish, not only in local journals, in international journals. My background really put me [in] some advantage.

In some cases, even I was better than, I don't know, second-generation students who come from very strong background, strong social family background. Sometimes, your family's economic-social background might help you to excel [above] other students. When I compare myself with others with most of the students, most of the students were not able to publish [in] international journals. They don't know about research. They don't know about conferences.

When I compared myself with these students I say, 'Although I was disadvantage in some way, but the very personal efforts I made just gave me some advantage in terms of research, in terms of conference, in terms of knowledge.' That gave me really some confidence. Was that because of my family background? No. Because of the background of my community? No. Because of the college I went to? No. That was purely my personal effort. I cannot explain how that happened, but there are such difference that you cannot explain.

He continued to say:

They [administrators] did not look at my family or maybe [my] background that I was first-generation student. They simply looked at my publishing background, academic background.

Again, people don't ask whether you are first-generation or second-generation student. All what they see is do you have a publishing background, do you have a strong academic background, whatever...I don't think anyone would look at your previous social origin, or whatever. They simply look at your academic condition whether you have been able to publish, you have been able to write well, you have been able to understand academic, this course, or whatever.

Nearly past the half way mark in the first interview, Cesar could not report being asked about his identity as first-generation; not during the application process, not in the class, and not among his cohort-mates. But, Cesar recalled an informal conversation with his advisor, the dean of the school of education, where they engaged in a discussion about each other's parents' education background. At that moment, they discovered they were both products of parents who did not attend college. Cesar said:

By the way the dean also talks about she's first-generation college student. Her parents didn't go to college or a university...

In the second interview, I inquired about how the conversation came up and if this interaction was meaningful to Cesar. He said:

You know how I found out? Initially when we meet and we talk about education and she ask me 'How did you go to school?' So she asks me where I was born so I say 'I was born in a very remote Ethiopian village where we have no, even, secondary school' and whatever. Then she asks me 'So, how did you go? Were your parents educated at the time?' or whatever. So I talk about my history and she also says 'Well, you know, my father not only, I think maybe secondary school to certain level' or her mother or so went to school just to a certain level. So she always mentions this and we always discuss. So how did we continue to be more educated if our parents didn't observe that level of education or whatever, we discussed these issues. That's how I found out that she was a first-generation.

When we meet informally we discuss these things, not a formal discussion. When somebody identifies with you in similar experience, whatever, you feel comfortable to talk to that person. That gives you motivation, that's a safer environment to interact with that person. You become more informal with that person. You know, it's good to share experiences, historical trajectories with people when you have the same things you tend to reveal yourself and tend to communicate better.

Cesar's experience demonstrated two things. First, he personally and deeply reflected on the meaning the identity had for him. But, his connection to the identity did not seem to shape his experience in one way or another. Instead, his publishing endeavors

seemed to matter more than his family's education background. Secondly, Cesar's experience illustrated one opportunity when he discussed his identity. Otherwise, as a second year doctoral student, Cesar did not recall any other interactions discussing his first-generation identity. The first-generation identity is an unspoken characteristic that exists in the doctoral program. Although personally held by Cesar, it did not go much beyond his knowledge and that of the dean of the school.

Reyes. Similar to Cesar, Reyes also remarked how little the first-generation status came up in conversations. At first, it was difficult to remember experiences directly related to being first-generation. And like Cesar, Reyes's identity as first-generation was brought up discreetly and informally with classmates discussing their parents' education background. In the first interview, Reyes shared:

When others talk about their parents and the way they were able to provide support when they were in college that I didn't have access to, made me feel different. It made me wonder what I was missing out on, what other things I was missing out on. Other than what they were describing, how their parents were helping them. This is something that I personally struggle with is, not self-esteem, but sometimes just self-confidence.

Unlike Cesar, Reyes' reaction to the doctoral students' commenting on parents' source of support questioned his ability or place in the program. Later in the interview, Reyes commented:

My reaction was to, on a deeper level, 'I'm not good enough' or 'I'm not as good.' We will have the same degree, but somehow, I'm not as good. That tends to be my first reaction.

There are other times where...It should also just be noted that it doesn't come up that often. It's just unspoken and it's, 'Well, you got to this level, so it doesn't matter at this point what your status is, because you're at this really high level. You've been able to do something to get here that has served you well.' It doesn't actually really come up that often. If it does,

it's in such a discrete way like the interaction I was talking about; where someone was talking... They just simply talked about how their parents went to such and such [college]. That's how you know that they're not first-generation. That's how I knew that I was... For that just reinforces for me, 'Oh, that's right. I am first-generation. My parents didn't go to college.'

Reyes shared a similar reaction to Cesar. He was proud to be at this level of education.

He said:

There have been other times where I thought about... like, 'Wow. Good for me.' That, I will say, 'Right. I was first-generation, but still was able ... from a lower middle class, but I was still able ... I'm here and I've been able to make it work.'

Furthermore, he shared:

In fact, I'm sure most people just assume that I'm ... I think it's almost always assumed your parents went to college. It just was not at all talked about when I was an undergrad. It's certainly, not talked about now; unless, we're talking about undergraduate students. There seems to be ... It's probably a common assumption that I would even be guilty of it too that I assume everyone around me is ... not first-generation.

Toward the end of the first interview, Reyes was asked, how, if at all, the program reacted to his first-generation identity. At this point, Reyes commented on very little to no interactions involving his identity as first-generation, and thus did not know how to answer the question. This experience was also shared by Cesar. Reyes shared:

That is a really good question. I don't know if I can point to an experience where I felt the program reacted to me being first-generation. Only because I don't think anyone knows. I tell people, it's not that I'm not willing to talk about it. It just isn't in the conversation that's had. It's not something that you asked on an application. It wasn't a part of ... It's not such a strong part of my identity that I would write about it in a cover letter to get into the program. I can't say ... I don't know if I can speak to that.

Earlier, Cesar unveiled his identity as first-generation and commented, "It's good to share experiences, historical trajectories with people. When you have the same things

you tend to reveal yourself and tend to communicate better.” Reyes remarked similarly to Cesar, that when the first-generation status is casually mentioned as a form of an identity, knowledge is formed about those who identified as such and can make visible an unspoken community.

There are some people who said, ‘Oh, my mom didn't go to college.’ Or, ‘My dad didn't go to college,’ or have been like, ‘Oh, neither of my parents went to college either.’

It's almost like, ‘Oh, okay.’ We almost [have] a deeper connection to the person. Even if we're not close friends, we're just like, we kind of know. There's something common about the first-generation experience and particularly around race. It just helps form like an unspoken community and just like these subtle connections within the program.

The first-generation status is rarely inquired about or discussed, as he mentioned repeatedly, making the doctoral program unaware of his status as first-generation. He could only recall passive interactions when doctoral students discussed their parents’ education background, which became reminders of his first-generation background. Like Cesar, Reyes commented the first-generation identity as seldom present and thus as unshaping his doctoral experience. It was difficult for Reyes to think about specific examples related to this identity. Reyes’ experience is another illustration of an identity that is already invisible to the naked eye and further hidden in the doctoral community.

Brendan. In the first interview, Brendan addressed this sense of living in two worlds when thinking about experiences focused on or as reminders of his first-generation status. He felt “on guard” by messages received from his home life and school life, and thus associated this with his identity as first-generation. This is a unique experience for Brendan, and dissimilar to Cesar, Reyes and Monserrat. Brendan further explained:

There are individuals that, they know, but generally. 'Oh, man! Those people don't care about you. They just want the token black dude in their program and just to get you through it, they're going to pass you and they're going to say stuff to you that doesn't mean [s-word].' I know that's not true because I'm older, I've been through a lot and I know, okay, some of it might be true but generally, there's some genuine people [faculty, administrators] really trying to make it so that all their students are successful, and I'm one of their students. Whatever it takes to make them successful, that's what they're trying to do and I know it. They [individuals] don't know that so I got to [think], 'All right, keep some of the things you're saying and you keep that.'

On the other side [academic side], it's the same thing, the same kind of, 'Oh, you know, you don't have to worry about this and that's not really a concern.' Meanwhile, you're [faculty, administrators] not telling everyone [students] else that, so why you telling me that? What's going on?

From this experience, Brendan seemed to hear unsupportive messages from individuals from outside of the program and inconsistent messages from school. Together, the two made Brendan become a little bit on edge about his place in school and it was possible that messages from individuals influenced how he perceived messages from school.

Brendan did not consider himself first-generation because he knew more about higher education than he did when he began college. Later in the first interview, he shared the following when I asked him if he recalled any specific moments when the environment reacted to him as first-generation:

A lot of what, again sometimes I don't feel like I'm first generation because [it's] my third degree at the same school so I'm indoctrinated in this culture here but a lot of what's done and said is and the support that's there is for first generation international students.

I just find that that's beneficial for all kinds of first generation students, if that makes sense. Me, personally, I haven't had any, in the doctoral program, I haven't had experiences where I feel like, 'Oh, this one I can't handle because I don't have the tools to deal with it.' I just feel like I don't have that problem, at least I feel so far.

Brendan was the last person interviewed for each interview, and that always positioned him to concur with, or not, with emerging themes expressed by the others. So, during the second interview, I shared what the other participants recalled about experiences related to their first-generation status. Brendan remembered an ice breaker activity the professor facilitated in class. As part of the activity, students began to disclose their parents' education background. It became evident that Brendan was the only first-generation among classmates whose parents had a college degree.

...give a little history, talk about your family, just something about you to get everybody to know something about you. So the first girl that went, 'Oh, I went to UCLA, my parents went to UCLA, and then we moved down here, and I'm in this PhD program'. And that was kind of how it started. So everybody started talking about their parents. 'Oh, my parents went to Michigan and then we moved here, so I was an undergrad at [name of school]', and then so I don't know how it got on parents. So when it came around the room, everybody basically was talking about their parents. So I'm like 'my parents are divorced, my dad left my mom when I was four, my mom never made it... she made it... she barely made it out of high school. She just started going to college last year', you know what I mean? So that reminded, me, it was a stark reminder that I was first-generation... I was a first-generation college student. And my response was, 'Well, I'm from San Diego, and my parents are still here, at least my mom is. And I've been to [name of school], and this is my third round at [name of school], undergrad, master's and now a Ph.D.' So then the folks became, 'Oh, man, you got all your degrees here, you're going to have all your degrees here.' Meanwhile, your parents went to UCLA, he's a Provost at this school, legacy at that school. Oh, everybody's talking about their parents and how wonderful and great they are. And not that my mother's not the jewel of the world, but I mean, she doesn't have her college degree. So in that discussion it was like, 'Oh, I'm a first-generation student.'

Brendan did not unveil his identity in a class full of classmates. His reaction is different from Cesar and Reyes, both of whom shared their identity with others. When asked what drove Brendan to conceal his identity, it was mostly to prevent a negative outlook upon his mother. He said:

Well because it made me uncomfortable, because everyone was talking about the education of their parents... I don't want you guys to focus on her not being educated, because that's not what defines her. You know what I mean?!

Brendan's experience was different from Cesar and Reyes, and thus unique to him. His reaction to the experiences was also different. Brendan's experience with the class activity is the strongest example of doctoral students participating in an activity involving parents' education background and choosing to disclose or conceal their personal status. The choice to state his identity was set up in a very different context than that of Cesar and Reyes; nonetheless, it was an opportunity to break the cycle of all the other students discussing their parents' education experiences.

Brendan did not seem to focus on his first-generation identity; in fact, he did not consider himself first-generation. Brendan is aware of his identity, understood he was a product of a parent without a college degree, and identified interactions specific to the identity. But at the same time, at this level of education, the program was unaware of his status which could not determine how, if at all, the environment would have reacted to Brendan's first-generation identity had he disclosed it. Brendan's experience was different from Cesar and Reyes in that he was unwilling to talk about it, and at the time the activity took place, it was uncomfortable to share. Instead, he focused on addressing his two-time alumnus status. Brendan's experience is also unique to Monserrat's experience. Yet, she, too, reacted to the experience in such a way that kept the first-generation identity hidden.

Monserrat. During the first-year in the program, Monserrat was unfamiliar with research terms and language (i.e., critical theory, pedagogy) which are often encountered

in literature and class conversations. This unfamiliarity was a reminder of her first-generation status; that is, her previous academic experience did not prepare her as well as her classmates seemed to be prepared. It was also a reminder of a similar experience she recalled during her undergraduate years. At the doctoral level, she again felt as if she was the only student unfamiliar with the research language, an association she made with her status as first-generation. In the first interview, Monserrat shared:

I think... I don't have a clear example of it, because it happens so often about discussions around terms, discussions around conferences, discussions around some research methodologies and words, and theories that I wasn't familiar with that I figured, 'well no one's familiar with this yet because we're in this doctoral program together.' So feeling like they knew more than me already from the very get go. That was very familiar; I went to [name of school] for a bachelor's. I remember thinking, 'Wow this chemistry class is really hard,' just thinking that and then these two people said, 'We did this in high school,' I was like, 'Oh [s-word], I went to a bad high school', already. So kind of the same thing happening where I felt like it rolled off their tongue a little too easily, like 'Oh I'm doing a critical theory' ... and I'm like, 'What's a critical theory?' I actually would write down the terms that I would hear then I would Google them later and be resourceful in that way. Or like I shared with you earlier, go talk to someone. It doesn't happen anymore, but it did happen the first year a lot. That's where I thought that maybe I don't belong here because they seem to know a lot more already. So maybe I'm just really behind or maybe this isn't what I'm cut out to do.

To camouflage this unfamiliarity, Monserrat developed a "front." As part of the first interview, she shared:

So that's kind of played out in the doctoral program. I feel like sometimes I come in and the other students have experience with certain terms, like this Qual A [Qualitative A] paper, it was really just rolling off their tongue...what the hell is a Qual A paper? I have to go back to the handbook and look, and then I feel like I'm fronting, and I don't like the fronting part because it feels like maybe I don't belong there if I'm faking my way through it.

In the same interview, and when asked if she could think of a time when the environment reacted to her as first-generation, she thought of a conversation with a professor who remarked her status as “one of the few”, and what she planned on doing with the doctoral degree to support others like her. She shared:

The conversation that I mostly have and it's the same professor that's been really helpful, is he's actually the one that says 'well what do you want to do with this Ph. D.? There isn't many Latinas or women of color in this field. You can really make your name known for some area [of] study.' So there's been a lot of support as being one of the few. One of the upcoming, like, being the next [Patricia] Gándara.' Like, there is very few of you out there.

I don't necessarily feel exploited by that. I feel like there is some support there, but it's just funny to get that sort of feedback like, you're one of the very few. Like move forward and you can really set your name out for something. I can't think of anything else. Has it [first-generation] come up in the environment? I don't think so, not in other ways past what I've already described.

Montserrat experienced interactions similar to previous academic experiences which were reminders of her first-generation identity. Reflecting on her earlier education was a primary indication of Montserrat's total journey as being the only who did not know as much or as well as her classmates while she had to figure it out when the time was right. Like Brendan, Montserrat's first-generation status remained personally concealed. She put up a front to hide her status because of the lack of knowledge classmates did not encounter.

There are three interpretations that can be made from the participants' experiences. First, most participants communicated a weak connection to the first-generation identity as doctoral students even though they were aware of the identity based on their family's education background. Second, they were reminded of the status

through personal reflections or through interactions with non-first-generation doctoral students. Third, two participants' reaction to the interactions did not disclose their identity as first-generation while the other two did so. I believe the difference rested in the context in which the experience presented itself; a personal experience with few people versus an experience in a larger context with several people. The last interpretation illustrates the first-generation status as likely to be expressed by the participant when he or she was in "harmony" with the environment, like Cesar and Reyes. When the participant was in "conflict" with the environment, like Monserrat and Brendan, the first-generation status was concealed and unspoken to the community.

The combination of the three interpretations lessens the chance for the first-generation doctoral community to be visible in a prevalent community of doctoral students (including administrators) with college educated parents. Those who are first-generation may benefit from knowing who else shares the identity—an already invisible characteristic—in an effort to connect differently. If neither the participant nor the doctoral environment seeks to discover who is who in the doctoral community, it becomes disadvantageous to both the participant and the doctoral program to assume that certain characteristics only exist and others do not. If there is a chance to make this invisible status visible in a dominant culture of non-first-generation status, we begin to question what has always been present to uncover what has been hidden but always existed.

The Role of Language

Language held a significant role for each participant. It was a means to interpret, maintain and challenge cultural identity in the doctoral program environment. Each

participant shared a common experience with language, discussed interactions involving language, and their reaction at the time of the interaction. Participants' experiences showed four different interactions and reactions related to the role of language.

Cesar's experience with language was described as forcing to consciously connect through language accent. He assessed each interaction in an effort to be understood or to understand others; something he never did in his home country. Reyes experienced language in two ways. First, he discussed an ability to understand language related to academic terms. He owed this ability to previous academic experiences. Second, the inability to speak Spanish made it difficult to claim his Mexican-American identity. The more he interacted with Spanish speaking classmates, the more difficult it was to connect with this part of himself.

Montserrat's experience with language involved a deliberate rejection of pompous language to adhere to some sort of a scholarly status. Adopting this language was inconsistent with how she usually talked and how the community she served as a principal talked. So, Monserrat began to use a method she called code switching to maintain relevancy to the community she served. Brendan's experience described professors and classmates interested in learning about diverse communities, but disinterested in the reality of the struggles diverse communities really experience. Brendan talked about an experience in which classmates and professors were disturbed by his questions and comments addressing authentic experiences of black male high school students. The class' response was upsetting to and deterred Brendan from sharing any more authentic realities of diverse communities including his own. What follows are four distinct experiences and reactions involving the role of language as a form to

interpret, challenge and maintain their individual cultural identities. Figure 4 illustrates the participants' unique experiences and unique reaction with language in the doctoral program.

Cesar. Cesar's foundation of self was rooted in ethnicity, race and language accent. By formal training, Cesar held a faculty position and taught language education in his home country. As an international student, Cesar struggled with doing group work with classmates primarily because of the type of English spoken in the program. In the first interview, Cesar shared:

Let me give you an example. When I came here, I always believe the American continent is different from the rest of the world; not only in terms of culture, language or whatever, many things. When international students come here, the most challenging thing for them is the American colloquialism.

English? We have English in Ethiopia. We have English in England and Australia. The English here is different because of the colloquialism or informal language people speak here. It was really quite different from what I used to think about the American English, totally different. I didn't think it would be a challenge for me as an international student.

In the classroom, some professors speak standard English. It was fine. I don't have problems with the English many professors speak. There are professors who speak very colloquial, very informal English.

Almost all students speak this colloquial or informal English. If you are in a class or you have to do group work, whatever. You have to be able to interact with the students. That was quite a challenge.

The systems in the university should have been prepared for that kind of accommodation. They must say, 'The international students speak different language, so we have to prepare them for the instructional language. We have to give them more training. We have to create awareness about the differences, the common language student speak, whatever.'

I haven't seen that. It's very important. It's not because international students don't speak English. It's simply because it's different.

I asked, “And that was important?” He responded:

Yes. Sure, it has affected me a lot in the beginning. I couldn’t interact with students. At one point, even I thought, ‘Are these students speaking English or something different?’ because we couldn’t interact. They couldn’t understand me, I couldn’t understand them. I thought the system could have prepared me for that kind of interaction. Some students speak very informal, very colloquial English. I don’t know what they talk about. It was a challenge. They don’t know academic English. Even the professor was speaking in one class, ‘The international student really writes better academic English than American students.’

Yes, they speak lots of informal language, very colloquial language. That was really very important for group discussion, or whatever. Whatever you write is really good for the professor, but the group interaction is based on the kind of language students speak.

As a participant, Cesar quickly established a strong connection between his identity and its relationship with ethnicity, race and language accent. These three things were very important to him. During the second interview, I asked him if he could tell me more, particularly about language accent. Cesar shared:

I was not very conscious of my identity in terms of the type of language I speak, the linguistic group I am from, so when I came here I started to be conscious of my identity. Who am I? What’s my ethnic group? What’s my race? Especially race is very important here, in Ethiopia no race problem. You start to relate yourself in a more conscious way. You try to relate yourself with others in terms of the kind of language you speak, your race, you try to be conscious. For example, when you speak in English you say “Who am I speaking to? Am I speaking to African Americans or do they understand my English?” Then you try to adjust your English to white persons so they understand my English. You speak to other people from Africa you try to ... when you try to adjust yourself to different people obviously you think of yourself ... you become conscious of your identity. Sometimes you say why should I suffer to this extent? Why shouldn’t I simply interact naturally and then people help themselves if they are able to do. If they don’t understand it is up to them. Sometimes you become in this kind of dilemma but people just continuously put you in these kinds of dynamics.

I have, whenever I walk, whenever I sit down, whenever I see things I try to look at things from the perspective of race, language, even I mentioned accent, accent is very important. English is spoken by different people in different ways, that's accent. So people don't pay attention to whether you communicate in English or not, they pay attention to what kind of accent you're speaking and it's "Oh your English is good!" or "Where are you from?" It's not the content, it's the way you say it.

When people evaluate you continuously, you try to be more conscious. I think of this problem back home. Maybe I'm a victim of ... maybe back home we might have evaluated people in the way other people are evaluating me here. So that's what I mean by change of identity or whatever.

Cesar experienced difficulty with language accent with students, but not with faculty, as briefly mentioned in the above stanza. Cesar was a faculty at home which might explain why he experienced less of a language struggle with faculty. He explained:

I am more comfortable when I interact with professors. When I interact, for example the dean, other people who are more educated, they can easily understand you, they just assist you in the conversation process.

When I asked about the comfort he felt with faculty, he responded:

Well, they value your ideas. For example, now always just make a comment about my background, for example, 'Oh he's well published' or 'He used to be a faculty member in Ethiopia.' They just start with some kind of positive comment about you, but others don't know this. For example, other members of my cohort might have that kind of information but other people when you communicate on the street or wherever you go, they don't know. Or what they try to look at, what they see, what they hear, they just try to evaluate you from what we call from your face value. My face value may be not as valued as what my background shows or what I have been through. So that's how environment presents different kinds of challenges. So it's really important, the kind of people you talk to and even ... it's not only the kind of people, people who know you well will help you to be in better communicative situations than people who don't know your background or whatever.

The role of language in Cesar's experience played a critical role in the way he related to others and the way he understood himself in reaction to others. Speaking and comprehending an English language accent different from what Cesar was accustomed

to, is the specific role language played in his on-going adjustment in the doctoral program. Interactions were difficult and impaired relationships primarily with cohort-mates, as opposed to faculty, based on the language accent. Cesar constantly assessed interactions based on with whom he spoke, if he was understood and if others understood him. Language accent, one of the three most important components that define Cesar, challenged his identity and frequently made him consciously aware of his being. Cesar's native English language accent, a deeply rooted form of identity, encountered an environment with also deeply rooted values and beliefs. He said, "You become conscious of your identity. Sometimes you say why should I suffer to this extent? Why shouldn't I simply interact naturally and then people help themselves if they are able to. If they don't understand it is up to them. Sometimes you become in this kind of dilemma but people just continuously put you in these kinds of dynamics." Accordingly, Cesar seemed to be positioned to adjust to others, while others seemed to preserve their normal routine ways of interacting. Cesar's experience illustrated a responsibility to work hard to fit into an environment culturally different from his instead of illustrating interactions that adjusted to Cesar.

Montserrat. The first interview was coming to an end. In fact, it was the last question. Has the doctoral program hindered you in pursuit of the degree? Monserrat felt well supported in the doctoral program. She could not think of anything specific. She said, "I haven't felt hindered." Then followed the answer with, "I think it's very ethnocentric, but I point that out and I'm comfortable with pointing that out. I think the older I get, the more comfortable I am." Monserrat continued:

There's very western values of leadership. So specifically on leadership topics and leading organizations, it's very ethnocentric, white-man theory...All of the theories we have learned, all older white men...older white authors...so it's very much like that.

When asked about interactions that were ethnocentric in nature, she responded:

I mean, this world is so much more global. We need to include other points of view. I know the way that I've contributed to class is well, in the community that I seek to lead which is a community of immigrants.

I can't say or do the things that you're describing. It would be considered disrespectful. So there is this whole notion of respect that is very different from what the American notion of respect. I have to learn how to code-switch and be respectful to both communities all the time. That's the way it's come up...

When she first started the program, Monserrat had to learn the academic language of the program; something she struggled with mostly as a first-year doctoral student. As she persisted year after year, she either chose to accept or reject using academic language she learned to avoid conforming to behaviors inconsistent with which she is and the community she served as a principal. This resistance is deliberate in order to preserve her identity. What follows is a reflection of feeling influenced to speak like her cohort-mate and Monserrat's resistance to react accordingly. Monserrat shared:

I feel like sometimes I have actually; this has been my Facebook status, I have sometimes left that class feeling so pompous, like, I'm a scholar and I used these words like 'dichotomy' and I understand what they are, but I don't speak that way, neither does the community I live in.

I don't know if these people go home and speak that way. I mean, I keep thinking, is this how other people talk all the time? Jesus Christ. So, I've said I don't want to be a [f-word] scholar. That sounds so uptight to me. I actually want to work with people and help them, and so that has come up in both ways. It's either come up with me contributing in that sense and kind of adapting to that, or I get that little punk rock edge and say something that completely stabs that sort of [uptight] outlook. So I'll give an example.

Someone was trying to make small talk with me and said, 'Have you seen Waiting for Superman? I said, 'No if I have time to go to the movies, I'm going to watch Jackass.' I mean I just said it to like shut [her] up, you know? It was mostly my outward rejection of 'I don't want to be like you.'

I know that that sometimes contributes to me making friends that I said I don't have because if you're really going to treat me like the other, then I will be the other. If you're really going to speak that way and then I feel like I have to work extra hard to catch up with you, then I'm really not going to speak like you at all.

Sometimes, I don't know if it's a mood thing or how hard I feel pressed, but either I contribute in that way or I just completely remove myself from the group.

At the time of the second round of interviews, the use and type of language had become an emerging theme. I asked if there was anything else she wanted to add after I reviewed what she shared in the first interview:

I think that it comes with experience but I also know that I'm very aware that I have to code switch when I'm a principal, with a parent of course, when I'm a principal with a teacher, with a child, with my own family, when I'm considered a scholar or a research student, and then there's my girlfriends.

That language piece was very important for me to understand and make sure I break it through. I have learned that I have to do that or else I will not be accepted in the new community that I'm trying to break in. I actually think if I'm going to go back to the people that have broken cycles, they understand that too, that there's a certain acculturation I have to do and a certain text of words that I have to say in order to be accepted into that group.

Over time, Monserrat journeyed through some experiences influenced by a certain type of language. She noticed a type of language heavily rooted in western culture inconsistent with her identities and the elementary school community she served every day. This interpretation placed Monserrat in the middle of two worlds, the world in which she needed to be a doctoral student and the world outside of the program. To operate as effectively as possible, Monserrat learned to code switch. Code switch meant altering

language learned in the doctoral program to connect with communities outside of the doctoral program. In her telling, what made sense in the academic world did not fit with her community. As she put it, the academic language that resonated most with the western culture did not resonate with her identity or with her research interest on Latina principals. Monserrat was left to determine how, if at all, will academic language work and be useful in her own community. She also deliberately resisted language-use to preserve her sense of self. Monserrat's experience with the way language shaped her experience is unique to her. Unlike Cesar who looked for ways to connect consciously with the doctoral community, Monserrat rejected an interaction that made her feel she had to work to be like her cohort-mate.

Reyes. Reyes is biracial. He is Mexican American and White. Academic language was quickly learned during his journey in the doctoral program. Also, he noticed in class that other students of color seemed to have more difficulty with academic terms which reinforced his knowledge because he could answer questions related to those terms. As the role of language emerged as a theme, Reyes discussed what it meant to him. In the second interview, he commented:

When I'm in class, I feel like I understand what the professors are saying, so actually in contrast to what that student shared, I actually feel quite comfortable and can actually keep up with many of the things that people are saying in class. I don't know if that's a result of my education, if that's a result of my field of study in my master's program that prepared me to figure out what's being said or to already know the terminology, but that has not been a struggle for me. In fact I actually feel in some ways at an advanced level within my cohort and from other people in the doc program when it comes to language and when it comes to the language of a doctoral student and the written language.

Also I feel my writing is more advanced. I think that has a lot to do with going to private Catholic school for 12 years and predominantly white, so

it was a predominantly white institution. I think it has a little bit to do with my master's ... actually a lot to do with my master's program and the way that I was taught to...the way that I was trained to be a critical thinker, the way that I was taught to write, and the terminology that we used is very similar to the terminology that is used in the doc program. In that way actually I feel quite comfortable even though I'm a first-generation student and can't talk about that with family, I've been able to get that information that I need to be successful from other places.

Reyes proceeded to describe evidence that confirmed his knowledge of and comfort with academic language. He said in the second interview:

I think that there ... I don't know if I can point you to a specific instance and go into detail about it, but there have been several times where either in casual conversations or even conversations in the classrooms where someone will ask, I don't know if there was ... be brave and say, 'I don't know what this means' or 'I don't know what that means' and it becomes clear that a lot of other people don't know what it means either. And that is not ... I'm like, 'Oh already, I know what that means' or if we're working on a group project or in groups about something and it becomes evident that some people aren't on the same page that I am or that maybe other students are when it comes to being able to talk about what we need to talk about. And so those sort of instances have helped confirm for me that ... not that I'm better than them, but that I ... that is not a struggle for me and I'm not struggling in that way.

In the doc program, the language used is just not very accessible to some people of color. My dad just doesn't understand sometimes when I talk about my program, whereas my mom tends to understand a lot more even if she doesn't know the terminology. I've seen this in class, too, both as a fellow classmate and as a teaching assistant, where international students and students of color tend to struggle more than white students with the way we describe and reflect on leadership. I don't know the extent to which being first-gen plays a role in this; I imagine it does, but because it's not talked about it's hard to say.

Reyes clearly stated his previous academic experiences attributed to the ability to understand academic terms discussed in class. His knowledge was confirmed when doctoral students explicitly inquired about the definition of those terms. He understood his proficiency through these interactions. He also remarked that most questions came

from students of color and then connected that with his parents. This was a mindful recognition that language and the way it is used, is not always equally friendly with everyone. Although Reyes did not know the extent to which, if at all, this shaped his first-generation identity; his reflection on his previous academic journey and the ability to discuss this with his parents, are a reflection of his first-generation identity. Similar to Monserrat's struggle with academic terms at the beginning of the doctoral program reminded her of her college experience, so did Reyes' experience with academic language reminded him of his academic journey.

Reyes struggled with language, just like the other participants, but in a slightly different way. As half Mexican American, Reyes had difficulty claiming this identity largely because he did not speak Spanish. In his experience, language further promoted his Whiteness while it concealed his Mexican American heritage. In the first interview, he explained:

In a sense, I feel that grad school has enhanced my understanding of how "White" I am but not about how "Mexican" I am. With Women's Studies, I was pushed to realize how my position as someone who passes as White privileges me...[there's] a number of people in our program who are from Mexico or grew up speaking Spanish and identify as Latino or Hispanic. Interacting with them makes me feel not Latino enough.

I wanted to know more about how language shaped his identity as Mexican American. In the second interview, Reyes shared:

I feel like it is almost not fraudulent...it makes it difficult for me to claim or to tell people that I'm Mexican American when I don't speak Spanish. It would be different if I looked ... if my physical appearance were such that you would assume that I wasn't white then I'd feel like I would be able to claim that identity more. But because I look white, I'm culturally white, I dress very in a white way, not being able to speak Spanish is ... I don't know why that is the crux of me feeling more legitimate in claiming Mexican American. That's my initial thinking, my response.

Reyes' experience as feeling "fraudulent" about being Mexican American was related to not being able to speak Spanish and supported by passing as White. Also, the program admitted a healthy number of international students, like Cesar. Those from Spanish speaking countries, as well as Spanish speaking domestic students, shaped Reyes' experience with language as feeling "fraudulent". Cesar whose identity was deeply rooted in language accent and challenged each time he interacted with others, primarily students, was unlike Reyes' experience. Reyes' experience with language was a reminder of not being Mexican American enough which in some ways limited the ability to connect with those who spoke Spanish.

Brendan. After one year in the program, Brendan realized that an authentic Black experience is difficult to write about when the program expected a certain form of writing. This form of writing, he expressed, is hard to do in the "lingo" professors expect him to follow. Brendan is caught between how the program expected him to write and the freedom to express himself unbounded by rules that guided the academic writing. This experience emerged when I asked him about recommendations he would pass along to other first-generation Black doctoral students. In the first interview, Brendan shared:

I think even as a teacher now, I see kids, they're not ready to do that and just stress the importance of being able to write an effective sentence or effective paragraph with actual idea and a purpose behind it.

I think that's, for me as a first generation student, sometimes it's a challenge to write because I don't have that experience and write in the language that these professors want, so you have to learn the lingo and the language. That's not going to necessarily be taught to you.

I said, "Language seems to be an emerging theme. Say more about language as it applies to your experience." Brendan expanded:

Where I come from, we don't talk how people talk here or write how people talk here. Trying to put thoughts and words and when I say 'talk', I'm not talking about big words or small words, I'm talking about academic language that I don't even know.

I don't have people in my background that speak in academic terms. For me to be able to write, like I write from my experiences so that's not always going to reflect an academic tone. That's just going to reflect a tone but the academic language that these guys require is extensive and it's not just your vocabulary. It's almost like they're looking for you to incorporate your experiences. How do I word that? They want you to talk about your experiences but without your vernacular, that you have to talk about a black experience without the blackness, if that makes sense. That's a learned trait. That's not natural.

Brendan referenced “they”, “these guys”, “they’re” illustrating that his experience with language seemed to be controlled by a group of people. It also depicted a struggle between expressing a Black experience using language fitting to his experience and expressing a Black experience using an academic language required by this group of academic people. In other words, Brendan’s Black experience was defined by a type of language unfitting to an authentic identity. Brendan continued:

It's almost when I write about stuff and I don't use my experiences a lot of times. I'll fake some stuff because I don't know how to do that. I don't know how to not share a black experience without having some blackness in it so it's difficult for me to do that and it still has an academic undertone to it. It doesn't make sense to me.

A lot of what I give is not authentic and they want authenticity but it's not, it's like you want it but you don't really want it because if you wanted it, you would accept all of this regardless of where it's coming from, but that's not the case. Since it's not the case, that's not what you get.

When I asked Brendan to recall an experience that led him to write less authentically, he remembered when he shared comments on his classmates’ class presentation on the experience of black high school students. Brendan recalled:

In some of my classes, I felt it was necessary not to provide authentic answers or experiences because some of my classmates' previous reactions were toxic. Toxic as in doubting the veracity of the information being put forth in a presentation or a paper and causing problems and strife (discomfort) in the class; typically aimed at the person presenting the information. The resulting conversations were explosive and often polarizing, making for a stressful environment. Some of our professors were not equipped to deal with these situations, and let them get out of hand. Worse, they would side against the presenter (in an attempt to promote discussion), often creating an even more toxic situation.

A specific situation [is a co-presentation involving] white student teachers (my peers) volunteering at an inner-city school and after a month or so, leaving the school feeling good about themselves for volunteering/mentoring at such a school. They claimed the students felt so much more empowered because of 'their' presence and help. 'We changed lives' they claimed. When I discussed test scores and continued dropout rates of the very students they claimed to have helped, chaos ensued. I essentially called them out on their great work and showed them their impact was minimal, certainly not epic and monumental as they claimed. Once I relayed my experience [of working with the] high school student with similar encounters, they were [even more upset]. I could appreciate the lack of impact individuals in this situation could really make, verifying the information we put forth in our presentation. Our professor did nothing to stop the argument, which continued for most of the 3-hour class and into the next session.

After that experience, I took much greater care to dull the truth when necessary. Much of my research and point of view came from the other side of the lens these people tended to look through. What they perceived was often different from my own. It wasn't that I was scared or fearful but more that I didn't want to expend the energy on individuals that weren't going to change or grow from the discussion.

In the journal, Brendan reacted to the doctoral program's description and described how the program could personalize his Black experience. Brendan shared:

They should truly focus on the 'personalization' experience involved in the program. A personal focus would allow a greater focus or emphasis on the black experience as a black student. The onus should not be on me to provide the experiences necessary to grow and develop my 'black experience'. However, since the school is limited in its experience (and that of its staff) it would be a challenge for them to personalize the experience of each student to empower them to contribute. At the same

time, I am paying ALOT of money for this “experience” so it is okay for them to work more to make it happen.

Like Cesar, Reyes and Monserrat, Brendan encountered an experience that collided with his black and first-generation identities through the use of language bounded by the doctoral program. Brendan was unable to truly communicate his experience using his own words to depict his true self. Brendan talked about cohort-mates and some professors who say they want to learn from his experience but did not want to hear the whole experience. As a result, Brendan shared what they wanted to hear and not what they should have heard. In his experience, an authentic Black experience was not incorporated in the doctoral program.

The role of language was presented in various forms. The role of language was a reflection of each participant’s home community; the community responsible for molding who they are. When each participant described their experience in the program, it became apparent that language was tied to their identities and influenced their experience while it determined their transition in the program. Their identities and previous experiences collided with the doctoral program and provided four separate examples for understanding their selves in the doctoral community. Viewed through the lens of the role of language, participants were challenged by specific and unique interactions. These unique interactions prompted different reactions.

As a result, the first-generation doctoral students of color were placed in positions to protect their cultural identity through the use or rejection of language in the program. They determined the extent to which various forms of language needed to be adopted and the extent to which adopting language influenced their identities. During these moments,

they were faced with the decision to resist the program's culture in order to preserve their identity. Instead, language normally used to create an authentic interaction became a defensive mechanism that impacted the authenticity. Participants said they worked hard to connect with peers, purposely rejected interacting with a peer, felt fraudulent to claim racial identity and dulled the truth which were mechanisms to navigate language in the doctoral program and creating a disconnect with others as interactions occurred. Consequently, language was a real struggle that made the peer-to-peer and peer-to-faculty an authentic interaction hard to fulfill.

Participation in Classroom Conversations: To Participate or Not to Participate

Participants readily described how they participated in discussions and group activities in the classroom. These kinds of interactions were a foundational feature in how the participants experienced the doctoral program. Participation in leadership conversations on topics of race, socioeconomic status, religion, gender and sexual orientation made participants heroic. In this context, participants were often placed at the center of the topic to effectively lead the conversation. Participants symbolized a form of authority on the topic, were admired and often their comments were left unchallenged. In various ways, this heroic expectation was placed onto participants by classmates or professors in search for "the most right" answers to inform the class. Participants became aware of and followed gestures (i.e., looks and questions) directed to them to inform the class as topics on race, socioeconomic status, religion, gender and sexual orientation emerged. However, participants purposely withdrew from these conversations and became silent to escape this kind of influence. As a result of being silent, participants learned to balance when to participate and when not to participate in class discussions.

Reyes and Brendan reacted similarly to gestures. Cesar and Monserrat reacted differently from one another and differently from Reyes and Brendan. The participants' reaction to become silent followed a similar path. That is, Reyes and Brendan similarly interpreted being silent in the classroom, and Cesar and Monserrat interpreted being silent separate from the other and separate from Reyes and Brendan.

Initially, Cesar withdrew from participating in class to protect personally held beliefs from being misunderstood; and therefore from being misunderstood himself. By purposely being silent, Cesar protected his beliefs. However, his silence was interrupted when the professor guided Cesar through a series of questions that only Cesar could answer. These questions were specific to Cesar's home country, Africa. Through the professor's facilitation, a safe environment was created for and appreciated by Cesar.

The room in which Monserrat's class took place was structured in such a way that those at the center of room will be the center of the conversation. Monserrat was cued by the room's set up to engage in a conversation about race. But, there was no follow-up or inquiry. It was the end of the conversation. This experience led Monserrat to first be silent to assess the safety of the room in order to ascertain an honest conversation.

Reyes and Brendan both experienced classmates and professors directly give signs to carry on diversity-related conversations. Both decided to become silent in an effort to let classmates initiate and engage in the conversations. Both also shared that as one of the few or only persons of color, seldom did classmates' contributions to conversations added to their knowledge. Figure 5 illustrates the participants' experiences with classroom conversations including two who had independent interactions and reactions from one another and the other two shared similar interactions and reactions.

Cesar. During the first interview, Cesar described the doctoral program as being safe when he interacted with other doctoral students of color. The second interview allowed for a follow-up to that comment where Cesar recalled other experiences that shaped his experience as a doctoral student of color. He began describing the composition of his class; that is, he explained the types of students in his class. The composition of the class as having fewer African or African American/Black students led Cesar to declare the class environment as unsafe to engage in diverse leadership exchange. As one of the few persons of color, he preferred to exclude comments instead of saying something that may be misunderstood. The professor seemed to be instrumental to Cesar because he facilitated the direction of and Cesar's role in the conversation. In turn, the facilitation placed Cesar as heroic or authoritative during a conversation about Africa. Cesar welcomed the professor's lead because it provided a sense of comfort. In the second interview, Cesar shared:

I might have taken one or two courses with one or two people of African or African American origin ...my cohort is diverse but I am the only person from Africa, but there is maybe one person where I work who is from Kenya, a first-year doctoral student. Definitely he is now the closest person... Otherwise, in my doctoral program one or two persons with whom I took one or two courses otherwise dominantly white students. We don't have many African Americans in the doctoral program.

These days when I say safer zone, you know sometimes when you make a comment about race because our field of study we talk about lots of social issues, relationships, identity or whatever. So, I don't find it's so easy to make any comment, especially about these things, I'm very careful about what I say and even gender models sometimes when you are in the same category it's easy to say about each other anything you like but is difficult to make a comment about the other category. So, safety in terms of what we say, how much we say, okay... One important thing is religion, in this country for example, people are very, very sensitive about talking about Islam. There are a lot of things that I believe in about Islam, which I don't easily say here because people can easily misunderstand you and they can

easily label you and that can be risky to fix your relationship. So it's better not to say anything than endangering your relationship with others.

Cesar described the way professors made him feel comfortable to share his ideals and points of views. He proceeded in the second interview:

The professors try to [put you] in a better position always because they understand the challenge of interacting with other people. For example, they introduce you, they sometimes try to bring in something which they know about you and about your culture and they try to bring you into the discussion. For example, they say 'Okay, in Ethiopia or in Africa we have certain diseases, is that true Cesar? Can you say something?' So, you can make a comment because it's a kind of attraction into the discussion. Also, they try to protect you from saying something risky. 'Okay, we won't get into that stuff,' then you abstain from saying anything. Sometimes they defend you, 'What he's trying to say [is this] one, take us to this. Maybe it's a problem of language, otherwise Cesar wanted to say this and this.' So that's a way of creating more safe environment for you and sometimes they say more about you than you say about yourself.

When asked how it felt to be the only person to confirm or disconfirm the professor's statements about Africa, Cesar's country, he commented:

When the professor makes you point of discussion... You know the context, it's not to put you on the spot or to create something uncomfortable for you. Maybe it's to help you have a positive environment in the discussion so really it feels good when someone tries to protect you, defend you or just value your culture and then talks about your culture, your history or whatever. It feels good and I feel protected or defended or whatever.

As being one of the few doctoral students of color, Cesar remarked a lack of diversity in class kept him from sharing personally held beliefs or engaging in conversations to preserve relationships with classmates. This was the initial reason for being silent in class. Cesar's experience also demonstrated a central position he was given in answering specific questions about Africa as directed by the professor. In this experience, and as Reyes and Brendan's experiences will also demonstrate, specific cues

are given to doctoral students of color in these types of conversations and perhaps limit other doctoral students from being purposely approached.

Montserrat. The classroom was designed in such a way that one might be more included by the seat they have chosen. Based on the seat she had originally chosen, Monserrat felt excluded from the conversation on race. She purposely changed her seat from the peripheries to the center of the room to make sure she would be better included in the conversation. She “felt called on”, as she said, to expand the dialogue. She wanted to be seen, she wanted to be included. The design of the room indicated that sitting in the center of the room would be at the center of the conversation. On the contrary, when Monserrat contributed to the conversation about race, it was left unexamined. It was left hanging without a follow-up question or comment. Even though she changed her seat to be a part of the class conversation, the lack of follow-up disregarded Monserrat’s contribution toward the conversation. Monserrat’s physical position did not matter and therefore her comment on the topic was quickly nixed, undervalued and unexamined. This experience encouraged Monserrat to assess subsequent interactions before engaging with the environment. During the first interview, she remembered a classroom experience that shaped her experience as Latina. She commented:

We were having a discussion on race and it was black and white, black and white, black and white, and a lot of attention is always given to the center because everyone is kind of thrown in. We had a break and I purposely sat in the middle. Actually it wasn’t just me it was the five Latinas that were in that group. We said, ‘let’s sit in the middle.’ We’re sitting in the middle because again, there’s all this discussion about black and white; meanwhile there are two black people here, and there are all these white folks, and then there’s five Latinas, like we need to kind of expand this repertoire.

So we sat there and the discussion kept going on and I don't remember exactly what he said, but it was something about 'what about the Mexicans and minorities', or something like that, and so I was already upset by not being included in that conversation, and by some of the assumptions being made by the white people in that room.

So when he said that I just, that's when I just lost it. I was like, if I'm here I purposely sat here. Obviously I wanted to say something and I felt called on to say something. I did stand up and said, 'we're not a minority, Mexicans are not a minority especially if you live in San Diego. We are around everywhere. You just don't see us. Just like you haven't seen me sitting in front of you as you were talking.'

Latinas were missing from the conversation so we wanted to make it prevalent, like we're going to sit right in the middle of this black and white conversation, and we still were not seen. I mean when you're sitting that way everyone's eyes are in the middle and nothing was still brought up. It was purposeful.

"It was purposeful", as Monserrat just explained. She took a series of action to be seen and to be involved in a conversation lacking her and her friends' perspectives, perspectives from Latinas. The way the room was set up assisted Monserrat's decision to change her seat and join the conversation. When asked if sitting in the center of the class made a difference in being seen, she replied:

Not necessarily. No one followed up on that conversation. I think they were too uncomfortable. I actually think that's been most of my experience with conversations about race, it's too uncomfortable for people. So it's dropped.

The decision to withdraw from subsequent class conversations was driven by first assessing the environment. In the second interview, she shared:

That's what I strive for, sometimes when I stay quiet [it's] because I don't want to be the only representative of that particular theme [or] viewpoint lens because sometimes you need allies when you are about to go into that. I see the honest conversation as an assessment of the safety and sometimes I don't want to know what they really think. It goes into that safe space of do I really want to know? Do I want to expose this right now? Of course and then is it the proper time? And then it goes into, do I want to shame them right now because I'm angry with what they said? Like a public

spanking, or do I really care about them and say, 'I want them to learn.' And all of those assessments happen before that honest conversation happened, because some people aren't ready for it or they get defensive, when we expose like yeah, that is a stereotype.

Now, the assessment is, is this a teaching moment or not? Because I'm pretty quick with my responses and I'm pretty snarky with my responses and I have to catch myself from not saying them out loud, just in every aspect because it goes back to that assessment of like, 'is this comment going to be helpful in getting this person out of this mindset or is it going to contribute to the mindset about Latinas?'

Monserrat's experience is unique from the others. She saw an opportunity to participate and engage in a conversation to widen narrow perspectives that were being offered. Monserrat followed cues provided by the pattern the room exhibited with chairs set up at the center of the room. Based on the structure of the room, she thought she would be welcomed into the dialogue. She put the effort to be included and to be seen by changing her seat and standing up when she spoke. Like Cesar who followed the professor's questions to participate, so did Monserrat by following the patterns the room presented. In this experience, the notion of being seen, wanting to be seen was unmet when Monserrat's contribution was unexamined. "It was dropped," as she said. So, Monserrat's heroic role was attempted but not realized in this experience. As one of the few Latinas in class, this experience became a warning to too quickly react to feeling "called on" to participate. Because of this experience, she exercised silence to assess the safety of other environments before engaging in an honest conversation. Similar to Cesar, a safe environment was important to participate in the classroom experience.

Reyes. Reyes was very self-aware of his biracial identity that translated into being aware of the classroom environment. Reyes spoke from both his Mexican American and White identities. Specifically, the way he spoke of his White identity as being privilege

brought awareness to a class predominantly comprised of White students. “I think it gives more credibility”, Reyes said, as he reflected on his experience during classroom conversations. Reyes described specific in-class group activities where he purposely selected not to participate, and discovered silence led classmates to “take up the work” which demonstrated knowledge and ability to effectively engage in conversations on topics of race, socioeconomic status, religion, gender and sexual orientation. By the end of the first interview, and with all participants, the classroom experience, and more specifically classroom conversations about diversity, clearly emerged as a theme. Reyes’ classroom experience derived entirely from the second interview. He commented:

I am known informally as like the gender guy, so I have a woman’s studies degree, so I am therefore a master of anything and everything related to gender, and gender identity, and the way that interacts with and informs conversations, and dynamics, and power, and privilege, and oppression. That also then has now led to like diversity topics in general, I tend to have more informal authority or when I speak, people kind of know, ‘Yeah Reyes is legit, because he got his master’s degree in woman’s studies. And he studies this regularly, so he knows.’ And I have identities that are oppressed in some ways, so therefore I have even more authority to talk about these things. So in classes when race comes up particularly in the first class, there was one time we ... the whole class was just complicated to even say and like sum up in one sentence, but essentially there was this ...

We were listening to someone who had a leadership dilemma, and we have to ... the rest of the group has to analyze that person’s case from a systems perspective. One of the systems that came up was gender. There is obviously some gender power dynamics happening in this person’s case and that the person who shared the case can’t speak at all, like we’re kind of processing out loud in front of them.

And I kept my mouth shut. I did not say one thing. The entire time, I did not say one thing. However, I was looked at constantly especially around the gender and race, because the people involved were White, but the woman was a woman of color, and they were just looking ... they were kind of like prompting me in a nonverbal way to contribute, and I refuse.

However, people took up the work. They talked about it. It was helpful for me to know, 'Oh, I don't need to talk about it,' because one, it's not helpful for me to do all the talking. It's helpful for other people to get involved. And two, other people know. Other people have knowledge. And it helps them to know that they can talk about it that they can participate. It's not just me or like the token...like that other participant, like the token people who'd regularly take it up when it's not being talked about or when it needs to be talked about. That's like one example of a time when I ... I'm now regularly prompted, like people look to me to talk about it especially with gender.

There was another class, an organizational culture and theory class where the professor said something about ... someone brought up gender and he says, 'Yeah, I know gender is just a crazy thing, like Reyes you'd know a lot about, like Reyes you'd have to agree with that, or you know, Reyes you would know a lot about that, right?' I was like, 'Mm-hmm' didn't say anything though because I'm like I can't just ... I don't want to get pigeon holed because I have this expertise, and because I have these lived experiences that are diverse and not the norm, I can't just be that person to always talk about it. It's not solely the responsibility of the people who are diverse to be the ones to talk about it, and I think that it's unfortunate, and I also can recognize certain instances where ... like at one class where the people around me were a majority ... when we were talking about the case study, the majority of people were White, straight men and women.

I surmised the situation to be when people are silent ...when there's silence around when we're talking about diversity, when race, and gender, and diversity come up in class in the doc program, I almost feel like white students tend to be silent, because they don't want to say the wrong thing. And so rather they respond to what someone else has said which is typically, 'Oh my gosh, that's so interesting. That makes me think about XYZ.' They're not really ... very few white students contribute in my perspective meaningfully and in a critical way to conversations about diversity. It's just so rare.

Reyes was clearly aware of his contributions to classroom conversations on the topic of race, socioeconomic status, religion, gender and sexual orientation. He attributed this to his diverse background and experiences he lived every day. Reyes' experience demonstrated two classroom experiences where classmates and professors communicated a series of prompts directly to him. These prompts were looks, stares, and direct comments and questions to encourage Reyes to lead conversations on diversity topics.

Reyes' reaction to the prompts was to become silent to avoid the heroic role, to avoid being central to these conversations. By being silent, he discovered that others were able to take on conversations about diversity-related topics. He also discovered that a class mostly comprised of White doctoral students, minimal information and experiences were shared which became a disadvantage to Reyes' own professional growth through these conversations. Reyes' experience represented a series of behaviors consistent with developing Reyes as heroic by specifically directing questions for him to answer. These directives were so specific to Reyes that they limited opportunities for others to utilize their experiences as a frame of reference to equally engage in classroom participation. Reyes' experience was different from Cesar and Monserrat. However, Reyes' experience is most similar to Brendan's experience.

Brendan. Earlier in the chapter, Brendan expressed that when he enters a room comprised of predominantly White students he does not focus on being the only Black man in a room; others are more concerned about his racial/ethnic identity than he is in this kind of setting. Similar to Reyes, Brendan led conversations related to topics of race and socioeconomic status. He discussed a few examples where he was central to the direction of the conversation. One day after class, Brendan met with the professor about the nature of the class conversation. The professor assigned Brendan to prepare a presentation on impoverished communities for the next class. Unlike Cesar who found it helpful to follow the professor's facilitation, Brendan did not want nor did he find it helpful to be placed in this position; an experience similar to Reyes. Brendan's experiences made him heroic; he rescued the assigned topic and made him an authority in what is right and what is wrong about impoverished communities. As part of his reaction,

Brendan purposely exercised silence to “see which way the mood will swing to”, as he put it. His silence led classmates to react in different ways, but each reaction was equally profound. In the second interview, Brendan discussed details of classroom conversations he encountered when asked what those interactions were like. Brendan shared:

Then the American people, or the U.S. citizens, or whoever will pull an example from the U.S. ‘Oh, you know, like the ghettos in Detroit...’, and as soon as you say ghetto, I perk up because I’m waiting for the next line, you’re going to say ‘black’. It’s inevitable, or something that references minority or in some way it’s going to come up. Then they kind of look at me like, ‘is it okay if I talk about?’ You know what I mean? How do I know? I know about the ghetto, but I’m not in the ghetto right now. I can go back and visit occasionally, but I’m not like a straight up ... that’s not me. Because I’m the only one in the room, I am the expert. ‘You may speak about the ghetto, yes, keep going. Or hold on, what did you say?’ Well, you know, it’s really like they’re waiting for me to like, ‘all right, go ahead keep talking. Or no, stop, that’s too much. What are you talking about?’ I like to let them dig their own graves or whatever. Or just get your thoughts out so whatever your example’s going to be so you can keep this moving. Many times I’m looked at as the expert on anything that has to do with African American culture, ghetto references, or something poor...

Similar to Reyes, Brendan’s experience illustrated cues that he encountered in class.

These cues directed him to contribute, lead and confirm discussions on race and socioeconomic status. Brendan was knowledgeable about these topics, but these topics are not necessarily his personal experiences. By virtue of being the only Black man, it was assumed that these were his experiences. I asked Brendan if there was anything that could have been done to engage others in the conversations. Brendan shared:

I have to be the voice ... not the voice of reason, but I have to remind them hey... ‘not everybody has the same background as you. Other people come from different walks of life.’ Then the conversation gets a little bit more ... it deepens it, but a lot of times it’s very plain and vanilla. ‘Oh, you know, in my experience’..., which is not any experience at all

because you're either too young or you haven't had the experience. You've been spoon fed, you haven't even had a job that you had to provide for yourself and struggle and doing things on your own. Mom bought you your first car and probably does now. Everything you know is privilege. You really don't have a point of reference, so it's just a lot of times you have to kind of rein people in. Even the professors have to be reminded that ... or I guess they have to be aware that a lot of this [conversation] is kind of like on the surface.

After class...the professor will be like, 'I know that you have a problem with this.' Then we'll have a discussion and I'm like, 'why couldn't we have that discussion in class, I think that would have been beneficial'. You can have a discussion but I'm going to be the only one talking or we can just let it go. That was the discussion we had after class and it turned out in the next class I'm doing a presentation on poor people. Everybody's listening and taking notes.

This experience involved a professor directing Brendan to provide a presentation on poverty, even though the professor acknowledged Brendan's discomfort in class.

Brendan's experience is ignored, while the class' experience is broadened at the expense of Brendan's experience. In the journal, Brendan talked about a specific comment made in class.

'These people need a lot of help!' This was a statement that was brought up in one of my doctoral classes as a discussion centered on helping impoverished school districts...After the statement, a discussion ensued before several people realized my silence and presence. After I was 'recognized', the room went kind of quiet and all eyes were on me, in a way. Clearly I was black and apparently poor. They knew from icebreakers and class introductions that I was from an urban area growing up. I felt a little embarrassed and upset that they would talk about black people as objects to move around and not actually understand. Then, magically, they realized that I identified with the people they were objectifying. I felt like I was suddenly singled out.

Brendan's intentional silence produced different responses from his classmates, which often left him with the last word. From the second interview, Brendan shared the following:

There have been times where I wait, I just don't say anything. I want to see what the mood will swing to before I speak as the African American or on a race topic. My silence is almost, I think it's more of an impact at times...it's more powerful. So if I'm quiet about it, someone in the room will become an advocate. And then if I do take up your position, 'Oh yeah, you're totally right, that is true...' no one will speak on it. And it just kind of goes away, unless the professor tries to get me riled up. I've seen that happen. Or, if I'm quiet, like literally very quiet, you can visibly see that he's not happy about this, someone will become the advocate after too long, it always happens. Or, if I agree with you, that shuts everybody down, too. So it seems like it [being silent] draws different responses from different people.

As previously mentioned, Brendan's and Reyes' experiences are very similar. As one of the few or only Black man in the room, Brendan was looked to "save" conversations addressing topics related to diversity. There was an air of "here we go again"; meaning that Brendan knew when the conversations turned to these types of topics, he was expected to join and contribute meaningfully to the dialogue. Cohort-mates and professors exhibited behaviors solely directed toward Brendan much like Reyes. In Brendan's classroom experience, these behaviors were consistent to make him central to these topics.

The participants often began by first describing the make-up of the classroom as being one of the few or only person of color, thereby quickly placed at the center of dialogues related to race, socioeconomic status, sexual orientation, gender and other diversity topics. This position was imposed on Cesar when he was the only one answering questions regarding Africa; when Reyes was stared at by classmates to lead a case study and when the professor directed gender-specific questions; and when Brendan was instructed to answer questions and present on impoverished communities. Monserrat's experience was the only one drawn by the set-up of the classroom (a room

set-up by someone in the program) to engage in a topic about race, and also the only one felt unwelcomed by her contribution on the topic. This central position was provoked by the participants' racial/ethnic background and therefore established their classroom experience as racialized experiences illustrating when they were "seen" and when they were "not seen" by their classmates and professors and, in turn, were marginalized by the same people. Cesar, Brendan and Reyes received several verbal and non-verbal cues to lead certain diversity topics which are acts of marginalizing the conversation with those who *appear* to know best about the topic. The same acts excluded other students from engaging in the classroom conversations by discounting that some may have the knowledge to contribute in those kinds of conversations.

However, these marginalized acts (i.e., stares and assigned presentation topic) and marginalizing topics were confronted by participants' deliberate act of becoming silent. Specifically, Brendan and Reyes purposely became silent as a way to reject a heroic role to see if others could engage in the conversation. Cesar was first silent to avoid being misunderstood by personally held-beliefs. Monserrat's silence became a learned behavior to first assess the safety of the classroom before engaging in an honest conversation about diversity topics. Especially in Reyes', Brendan's and Monserrat's experiences, purposefully becoming silent redirected marginalizing topics to the other students. But, becoming silent also left them unchallenged in their own thinking processes which impeded their personal leadership development in a leadership focused program. They were left unchallenged because they were expected to rescue diversity-related conversations that others did not engage in, and thus still remained, symbolically, heroes of those conversations. Everyday practices to engage students in diversity topics in the

classroom are vital in shaping students' contributions, particularly those who are visibly a minority.

Supporters as Agents of Information and Opportunities

Another shared experience was the consistent advice and guidance participants received from one, and in some cases, several persons in the program. This person was instrumental to better understand the program's expectations, meaningfully connect with peers, unveil pertinent information and expand professional opportunities. Together, participants shared the experience of a supporter serving as an agent of information and opportunities; however their interpretation of this person was different from one another. Cesar, Monserrat and Reyes described this person's impact similarly, while Brendan's reaction to his supporters was interpreted differently.

The availability of resources and faculty were instrumental for Cesar. These resources were helpful when he explored literature and opportunities for independent study. He specifically discussed a personal interaction with the dean of the school of education regarding opportunities for independent studies. Monserrat was approached by mentors who provided opportunities to teach, attend conferences and speak at two different government-related events. She, too, described these interactions as personally provided by mentors. Cesar and Monserrat were able to connect this experience with their identities as first-generation doctoral students of color.

Reyes' experience both came from faculty and peers. Faculty affirmed his talent in school-related projects. Peers, especially doctoral students who advanced to candidacy, supported Reyes by sharing their progress in the program. Brendan's experience was significant in gaining access to information that was otherwise unknown or invisible. The

information was made visible and accessible by his unofficial advisors. As a result of various supporters purposely involved in the participants' doctoral experience, participants navigated the doctoral program as informed students. Figure 6 illustrates the participants varied interpretations and reactions regarding support.

Cesar. The most important thing for Cesar was access to resources and opportunities for students. When he needed to meet with or get advice from faculty, they were available to him. Cesar felt supported by the program. Toward the end of the first interview, Cesar discussed different ways he was supported and the importance of being supported. He shared:

The most important support I think is the resources, the availability of the professors. Even the willingness of the administration in terms of creating opportunities for students to interact, to create different kinds of possibilities for students to get together, discuss the subject matter, exchange ideas.

I think ... I always compare, I don't know, here the students in the United States might have a different perception. For anyone who is African, the first thing is the resource, the readiness of the professors to support, to advice; and the readiness of the administration to always create opportunities for the student to do whatever the students want to do. These are the things that have been raised by so far. Yes, that's what I can say.

Cesar noted the importance of support as an international African doctoral student.

Specifically, he noted opportunities to connect with other students. This kind of support is instrumental and therefore shaped his experience in the doctoral program. Cesar shared specific times where support was exemplified.

For example, let's say I want an article to read. It's very easy for me. I'll ask the library to just give me this article. They give me three to four days, a book to read is very easy, they'll give me.

...My adviser is the dean of my school. Whenever I want some kind of course arrangement or independent study arrangement, she's willing to just create an opportunity. For example, two or three months ago, I wanted an independent study. She couldn't decide immediately, but she took me to the department head, to other people. Walked to other offices and then we tried to find out something useful for me.

I think that is the kind of support that makes the students to just create opportunities. The other thing is if a student wants to participate in the conference, in the research; there are opportunities.

As a teacher assistant, Cesar also provided support to other students. He commented:

For example, there's a course that we're running with the department chair, her technical assistant there at the conference, ILA conference. I don't know if you're familiar with that one. We have a course, special topics course in which students study about this association or about professional association, academic conference. We prepare them for the conference. If they want to present at the conference, we support them. If they simply want to participate in the conference, we support them. Everything is paid for them.

It's not only going to classrooms, it's not only getting articles in the books. Even when you want to go to a conference, you have the resources. What else do you want? These are the kind of resources and the support that a doctoral student wants.

I know that there are some students complain that [they] don't have enough support, but the support is really there. You can do ... You can engage in professional association, conferences, conference participation, research engagement.

For example, if you want to take a course, so you can get enough advice about it, really the supports ... There is enough support. They really have the system to accommodate for diversity needs.

I have been able to observe that one, I don't know. Other people might have different opinion.

I asked Cesar if the resources and the dean's help reminded him of his identities as first-generation doctoral student of color. Cesar continued to share in the first interview:

I don't know. By the way, the dean is my adviser. She might not invest in her time and energy for others to run in the same way, as she's investing

her time and energy for me because she's my adviser. I don't know how that connects with my identity, my origin...I don't remember, I don't recall me feeling that there was a first-generation college student because I always put myself in the same place as other students. I don't feel that I am because I'm first-generation student.

By the way, the dean also talks about ...always talks about she's a first-generation college student. Her parents didn't go to college or a university. Maybe that might have biased her in favor of me, but I'm not sure. She's always supporting, she's always helping me; maybe [because] she's my adviser, my supervisor.

I don't know. Me, feeling first-generation student or whatever, I don't know how's that has patterned my relationship with my supervisor. I'm not sure.

Cesar commented on a question regarding whether resources are meant for certain students and not others. Cesar commented:

I don't know, maybe the resources my school has ... I don't know how they distribute the resources and how they also just make available the resource. I don't know whether they prepare, make available to one group of students or another.

One thing that I know as a student, they're always ready to serve me. I have also other friends, colleagues who try to just make use of the resources. It's always available to them. I have for example a friend from Kenya, that student also enjoys this resource. You can use, you can get access to the resources. I have also another colleague from Argentina, the resources available to her. I don't know whether they have framed the resources to serve particular group of students.

As far as I know, it's available, but maybe certain type of students might want to use the resources more...I'm not sure if the resources are really particularly intended to serve me or other group of student. One thing that I know, it's always available to me.

When Cesar sought resources, he found them. When he had questions about doing an independent study, he got answers. Cesar also assisted students when they needed support with conference information. As an international student, he noted the importance of these resources. He equally noted the importance of resources with other international

cohort-mates. Cesar's experience aired a need for feeling prepared to transition into the doctoral program which seemed to have been mostly met through interactions with faculty and not as much through interactions with cohort-mates. In other words, feeling supported by a network of faculty and resources was foundational to his overall experience in the doctoral program.

Montserrat. Monserrat recalled her educational journey as always having a teacher in her corner. She credited this consistent support to her educational accomplishments, a contrasting outlook on her mother's expectations while also a reflection as first-generation Latina. The relationships she created and sustained with faculty opened many doors that led to, as Monserrat said, "really big opportunities." In the first interview, Monserrat shared how she was supported by various faculty members in the doctoral program.

I feel like there's been a lot of mentorships. Actually, this is how I feel about, and I'm going to bring it back to my whole educational experience, I really think that I have a lot to thank for teachers. For some reason in this little Mexican girl, they saw some potential and they kept pushing it. As far as my mom is concerned, as much as she wanted me to do well in school, she never said college or university, or anything like that. I'm a homemaker. I know how to clean everything, I know how to cook. She made me more into a domestic sort of role. To her it was like I graduate high school, get married, have kids, that's her big life. So, I really attributed it to my teachers. There was always one or two teachers every grade level that was like, 'you're so good, you're so smart, you can do it, you can do it'. Now I have one here saying the same things to me.

In any case, there's a few people here that have given me some really big opportunities and have really reached out to me and done that. I was able to go and speak to Congress on teacher education because of a person in the teaching program that I have a relationship with. Sometimes I go out to dinner with her and ask her for advice. Actually, she got me to go speak at two different conferences, [she] got me to go speak at the U.S. Congress about urban education. I'm teaching a course on urban education here because of her, and then I sat down and we were talking about 'well what

is it you want to do with a Ph.D.?’ you know that conversation they ask you? I said, ‘I don’t know maybe politics’. So I am really, really thankful for her. Those are some very clear things she has set up.

There has been another professor as well. I’ve been a TA because he also says you should come to this Creative Leadership Conference, or we’re going to see Situational Leadership up in [name of city], you should come, and have your voice as a leader and you’re actually doing the work. So I’ve had a lot of staff members really, really provide me some in depth opportunities.

I’m really thankful to actually have a current [mentor] right now, is [name of mentor] who I talk to about who contacted that person that seeks candidates, but the other person is [name of person] who’s got me, I mean, I’ve gone to so many conferences to talk about action research. I’m meeting with him tomorrow and he’s coming here. So I’ve developed some very clear and close relationships with faculty and they open up all sorts of doors. Just in different ways. This one’s political, this one’s action research...

Compared to Cesar who seemed to have found resources when searching for them, Monserrat’s experience seemed to illustrate a support network of faculty reaching out to her. The follow-up question clarified whether the opportunities came to her or whether she sought them out. She reflected on these opportunities as a sign of her identity as Latina.

So here’s the part that I’ve never said before; here’s the part where I wonder if I’m... because my first year I got a ton of attention. I kept wondering, I mean, I was on their brochure, on their website, being filmed, and I’m thinking ‘am I the only Latina here? Is that why you’re doing this?!’ I did carry that around. Now I think I’m, but that’s the part I don’t want because I start doubting my capabilities. It’s not because I’m capable, it’s because I’m brown?! So now I’m at the point where I’ve come through and gone because I’m capable. I have to...even if it’s not true I have to live with that. I can’t be constantly doubting myself that these opportunities are given to me because I’m brown.

Monserrat’s experience illustrated a journey that has long been supported by persons interested in her educational success. Her earliest memories included this type of support.

As an adult in the doctoral program, she doubted this kind of interest, and even convinced herself this interest could be untrue. Monserrat's tone during the study has been a lonely one. In many of the experiences she shared, she felt alone during a large portion of her education journey, and this experience also carried a little bit of this loneliness when she expressed doubt for the support she received.

Reyes. Like many during the first year, Reyes struggled with the workload. When he struggled with a paper, he remembered a conversation with professors that helped him believe that he can do great work. The professors engaged Reyes in such a way that transformed his "can't do" attitude to "can do" attitude. Reyes' experience illustrated a professor is in a delicate position to encourage and support the doctoral student, particularly underrepresented students. In the first interview, Reyes shared:

I've gotten a lot of support from the faculty member, who's now my dissertation chair. He's been very supportive. I was actually having a really rough time my first year. As most people do, it's a tough transition. I was also in a not so great relationship and was living with my partner. There's just a lot, there's a lot that I was going through.

He was one person that really helped. Really almost went above and beyond student-faculty interaction to make sure that I felt intelligent, that I had made a good decision to come here, that I deserve to be here and that I am doing good work.

I would say that of most of the faculty that I ... Actually, all of the faculty that I've been interacting with have made me feel in some way and supported in that way to some degree...

Reyes was additionally supported by peers, people with whom he shared learning experiences. He continued describing in the first interview.

There have been other students in the program that have made me feel ... What was the question about support? Supporting...?

I just wouldn't be ... Even more than the faculty I think, my peers and colleagues in the program have certainly helped, particularly people in my cohorts, people that I entered the program with.

We don't see each other in every class. We see each other in some classes. It's just like, 'I haven't seen you in so long,' like, 'How have you been? What's been going on? How's your research coming? Are you getting close to your topic?'

Currently, I'm here. I'm doing five years, so my cohorts ... some of my cohort members have defended their proposals, looking/finding their dissertation. I'm able to check in with them too like, How's it going? Tell me' They are more than willing to share their experiences and give advice on like, 'Do this, avoid this,' in terms of advice and wisdom.

Inquiring about peers' progress with projects, including dissertation work, was instrumental in connecting with and receiving support from peers. Reyes continued sharing details of interactions with supportive faculty. He shared:

The faculty member, he was teaching in one of the first class that I took in the program, he was the professor. I met with him one-on-one basically to say, 'I'm really struggling with this last paper. I don't like this topic anymore. I don't think I'm saying great things. I just am struggling.'

He just really gave me such great pep talk. There's something about the way ... He just seems like such a gentle soul. I think it has something to do with the way that he would comment, praise my work in class that made me feel comfortable and being so vulnerable and sane. 'It's all the [s-word] that's going on right now. I need help. I don't know if I can do this paper.'

He said, 'Your paper, I'm sure will be great,' then talks to me about, 'What do you want to do?' Actually, he got into questions about my life like wanting to get to know me more.

One line that I still remember and this is almost three years later, almost three years said, 'You have the DNA of a professor. You need to be a professor. That totally makes sense.' I was like, 'Wow! That is really great to hear.' Also, because that's what I want to do, that's even [more] great to hear from someone who is a professor and who's so well-known in the field of education.

Reyes described how another faculty responded to a paper project, and the vulnerability he felt with peers.

I sent an email saying like, 'I'm not going to meet it. Here's the paper. The deadline's right now. Here's the paper. It's all I can do and it's not that good.' He's like, 'Well, would an extra 24 hours help? I'm willing to wait for your work. Your writing is worth the wait.' That was another ... Just like, 'Really?' I was just so emotional. I even started crying when I read the email.

This was such like so moving for me to hear. It just hit me really in a good way, it really impacted me. Those are some specifics about that interaction. In terms of the cohort, there's something to be said for having common experiences with one another.

The fact that we were able ... every single master's student and doctoral student take this class called, Leadership Theory of Practice. It's like 80 to 90 people in a classroom. We all go through it together.

Instances like that where ... Especially in that class, where sometimes we make mistakes or sometimes we get called out on our [s-word]. We also have small sub-groups in addition to the large group. We even got to know each other even more in that way or in that setting.

There's something between both instances, both situations, there's something about vulnerability. Having the opportunity or the ability and the safety to be vulnerable with each other in small ways over time to build a really deep meaningful relationship, where we don't see each other that often. I don't hang out with many of them outside of the program. When I see them in class, I'm so happy to see them and they're happy to see me.

Reyes' interpretation of his experience was different from Cesar and Monserrat. Reyes's support was specific and critical in moments when he doubted the value of his work.

Faculty provided verbal support to help Reyes with two separate projects. These moments were critical to him as a first-year doctoral student. The second form of support was his relationship with peers in the doctoral program. The time taken to connect, inquire and share tips created meaningful exchange about how they were doing in the

program and helped Reyes feel safe. The support Reyes described spoke more to information than opportunities, and related to sharing feelings and current state of mind.

Brendan. Brendan found people that could lead him properly and intelligently through the program. The advising team, as he described them, consisted of his official advisor and his unofficial advisor. The official advisor was described as the assigned advisor by the department who took care of business-related stuff mostly requiring a signature. The unofficial advisors were people Brendan met before and during the program. This team of advisors communicated information to Brendan that was not written down somewhere and therefore normally inaccessible. As part of the first interview, Brendan described the important role of the advising team while navigating the first year in the doctoral program.

Before I got into the master's program, I met one of my unofficial advisors at a community event when I was working for the government, a Latino event and he told me who he was. I said, 'Hey, I'm going to come talk to you because I'm going to join the master's program [at name of school]' He says, 'Oh, man. That's awesome. We need more minorities and duh, duh, duh, duh and. Whatever I got to do to help you, man, I'm all for it'. His best friend was my boss so there was a bond. 'Yeah, you know, there's a ...' I said, 'Hey, there's a one year master's program that I'm looking at doing.' He's like, 'Are you talking about the [name of program]?' 'Well, yeah.' He's all, 'Make sure you talk to me before you register for that [bull crap] because there's some issues. It's going to be good but right now it's not what they say it is and I want to make sure you're taken care of before you just roll up in there.' That let me know that I could lean on him when I got here for all my 'no bull crap what's the deal' answers.

This experience occurred before he became a doctoral student. However, it was significant to Brendan as it established a relationship that was still there when he began the program. Brendan continued:

I go to my advisor, it sounds funny, [and then] I go back to him, he says,

‘This is what she really meant to say.’ I kept him in my back pocket because he's been vital to me navigating through different issues like with the [name of program]. They didn't want me to ...The people in the [name of program] didn't want me to do the Ph.D. program. They wanted me in their program. It's political stuff. He goes, ‘That's [bull crap]. Just do the Ph.D. program and take their classwork. They can't stop you. You're in the Ph.D. program, it trumps their program. They don't want to admit that to you but in our meetings, that's how it is.’

[That's what] Dr. [name of faculty was saying], ‘That's how it is so just do it and let them worry about telling you you can't later on because they can't tell you no.’ It's stuff like that that helped me as a first year, if you will, student get through the process, because I wouldn't have gotten that answer from my [official] advisor. I think she didn't want the controversy or she was not ready for that battle or she just didn't have time to deal with it. I don't know... I always go to my advisor because she's got to sign everything but if there's something that she says, something that's not on the up and up, I just run it back by him. ‘Hey, why is she saying this’ and we'll have a discussion and he'll check on some stuff or just make sure it's legit. Not that I don't trust my advisor, I just don't always understand why she's not saying, ‘Yes, Brendan.’ If you're not telling me yes, why not and then if your answer is not good to me, then I'll check it.

This experience fell in line with what he established from the very beginning of the study.

A support network was important to him, because he was told information that seemed hidden or not thoroughly explained. He questioned the official advisor's suggestions not because he didn't trust her but because he was not always satisfied with what she said.

Having people in “his back pocket” was instrumental for Brendan.

Oh, it's vital. That's something I've learned in my life is I got to find people who are going to be there for me. When I don't know, I need someone who knows so that's one of my first things I do is I find that person. In any situation to make sure that, all right, because I'm not always the brightest person in the room so I got to find someone smarter and make sure that they know what's going on so I can make myself smarter. I learned that a long time ago and still use it.

Brendan's experience was different from the other participants. Unofficial advisors showed him what was really “real” in the program. They helped de-code some of the

information he received from the official advisor; information unusually shared. In the second interview, I asked if this kind of relationship helped experience the program in a way that few are able to. Brendan shared:

It's interesting to look at it from that viewpoint. A lot of times, and this goes back to these people who are consistently around the program, they're consistently interacting with the professors and the admin people or what have you, so they know what's coming, how it's going to be laid out to you as a student. When you see people doing things a certain way in the classroom, why is she doing that? Or why is she asking those kinds of questions? How does she know to ask that question?

It's not because she's smarter or she's more intuitive, she's sitting in the room with the professor as they outline their lesson plan. It's not just one, it's more than one, it's like a handful. Now people, because their mentors or connections, they have more insight as to what's going on and what's important. How did you know you could miss this class or how are you able to miss so many classes and still have an effective relationship with the professor? That knowledge isn't always available to everyone.

I don't want to say it's a white or black thing, because it's not, it's more so your availability to involve yourself in the flow of the coursework, if that makes sense.

Brendan interpreted his experience differently from Cesar, Reyes and Monserrat. The support illustrated the importance of informal relationships in uncovering information that is typically not discussed in formal relationships, such as Brendan's relationship with his academic advisor. This type of information is also only available when this person (faculty/administrator) offers it. When this type of information was offered, it informed Brendan in a way that better prepared him to face a (or any) situation.

All of the participants were supported in different ways and for reasons that seemed to fit their in-the-moment need, and each relationship was equally significant based on the participant's need. At the National Association for Student Personnel Administrators (NASPA), State Representative Mary E. González for the House District

75, said “If you’re not at the table, you’re on the menu” (personal communication, November, 6, 2013). This is somewhat demonstrated through the relationship between the doctoral student and their supporters as agents of information and opportunities. In meetings, those “sitting at the table” have specifically been invited and become privy to information that others absent from the table will not have access to. Those “absent from the table” are “on the menu” because decisions are made without their input and by people who likely do not share their experience. In other words, decisions are often made without those voices normally unheard. The supporters’ position as faculty or administrators or older peers and their willingness to share tips, suggestions and other information symbolically brought the doctoral student to the “table”. The supporters’ access to information made the information visible and accessible to doctoral students. As a result, the doctoral student was informed and positioned to better navigate the doctoral environment because the supporter acted as an agent of information and opportunity.

When other areas of the doctoral program became difficult to manage, the relationship between the supporter and the doctoral student became even more significant. The relationship affirmed the participant belonged in the program and improved the participants’ connection to the program. All of the participants were supported by someone interested in their tenure as doctoral students and each supporter held a position in the program significant enough to properly guide the doctoral student. However, being supported in these ways did not remedy the classroom experience the participants communicated in the previous theme related to diversity topics discussed in the classroom. These classroom experiences were drawn from their position as the only or one of the few persons of color in the classroom. Therefore, it should be noted that

while the relationship with the supporters were helpful in navigating some parts of the program, other parts of the program, like classroom conversations on diversity topics, were harmful to the participants.

Conclusion

The first research question explored how the participants' doctoral journey was shaped by the doctoral program environment. Experiences were described through specific examples of meaningful interactions significant to their identities as first-generation and persons of color. The interactions were exemplified through four common themes that emerged mostly during the interviews and somewhat from the journals. The first theme is the first-generation status: an unspoken identity. The second theme is the role of language related to language accent; knowledge of academic terms and cultural language; code-switch; and authentic Black experience. The third theme is participation in classroom conversations. And the fourth theme is supporters as agents of information and opportunities. The themes were shared experiences among the participants with mostly diverse interpretations including diverse reactions to interactions.

Collectively, the participants experienced a relationship with the doctoral environment. They often described the racial/ethnic make-up of the doctoral program and told past stories remembering their first-generation status to make sense of their journey up to this point in their education. The themes reflected examples of when they felt supported and when they felt unsupported in the doctoral program. This seemingly roller-coaster relationship, experienced through several interactions with peers and faculty, often gauged an on-going assessment of the interaction to determine their reaction to others in the environment, and therefore provided an understanding of how they saw

themselves as part (or apart) from the program. This on-going assessment was often triggered by their racial/ethnic and first-generation statuses. The participants were persons of color and first-generation, and they applied their own cultural understanding of their identities to their experience. As a result, the first research question illustrated different experiences among participants who identified collectively as first-generation African/African American/Black and Hispanic doctoral students.

Addressing the Second Research Question

The second research question explored how first-generation doctoral students of color shaped the educational environment in which they were pursuing the doctoral degree. This question examined practices (or policies) taken up by faculty or advisors and how, if at all, the doctoral student's reaction reshaped the practice. In other words, the research question inquired about deeply rooted practices that fostered a particular experience in the doctoral program environment. Participants reflected on practices or policies they reacted to as means to explore the doctoral program's normal or traditional ways of doing things. Participants' reactions after a particular interaction sometimes resulted in a change of that practice. When there was a lack of reaction toward a practice, the impact on the participant's experience was still profound.

There were four different practices or policies that elicited four different reactions from the participants. The policies and practices are embedded within and supported by the doctoral program. They are (1) the use of the course evaluation to capture classroom experiences; (2) a professor's grading practice; (3) the selection of graduate assistant; and (4) the format and process of interviewing prospective doctoral students. The experiences derived from reflecting on a time when the participant reacted to a process or practice.

They commented on whether their reaction reshaped practice and if it influenced others' reaction. These are represented in figure 7 and describe the reaction to and reshaping of practice or policy in the doctoral program.

Cesar

In Ethics and Leadership, the professor provided a course evaluation. Using the course evaluation, Cesar shared there were too many group activities assigned in class. Cesar recalled the professor's comment as, "Some of you said there are too many group works. I'm going to think about that one." Cesar did not recall his comment making a change in the professor's teaching practice. In another experience with a professor, Cesar shared a suggestion to teach the class, and his suggestion was immediately applied. Both experiences asked for Cesar's feedback, both were provided, but only one was executed and witnessed. The differences between the experiences are first, Cesar's roles as a student in one experience and as a teaching assistant in the other experience. The second difference is the professor's urgency to want to execute this change to capture Cesar's immediate experience. In the first interview, Cesar began answering the question with some uncertainty. He shared:

It's a bit complex. A particular force that I reacted to? I don't know, process I reacted to and changed it because of my reaction? I don't know. I always react to different processes. As a human being, you react to something. For example, there are courses that I have taken that I have reacted to those courses by writing, or by my behavior. I don't know how they have changes those courses because of my reaction.

For example, one example is we evaluate courses. Maybe one course that I remember is ethics and leadership. There was a mid-evaluation in the middle of the course. We were asked to evaluate. I just gave a comment that there were too many group works and the professor mentioned about it without mentioning my name.

I am not sure if the professor made a change based on my comment; maybe that was one thing that I can remember.

At this moment, I asked for clarity in the example Cesar shared. He continued:

Yes, he said, 'Some of you said there are too many group works.' He said, 'I'm going to think about that one,' without mentioning my name. Maybe other students might have also made the same comment.

Yes, I made that comment. Maybe there are similar comments that I made in other courses, but those comments are at the end of the semester. I don't know if the professors made changes when the course was over.

Cesar's response illustrated that the program was interested in the class' overall experience. In this reflective experience, Cesar faced an opportunity to make a difference through a traditional practice administered at certain points of the semester. I specifically asked Cesar if the comment described on the course evaluation changed the number of group activities. He shared in the same interview:

I don't know. I'm not afraid of making comments, by the way. I just seriously take course evaluations, just evaluate courses and then I just include my own comments. I don't know if professors really make changes based on the comments I make, other students also make comments.

I'm not sure, but one thing that I believe in the system is just take comments seriously. I don't have any evidence to say so, but I've heard people talking about students' comments and students' evaluations are really important in terms of just improving the system. This maybe, I don't know, something that's individually influence the system in one way or another. We cannot trace those influences.

It mattered to Cesar that he was asked for feedback about class. He took the course evaluation seriously enough to share his experience. Contrary to this experience, Cesar shared another experience when another professor took his comments seriously and immediately implemented a change in class. In this instance, his comment mattered. He said:

I'm working with a professor. We're offering a course this fall. We offered the course last fall. As a teaching assistant, I just made comments. I just suggest ideas. Those ideas are really important for the professors.

That may not be common to all other students because of my special relationship as a teaching assistant. My ideas really count, may be [that's another] examples.

For example, in terms of the kinds of activities that we have to ask students to complete. In terms of the number of assignments, we have to ask students to do or the type of assignments we have to ask students to do.

For example, one example is towards the end of the semester, I suggested that, 'Let's just give them this kind of reflection.' The professor said, 'Okay. That's really useful,' and then we did [it].

That is really as a teaching assistant. It may not be as a student, maybe if we think being a teaching assistant is part of being a doctoral student is such you can take it from them.

Cesar made a clear distinction between the two experiences. In the first experience he is a doctoral student. In this example, Cesar is a teacher assistant. The relationship with the professor and the position Cesar held independently in each interaction caused a different experience and thus a different reaction in the professor's teaching practice. I went back to the first experience and asked Cesar if there were other ways to give and receive feedback about a course. He shared:

Yes, I always think different ways of getting feedback. Course evaluation, I don't know if the students really seriously do it. It's really tricky because students in front of the professor or faculty, they don't speak about the course freely. The relationship with a professor or the faculty is influenced by the power of the professor to make evaluations, to decide the grades or whatever.

Maybe the students might be asked indirectly or I can't think of any system in which you can engage the students to talk about the course in the absence of the professor. In one way or another, you will be identified. Students don't want to be identified when they talk about, when they make

a comment about the course because they think the grading is affected by that kind of comment.

Based on this response, Cesar seemed to be more concerned about the anonymity of the student to give feedback. There were no examples of interaction to support students' distrust to honestly speak about their experiences. He continued:

If there's a system in which a student don't think about the grade, they can freely speak about the course, if there's such a system, that's really a great system. Professors or faculty members need to pay attention to how students behave or what students say throughout the course.

Sometimes we knowingly or unknowingly say something about the course throughout in each class, in each direction. I think all those things need to be taken into account. It's a lot of work for the professor or faculty to document all those things and trace.

The system wants to evaluate the course objectively, so they don't want to get the information from the professor because they want to get the information from the students. I mean it's a very complex thing. I don't know. We have to think something very creative.

Cesar's experience with a course in-progress through the use of a formal tool—a course evaluation—administered at mid and end of the semester begs to wonder the purpose and benefit of the course evaluation in immediately responding to and capturing in-the-moment classroom experiences. Should Cesar's only opportunity to share his experience with group activities only be captured during a timely administered tool? Should a professor's only opportunity to learn about Cesar's experience with group activities be read at the conclusion of the evaluation? On the other hand, the other professor responded immediately to Cesar's suggestion rather than wait to implement it. Cesar's experiences illustrated that a student's experiences cannot wait to be investigated, rather experiences should be attended to at the moment they occur, or at least as close as possible to when the moment occurs. In other words, while the course evaluation

gathered the class' overall impression of the course, it missed out on individual experiences. So, for a first-generation doctoral student of color, like Cesar, whose interactions are embedded in language accent, ethnicity, and race (as he mentions throughout the study), the course evaluation was too formal, traditional and timely in nature to capture immediate experiences Cesar felt with group activities. It is not to say that the course evaluation tool should not be used. However, some practices heavily embedded in everyday lives, like anonymously gathering information from students about the course, does not put a "face" to the experience anymore. Rather, it makes the experience aggregated.

Montserrat

Similar to Cesar, Monserrat reflected on two separate classroom interactions that led to two different outcomes by two different professors. In one case there was a change in practice and in the other no change in practice was observed. In one class, the professor told the class that her grading practice had been inconsistent with one particular paper. This interaction led Monserrat to react to the grading practice but without talking to the professor about it. In another class, the professor's teaching practice did not allow for enough time for the class to reflect on the content of the class. This interaction led Monserrat to publicly address the concern in class and her reaction was well accepted. In the first interview, Monserrat shared:

...and there was a professor there and I actually think that it was the semester that I dropped out that I dropped my classes and said I'll take a 'W'. It was a professor in that class. I didn't like what she had to say and I was already feeling very uncomfortable being in her class. What she said was, she was giving up a third draft back and as she's passing out the papers she said, 'some of you will be in shock because I haven't been grading to the rubric, and now I am. You'll be shocked at the poor grades

that you have.’ As a principal, I got really annoyed. I said; A) you didn’t tell us you weren’t grading us with the rubric [with] the other two [drafts], so we might think we’ve been doing okay. And now return this paper and we’re going to be in shock, and how are you mocking us by trying to scare us, and we’re going to be shocked before we even get the paper. I was appalled by that practice okay. I didn’t even get a bad grade, I think I got a B, which I’m okay with in the doctoral program, but I didn’t like that at all. I didn’t want to be taught by that person. I didn’t want to be taught by a person who thought that was good teaching pedagogy. I didn’t even talk to her about it. I just dropped the class. I just didn’t like her tone and I didn’t like the way she taught.

With the other two professors; one of them I said, ‘you know Dr. [name of faculty], you don’t provide enough wait time. You ask really good questions and you get silence and you move on, but we’re thinking. Just stop and count to 10 in your head or something’. He’s like okay, ‘I’ll try that’, and I don’t know, I felt it got better. He actually made a comment two classes afterward that I had to take with him. He said ‘wait time’, you know. So I don’t know he didn’t say anything negative. He still had a positive attitude with me, but that was it.

Both professors enacted a practice that led Monserrat to react differently. Monserrat’s reaction to the professor with the grading practice led her not to say anything. The other experience led Monserrat to speak up to the professor which he immediately responded; similar to Cesar’s experience. It was also impactful enough for the professor to recall her statement “wait time” in a *different* class she took with him. It would be unfair to say that the professor’s grading practice seemed rigid and closed to making changes because Monserrat did not speak to the professor. However, Monserrat’s reaction was profound enough to discontinue her enrollment in the class, re-take the class with another professor, and pay tuition for the same class. The two experiences also led to different types of future relationships. Monserrat never talked to the professor with the grading practice while she became the other professor’s teacher assistant. Monserrat elaborated on this difference between the experiences.

I actually have tried to unpack why I stayed silent in one and then not silent in the other, and I really think it had to do with knowing Dr. [name of faculty] and knowing that it wouldn't be insulting. I felt that particular professor on the grading part was always talking about her own dissertation from [name of school] and her bachelor's degree from some Ivy League school. ...the conversation was about how great she was and what she did for her research, and she would say things like, don't ever use the word 'that' when you're writing.

She had a lot of rules, a lot of ivory tower belief systems in her that I didn't like. I felt a very clear line of haves and have nots in her class and I felt if she's already expressing disdain for some of the papers that she was passing out, me raising my hand and saying, that's not an appropriate teaching strategy, I didn't feel like it was going to make a difference, but I knew that I did not want to be part of a professor that would do that to students.

By way of expressing how papers were graded, the professor created a strong enough class environment that derailed Monserrat from expressing her concerns. While Monserrat could have verbally reacted, she had already felt disempowered to speak up, and thus her immediate experience with the professor in getting her paper back was left unresolved yet profound for Monserrat as a first-generation doctoral student of color.

I wouldn't want to see a teacher doing that to students here and I don't want to be the student that that's done to because if you were [not] grading to the rubric the last two [papers], then you should have said so, like two papers ago not now. And saying that we were going to be in shock, I thought that was mean-spirited. That's the part...I didn't ever talk to her again. I never took another class with her on purpose. I don't have a relationship with her.

Monserrat talked about this experience to a cohort-mate who sat next to her at the time the experience happened. She said, "The only person I spoke to about that was a teacher [who is also a classmate] and when she [professor] made that comment I looked at her and said 'did she just say that?'" With this interaction, it may have been that that student thought of the professor's grading practice as bad practice, too.

Montserrat's decision to withdraw from class and avoid being taught by this professor was not due to her incompetence or inability to perform in the program. Her decision was due to the professor's grading practice that set a strong tone contrary to what she knew was good practice, and as a result deemed disadvantageous to Montserrat's learning. Montserrat's experience illustrated that the professor's grading and teaching practices and the student's reaction to those practices promote achievement for the student.

Reyes

Reyes' experience was very much related to what many first-generation doctoral students are more likely to face than non-first-generation; funding school without excessive loans. The program offered graduate assistant positions to doctoral students. The positions were very competitive. They were well funded—enough to waive the program's tuition and fees. Upon getting accepted into the doctoral program, Reyes recalled disclosing the need for financial support before accepting admission and committing to attend. He was assured that he would be offered financial support through a graduate assistant position. After applying for a few positions, Reyes was not offered any, leading him to question how much the positions were need-based or merit-based. In the first interview, Reyes shared the process of applying for a graduate assistant position:

I gotten accepted [to the program] and then we got to apply. I only applied to two. I get interviews and then I don't get either of them. People who had gotten them, one was already in the GA [graduate assistant] position, but switched. The other one had been working full-time and then decided to no longer work full-time and got a GA position. Actually, I applied to three and then the third position was the same story. It was that, one worked full-time and got that position, left her job and got that [graduate assistant] position.

I contacted the department chair, who was [my] adviser, my assigned adviser. I was like, 'Listen, I need funding. What do I do? I said in my cover letter, I've said to you multiple times, I don't have a job. I'm leaving my other graduate assistant position because I graduated from [name of school].'

I don't have full-time work. I don't have anything else lined up. Two of these other women were working full-time, have partners, have other means of financial support and I do not. My parents were not financially able to help me at all anymore. They cannot help me other than if I were to move back-in with them will they be able to give me some no-rent space, so I can find a job or find another opportunity.

Her reaction was, kind of like, 'Oh, well. I'll see if there are other GA positions on campus. They won't have funding, but I'll see if there's anything. Would you be interested?' I said, 'Yes.'

I was like, 'Okay, thanks.' That was my initial reaction. 'I just want this meeting to be over because I'm upset with your answer, with your reply. I feel like you recruited me into this program. You wanted me here, but now you don't ... I am not getting support; that I told you that I needed to be in here.'

Now, it's too late to do a job ... I've already disengaged in that job search process that I had started. Now, I'm totally behind. It's going to be difficult for me to find a job now. Now, I feel stuck. I'm sorry and I am still living with my partner or I had moved in with my partner. I needed to be in [name of city]. I couldn't just go to a job anywhere else.

My reaction to her reaction later, not in person was, I was so upset. I felt defeated. There were lots of tears. I felt unsure of what to do because I wasn't ... Basically, I felt like I was in the mercy of the department chair, 'Well, maybe she'll get me something, maybe she won't.'

It was this waiting game. I basically felt very disempowered, not like I've had a lot of control. I thought these were like ... how much are these GA positions need-based and how much are they merit-based? When we're talking about financial need, I clearly have demonstrated financial need. That I would prefer not to take out \$34,000 in student loans this year.

To Reyes' knowledge, there was no systematic way for the advisor to know about his first-generation status. But, Reyes expressed the need to be financially supported by stating his and his parents' limitations to pay for school. Even with this self-disclosure,

Reyes was left at the mercy of the advisor and questioned those selected for the graduate assistant positions. Even though the advisor was informed about his financial need, her practice or policy was unshaken by it. It was after his plea for financial support the advisor found a scholarship to help Reyes. He continued in the first interview:

I got the scholarship. I was like, 'Okay, so they recognized.' We're getting something and they got me GA position. Actually, that GA position even though it wasn't funded got me the position that I now have which is funded and that I've had for the past two years. It all worked out, but that was one of the ... that's an example.

I asked Reyes if his plea to gain a position to financially support his education an expression of his identity as first-generation. In the second interview, Reyes shared:

I think absolutely it was communicated that my parents cannot help me and that I didn't have means to support myself if I didn't have a GA position other than to take out tons of loans which is what a lot of first-generation students do and I would prefer, and I have, and I did that throughout, like I've always taken out loans, and I would just really prefer to not have that be mounting. I just really like the debt to not continue to mount. I think that that's where identifying, having somewhere on the form like marking first-generation could be really useful.

It seemed Reyes' reaction prompted program administrators to warn entering doctoral students about the likelihood of gaining a graduate assistant position. He believed the overall process had not changed much by virtue of his experience.

I don't think very much changed. In fact, now, I have a close colleague or a close friend who applied and got in. Experienced something very similar – don't have a job, need a GA position, was given some funding, so he decided to stay and went through another round of GA positions. Has searched again just throughout his first year and still didn't get anything.

He was told that all the first years don't get these GA positions. Entering people typically, don't get GA positions for their first year. I'm like, 'That's not true.' I don't know if that ... that's new information. I was encouraged to apply. I was told you would have a good shot of getting them.

I don't know that my reaction was in concert with others... They're telling people not to expect to get them now, so that we don't hear people complain, I have no idea. It's all very confusing. It's still confusing, so I don't think the process changed at all.

Federal student loans are a real concern for the first-generation population.

Financial support, in the form other than federal student loans, is very important to first-generation doctoral students; often students of color. This was Reyes' experience, a typical experience of first-generation doctoral students of color. The advisor missed or disregarded Reyes' background when offering graduate assistant positions. On the same hand, Reyes noticed that cohort-mates in those positions had partners and held full-time work and were, therefore, more financially sound than he was. Those doctoral students in graduate assistant positions brought Reyes to question the true intention for those assistantships. I am not suggesting that only first-generation doctoral students of color should receive this type of financial support primarily because of their financial challenges. I am simply suggesting that when most recipients of graduate assistant positions seem to represent a group of people with certain qualities and not particular needs, it is essential to investigate the pool of candidates and those selected for the positions to be aware of certain trends. The program eventually recognized Reyes' need when they found another source to support his doctoral degree—a diversity scholarship—but only because of his commitment to react to the initial lack of offer.

Brendan

At the time of the study, Brendan had just completed his first year in the doctoral program. The entire first year was vivid enough to reflect on his experience beginning with the interview process all the way to the very end of the academic year. He recalled

the interview process as being confusing and as having mixed feelings about some students who were admitted in the program. All of this led Brendan to consult with mentors to bring clarity to the entire interview process which also brought clarity to his own experience in the interview process. Moreover, the series of interactions became a warning to pay closer attention to his personal academic standing. Similar to Cesar, Brendan tried to wrap his thoughts around the question before answering. In the first interview, he began reflecting on the interview process as the gateway to getting into the doctoral program.

The interview process to get into the program, I [have] mixed feelings about. They feel like you have the application portion of it and then if you make it through that initial screening, it's an interview with faculty and the dean of the department but it's not an individual interview about you and your experiences or application or questions for you, it's a group interview and it's not even ... It's literally everybody who made it through the application screening is brought in for a group interview.

Now, they can do a telephone interview if you can't make it here but when I did my group interview, there were 60 people and broke us all up into smaller groups. I don't know how that worked out but if you looked at it, they had 10 Mexicans, spread the Mexicans out, they had four blacks, they spread the blacks out, they sprinkle everybody else into these different groups and you just shuffle through the different rooms where the faculty were. They'd ask you one or two questions.

I don't know what the point of that really was because the questions were B.S. questions. 'Tell us about your worst experience in education.' There's some fluff. They want to see I guess how you, your poise and really just take a look at you and see if you are [name of school] material. I'm not sure what that was, so I actually asked the question, 'What's the purpose of that group interview?' I never got an answer in terms of what they were looking for until I went to my resource. He said, 'Well, they want to make sure they have the right mix of people.' I said, 'what do you mean mix?' I already knew what he meant but I said, 'what do you mean mix?' He said, 'You know what I mean. You got to have X amount of white people, X amount of black people, X amount of Mexicans, X amount of this, X amount of that, you can't let go of this person, you can't let go ... It's terrible and the questions will ... Well, they're not really fluff

questions but it gives us an idea of your ability to think on your feet.'

I go, 'It's not a job interview. Why am I thinking on my feet? This is like a research based program. I don't need to think on my feet. I can think about it and research and present.' He said, 'No, that's true and that's one of the things we're looking at retooling because it's not the best use of the interview process.'

On the other hand I'm like, 'Oh, at least if on paper I'm not black, in person I'm definitely black so that helps me in terms of getting in the program... That's my mixed reaction to him... Really, it's for that purpose. For me, it's just to see, okay, we got to make sure [we let in the right people] [in] terms of creating the global international look and feel of the program. They're saying they're international. They want to say they look international, so instead of being lily-white, they have to make sure they have representation from everywhere. One way to do that is to bring in as many people as they can that make the screen, because he said 'Technically, if you made it through that screening process, your application, you're all qualified. They all have the G.R.E. score, their essays were appropriate, they have the right credentials in terms of master's degree, whatever the minimum qualifications were, so we could let everyone in. We can't because we only have so many spots so if we only have 20 spots, we got to make sure the 20 people are appropriately dispersed.'

Through the interview process, Brendan may have reflected on his racial identity playing a role in being shuffled throughout the interview and eventually selected to join the leadership studies program. He specifically remembered the way prospective students, including him as well as international students, of different racial backgrounds were separated. Brendan felt his personal experiences were missed based on the interview questions. This reflection culminated in Brendan's ability to think back to the interview experience to understand how his cohort came to be. Brendan continued to share that the interview process informally continued to recognize students displaying some difficulties. He shared in the first interview:

They still don't know if you can write and do research and be a doctoral student so those first few classes, they start ... They don't start trimming

but they start recognizing, 'Okay, this person's going to have a problem writing' so down the road, in other classes, you're going to have a real problem writing because there's more and more writing and reading and displaying your thoughts so they're still weeding out [the] process. It just happens.

Yes, they don't say that it is but they start recognizing that certain students are not performing well, they're not researching well, they're not able to write, so they're going to have a hard time getting those, like certain papers ... What's it called? Qual paper [proposal] is done so they can move on to the dissertation phase.

Yes, so they don't want them to waste too much time so they start to recognize at certain points, there are certain ... I don't know what those hit points are, where you're probably not going to be able to finish this program and we don't want you to get through this process and be A.B.D. [all but dissertation] and not be able to defend because you never got a proposal approved. I think that's another aspect of that process. It's unspoken.

It seemed the interview process continued well after doctoral students were admitted.

That is, after a few classes, doctoral students exposed whatever academic abilities they had which were naturally graded for performance evaluation. As a first year student,

Brendan caught on to these "recognitions" or "hit points" which were unspoken to him.

Brendan recalled a professor's announcement about a doctoral student having a difficult time adjusting to the program's academic expectations. He shared in the first interview:

We had a professor mention several times that there were certain students now, not in our cohort but in other cohorts that weren't going to make it so the department was in the process of trying to figure out how best to let that student know that you [stink], aside from grades because the guy...you don't get credit for a class if you don't have a B- and he had like three Cs. That should be a huge alarm in your head that 'I'm not going to progress to this degree' like that should be a huge hint. They tell you up front, 'If you don't have B- in your classes, you're not meeting the requirements...'

As a result of cohort-mates' difficulty to meet the program's academic standard, Brendan became diligent in being informed about his own academic progress. He commented in

the first interview:

For one, I make sure I don't have any C's in my classes and if I'm even close, I'm having discussions with that professor [of] where I'm at, before you put my grade up because you submit a final worth 30% of your grade, you don't know you didn't pass it until it's too late. For example, finals were May 13, I think that week of May 13. We submitted a 25 page paper, 30% of your grade so if you don't pass your paper, that's a C or worse. I wanted to know before, 'Hey, what are my odds of getting a C on this? What's going on? Talk to me about my grade or I don't want any surprises come June or whenever the grades come out.' There's these discussions that I have.

If I think I'm having an issue with certain teachers, professors, I have a discussion beforehand so I can prepare myself or someone to deal with it before it becomes an issue, just so I'm not in that same boat of having to drop the program or restart or something crazy like that.

It made me more aware of the possibility of not completing the program from outside sources, like not my own decision, like, 'Hey, they can still kick you ... It's not a given that you'll pass this degree if you just show up and do your work. You have to actually perform and perform well.' I made sure that's what I was doing really is double checking and making sure that everything I was doing was what I needed to do to make sure I was on the ball.

The culmination of the interview process, announcements about cohort-mates, and his progress in the doctoral program led Brendan to initiate conversations with administrators to consider changing the interview process. These direct and indirect experiences encouraged Brendan to have discussions with administrators to help look at the interview process a little bit differently. He commented in the first interview:

I had this...Not the same conversation but a similar conversation with three of my professors and two of my advisors and then they all started sharing stories of my questions and I think it started, it's going to help the interview process the next round because, is that later on? Yes, this next one because ... I said, 'There are people that are here, they're smart, they're great, they're awesome people but they don't know the research component is going to prevent them from being successful. There's one student already, he was having a hell of a time dealing with finding his topic, finding support for his research topic and getting it all in a legible,

credible document that would pass him in his class. It was probably because he wasn't prepared properly, as an international student, that's what you're going to have to deal with. They could have done some ground work ahead of time and let him know what he was walking into but he just walked into those classes.

They let him register for those classes and he probably could have, as an international student, maybe have been given a preparation class or something, I don't know. Some kind of orientation aside from, 'Oh, this is [name of school] look at the beautiful buildings.' I think they're going to move towards making that some sort of prereq or part of their experience as a student, looking at people's information a little bit more because he had two master's degrees. He's well educated but not for what they wanted him to do so they're deepening their look at the process. I don't know if it's necessarily from my questions but I think there's a lot of people saying a lot of different things and I added to the conversation.

Brendan was at the end of the first year of the doctoral program but still a novice to the environment. As mentioned earlier, the first action Brendan took was to connect with people who knew best; people he could rely on so he can better navigate this new environment. In his experience, Brendan made connections in three different situations; the interview process, other doctoral students' experiences and the professor's announcement. The combination of the three facilitated Brendan to see himself in others' experiences and found meaning in those experiences. Ultimately, Brendan influenced the environment enough to look for "hit points" that seemed unspoken to other struggling students. With this discovery, it was apparent that Brendan needed to be sure of his academic standing with the program. Brendan's innate sense to always make connections with those most familiar with an environment so new to him illustrated an ability to assess interacting differences among people so he can better make sense of himself as the moments occurred.

The second research question explored how participants reshaped the

environment in which they were pursuing the doctoral degree. Although difficult to reflect on such an experience, participants discussed how they reacted to a process or practice in the program and how their reaction reshaped the program's process or practice. For example, a process can be the method for selecting recipients for a graduate position or for selecting prospective doctoral students into a program. A practice can be a professor's teaching or advising style or the use of an evaluation tool. This research question also revealed participants' responsibility to respond to a process or a practice influencing their learning as first-generation doctoral students of color. Cesar and Monserrat's experiences each demonstrated two experiences with a faculty where their reaction to a practice was implemented and the other was not. However, all participants' reaction to a process or a practice, when mentioned and usually based on an established relationship, illustrated a change in or at least considered a change in that practice or process. In addition, Reyes and Brendan connected their experience to their first-generation and racial/ethnic identities, respectively.

The experiences were different among the participants, and their roles as primary investigators of their environment portrayed the doctoral program as a large system made up of rules and processes. The participants—first-generation and a person of color—revealed less salient everyday experiences bounded by a set of rules in a larger system, and analyzed what was happening to them through sets of rules and processes. The experiences, which were very focused and unique to each participant, illustrated pushing-back on authorities (i.e., faculty and program administrators). In this light, while the first-generation and person of color are inherited characteristics, practices and policies do not have to be inherited or readily accepted, rather they can be challenged.

Being Resilient: Navigating Mainstream Doctoral Programs

The narratives provided a powerful lens to learn about the lived experiences of the participants. The narratives gave a portrayal of each participant's previous experiences, characteristics and personalities to pave the way to how they had to become resilient during their experience in the doctoral program. Resilient behaviors became clear through the themes discussed earlier and through participants' reaction to the program's environment. They also became clear because of their reflection and acknowledgement of their personal journey. And so, the themes and self-reflections were cornerstones to analyze participants' resilience in pursuit of the doctoral degree. Four participants with different walks of life experience translated into four different interpretations of being resilient, making each unique in understanding the road to gain the doctoral degree. In the journal, participants were asked if there was anything on their mind about being resilience in the doctoral program. Being resilient also came up in other directives.

Being resilient was interpreted as finding balance in navigating mainstream doctoral program by being alone and doing it alone; by being mentored; and by establishing a connection to avoid misunderstandings. Figure 8 depicts being resilient and specifically illustrates which three facets of resilience—environment, personal and family—affected the participant's doctoral journey and which worked together to buffer adverse situations.

Cesar

Ethnicity, race and language were at the core of Cesar's being. "Everything I do", he said, "is based on these three things, ethnicity, race and language." He made that very

clear throughout the study. His experience in the doctoral program were shaped by acknowledging differences, and understanding himself from these differences in order to make meaning of his place in the doctoral environment. For Cesar, making sense of his place in the doctoral program meant balancing what he learned through professors' ways of teaching. He called this balance, "a search for a third space." At the conclusion of his journal, Cesar added this about his experience in the doctoral program.

Being a student requires new ways of being and becoming. In particular, having worked as a practitioner for many years, coming back to school resulted in many dissonances. For example, I seem to be reluctant to fit into my professors peculiar teaching styles. I wanted more independence and freedom to practice my own ways of learning. I didn't want my own ways or preferences of learning to be compromised by professors' ways of teaching. Sometimes there is a clash between the two. But gradually, I am learning how to balance the two. I feel this is a part of resilience-being able to balance what others need and what I need. It doesn't mean I have to give up the values and purposes I cherish. It is about searching for a space between the two. You might call it a search for a third space, which doesn't affect the very reason of becoming a doctoral student.

As a doctoral student with teaching experiences, Cesar acknowledged his new role as a student with faculty. He respected this new relationship but still struggled with fulfilling his own need to learn. However, his thirst to learn became even more difficult when he assessed interactions in mainstream [name of school]. He described fitting mainstream [name of school] by consciously connecting at a higher level to catch up to the majority of his cohort-mates. Cesar described:

Another challenge which I have been battling with constantly is holding identities (other than a student identity) which have a constraining factor and engaging in advanced scholarship. The feeling of minority identity is bad. For example, my L1 language is minority language here. My color is minority color here. My religion is minority religion here. My ethnicity is minority ethnicity here. I can go on and on listing the identity domains. What does this mean? It means I have to learn how people in the mainstream identity domains act, behave and operate. The system is

designed for the mainstream culture. In the class, the metaphors, symbolic expressions, figurative languages, songs selected, cases identified, histories alluded to, etc. used by professors favor students from the mainstream culture. In other words, I have to operate at a more consciousness level than those students because I have to respond to the cognitive demands as well as the cultural demands. Double or triple loop consciousness is required from me while students from other cultures are demanded only at cognitive level since they are quite familiar with the cultural and linguistic references.

Cesar was one of the very few in the doctoral program who stood along mainstream [name of school] but did not really feel in stream with the mainstream. Being resilient in the doctoral program was characterized by finding a third space among different interactions shaping his experience as an international doctoral student of color with different beliefs. His identities shifted a lot, perhaps a lot more than cohort-mates who shared similar and dominant identities. These interactions were hard for Cesar to find a sense of belonging in the doctoral program regardless of the family and personal efforts he had.

Montserrat

Montserrat left the program for a semester during her journey in the doctoral program. As part of the journal, she described interactions with family, friends and faculty that helped her see where being resilient really came from. It rested mostly through her relationships with her husband and a faculty person. She wrote in the journal:

The second semester I dropped out; took a 'W' from one class and said I wasn't going back, I felt like my family didn't really care, except my husband-I almost felt shamed from him, he even said 'you're not a quitter' it is because of him that I came back. My advisor also was very helpful and motivating to stay in the program, I believe I shared that story with you already. [And my] friends were supportive with my dropping [out], they saw how stressed I was and thought it was the best decision.

I asked Monserrat about her personal contributions toward being resilient in the doctoral program. She remarked:

How do I support myself? By taking time away from all of this-I've been really into gardening lately, it calms me and it settles my mind, I feel like I am able to come back and concentrate after spending time gardening.

I do feel alone in this though. The doc program is this totally separate thing to me, I'm no full time student, I'm not a part of the circle, I'm not on campus for everything (nor want to be, nor can be) hence I'm not really a part of it socially-I do go to 'them' for support. Like right now, I'm super stressed about the [Qualitative A] paper and have questions, I know I should ask and then I just set it aside and handle it on my own. But that's what I've learned, I can do it alone, I'm resilient, that's why I'm where I am, that's why I'm first-generation doc student cause I don't go around to the great white hope and ask for help (yeah I'm a little annoyed today)...

Monserrat did not feel she belonged in the doctoral program. She did not have the time to belong mostly because she is a full-time principal and married with children. These priorities limit time spent on campus to interact with faculty and peers outside of class. Most of her higher education journey has primarily been a lonely road. However, Monserrat interprets this lonely place as an ability to do it alone that comes from a place of strength.

In the second interview and also mentioned earlier, Monserrat recalled an experience in college where she felt alone. She said, "I don't want to be here anymore. That goes back to the whole resilience of you're in college and you want to finish college but no one ever told me this is how this could feel." This consistent feeling of being left to do it alone was also reflected when she answered a prompt in the journal inquiring about her perspective of the leadership program's description. While it does not inquire directly about being resilient in the program, Monserrat's response remained supportive

of the lonely journey she endured and, in some way, preferred. She remarked in the journal:

I have this very strong awareness that I am alone, that I have to be the one that is resourceful and smart and that I should first count on myself. I know that it sounds lonely or even angry to say this-and I also do believe that those emotions exist within me, but ultimately, it is what has helped guide me into breaking a poverty cycle.

Montserrat's interpretation of personal achievement was heavily rooted with what it took to break the cycle of poverty, the cycle to be first to go to college. However, while breaking the cycle had become a great accomplishment by way of self-reliance, it had also become a point of being resilient to stay on course to the doctoral degree. In other words, being resilient meant, for the most part, doing it alone and being okay to do it alone.

Reyes

Reyes' experience of being resilient aligned with Brendan's overall experience of finding or having that person to show the ropes in the doctoral program. Reyes' relationship with a friend helped to critically dissect his experience, and as a result helped surpass barriers rooted in the doctoral program. This relationship was the catalyst to "speed up" the process of "getting it" as Reyes began and persisted in the program. In the journal, he wrote:

[Name of friend], who recently graduated from the leadership studies PhD program. I became friends with him during my first year in the [name of school] Women's Studies MA program, and our friendship has become close over the last five or so years. The interactions that matter most are the times when we debrief about our experiences in the doctoral program (usually the negative ones) and when he helps me think critically about my research and career path. A lot of these negative experiences have to do with the politics of the department. One negative experience was when I didn't get one of the doctoral GA positions when I began the program. It

was a blow to the ego, certainly, but there were also hefty financial implications since doctoral GAs have their tuition fully funded and I didn't at that point have a job or anything. I remember thinking, 'Okay, so the people who got the positions I applied for had been working full time previously, whereas I had not been and actually had great(er) financial need for the position.' Since [name of friend] was three years ahead of me in the program, he helped me process these sorts of experiences and give me 'insider information' about the department since he, himself, had a doctoral GA position. With this situation, he gave me some pointers: how to strengthen my resume, which faculty and staff members to get 'on my side,' and to 'just keep going.' [Name of friend] is also a lot older than I am (by 17 years), so he also has been able to share some of his own struggles before and during the program and the wisdom he's gained from them. I wouldn't have initially referred to my navigating these negative/political experiences as 'resiliency' until this past year in my position. On three separate occasions and from three different people, I was told that I handled the stress (which, according to them, was at times 'significant') from my current doctoral GA position with 'grace.' All three times, I didn't really know what to say because it just never occurred to me that someone would describe me that way. I think people like [name of friend] and our interactions about processing the politics of the department have helped me stay strong mentally and emotionally to persist through the drama and the stress-to be resilient through it all.

This reflection was centered on a relationship Reyes had with a friend who was also a doctoral student from an older cohort. This friend shared critical information helpful for Reyes to better navigate the program and provided a new set of lenses to view the doctoral program in a different way, in a necessary way. With this relationship, Reyes' subsequent reaction to the doctoral program shifted because of this relationship, and consequently made him stronger to get through the rough stuff.

Brendan

With a long career in the military, Brendan's survival background immediately translated into establishing a network of support to navigate various policies and demands of the doctoral program. This network of support served as a primary vehicle to be informed about the climate of the program, and as a result Brendan became resilient

when situations were culturally counterproductive to his experience. In the journal, he wrote:

The fact that previous few black males are in the program and succeeding (finishing) is a big barrier. Often times, professors are tentative-hesitant to deal with you as an individual for fear of not being “politically correct” in their dealings or not wanting to have any potential confrontation. This is not to say the staff is not friendly or willing to help, but there is clearly a difference in their dealings with black men and others. I have to go out of my way (at times) to get them to feel comfortable with me as an individual so that when issues in the class come up (i.e. dealing with the black, poor or minority experience) it is not a tense subject, but more of a discussion point. If I want the experience of the program to be an enriching one, I feel the need to establish this position immediately, if necessary to overcome the barriers...

In an effort to avoid uncomfortable conversations, Brendan needed to establish some sort of a connection by introducing himself as a black doctoral student; possibly to avoid a first unpleasant interaction. In this approach, Brendan did not just attempt to create a comfortable environment for him but also for the professors. In the journal, he added final thoughts:

At the end of the day I had nothing much to say regarding resiliency other than to keep pushing, leaning on those that came before you (i.e. mentors you have found, helpful professors, peers) when the going gets rough in order to find the level of perseverance necessary to drive on. My own level of perseverance has been consistently in place as I have to finish in order to accomplish my goals in my career field. That fact is powerful enough for me as it helps me to remember everything that goes along with it (i.e. being a black male, not many of us in secondary educational leadership, the PhD program, at [name of school])—so I have to represent.

“To represent” is a meaningful expression that is often expressed in the black community conveying that as one of the few in the new environment, like the doctoral program, there is a responsibility to do well and get the degree because others paved the way in order for

Brendan to walk on the path others did not get to walk on. In Brendan's experience, perseverance was essential to stay on course during the first year of the doctoral program.

Resilience came through in different ways for each participant. Cesar searched for a third space while Monserrat learned to do it alone. Reyes was resilient when mentored by a peer to overcome policies ingrained in the program. Brendan quickly learned to "step out" and make connections in the doctoral program to keep his goals on track to gain the degree. Monserrat was the only one whose interpretation of being resilient also resulted as a personal barrier in her doctoral journey. Cesar, Monserrat, Reyes and Brendan had distinct personalities, personal and professional experiences which came through consistently through the interviews and the journals. Their personalities combined with an understanding of their identities as first-generation and students of color help articulate the adjustment to and integration in the doctoral program. In part, it crystalized when the environment of the program did not cooperate with other protective factors such as family support, personal efforts to do well, and personal and professional opportunities. It was in these moments their identities as first-generation doctoral students of color were pivotal for experiencing the doctoral environment differently from other students.

As a group, participants were resilient by exhibiting a hyper self-awareness of their environment because they were the minority among the majority. From the beginning of the study, they discussed experiences where they enacted resilient strategies like accepting the professor's invitation to lead conversations about Africa for fear of being misunderstood, becoming silent when diversity topics emerged to avoid being central to the conversation, and reacting to and pushing back on the program's policies.

These acts of resilience stem from recognizing and often describing themselves as one of the few persons of color and from their understanding of their first-generation status. Being resilient and adopting resilient strategies were necessary to understand and reshape their experience as minorities in the doctoral program. By doing so, the participants were reshaping themselves in response to the culture of the doctoral program.

Summary

This chapter narrated the lived experiences of four first-generation doctoral students of color enrolled in a Ph.D. Leadership Studies program. Their experiences stemmed from a three-month period of interviews and journal writing. The chapter illustrated each experience as seen through their eyes and focused on experiences representative of their identities.

As the researcher for this study, I learned that a person's experience is strongly influenced by the environment in which he or she is pursuing their degree. Equally, I learned the environment can be influenced by a person's reaction to the environment. However, the way in which a person influences the environment was not readily identified by these participants. In other words, they talked a lot about how they were changed by the environment, but were unable to easily identify experiences where they changed the environment.

The experience of this underrepresented population was shaped by the context of the doctoral environment and therefore by every day practices chosen to teach and mold doctoral students into professional educators. Also, this underrepresented population showed that when there is a reaction or a lack of reaction to something or toward

someone, it influences the doctoral environment, and reshaped their experience as first-generation doctoral students of color.

Participants' willingness to be open and reflective enabled them to operate as primary investigators of their own environment in order to identify specific examples depicting their journey. Participants not only put words to their story, they put a face to it by identifying specific people, by describing the environment, and by being vulnerable. In view of that, they let me into their lives as first-generation doctoral students of color.

Chapter 5

Discussions

In this last chapter, the statement of the problem, the theoretical framework, the research questions, and the methodology of the study are reviewed. Findings from the study are revised in conjunction with the literature review. The chapter concludes with implications, future consideration, limitations, and a conclusion.

Summary

Overview of the statement of the problem

The demographic of students enrolling in higher education has changed in the last few decades. Higher education has been faced with students with a myriad of diverse characteristics and experiences. African Americans/Blacks and Hispanics, often first-generation doctoral students, are pursuing the doctoral degree more and more, but they still remain underrepresented as enrollees and degree attainers.

In the doctoral program environment, research indicates the experiences of students of color as being marginalized and as experiencing a poor integration into the doctoral community. According to the research, the students' diverse characteristics and experiences collide with the doctoral program environment making the student and the environment separate from one another. Students come with a lot of different, rich cultural background grounded in family, previous academic experiences, professional experiences, and expectations. But it is not always what the students bring to the program; rather what happens to them once they begin the program (Lovitts, 1996) that determines their overall experience with the doctoral program.

Chapter two highlighted literature on doctoral students' experiences in higher education, and primarily focused on experiences of doctoral students of color including first-generation students. The literature revealed hardship in adjusting to the doctoral program by way of maintaining cultural identities, building relationships, and seeking financial and faculty support. The literature also revealed strategies used to mediate experiences. This study explored experiences of first-generation doctoral students of color during their educational journey toward degree completion. It explored interactions as sets of behavior that occurred in the doctoral program shaping the students' experience and explored the students' reaction to the interactions to examine how that may have shaped the doctoral environment. This exploration focused on patterns of behaviors that are similar or divergent among the participants identified as first-generation doctoral students of color. In other words, their experiences were embedded in specific interactions shaping their identities, and the goal was to zoom in on those interactions in an effort to further understand what happened to them during their time in graduate school.

Theoretical Framework

Symbolic interactionism, resilience theory, and practice theory were the theoretical framework for the study. The theoretical framework focused on the students' ability to find meaning in interactions to make sense of their selves in the doctoral program. Making sense of their selves meant reflecting on and dissecting experiences influenced by the environment and ways in which they became resilient to stay in the program. In telling their story, doctoral students symbolically interpreted their experience as part of and at times separate from the program environment.

The design of the study was narrative inquiry because it was the most appropriate design to give voice to this population's experience in the doctoral program. Narrative inquiry consisted of conducting interviews and journal writing which facilitated the content of the study, and in turn the content was interpreted using the theoretical framework. Four themes emerged to address the first research question, and four singular experiences addressed the second research question. The themes inform the discussion in this chapter and guide implications, future consideration, and the limitations of the study which are reported at the end of the chapter.

Methodology

Based on the recruitment email, participants self-identified as first-generation and African American/Black or Hispanic (See Appendix B). Participants were selected first by using purposeful homogeneous followed by snowball recruitment to meet the intended number of participants to do the study. Four first-generation doctoral students of which three were males, one was female identified as African, African American/Black, biracial (Mexican American and White), and Latina. Although the goal was to recruit African Americans/Blacks and Hispanics, the experiences of the African participant and the biracial participant were consistent with the experiences of the other two participants after data was collected and coded. Thus, their experiences remained as part of the study. All participants were also doctoral students for more than one semester at the time they self-identified.

The participants were involved in two sets of interviews and journal writing for a period of three months. The interviews were transcribed and reviewed by the participant for accuracy prior to being analyzed. Journaling, using Google documents, provided the

participant and the researcher a unique forum. I engaged in the journal writing as the participant recollected and wrote about events that occurred in the doctoral program. In order to identify emerging themes, in vivo coding was manually performed. In order to identify patterns within the themes, pattern coding was also manually performed. This was true for both transcribed interviews and journals.

Summary of Findings

First Research Question

The first research question was, in what ways do first-generation doctoral students of color find their experience shaped by the educational environment while working toward degree completion? Four themes emerged from the interviews and the journals to address this question. Themes were consistent with all participants, but their experiences were mostly different from one another. Below is a summary of the four themes; (1) first-generation: an unspoken identity, (2) the role of the language, (3) participation in classroom conversations: to participate or not to participate; and (4) supporters as agents of information and opportunities.

First-generation status: An unspoken identity. The first-generation status is defined as neither parents having a college experience or having a college degree (Chen & Carroll, 2005; Engle, Bermeo, & O'Brien, 2006; Inkelas, Daver, Vogt, & Leonard, 2007; Terenzini, Springer, Yaeger, Pascarella, & Nora, 1996). All participants defined and reflected on the status as the first in their family to graduate from college. Participants' reflection as first-generation included growing up in single-family homes or two-parent homes and status as lower income. They recalled parental limited ability to convey higher education knowledge in the home. And, they were encouraged by their

families to be college-educated people. When parents could not convey this same encouragement, others did; like the teacher in Monserrat's case. Prior to college, their academic experiences came from public and private schools. Altogether, the participants' pre-college characteristics mostly aligned with what has been reported about first-generation college students.

Participants articulated a different college journey because they are the first to go to college, and the first-generation identity was most salient during these reflective moments. However, as doctoral students, being first-generation was not a salient identity as much as it was when they recalled the journey to and through college because as doctoral students, the first-generation identity was not inquired about nor discussed during the doctoral experience. It did not seem to matter as much, yet it was not forgotten. Essentially, the first-generation-ness lost its saliency. Participants had a hard time recalling experiences in the doctoral program directly influencing the first-generation status. When the environment presented itself to disclose their first-generation-ness, two participants disclosed their identity and two did not. The limited interactions that inquired about the identity were exemplified in Cesar and Reyes' experiences. But even then, they were casual in nature. They both stated that if the doctoral community knew about those who are first-generation it would allow for a different way to connect. The other two participants—Brendan and Monserrat—did not disclose the first-generation identity because of the unsafe nature of the environment. As a result, participants' interactions with and reactions to others, in the context of the doctoral environment, made the first-generation status an unspoken identity. The combination of their first-generation-ness as being less salient as doctoral students and

the unlikelihood for inquiries about the doctoral student's personal background in the doctoral environment made it difficult to determine the extent to which it influenced the doctoral experience.

This finding showed that first-generation doctoral students of color could not fully articulate their first-generation-ness experience because it was unspoken. Because it was unspoken, it became even more invisible in a doctoral program among students with college educated parents. Perhaps the reason why the first-generation identity is not discussed is because it is fairly new and unfamiliar among educators (Davis, 2010) even though data about student's parents' education has been collected since 1963 (NSFSED, 2011). Yet doctoral programs that inquire about the implications that may exist about underrepresented graduate students' socialization experience (Tierney, 1997) begin to examine their organization as unique sets of ceremonies, rites and traditions (Tierney, 1988) and believe students can influence perspectives of the socialization process (Gardner, 2010). Among the participants, the finding barely contributes to "understanding how a student's race and ethnicity function in combination with first-generation status as well as how this combination impacts learning" (Ward, Siegel, & Davenport, 2012, p. 76) as part of their current experiences in the doctoral program. Instead, the intersection of race/ethnicity and first-generation status was seldom explained together as part of the doctoral experience. However, throughout the study, participants' connected their first-generation identity with the other themes. For example, Brendan connected his first-generation identity when he recalled the language used in his community. Cesar connected his first-generation identity when he expressed the importance of resources. Monserrat and Reyes connected the first-generation identity to

the knowledge of academic terms. Reyes also connected the first-generation status to financial support. Unlike their race/ethnicity—a noticeable physical characteristic—the first-generation operated as an invisible marker that could only be internalized by the participants. As a result, the study could not ascertain the potential impact of the *combination* of the first-generation *and* race/ethnic identities on the participants' educational journey.

The Role of Language. According to Webster's dictionary, language is defined as the system of words or signs that people use to express thoughts and feelings to each other; any one of the systems of human language that are used and understood by a particular group of people; and words of a particular kind (<http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/language>). The participants—first-generation doctoral students of color—and the doctoral program interface through the use of language which did not allow participants to express thoughts and feelings nor were they understood by peers and faculty. Their interpretation of language was challenged and inconsistent with their cultural being (i.e., language used in the household, home community), and made it difficult to connect with others at given moments. In those moments, they felt and were aware of their difference from others with whom they engaged. Cesar was consciously aware of his L1 (first language); Monserrat rejected engaging with a peer because she felt pressured to meet her peer's expectation; and Brendan decided to water-down the truth about his experiences because they were seen as elusive. Reyes' experience with (Spanish) language questioned his Mexican American identity but language related to academic knowledge was confirmed through other experiences. Their reaction to others

in the way they were being engaged through language was a mean to protect their cultural self.

This finding is parallel with the studies concerning the lack of connection experienced by doctoral students of color (Boulder, 2010; Deboyas, 2009; González, 2006; Ingram, 2007; Orr, 2011) and first-generation doctoral students of color (Adams, 2011; Barnes King, 2011; Fuerth, 2008; Morris, 2007; Stiemke, 2012,). An “ongoing negotiation to stay on course” (Reid, 2012) to persist to the degree was vital to the participants of those studies. The finding of the role of language and the different ways it was presented, illustrated participants negotiating their self through the use of language. The finding brings to light language as an imperative component in interactions that make or break a person’s perception of belonging in a community and a community’s understanding of the impact language has on the community’s culture. Remember Shane, the student made disabled by his school? Part of being labeled as a disabled student was due to language as a constitutive activity (Mehan, 1993). In that study, language from authoritative, socio-cultural and historical perspectives played a part in deciding Shane’s educational future, but it was the authoritative language (that of the psychologist) that decided his fate. Similarly, language for the four first-generation doctoral students of color shaped their experience as being culturally different, and the way it was used led them—for the most part—to reassess and ultimately disengage from using language that left them in limbo.

Participation in Classroom Conversations: To Participate or Not to

Participate. The participants described themselves as being one of the few or the only doctoral student of color sharing classroom experiences when conversations on diversity-

related topics emerged. Conversely, the classrooms of mostly white and straight students depended on the doctoral students of color to elaborate on diversity-related conversations.

By virtue of certain gestures (i.e., looks, verbal requests and questions), participants were offered a heroic position—a symbolic position of authority and admiration—to take the lead in those conversations. Rather than embracing this position, participants purposely became silent and decentralized themselves from the conversation. This form of transaction—offering the role and rejecting the role—magnified who offered it, who received it and within which culture this transaction was taking place; ultimately shedding light on whose experience was shaped by whom and where.

This finding was situated uniquely in the classroom. Consequently, this finding placed the classroom as a central and foundational component of the participants' experience. The classroom is a structure and a laboratory where teaching and learning the content is not enough; rather, keeping an investigative eye on the interactions and reactions occurring in class deepens the context in which teaching and learning the content take place. Research on doctoral students of color, including first-generation, pointed to a culture lacking sensitivity toward students of color and charging them to add multicultural perspectives in the classroom (Ingram, 2007), needing to keep their cultural core intact and needing to be visible in class for meaningful exchange (Deboyas, 2009), resisting assimilation to the doctoral program by creating outside relationships (González, 2006), needing to create a safe space to avoid fear of retaliation (Barness King, 2011); and feeling unprepared to become leaders due to faculty's inability to facilitate culturally-based conversations (Stiemke, 2012).

This finding speaks to a transaction (heroic and silence) of first-generation

doctoral students of color in the context of a classroom. By focusing on this transaction, a slight social structure in the making began to reveal itself (Mehan, 1993). Through series of actions, first-generation doctoral students of color were looked upon to manage leadership conversations because their characteristics paralleled that of the topic and assumed their experience was the same as those being discussed. These actions were guided by professors and peers in a classroom described as predominantly hegemonic. The finding was consistent with all of the participants. When these kinds of patterns of interactions within the same population are unveiled, there becomes a [need for] deep cultural analysis to better examine the set of players intertwined in these interactions (Pollock, 2008) shaping these participants' experiences in the classroom. Since classrooms are central to academic success, patterns are produced in part as educators react to students' behaviors and students react to educators, and particularly as educators reward some behaviors and punish others (Pollock, 2008). Investigated in this way, this finding adds to the literature about first-generation doctoral students of color. It also supports the need to deeply dissect the educational environment through people's interactions and reactions to others and the environment, rather than be complacent with what the environment presents at a superficial level.

Supporters as Agents of Information and Opportunities. As first-generation doctoral students of color, the participants were supported in the program for different reasons. The participants sought support because they needed help or clarity on an issue. In these moments of exploration, the supporter acted as an agent of information and opportunity. They were interested in the participants' needs and well-being as first-generation doctoral students of color. Participants described their experiences in detail

and therefore provided an illustration of the types of interactions and response to those interactions in ways they have not been described in previous studies. Previous studies have found that support is important and have been mostly provided by external supporters (i.e., outside of the program) who identify with doctoral students' cultural identities (Barness King, 2011; Fuerth, 2008; Morris, 2007; Stiemke, 2012) because there are so few faculty of color in doctoral programs. Yet, faculty of color are reported to validate the experiences and are a great source of support to diverse students (Contreras & Gándara, 2006), and supporting doctoral students' research is an important contribution provided by faculty (Contreras & Gándara, 2006; Nettles, 1990).

This finding reports supporters' willingness to share themselves with the participants to help uncover the hidden agenda and made that exact experience in the doctoral program attainable and possible. For example, when Reyes felt defeated by his paper, the professor said, "Well, would an extra 24 hours help? I'm willing to wait for your work. Your writing is worth the wait." Reyes' experience demonstrated that the doctoral program does not have to be rigid and therefore feel unattainable. Instead, a transparent blue print of what to expect in the program unveiled by those in key positions or experienced by older doctoral students is okay to share.

Another example can be viewed in Brendan's experience when his unofficial advisor said, "You're in the Ph.D. program. It trumps their program. They don't want to admit that to you but in our meetings, that's how it is." This signifies a supporter's willingness to bring key information to Brendan's attention. His unofficial advisor "brought" the agenda and made visible what is usually invisible to doctoral students. This kind of information is highly impactful for any doctoral student, but more so for first-

generation doctoral students of color. Getting through the doctoral program does not have to be a secret rite of passage especially when they are reported to likely face the same obstacles experienced in getting to and through college as entering and completing a graduate degree (Barnett, 2008; Engle, 2007; Vuong, Brown-Welty & Tracz, 2010).

Additionally, the finding supports the notion of creating a culture of possibility for doctoral students, especially first-generation doctoral students of color. Culture of possibility, coined by Gándara (1995) in *Over the Ivy Walls: The Education Mobility of Low-Income Chicanos*, was captured in the homes through families' messages, stories and words of encouragement. One can think about how to create a culture of possibility at the time it is needed. That is, creating a culture of possibility should be made in real-time or as needed at the time it is presented. In other words, supporters interacting with and communicating information and opportunities to the participants immediately created a culture of possibility for the participants as the time presented itself.

Second Research Question: Reaction to and Reshaping of Practice or Policy in the Doctoral Program

The second research question was, how do first-generation doctoral students of color shape the educational environment in which they are pursuing their doctoral degree? Participants described a unique experience addressing a practice or policy in the doctoral program they reacted to, and by virtue of their reaction (or lack thereof) changed the practice or policy. In this intent and through the participants' explanation of the precise experience, practices or policies deeply rooted in the person and/or in the program became the focus and thus helped address the research question. The exposed practices or policies participants respectively encountered were the administering of the course

evaluation, grading and teaching practices of professors, offering of graduate assistantship positions, and the interview process as a gateway to unveiling spoken or unspoken expectations. These were symbolic interactions unique to each individual and divergently interpreted by and reacted to while they shared the same characteristics as first-generation and student of color.

The most profound example was Monserrat's experience with professors' grading and teaching practices; two opposing experiences. Monserrat quoted the professor, "Some of you will be in shock because I haven't been grading to the rubric, and now I am. You'll be shocked at the poor grades that you have." Monserrat's reaction was, "I didn't want to be taught by a person who thought that was good teaching pedagogy... I didn't even talk to her about it... I felt a very clear line of haves and have nots in her class and I felt if she's already expressing disdain for some of the papers that she was passing out, me raising my hand and saying, that's not an appropriate teaching strategy, I didn't feel like it was going to make a difference, but I knew that I did not want to be part of a professor that would do that to students... I never took another class with her on purpose."

Another example includes my drive to work every morning. Every morning, I get in my car, take the same route to work, drive by the same buildings and coffee shops, and make turns on the same streets. I also park my car in the same vicinity within the parking structure. After three years of taking the same roads to work, I stopped looking. I stopped looking at the buildings, street signs, and even the same person in the red jacket with gray hair walking to what I presumed to be work. I stopped looking because my drive to work was not so new to me anymore and therefore, I was embedded in my own routine of

getting to work. There are everyday life strategies, routines and traditions used personally and at work that lead us to become too friendly with the status quo of doing or approaching things. Monserrat's example with this professor is similar. The professor's grading practice may have been routine practice that she was used to and therefore business as usual, but was also interpreted by Monserrat as "mocking students and feeling disdain for the papers." And at the same time, it shaped her experience as a first-generation Latina. Monserrat's other experience with a professor included asking the professor for more time to reflect on questions. The professor had the tendency to move too fast leaving the students with little time to think. The professor responded to her request and immediately shifted his teaching practice accordingly.

These experiences help identify what familiar or everyday practices, categories, labels, explanations, and processes in education need to be looked at closely to denaturalize them in the interest of the students, faculty and others (Pollock, 2012). This means that any practices in education have the potential to contribute to students' achievement or lack of achievement. As previously mentioned, research illustrates doctoral students of color, including first-generation, experience difficulties integrating in the program. This difficulty is fluid; it can occur at various points and places during the program. However, the participants' experiences, and particularly Monserrat's, support that a deficit can exist with education as opposed to with the student carrying this deficit and bearing sole responsibility for the outcome of their education (Knapp, 2001). The need to learn what drives this population to leave prior to attaining the degree (Witkowsky, 2010) is illustrated in this finding, particularly in Monserrat's experience. Traditions, rituals and routines bring a sense of history in a culture and for people.

However, routine practices in teaching and learning can prevent individuals from seeing differently, asking questions differently, learning differently, considering others normally not in the majority, and fail to uncover patterns that were always there but hidden by everyday practices. Critical reflection on routine practices can enable educators to become disrupters of the status quo to create an educational friendly-environment where students' diverse backgrounds are shifting the demographic of education enrollees.

Summary of Being Resilient: Navigating Mainstream Doctoral Programs

One of the findings was participants were supported by one or two persons in the doctoral program that helped them gain information to which they would otherwise not have access. This finding highlights the structure of the program. Despite the support the four first-generation doctoral students of color received, they expressed the need (almost a requirement) to be resilient to negotiate experiences that seemed to be problematic. Resilience is not a trait that someone has or does not have. Resilience describes a person's competence even during arduous times (Luthar, Cicchetti, & Becker, 2000). Cesar said "the system is designed for the mainstream". He meant that as an international African first-generation doctoral student, he was always the minority in race/ethnicity, religion, and language. The other three participants also experienced a need to navigate the program's mainstream environment in order to not feel completely out-streamed which is when resilience, an innate and normal part of a person, develops (Benard, 2003; Brown, D'Emidio-Caston, & Benard, 2001; Luthar, et al., 2000; Ungar, 2008).

Being resilient due to the structure of the doctoral program is not something shared with non-minority doctoral students because they do not encounter experiences that question their cultural identities (i.e., race/ethnicity, SES, sexual orientation). In this

case, resilience can be viewed as Eurocentric and focusing on western values (Ungar, 2008). The structure of the doctoral program as being predominantly white is the challenge that led first-generation doctoral students of color to “figure it out” in an effort to make it work for them and to be as effective as possible in the doctoral program. This supports the notion that participants—first-generation doctoral students of color—do not just somehow make it to the degree, but that there exist social and political inactions that exclude culturally different populations (Burley, Barbard-Brak, Marbley, & Deason, 2010; Campa, 2010; Ceja, 2004; Meyer, Licklider, & Wiersema, 2009). This finding supports previous studies. Previous studies illustrated culturally different populations became resilient in order to make it through higher education (Campa, 2010; Gardner & Holley 2011; O’Connor, 2002) as an underrepresented population. Previous studies also reported that to understand the process of being resilient is to understand how the environment, family and personal efforts work together to create opportunities and support for doctoral students of color (Campa, 2010; Luthar et al., 2000). Although this study did not focus on the core understanding of how these three components of resilience work together, this finding showed four first-generation doctoral students of color enacting resilience in an environment where cultural experiences were different from the structure of a predominantly white doctoral program environment, even though they were supported by family and peers, driven by personal efforts, and given opportunities through personally held relationships with faculty.

Implications

Based on the data presented in the study, there are implications doctoral programs can be mindful of in order to become increasingly aware of the experiences of first-

generation doctoral students, often students of color. In this section, implications address practices to consider as possible future effect on this population pursuing the doctoral degree. Overall, the implications address a need to be aware of the now, avoid complacency and use a humanistic approach when connecting with the environment and with those in it.

Administrative Leadership

The on-going battle of first-generation doctoral students of color maneuvering through and up the education ladder can be rectified by an increased awareness of first-generation students of color in doctoral programs, understanding unique and divergent experiences in the program, and considering multiple characteristics that intersect with the first-generation status. Upon admitting a cohort of doctoral students, program administrators could inquire about ways to know admitted students; who is who among the students, and if any of the students identify as first-generation. This does not mean the identity is salient to the student, and in turn the administrator should not solely focus on the identity. It merely helps to look beyond physical characteristics of entering cohorts, or existing cohorts.

A thorough investigation of traditional policies and practices may need a review in an effort to better serve an increasingly complex doctoral student population. For example, has the program followed the same interview process for admitting students? Has the course syllabus been used for several years? Are readings authored by persons of color strictly assigned in a diversity courses and are they also included in other courses? Which doctoral students are recipients of graduate assistant positions, and why? These questions deconstruct practices and policies that may be so embedded in the program

structure that they limit the potential to expand beyond what the program offers. Deconstructing practices and policies means having to ask “why?” to challenge the now. Why has this been done this way and not that way? Why is the diversity course responsible for developing the student’s cultural competency? Why aren’t White faculty teaching diversity courses? Asking the question “why?” means, as program administrators, we are looking beyond everyday routine ways of doing things and seek to stay relevant with the now.

Support was a clear resource for first-generation doctoral students of color to build relationships that led to information and opportunities. This must continue. However, support seemed to be static among the first-generation doctoral students of color. In other words, support was evident in some parts of their experience but not throughout. In this case, how can the doctoral program provide and sustain support throughout the entire doctoral experience? Take a look at the hallway in which your office resides. Are doors open or closed? When are office hours provided? Are office hours provided when students are working? Are there signs and brochures in the program that communicate certain messages? Are services provided to or used by one group of students and not the other? Supporting first-generation doctoral students of color, as shown in the study, should not be interpreted as disregarding structural policies or practices impeding student success, especially in the classroom, despite personal and familial support.

Leadership for Faculty and Doctoral Students

The classroom is the foundational location where learning occurs, where faculty and student spend most of their time together, where experiences are shaped and

essentially where the doctoral program happens. Faculty can become primary investigators of their classroom to determine interactions and reactions among *every* student in the classroom. In this way, initial raw, classroom experiences are not left unexamined. These experiences are treated as real-time, current and instantaneous. Likewise, doctoral students can be positioned as primary investigators of their environment—like the participants of this study—by investigating interrelated experiences between behavior and the environment in an effort to understand and articulate their own experiences.

Consequently, the students are actively engaged in the environment to dissect interactions shaping their experience as first-generation doctoral students of color, including their cohort-mates'. Faculty can observe verbal and non-verbal cues, learn to manage cues, and accordingly respond to cues that may shape the student's experience as first-generation doctoral students of color. Similarly, students can be taught to pay attention to the same cues that also shape their own experience as well as others'. Cues include silence, stares, and taking notice on certain students answering certain questions or leading discussions. Conversely, faculty and students should not assume that first-generation African Americans/Blacks or Hispanics share the same experience because, based on this study, first-generation doctoral students of color interpreted experiences differently and experiences were also qualitatively different among the participants.

Additionally, faculty can begin to create a culture in which all walks of life determine the extent to which students will develop during their tenure in the program. Likewise, doctoral students should not assume that because of the level of the education they have reached, all of the students have college educated parents, and are therefore the

only first-generation student. Doctoral students should not assume that the first-generation status is interpreted similarly among one another just because they share this status. Together, faculty and students avoid assuming a homogenous population by virtue of the level of education, and instead uncover an existing culture that is, based on this study, rarely inquired about.

Leadership for Professional Development

Implications for my professional development are important to address among previously mentioned implications. My professional leadership is informed by the study I conducted in that I am intrigued by how my practice is influenced by others and how I influence others by practice. I am intrigued by others' reaction to and interactions with others while recognizing the environment in which they are taking place. I am intrigued by how connected I can become—or how the environment may prevent me from connecting—with in-the-moment experiences. As a leader-practitioner, I will be (and should be) challenged by educational environments to force me to inquire about all students, principally underserved students, new and seasoned colleagues, policies and documents. In order to stay relevant in education, I have to assess, challenge and disrupt the status quo. There cannot be room for status quo in education when we are continuously concerned by students of color's persistence to the doctoral degree. I cannot be satisfied with what is and will be presented in education. Earlier I described the daily drive to work; a drive that is ritualistic and unchanging. In this frame and as a leader-practitioner, I have to ask myself, "am I getting my work done in the same way I travel to work?" That is, is my work so routine that I have become comfortable and unchallenged by it? Professional development is just that, a process of development. The moment I stop

asking “why” questions is the moment I stop developing as a leader-practitioner. Future experiences, good and bad, will further inform my work and my contribution to education. That is where the work begins and continues.

Future Considerations

There is much to learn about first-generation students of color and their experience at the doctoral level in higher education. To better understand this population, further research is considered and suggested. The following considerations are not listed in any level of importance. First, studies have investigated the experiences of African American/Black and Hispanic doctoral students who happen to be first-generation which have led to a better understanding of their experiences but have not focused on the identity of first-generation status. With that said, future research on the degree of salience of first-generation, race/ethnicity, including SES, sexual orientation and other cultural identities should consider administering the Multidimensional Identity Model (MDI) developed by Jones and McEwen (2000). The MDI was first used on a group of diverse college-aged women representing multiple identities. The model is said to be:

Fluid and dynamic; representing ongoing construction of identities while considering the changing contexts on the experience of identity development. It is illustrative of one person’s identity construction at a particular time. Therefore, MDI depicts the possibility of living comfortably with multiple identities, rather than just describing multiple dimensions of identity. (Jones & McEwen, 2000, pp. 408)

Since 2000, MDI has been revised as the Reconceptualized Model of Multiple Dimensions of Identity (Abes, Jones, & McEwen, 2007) in which meaning-making was added to the model. The addition of meaning-making explores not just *what* relationships

are perceived by students but also *how* students perceive relationships as they do (Evans, Forney, Guido, Patton, & Renn, 2010).

Using MDI may shed more light on the degree to which the first-generation status is salient in specific time and place in the doctoral program. Related to MDI and its role in discovering the interworking of multiple identities, MDI can also be used to frame activities to help doctoral students enrolled in the same cohort explore their own multidimensional identities. In conjunction, all doctoral students within the same cohort can be paired together and learn from one another for a period of time (i.e., one year). As a two-person team, they can explore what they know about their selves, how do they know what they know about their selves, what do others assume about their selves, and how do their experiences contribute to the concept of leadership in a diverse society. Through this exploratory activity, all students can equally—as much as possible—contribute to each other’s professional and educational development as they relate to diversity competency.

This study is slightly rooted in anthropology; the study of culture. Future consideration should include the researcher as observing first-generation doctoral students of color in the doctoral environment and consider observing and interviewing faculty. In this effort, the anthropology undertone of the study is strongly met, and another dimension of the study is added through the participation of faculty to further understand the interactions and reactions between the actors.

Additionally, adjusting the population may lead to further understand first-generation doctoral students of color in a more focused way. Future research should inquire about first-generation doctoral students’ previous academic experiences as part of

the recruitment profile (i.e., private high school and private undergraduate school versus public high school and public undergraduate school). I believe it may provide some understanding in previous academic experiences or the influence of previous academic experiences on the doctoral experience. Also, selecting first-generation doctoral students in the same year in the program may also provide a different understanding of their experiences as opposed to investigating participants at different stages in the doctoral program.

Although the focus of the study was not to compare African Americans/Blacks with Hispanics, but rather to understand their experiences as first-generation doctoral students of color, future consideration should include recruiting one race/ethnicity at a time to understand the experiences of first-generation African Americans/Blacks separate from first-generation Hispanics to control for inappropriate comparisons between groups whose experiences are so dissimilar (Alessandria & Nelson, 2005) and to prevent from luring anyone to believe that group comparisons is acceptable.

These considerations will add to the body of knowledge of first-generation students of color experiencing higher education at the doctoral level, a level of higher education hardly met by this population. Moreover, these considerations help to tailor future studies to be focused and leaving little room for interpretation. Program administrators and doctoral students can benefit from learning what shapes this population's experience en route to gaining the doctoral degree.

Limitations

Like any qualitative study, limitations are inevitable. It is ethical to faithfully acknowledge any factors that limit this study to warn future researchers seeking to

replicate the study. This section reflects on the study's overall design and is also a review of the limitations conveyed in chapter three.

Generalization

The study took place at a predominantly white medium size institution in Southern California. The institution has other unique characteristics that will remain nameless in an effort to keep its identity protected. These unique characteristics, location of the study, and other features influenced the context of the doctoral program the participants were seeking the degree from and were not exclusive to the total experience of the participants. If this study is replicated the results cannot be generalized because context is influenced by the location of the campus. It was the study's goal to recruit all participants from the same institution and program with characteristics of first-generation, African American/Black, and Hispanic. The combination of recruiting and selecting this population from one location at the doctoral level required patience and hope because there were so few enrolled in the doctoral program. Because of this, it limited my ability to be selective. Because there are fewer members of this population at the doctoral level, future researchers interested in investigating this population in one context, may not be able to reach their desired number of participants from one location.

Narrative inquiry was the design of the study. By its very design, the story of each participant was unique to that person. I made every effort to be objective during the process of this research, and through their words, faithfully told their story. Since the stories are uniquely expressed by each participant, generalizing their experience upon other first-generation doctoral students of color would be imprudent.

Positionality

I identify as a first-generation Black woman and am also pursuing a doctoral degree. I was born outside of the U.S. and English is my second language. I am not only living my own doctoral experience, it also came to no surprise that I saw a little bit of me in some of the stories shared during this study. In this position, I validated the participant's feelings, while keeping myself in check as much as possible in order to make this experience their experience. On the other hand, it was a special experience to be able to investigate a population with whom I identify.

Conclusion

As long as there is a disparity in degree attainment among first-generation students of color in higher education, and more specifically at the doctoral level, there is a continued need to research this population to increase our understanding. First-generation doctoral students of color have fallen short of the education system for far too long. Current studies on students of color that are so often first-generation have conveyed to the audience that the culture of higher education is unparalleled and unwelcoming of diverse populations; often underserved populations.

The study looked further into what shapes the experiences of first-generation doctoral students of color. Specially, the first research question inquired about ways first-generation doctoral students of color find their experiences shaped by the educational environment while working towards degree completion. The second research question inquired about how they (the participants) shaped the environment in which they were pursuing their doctoral degree. The research questions guided the study. During a three-month collection of data, themes emerged, personalities were revealed, and stories were told. Thus, the lived experiences of the selected population gave voice to the study.

Overall the findings of the study added to the experiences of a diverse underrepresented population enrolled in higher education. The study informs stakeholders, including students, to intentionally, personally and humanly create a culture of possibility for first-generation doctoral students of color while enrolled in the program. A culture of possibility is created by believing that the environment influences the student's experience and believing the student also influences the environment, and therefore the two are seen as influencing one another. In an effort to remain relevant to diverse populations in higher education, a critical-friendly eye must become a natural part of everyday practice

Appendix A

Definition of Terms

The following definitions clarified how the study utilized the terms.

- Culture: Culture, environment and system were used interchangeably.
- Doctoral Program: Participants of the Doctorate of Education (Ed.D.) or Doctorate of Philosophy (Ph.D.) program specializing in Education, Leadership, or Higher Education Policy.
- Environment: Environment, culture and system were used interchangeably.
- First-generation status: Those whose parents have a high school diploma or less, and have never enrolled in college as opposed to those parents that were enrolled for a period of time but did not gain the bachelor degree.
- Non-first-generation students: Those whose parents have a college degree.
- Participants: Those who participated in the study. They ranged between first-year to dissertation phase.
 - First-years: Had at least one semester (semester system) of experience in the program.
 - Dissertation students are those writing their dissertation.
- (Re)Produce: As a result of the reciprocal relationship of behaviors and environment, and people's reaction to behavior. Therefore, behaviors produced by the environment and the environment re-produced by behaviors.
- Students of color/Minority: African American or Black, Latino(a), including those who identify as Hispanic or Chicano(a). Student of color and minority were used interchangeably.

- o African American/Black: People who identify as having origins in any of the Black racial groups of Africa (U.S. Census Bureau, September 2011).
 - o Hispanic/Latino(a) Origin: People who identify as Mexican, Mexican American, Chicano, Puerto Rican or Cuban—as well as those who indicate that they are another Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origin. Origin can be viewed as the heritage, nationality group, lineage, or country of birth of the person or the person’s ancestors before their arrival in the United States (U.S. Census Bureau, 2012).
- Racial/Ethnic Identity: Used interchangeably in the study, but not without notice that the racial and ethnic identities have been defined as related but different constructs (Evans, Forney, Guido, Patton, & Renn, 2010).
- System: System, culture and environment were used interchangeably.

Appendix B

Recruitment Email to Participants

My name is Karina M. Viaud, and I'm a doctoral candidate at UCSD/CSUSM in the joint Educational Leadership Program. The goal of this email is to recruit participants for my dissertation research. I am conducting a qualitative study designed to explore experiences of first-generation doctoral students of color who are currently in an Ed.D. or Ph.D. program in Education. I want to gain a deeper understanding of individual's overall journeys while pursuing the doctoral degree. Current research indicates that about half of doctoral students gain their doctoral degree while the other half do not. This is the national statistic as well as a national concern. The doctoral degree attainment gap is greater for first-generation and students of color.

The format of collecting data is as follows: I plan to conduct 3 individual interviews, and participants will engage in journal writing for a minimum of one month for this exploratory study. Specifically, the first interview will consist of 10 questions which will take at least 1 hour to complete. An informal meeting for approximately 30 minutes will follow to allow me and the participant to get to know each other and to explain the journal writing activity. After the informal meeting, the participant begins the journal writing. The second interview (approximately 30 minutes) will be guided by the content of the journal, build rapport with the participant, and ensure the journal experience is positive. The third interview (approximately 1 hour) will also be guided by the content of the journal, discuss the journal experience, and relay my accessibility as the relationship between the participant and I come to a close. In turn, the interviews and the journal will provide an in-depth understanding of the participant's educational

journey as a first-generation doctoral student of color. Altogether, participants can expect a span of three months to complete interviews and to write the journal.

If you identify as first-generation and as a person of color, specifically African American/Black or Hispanic, your participation would be greatly appreciated. In this study, first-generation is defined as the first in your immediate family to obtain a college/bachelor degree. In other words, your parents don't hold a college degree nor do they have any college experience. If this applies to you and participation in my study appeals to you, please answer the following demographic questions. Once sufficient forms from participants are received, the pool of participants will be reviewed to select the final individuals that will be part of the study. Those individuals selected will be emailed a consent form, receive details about the study, and set up a date for the first interview. ***Consider this recruitment message as the first step to identify interested first-generation doctoral students of color for the intended study.***

Please feel free to contact me directly at kmviaud@gmail.com with any questions you may have. Again, if the study applies and appeals to you, please answer the following demographic questions to commence the process.

Profile questions:

Thank you for your consideration to participate in my study. The following questions help identify participants' profile interested in my research and to make final selections. Once sufficient forms are received, the pool of participants will be reviewed for the desired profile. Those individuals selected will be contacted, emailed a consent form, receive details about the study, and set up a date for the first interview.

1. I am first-generation: (choose one)

- a. Neither of my parents holds a 4-year college/bachelor degree from the U.S. or from any other country.
- b. My parents have college experience but did not graduate from a U.S. college or any other college outside the U.S.
- c. Neither (a) or (b) apply because:

2. I identify as:

- a. African American/Black (*define as people who identify as having origins in any of the Black racial groups of Africa (U.S. Census Bureau, September 2011).*)
- b. Hispanic (*define as people who identify as Mexican, Mexican American, Chicano, Puerto Rican or Cuban—as well as those who indicate that they are another Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origin. Origin can be viewed as the heritage, nationality group, lineage, or country of birth of the person or the person’s ancestors before their arrival in the United States (U.S. Census Bureau, 2012).*)

3. I identify as: Male or Female

4. I am currently in a doctoral program at:

a. Name of institution and program:_____

b. Name the year in program:_____

5. If you are currently in the first-year of the program, how many semesters or quarters have you completed at the time you are filling out this form?

6. If you are at the dissertation level of the program, how far along are you in the process?

- a. Working on my proposal/ Submitted my proposal for approval;
- b. Conducting research and collecting data;
- c. Writing final chapters; or
- d. Will or have defended my dissertation (date of defense):

7. Your full name: _____

8. School email: _____

9. Phone number: _____

If you are selected as a final participant, an informed consent will be emailed. You will then have up to 5 days to fax or scan the signed informed consent. Thank you for your time

Appendix C

Consent Form to Participate in Research

Invitation to Participate

My name is Karina M. Viaud, and I'm completing the final year in the Educational Leadership Program at UCSD/CSUSM. I'm currently conducting a study on the experiences of first-generation doctoral students of color pursuing a degree in the Department of Education.

This topic aims to capture information about the overall experience of participants pursuing a doctoral degree. This is important because too often the statuses of first-generation and students of color (specifically African Americans/Blacks and Hispanics) are described as the unlikely student to pursue and persist in a doctoral program. You are invited to participate in this study because you identify as *first-generation* defined as neither of your parents holding a four-year college degree and you also identify as African American/Black or Hispanic.

Description of Procedure

Once you have read and signed the consent form, you will be contacted within 5 days to schedule the first interview. Below are activities involved in the research.

Activities involved in the research

- *First Interview:* The first interview entails a minimum of 1 hour responding to about ten questions, and going over your rights as a participant.
- *Informal Meeting:* An informal meeting follows the first interview, where you will engage in an unstructured 30-minute conversation with the primary investigator. The goal of the informal meeting is to build rapport with you as you begin the journal writing.
- *Journal Writing:* Journal writing begins after the informal meeting. You will engage in journal writing between 1-3 months. You are asked to write in your journal at least twice a week. Prompts will be provided to help you jump start your writing.
- *Second Interview:* One month into the journal writing, you will engage in a 30-minute interview guided by the content of the journal.
- *Third Interview:* The third interview is scheduled at least 1 month after the second interview and toward the end of the journal writing, and will be a minimum of 1 hour.

The activities will span over a period of 3 months. The interviews and the informal meeting will be sporadically scheduled. You will meet with the primary investigator 4 times.

The use of Google Documents

Google documents will be used for journal writing. The primary investigator will create a document, assign it specifically to you, and use features to protect your identity and

confidentiality. These features will be reviewed at the informal meeting. The primary investigator will be able to view your journal writing as it happens, and thus will be engaged during your experience. Click here to see a demonstration <http://www.screenr.com/bWq7>

Recording and Transcripts

The first interview will be the only interaction that will be audio recorded. A transcription of this interview will be provided to you before the informal meeting and reviewed during that time. You will confirm the transcription at the informal meeting.

Risks

There are minimal risks in participating in the research. They include:

1. Recalling uncomfortable, sad memories or current struggles that are deemed difficult to articulate or share.
2. Experiencing deeply-rooted unexpected and unresolved feelings.
3. Personal information may be subject to being breached.

Safe guards

Safe guards are put in place to minimize risks. They include:

- 1 You can ask the primary investigator to turn off the audio-recorder and take a moment to recuperate, or refuse to answer any question.
- 2 You will be directed to talk with people you trust (i.e., family, friend, and mentor), make an appointment with a counselor, or if necessary, request to stop or withdraw from the research. Also, a list of health services referrals from your school and from the primary investigator's home campus will be offered if a strong emotional reaction is evoked during the interview and journal writing processes.
- 3 Documents will be kept in a locked cabinet and within a login-only accessible computer with the primary investigator only having access to the documents. The primary investigator is working alone, thus limiting others to have access to data. Pseudonyms will be used to hide your identity.

Benefits

Although your participation will yield minimal or no direct benefits to you, the primary investigator believes that your authentic participation will add an in-depth understanding of your lived experiences, and focus on attributes that clarify your educational environment as you pursue the highest educational degree. In turn, your responses add information to the educational journey of first-generation doctoral students of color, a population that has been described as marginalized in doctoral programs.

Voluntary Participation

Your participation is entirely voluntary, and may be withdrawn at any time. If the length of the interview becomes inconvenient, you may stop at any time. There are no consequences if you decide not to participate.

Incentive

The primary investigator understands the time commitment behind your participation in the research, and the travel that is involved. Once you have completed the first interview encompassing the 10 questions, you become eligible for a \$25 gas gift card.

Questions and Contact Information

This study has been approved by the California State University San Marcos Institutional Review Board (IRB). If you have questions about the study, you may direct them to the primary investigator, Karina M. Viaud at kmviaud@gmail.com or (619) 339-2181, or the primary investigator's Chair, Dr. Patricia Prado-Olmos at pprado@csusm.edu. Questions about your rights as a participant should be directed to the IRB at (760) 750-4029. You will be given a copy of this form to keep for your records.

- ☐ I agree to participate in the study.
- ☐ I agree to be audio taped.

Participant's name: _____

Participant's signature: _____

Date: _____

Primary Investigator's signature: _____

Date: _____

Appendix D
Questions for First Interview

1. Please describe any previous educational experiences that impacted your decision to pursue a doctoral degree.
2. Tell me about your journey to the doctoral program. What drew you to this program and why?
3. Tell me about your personal identity as a first-generation, student of color.
4. In the doctoral program, can you talk about interactions you've experienced with others (students/faculty) that shape your identity as first-generation? Can you describe your reaction to those interactions?
5. In the doctoral program, can you talk about interactions you've experienced with others (students/faculty) that shape your identity as a person of color? Can you describe your reaction to those interactions?
6. Can you think of a time when the environment of the doctoral program reacted to you as a first-generation doctoral student of color? What meaning did that bring to you, if at all?
7. In what ways has the doctoral program supported you in pursuit of the degree? Any examples of specific interactions or events?
8. In what ways has the doctoral program hindered you in pursuit of the degree? Any examples of specific interactions or events?
9. Have you experienced a time when you reacted to a particular process in the doctoral program? Did your reaction reshape the process? If so, how?
 - o How did your reaction to the process shape interactions with others (students/faculty)?
 - o How did others' response to your reaction shape interactions with you?
10. As a first-generation doctoral student of color, how might your experience in *this* doctoral program shape what you would advise to other first-generation doctoral students of color seeking to pursue the doctoral degree?

Appendix E
Questions for Second Interview

Interviewer:

“Right here you say that, ‘My father was pushing for some kind of educational power.’ What do you mean by that?”

Cesar:

“It simply means that my father wanted me to get educated, to have some kind of college education or university education. To be educated more and more. That’s what he means by educational power, to be educated yourself.”

Interviewer:

“Let’s see. The first part, and it’s throughout the whole transcription, is you really like Dr. [name of faculty] class. You’ve served as a TA as well. What is it about Dr. [name of faculty] class in Human Relations Workshop that has been so appealing to you? You’ve taken it several times. Can you tie that in to your experience in the Doctoral Program? Please think about your identities, too.”

Monserrat:

“It’s helped me actually understand my identities. It’s helped me understand why those identities were formed. Especially in my busy pace, sometimes we don’t pay attention to those things like why did I choose to say that, why did I react that way when that person said that or did this. Her class helped me slow down and take that data in.”

Interviewer:

“Okay. Last time when we talked, we talked about two different situations where you revealed your identity as biracial. One instant was between yourself and your advisor, and after some time, that’s when you revealed your identity. With the feminist group, you just said, ‘You know, I’m just going to tell them who I am now,’ and then later offer reasons of credibility because of really the messages and the conversations that happened within this group, you reveal yourself. I wanted to ask you, was this revealing yourself to the feminist group a play on previous experiences of revealing or not revealing yourself before?”

Appendix E
Questions for Second Interview, Continue

Reyes:

“Were there instances where I wish I would have because when I didn’t, things happened that I didn’t like. In undergrad, my first major was social work, for my second major was women’s studies. And so in these classes, there was one professor that I loved and took a lot of classes with her, probably three or four, and there was one class where I said ... I forgot the class, but I can visualize it, and I had said something, and someone said like, something about like, ‘Well, how would you know, you’re white,’ or ‘Well, of course the white guy said that,’ like, ‘You’re white and you’re saying that, of course.’”

Interviewer:

“Yes! A lot of the research already says finding a mentor, somebody to connect with, is important. I’m trying to figure out ... we do know that and we know that we need somebody to show the ropes or communicate expectations. I want to dig deeper into what’s happening in those relationships that I haven’t encountered in those research articles. What’s being said and how does that shift or give you a better understanding of those expectations that you say [name of friend] has communicated to you to stay on course with the program?”

Brendan:

“Exactly! Okay, let’s see. I’m trying to dig for an example. He’s given me a bunch and he’s not the only one that ... I’m trying to give an example to you of how I presented myself or did something so that I would be more acceptable to whomever in the program, because I knew what to do versus not knowing and all of a sudden come off as this, ‘oh, he’s just another...’”

Table 1 : Doctoral degrees in Education, Health Profession and Related Programs, and Legal Professions and Studies conferred by degree-granting institutions by sex, ethnicity, and field of study: Academic years 2008-2009 and 2009-2010.

Field of study	Academic year	Total				Males				Females			
		White	Black	Hispanic	White	Black	White	Black	Hispanic	White	Black	Hispanic	White
Education	2008-2009	5852	1585	540	1994	432	187	3858	1153	353	353	353	353
Education	2009-2010	6122	1595	489	2059	447	168	4053	1148	321	321	321	321
Health professions & related programs	2008-2009	38114	32228	2389	16126	1025	1000	21988	2203	1389	1389	1389	1389
Health professions & related programs	2009-2010	40134	3426	2652	16094	1097	1113	23230	2329	1539	1539	1539	1539
Legal professions & studies	2008-2009	33195	3175	2964	19032	1175	1422	14163	2000	1542	1542	1542	1542
Legal professions & studies	2009-2010	33106	3216	3190	18415	1216	1553	14691	2000	1637	1637	1637	1637

Note. Adapted from Table 307. Doctor's degrees conferred by degree-granting institutions, by sex, race/ethnicity, and field of study, 2009-10 by U.S. Department of Education, *National Center for Education Statistics, Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System Fall 2010, Completions component*. (This table was prepared November 2011.)

Note. Adapted from Table 308. Doctor's degrees conferred by degree-granting institutions, by sex, race/ethnicity, and field of study: 2008-09 by U.S. Department of Education, *National Center for Education Statistics, Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System Fall 2009, Completions component*. (This table was prepared November 2011.)

Table 2: Three Dimensional Space Narrative Structure

<u>Interaction</u>		<u>Continuity</u>		<u>Situation</u>
Personal	Social	Past	Future	Place
Internal conditions, feelings, hopes, aesthetics, reactions, moral, dispositions	Existential conditions in the environment with other people and their intentions, purposes, assumptions and points of view	Remembered stories and experiences from earlier times	Implied and possible experiences and plot lines	Context, time and place situated in a physical landscape or in a setting bounded by characters' intentions, purposes and different points of view

Note. Adapted from Clandinin and Connelly (2000) cited by Creswell, J. W., 2008, *Educational research: Planning, conducting, and evaluating quantitative and qualitative research*, p. 521
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Table 3: Journal Questions and Answers

Journal Questions	Cesar	Montserrat	Reyes	Brendan
1. Who is involved in your pathway? Think about peers, professors, family, friends. Then, document and comment on interactions that matter to your pathway.	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
2. Below are descriptions of Leadership Studies; Department of Leadership Studies; and program overview. What is your reaction to the descriptions as they relate your experience and your identities a person of color and first-generation. Address each description.	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
3. Anything on your mind about resilience or being resilient in the doctoral program?	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
4. How are your everyday behaviors shaped by preexisting conditions? What are others' actions at that moment? How are their action received by/shape the institution and others' actions?	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
5. Capture a quote that is meaningful to you as you experience the doctoral program, and write about it. What meaning does the quote bring as first-generation student of color?	No (did not ask him)	Yes	Yes	Yes

Table 4: Participants' Profile

Pseudonym	Gender	Race	First-generation	Year	Current/Past Profession	Notes
Cesar*	Male	African	Yes	2	Faculty	Scholarly writer
Monserrat	Female	Latina	Yes	4	Principal	Master degree recipient from current Ph.D. program
Reyes	Male	Mexican American/White	Yes	3	Graduate Assistant	Entered Ph.D. program immediately following completion of master's program
Brendan*	Male	African American/Black	Yes	1	Teacher/Military	Bachelor and master's degrees recipient from current Ph.D. program

(*) Pseudonyms were assigned

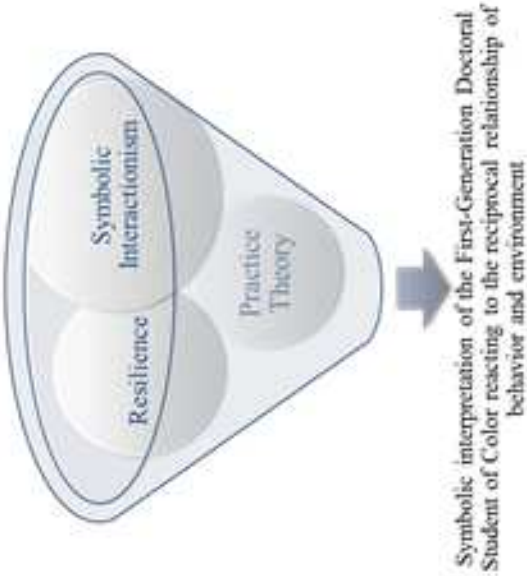


Figure 1: Conceptual Frameworks of Symbolic Interactionism, Resilience Theory and Practice Theory

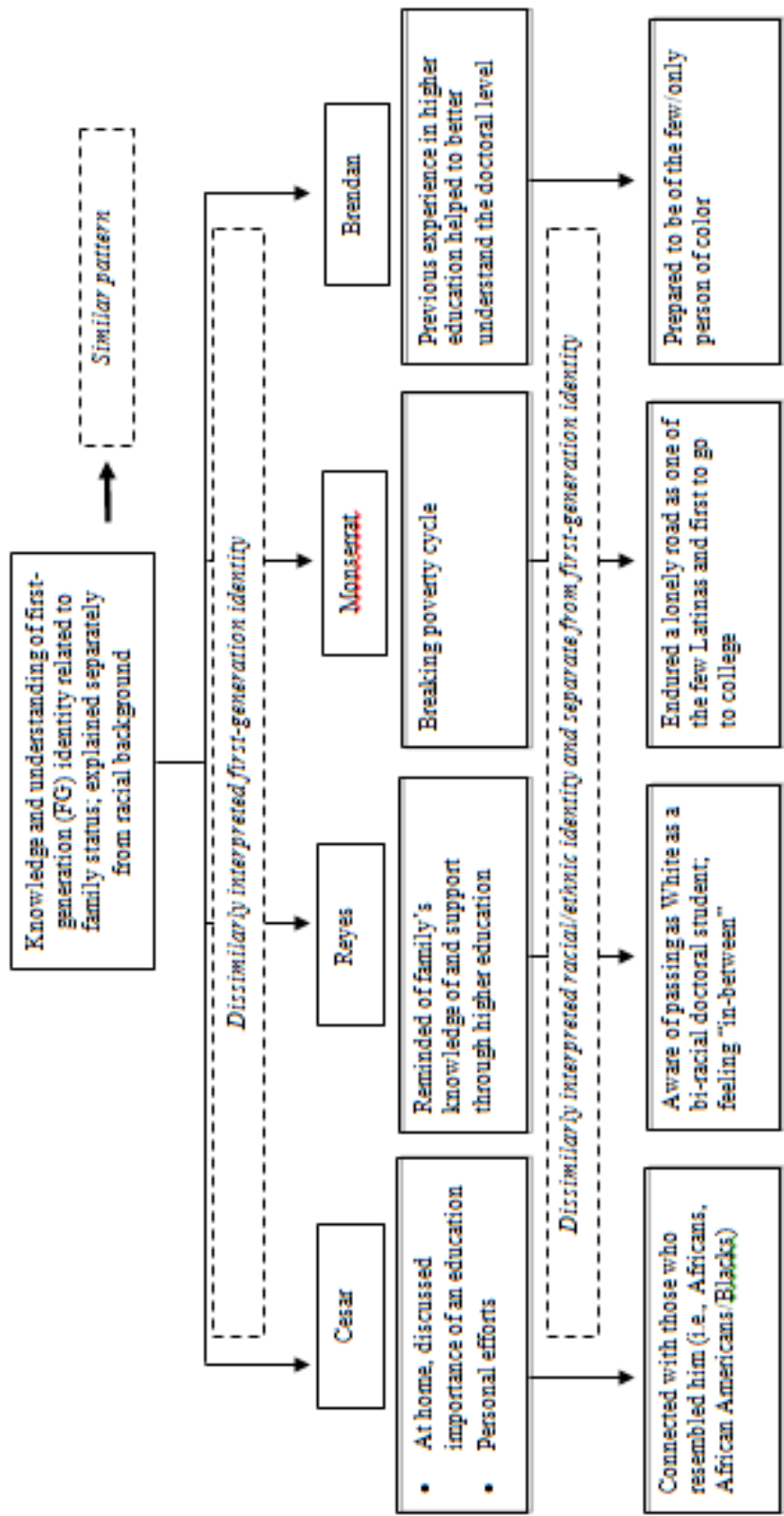


Figure 2: First-Generation and Doctoral Student of Color

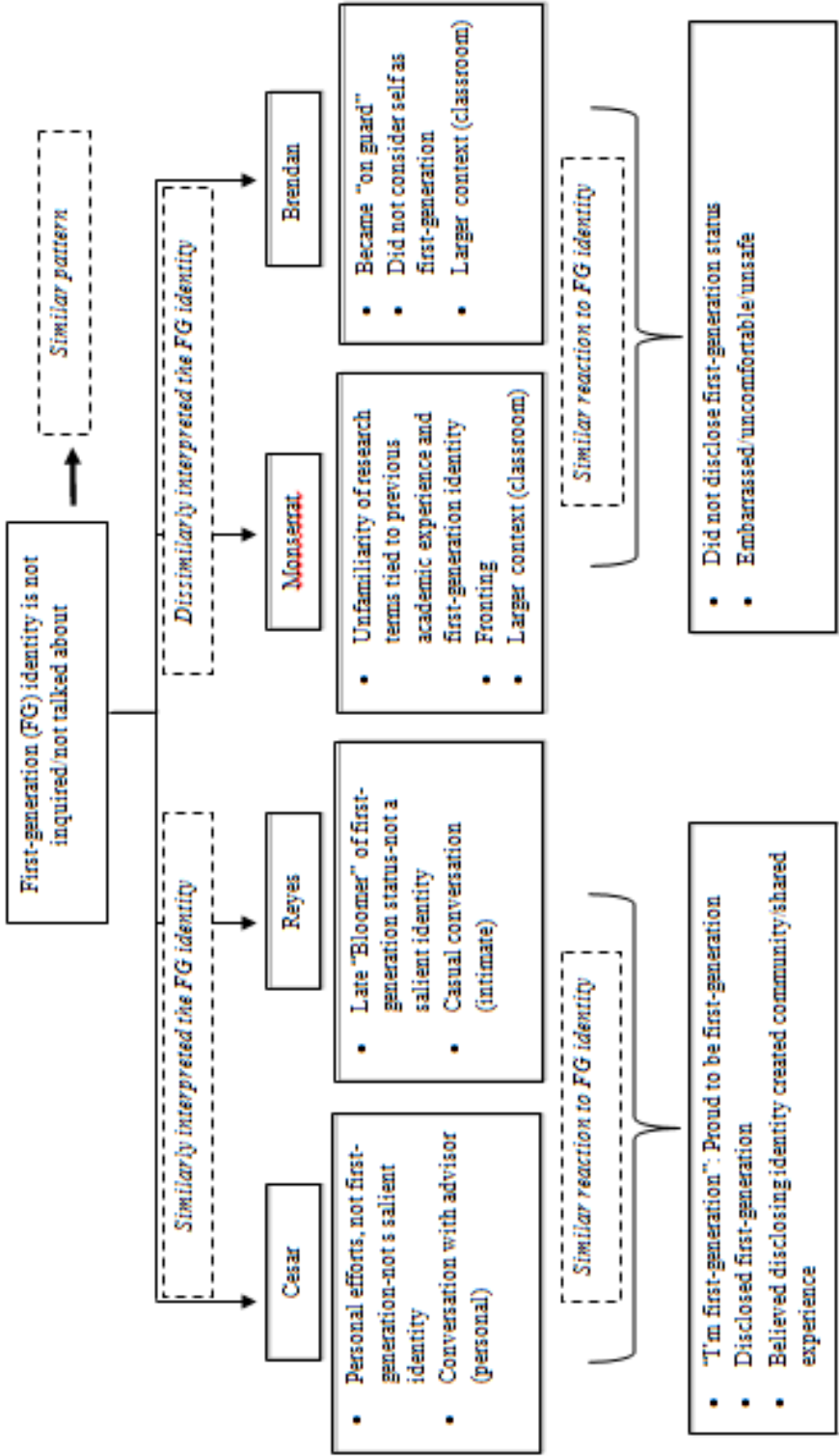


Figure 3: First-Generation Status: An Unspoken Identity

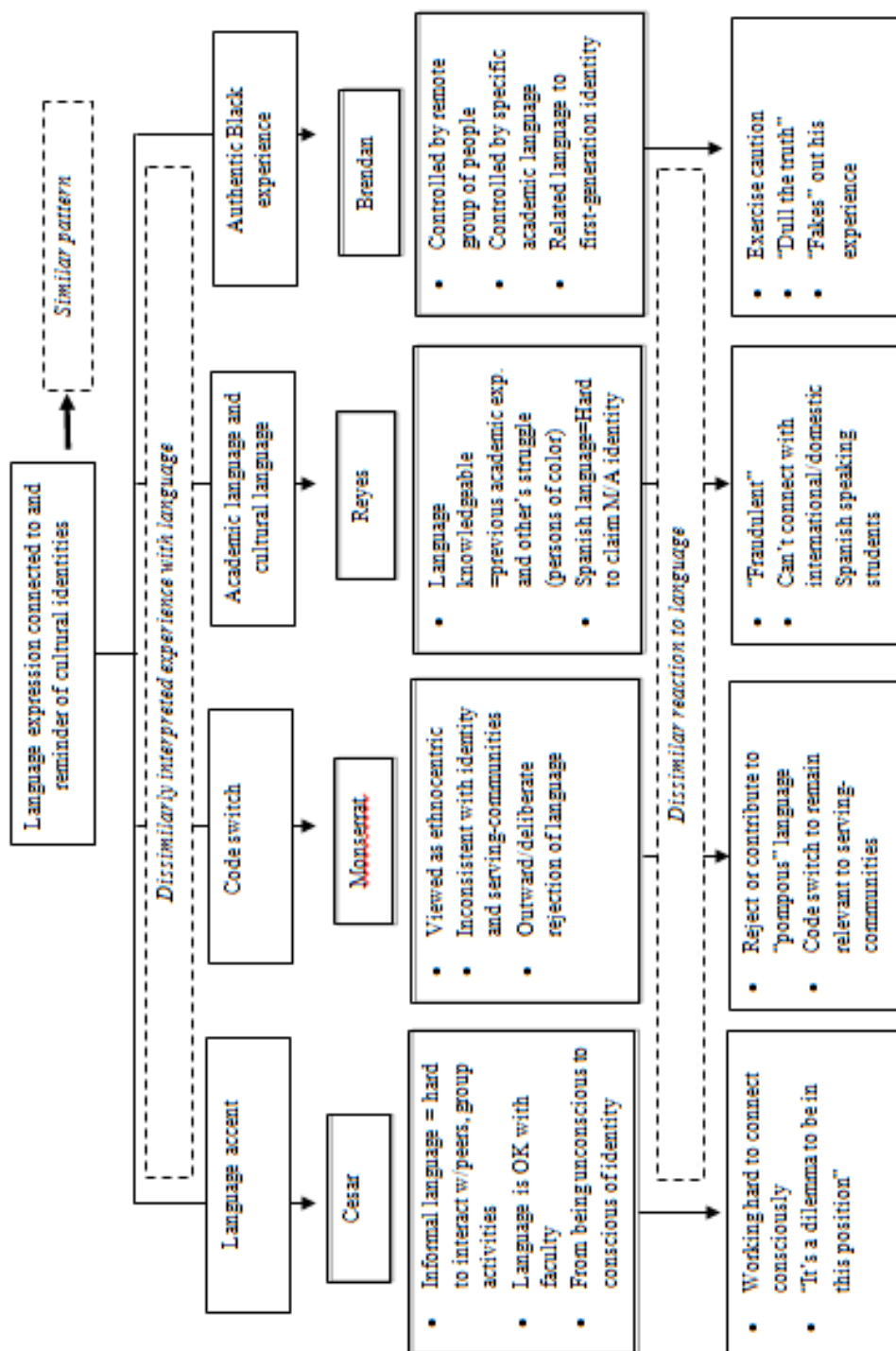


Figure 4: The Role of Language

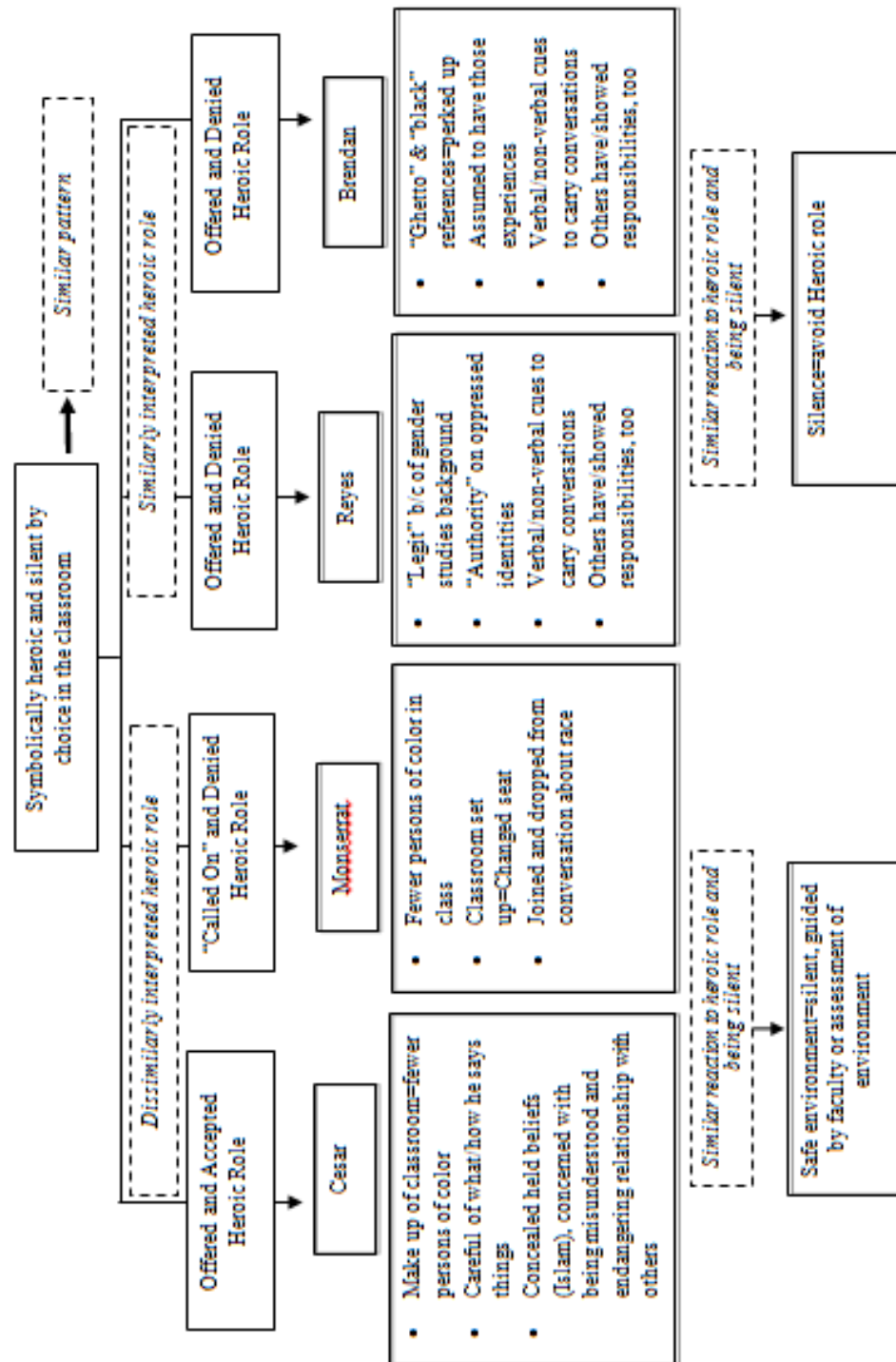


Figure 5: Participation in Classroom Conversations: To Participate or Not to Participate

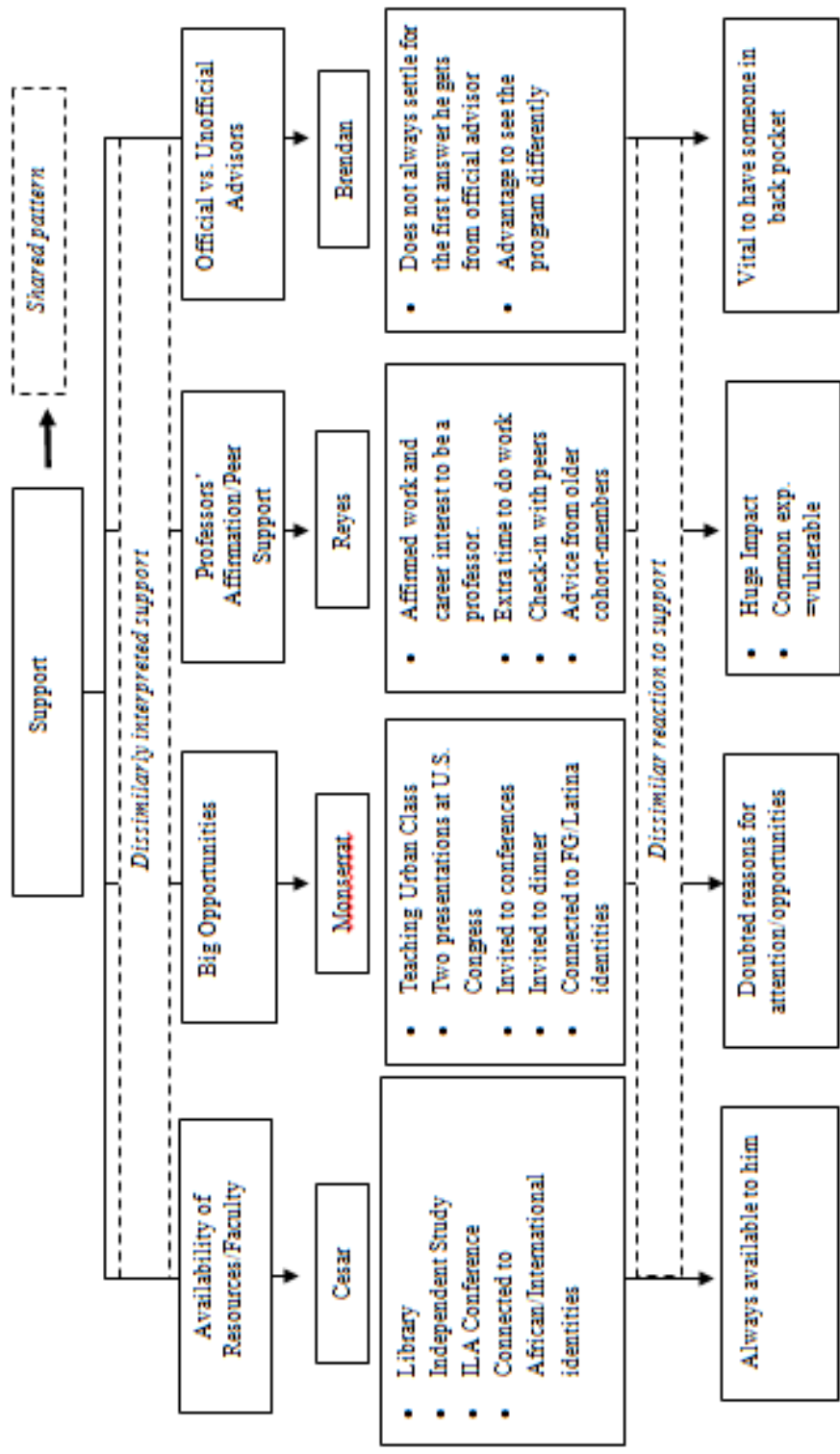


Figure 6: Supporters as Agents of Information and Opportunities

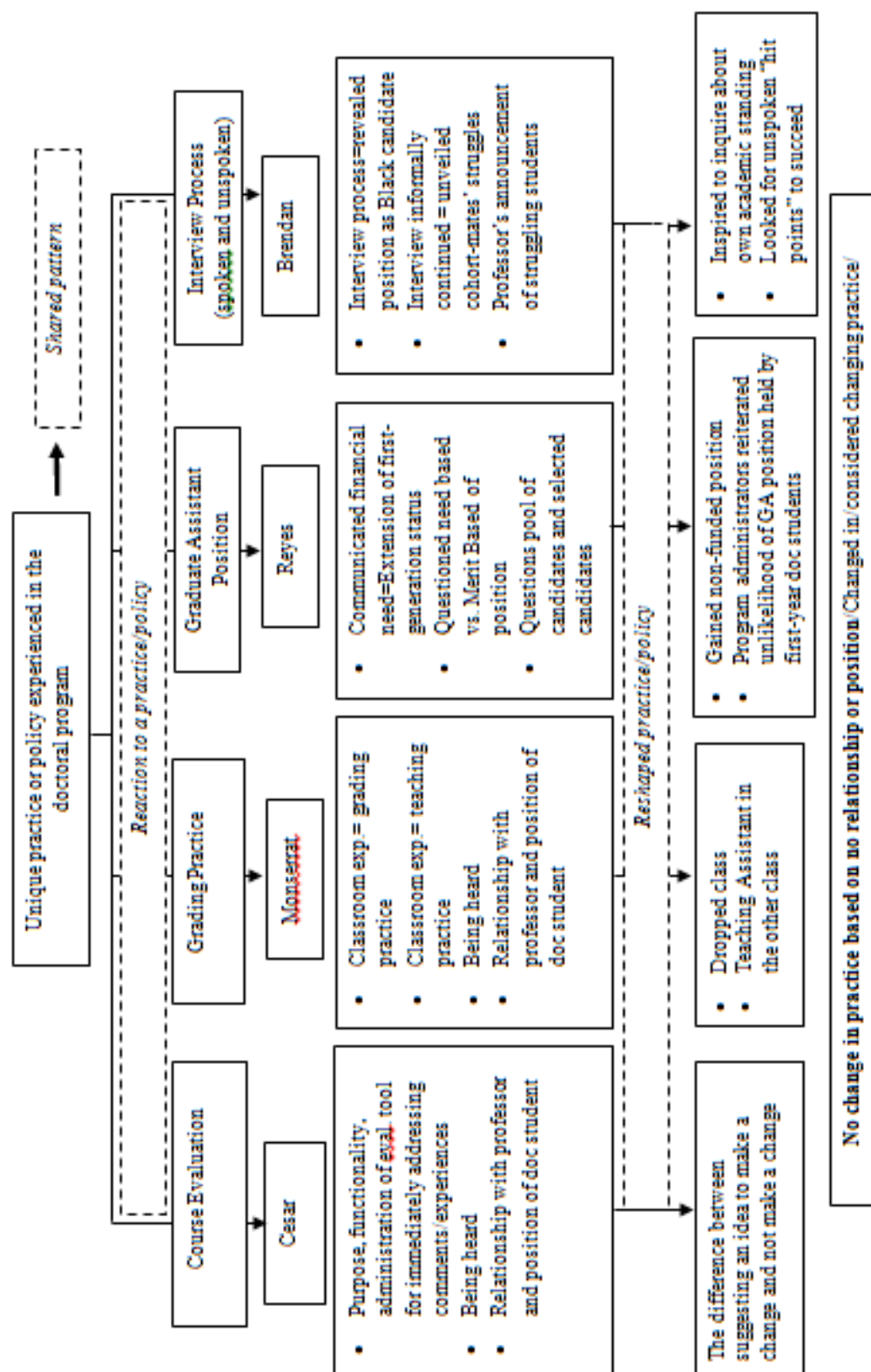


Figure 7: Reaction to/Reshaping of Practice or Policy in the Doctoral Program

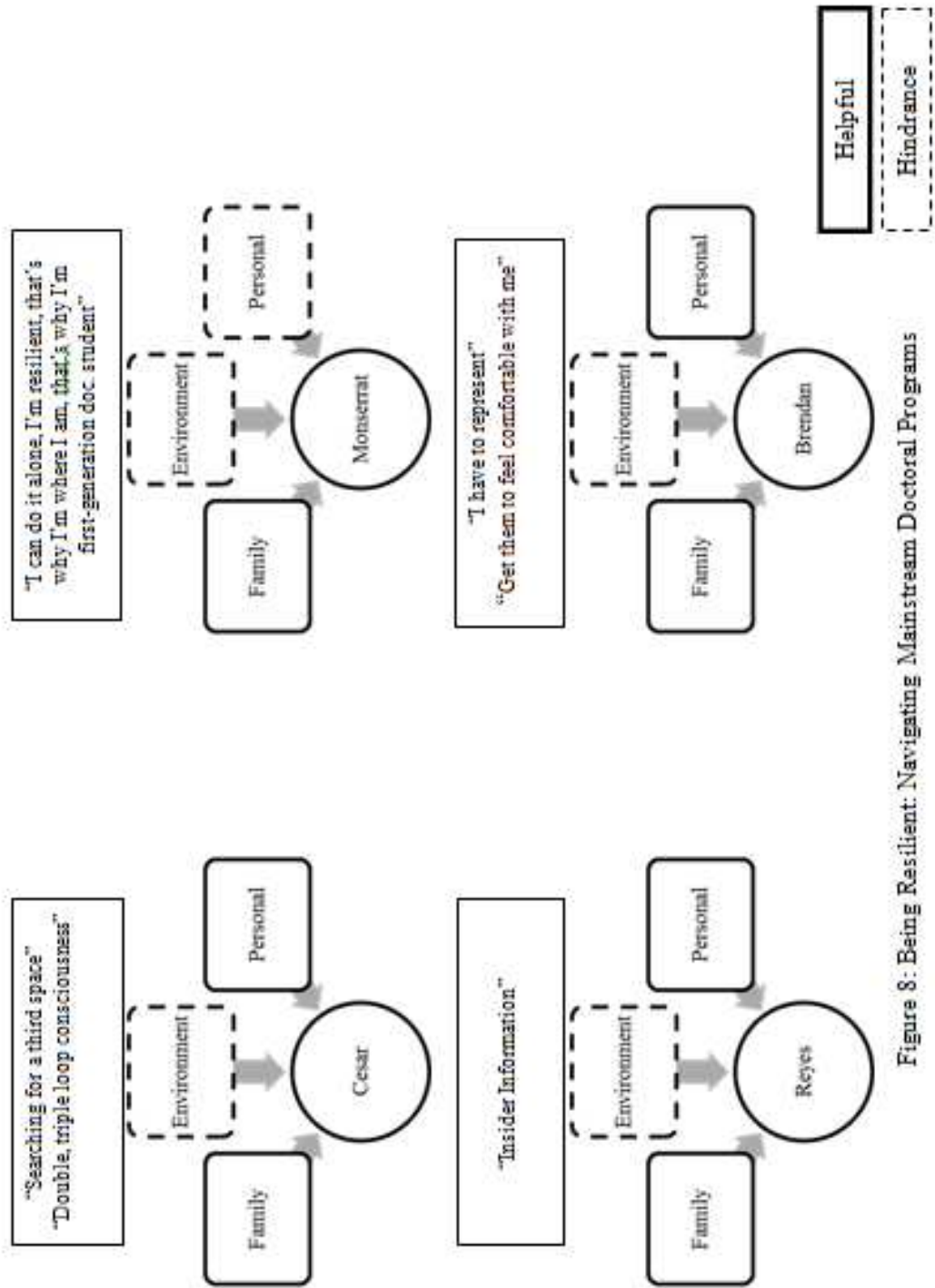


Figure 8: Being Resilient: Navigating Mainstream Doctoral Programs

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