A PHENOMENOLOGICAL EXPLORATION OF THE IMPACT OF RECOGNITION BY A TEACHER ON HISTORICALLY UNDERREPRESENTED STUDENTS AS IT RELATES TO THEIR PERSISTENCE IN HIGHER EDUCATION

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DEDICATION

"Go and love someone exactly as they are. And then watch how quickly
they transform into the greatest, truest version of themselves.
When one feels seen and appreciated in their own essence,
one is instantly empowered."

—Wes Angelozzi

This dissertation is a tribute to all students who yearn for the day when their God-given potential and worth are recognized and acknowledged, and they are provided with equal opportunities to attend the college or university of their dreams. I want you to know that I see you.

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> I pray that out of [My] glorious riches you may be strengthened with power through [My] Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your heart through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the Lord's holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God (Eph 3:16-19, NIV).

Through the challenges of doctoral student life, I have felt sustained by God's unwavering love, grace, and provision. This journey was not a solo adventure but rather a testament to the remarkable support, help, and encouragement provided by my family, friends, committee, and editors—all gifts from God.

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ABSTRACT

Education is an inherent right for all individuals, and lack of access to education has remained a significant issue of fairness. Historically underrepresented students have encountered obstacles to achieving academic success within higher education institutions. Efforts and academic studies spanning several decades have concentrated on equalizing opportunities and modifying policies. These endeavors view problems related to social justice through economic and societal lens, addressing them by redistributing resources, capabilities, and societal benefits through policy adjustments. These initiatives have had a positive impact on historically marginalized students' access to education. Despite this progress, these individuals still exhibit lower rates of persistence and graduation compared to peers from different backgrounds. The objective of this qualitative study using hermeneutic phenomenology was to gain insight into effects of teacher recognition on historically underrepresented students who have persisted in their education in higher learning institutions. The study's data originated from a group of such students who participated in a wraparound program at a 4-year college or university in Washington State. The primary method of data collection was in-depth individual interviews, which enabled the researcher to comprehend participants' personal experiences. The study's findings highlighted historically marginalized students experience challenges not solely related to socioeconomic factors. Study participants articulated being recognized by a teacher was a driving force for their perseverance in higher education, while lack of recognition was discouraging and may even lead them to drop out. Additionally, students emphasized importance and necessity for advanced training for educational leaders in diversity, inclusion, and cultural relevant pedagogy.

Keywords: higher education, historically underrepresented students, recognition theory, teacher leadership, critical race theory, persistence, academic achievement, qualitative, hermeneutic, phenomenology.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Education is a fundamental right of every human being, and a denial of that right remains one of today's biggest justice issues (Executive Office of the President, 2021; McNay, 2008; United Nations, 2021). Since the inception of colleges in the United States, historically underrepresented students—Black people, Hispanics, and Native Americans/Alaska Natives—have faced barriers to academic achievement at higher education institutions (HEIs; Kobar, 2020; Schockman, 2019; Thelin, 2019). Despite the United States' founding principle of equality, HEIs often developed with policies and laws preventing historically underrepresented groups from pursuing or completing a college education (Bastedo et al., 2016; Thelin, 2019). McBride and Wiseman (2022) argued, "Whenever there is a significant attempt to acknowledge and address this tragedy, powerful forces mobilize to put this history back into the shadows" (p. 18).

Students from historically unrepresented groups still encounter economic, structural, and social inequities, leading to lower rates of advancement than White or Asian students (Andrade et al., 2022; Barnes et al., 2021; Bidwell, 2017; Center for Urban Education, 2016; Fletcher & Tan, 2021; Kirby, 2021; Ladson-Billings & Anderson, 2021). The Center for Urban Education (2016) defined equity as "achieving parity in student educational outcomes, regardless of race and ethnicity" (para. 1). Barnes et al. (2021) and Maclean et al. (2021) distinguished between equality and equity, claiming treating everyone equally does not mean equity; instead, equitable practices remove barriers by changing educational structures, policies, and procedures. Past policy

reform has not eliminated educational inequities; therefore, administrators and teachers need to develop new approaches to this issue.

Teachers play a pivotal role in the life of students and hold developmental relationships that can increase the academic success of historically underrepresented students (Blackmore, 2009; Burris, 2019; Furman, 2012; Kim et al., 2018; Maxwell, 2022; O'Day & Smith, 2016; Patton et al., 2016; Shen et al., 2020; York-Barr & Duke, 2004). These developmental relationships influence the way a student sees themselves and their ability to achieve their goals (Antopolskaya et al., 2020; Iser, 2019; Y. K. Kim et al., 2018; L. Patton et al., 2016). Teachers rely on their worldview, leadership theory, and leadership practice when interacting with students (de Silva et al., 2018). Research has indicated a strong link between teachers' leadership theory and practice and students' academic success (Black, 2015; Shen et al., 2020; York-Barr & Duke, 2004). Academic literature has shown little consideration, however, of the impact of leadership theory and practice on equity issues (Blackmore, 2009; Burris, 2019; Furman, 2012; Maxwell, 2022; O'Day & Smith, 2016; L. Patton et al., 2016; Shen et al., 2020; York-Barr & Duke, 2004).

As a whole, educational research has fallen short in improving and implementing new equitable strategies into teacher leadership development (Cardona, 2019; O'Day & Smith, 2016; L. Patton et al., 2016; Redding, 2019). Many researchers, school administrators, and teachers have agreed it is time for a new approach to help historically underrepresented students persist and graduate from college (Cardona, 2019; Y. K. Kim et al., 2018; O'Day & Smith, 2016). O'Day and Smith (2016) argued additional research

is needed to determine the impact of teacher leadership theory and practice on the academic success of historically underrepresented students.

The remainder of this chapter provides the reader with an overview and rationale for this qualitative hermeneutic phenomenological dissertation study. The chapter begins with the study background and gap in literature and offers an overview of the theoretical framework and importance of leadership theory and practice. Chapter 1 concludes with a definition of terms, methodology, limitations, significance of the study, and an organization of the study.

Background of the Study

This section assesses the challenges and opportunities of equality in higher education for students from historically underrepresented groups through a historical and contemporary viewpoint in the United States. The study background begins with a definition of historically underrepresented groups, who this research focuses on, followed by the purpose and history of U.S. higher education.

Historically Underrepresented Groups

Some current literature and people in academia refer to historically underrepresented groups as historically underrepresented minorities (HURM). Goforth (2022) described HURM as "members of racial, ethnic, or gender groups that have been disproportionately underrepresented for a period of more than ten years" (para. 3) and include Blacks, American Indians/Alaska Natives, and Hispanics. The 2020 U.S. Census reported HURM make up most of the 37.2 million people living in poverty in the United States (U.S. Census Bureau, 2022b).

Although some researchers in academia have used the term "underrepresented minorities" and the related acronym HURM, legitimate critique suggested these terms "are viewed as harmful and racist" (Williams, 2020, p. 3). Williams (2020) asserted these terms deny groups from naming themselves, ignore differences among racial and ethnic identities, and imply "a master-slave relationship between overrepresented majorities and underrepresented minorities" (para. 12). To pursue a study that honors the dignity of all humans, this research refers to this group of people as students from historically underrepresented groups, or historically underrepresented students, instead of using the term "underrepresented minorities" or HURM.

Purpose of Higher Education

In the United States, higher education has a reputation as the driver for social and economic change and growth—a gateway to live out the American Dream (Atwater, 2017; Bastedo et al., 2016; Torpey, 2021). Historical evidence has shown attaining a college degree increases job potential and lifetime income and significantly decreases unemployment (Association of Public & Land-Grant Universities, 2022; U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2021). People with bachelor's degrees are half as likely to experience unemployment and earn up to 84% more per month, with salaries of $1.2 million more over the average lifetime compared to those with a high school diploma (Association of Public & Land-Grant Universities, 2022; U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2021).

Dating back to the 17th century, the tangible value of education was well understood. Horace Mann, known for transforming the public education system in the 1800s, stated "education then, beyond all other devices of human origin, is the great equalizer of the conditions of men, the balance-wheel of the social machinery" (Atwater,

2017, para. 2). This view has expanded over time to encompass not only the individual benefits but also the societal advantages of education. In 1947, President Truman established a commission to evaluate U.S. higher education. This commission created a report called *Educating for American Democracy* (EAD). The goal of this report was to design a roadmap for civic education that could be delivered equally to every U.S. citizen (Harvard University, 2022). The EAD declared the purpose of higher education was to educate citizens in democratic ideals, values, and processes (Zook, 1947).

In 1947, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. authored an editorial for his college newspaper titled, "The Purpose of Higher Education," in which he wrote:

> It seems to me that education has a two-fold function to perform in the life of man and in society: the one is utility and the other is culture. Education must enable a man to become more efficient, to achieve with increasing facility the legitimate goals of his life. (para. 2)

King (1947) believed higher education benefited both the individual and the community and a threefold purpose existed for higher education: self-actualization, vocational development, and citizenship (Fischer, 2016; Labaree, 2018). Students achieve self-actualization when they can identify personal attributes and beliefs (e.g., strengths, weaknesses, and worldviews) and then live mindful of and congruent with those attributes and beliefs on a daily basis (Komives & Wagner, 2017). Vocational development happens when HEIs prepare students successfully for the workforce (Komives & Wagner, 2017). Colleges cultivate citizenship when instilling a set of values and beliefs in their students that help them recognize their individual contribution within

a global context (Komives & Wagner, 2017; Labaree, 2018; Ostermiller, 2005). In these ways, HEIs serve as both personal refiners and economic drivers.

In addition to offering personal and economic benefits, U.S. higher education can advance democratic ideals (King, 1947; Thelin, 2019; Zook, 1947). In the Wingspread Declaration (1998–1999), a group of higher education presidents, deans, and faculty called on institutions to serve as both "agents and architects" of a free and equal society (Boyte & Hollander, 2015). The United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO, 1998), in its World Conference on Higher Education article 1, stated the mission and function of higher education is "to educate, to train and to undertake research" (para. 2). Additionally, in its *World Declaration on Higher Education for the Twenty-First Century: Vision and Action* (UNESCO, 1998), the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights specified one of the missions and functions of higher education is to

> provide opportunities for higher learning and for learning throughout life, giving to learners an optimal range of choice and a flexibility of entry and exit points within the system, as well as an opportunity for individual development and social mobility in order to educate for citizenship and for active participation in society, with a worldwide vision, for endogenous capacity-building, and for the consolidation of human rights, sustainable development, democracy and peace, in a context of justice. (para. 3)

U.S. higher education not only provides personal and economic benefits but also plays a vital role in promoting democratic ideals.

Other leaders have advocated for higher education to provide an affordable, high-quality education to any student who desires to attend (Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, 2020). By offering equality and equity in higher education, all students can be supported in building the skills and knowledge they need to be productive and thriving contributors to social and economic change (Waterford, 2022). Unfortunately, the long history of inequality in higher education has made these worthy goals challenging to achieve (Clark, 2021; Maxwell, 2022).

History of Higher Education

Throughout the history of higher education, policymakers, higher institution leaders, nonprofit organizations, and community members have attempted to address academic inequalities (Bastedo et al., 2016; Kobar, 2020; Thelin, 2019). These efforts have focused primarily on systematic issues like redistribution and policy changes (Bastedo et al., 2016; Cahalan et al., 2020; Creamer, 2020; Fraser et al., 2003; Ladson-Billings & Donnor, 2008). Despite the progress made toward increasing access to higher education, underrepresented groups have continued to face lower retention and persistence rates (U.S. Census Bureau, 2022a).

Looking back at the work previous research has done to minimize inequities in higher education provides a lens through which to evaluate the benefits and limitations of the interventions on behalf of historically underrepresented groups in the past. For this study, I examined 367 peer-reviewed scholarly articles, historical documents, academic books, and legal cases in the collection phase. Of those resources, 138 literary resources (38%) proved relevant to the purpose of this study, with three topical themes emerging

about the inequalities underrepresented students have faced: economic inequalities, structural inequalities, and social inequalities (Thelin, 2019).

Academic Inequalities – Economic

Economic inequalities refer to the disproportionate distribution of opportunity due to income (IZA World of Labor, 2023). Historically, Black, Hispanic, and Native American/Alaska Native people have experienced the most negative effects of poverty and reduced social mobility (Creamer, 2020). The National Association of Student Financial Aid Administrators (NASFAA) has conducted regular surveys and research on financial aid and affordability in higher education. Their reports often have highlighted the challenges students face in affording college and the impact of financial constraints on college access and completion.

The NASFAA reported 8 of 10 theoretical students could not afford most colleges (Bidwell, 2017). Accredited Schools Online (2022) stated 50% of students from high-income homes completed a 4-year degree, whereas only 10% of low-income students completed a 4-year degree. Furthermore, in a College Board report, Ma and Pender (2022) found:

> In 2021, the average family income was $22,120 for the lowest fifth and $305,500 for the highest fifth of families. Family incomes vary by demographic characteristics. In 2021, median incomes for Black and Hispanic families were about 60% of the median for White families and the median income for families with at least one four-year college graduate was more than double the median for families headed by a high school graduate. (p. 1)

These numbers highlight the significant disparities in educational opportunities and outcomes based on students' socioeconomic backgrounds. In addition to economic inequalities, historically underrepresented students face academic inequalities.

Academic Inequalities—Structural

Structural inequality refers to the unequal opportunities or privileges one person receives over another (Naylor & Mifsud, 2020). For example, Chu (2019) asserted, "Students of color and low-income students are repeatedly found to be taught by experienced, certified-in-field, and effective teachers at a lower rate than their White or more affluent peers" (p. 4). Knight (2017) confirmed this creates a "teacher experience gap" (p. 1). In addition, students from underrepresented groups have less access to advanced academic classes and to mentors or advisors who can help them focus on future opportunities and prepare for college (U.S. Department of Education, 2016). Another contributor to educational inequality is a lack of representation of underrepresented groups among higher education professors. Although student populations are growing less White (Grawe, 2021), this same shift has not occurred among the faculty. Most teachers are White (71.1%), followed by Asian (9.9%) and Hispanic or Latino (9.3%; Zippia, 2021).

Structural inequality in education is evident through disparities in teacher quality and experience for students of color and low-income students, limited access to advanced academic classes and mentors, and a lack of representation of underrepresented groups among higher education professors (Naylor & Mifsud, 2020). In addition to economic and structural inequalities, many people of color, low-income, and first-generation students face social inequalities.

Academic Inequalities – Social

Social inequalities refer to the unequal treatment of a student based on their social/economic status or racial/ethnic group (Russell Sage Foundation, 2023). Social pressures and inequities can strongly affect students' ability to apply for, attend, and complete a postsecondary education (Bastedo et al., 2016). Underrepresented college students face identity contingencies and stereotype threats, which impact their social identity and self-concept (Quinnez, 2021; Spencer et al., 1999; Steele, 2011; Steele & Aronson, 1995). Identity contingencies are circumstances that arise as a result of a person's identity such as racism, classism, or sexism; they can threaten a person's individual or social identity and impact educational access and academic success (Quinnez, 2021; Steele, 2011).

Steele and Aronson (1995) defined stereotype threat as "the existence of a negative stereotype about a group to which one belongs . . . [which] means that in situations where the stereotype is applicable, one is at risk of confirming it as a self-characterization, both to oneself and to others who know the stereotype" (p. 30). In other words, people of stereotyped groups, like historically underrepresented students, often feel anxiety and pressure because they are concerned their individual performance confirms the groups negative repute. Quantitative evidence has revealed stereotype threat can impact a student's performance by a standard deviation of 15 points, therefore, one must remove the threat to improve academic equality (Spencer et al., 2016; Steele, 2011, 2013). Economic, structural, and social inequalities have contributed to a complex and multilayered problem affecting access, a student's ability to persist, and graduation rates for underrepresented populations (Latta, 2019).

Persistence of Historically Underrepresented Students

Monitoring and improving persistence rates among historically underrepresented students has become a key priority for higher education leaders (Pinkett, 2023). Spears (2020) defined the persistence of students in higher education as "a student's ability to continue on to the next term" (p. 1). Due to inequalities previously described, historically underrepresented students' persistence signifies not only their individual academic tenacity but also serves as a barometer for institutional health, inclusivity, and equity (Clark, 2021). When underrepresented students persist, that behavior denotes the educational institution has succeeded in creating a supportive environment that fosters academic continuity despite the potential challenges these students might face outside the institution (Asby & Shah, 2019).

Moreover, higher rates of persistence among these students contribute to a more diverse and representative student body, which enhances the learning experience for all students by promoting a broader range of perspectives and ideas (San Pedro & Kinloch, 2017). Although progress has occurred in the area of access to higher education for historically underrepresented groups, the gap in persistence still exists (Creamer, 2020), hence the need for academic research on possible contributors to students' ability to persist in college.

Gap in Literature

Decades of interventions by private foundations, federal government, and state government have focused on a redistribution and policy change (Bastedo et al., 2016; Cahalan et al., 2020; Creamer, 2020; Fraser et al., 2003; Ladson-Billings & Donnor, 2008). Redistribution theorists have viewed social justice issues through a socioeconomic

lens and attempts to solve those issues by reallocating wealth, capacities, and other social goods through policy reform (Fraser et al., 2003). Previous research on this topic has revealed these policy and redistribution efforts have made an impact on access to education for historically underrepresented students but still falls short in the area of academic achievement (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 1993; U.S. Census Bureau, 2019). Historically underrepresented individuals continue to have lower persistence and graduate rates than students from other groups (Crumb et al., 2019; Jones, 2013; U.S. Census Bureau, 2019).

A review of literature confirmed one cannot remedy the solution to academic inequities by redistribution efforts and policy reform (Bastedo et al., 2016). Educational leaders must consider the significance of race and ethnic devaluation along with misrecognition of historically underrepresented groups (Fraser et al., 2003; Ladson-Billings, 2021; Shen et al., 2020). Recognition theory argues schools cannot achieve equality until they recognize every human and treat them with equal dignity and worth (Honneth, 2020). Because of the pivotal role teachers play in student formation and achievement, educational leaders must consider the impact of leadership theory and practice in higher education a potential barrier to the success of historically underrepresented students (Blackmore, 2009; Burris, 2019; Furman, 2012; Maxwell, 2022; O'Day & Smith, 2016; L. Patton et al., 2016; Shen et al., 2020; York-Barr & Duke, 2004). At the time of this study, there was no literature on the impact of recognition by teachers on historically underrepresented students as related to their persistence. Therefore, this study was essential to understanding barriers hindering historically underrepresented students' ability to persist in a college or university.

Statement of Problem

Economic, structural, and social inequalities still exist for historically underrepresented students (U.S. Census Bureau, 2019). Although access rates have increased, historically underrepresented students have higher dropout rates and lower graduation rates than White or Asian students (Bouchrika, 2022). Research indicated "teacher leadership styles are strongly linked to student academic success" (Rashid et al., p. 360). Considering the impact of teacher influence on student academic success, educational leaders must pinpoint and address factors leading to persistent inequalities in higher education (de Silva et al., 2018; Freire & Macedo, 2018).

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative hermeneutic phenomenological study was to understand and describe the impact of recognition by teachers on historically underrepresented students who have persisted in higher education.

Research Questions

This qualitative hermeneutic phenomenological study sought to advance previous research on the academic success of historically underrepresented students by focusing on the impact of recognition by teachers on students' ability to persist. The primary research question for this study was: How does recognition impact the persistence of historically underrepresented students in higher education? The subsidiary questions included:

RQ1. What leadership theories or practices, if any, impact the persistence of historically underrepresented students in higher education?

RQ2. In what ways, if any, have historically underrepresented students experienced recognition by a teacher?

RQ3. In what ways, if any, have historically underrepresented students experienced misrecognition by a teacher?

RQ4. What is the effect of recognition or misrecognition on the persistence of historically underrepresented students in higher education?

Methodology

This study followed a qualitative phenomenological research approach, which studies people's lived experiences in the world (Peoples, 2020). A qualitative approach is best at identifying cultural, systematic, and societal specific issues or problems because it "addresses socio behavioral factors such as cultural norms, ethnic identities, gender norms, stigma, and socioeconomic status" (Mack et al., 2011, p. 8) by elevating the voice of underrepresented groups. The primary framework used in this study was hermeneutic phenomenology.

Theoretical Framework

Qualitative research uses two traditional phenomenological philosophies (Peoples, 2020; Sloan & Bowe, 2014). Husserl (1859–1938) and Heidegger (1889–1976) conceived these philosophies (Peoples, 2020). Husserl introduced the transcendental or descriptive framework, and Heidegger composed a hermeneutic or interpretive framework (Peoples, 2020). Husserl asserted research is only valid and reliable when the researcher can maintain the perspective of an unbiased bystander (Tassone, 2017). In contrast, Heidegger believed immeasurable value exists in the researcher's perspective and experience because it adds to their understanding (Peoples, 2020). Heidegger argued

it is impossible for researchers to operate as an impartial outsider, and trying to do so could impact the research outcomes (Peoples, 2020).

Heidegger introduced the concept of a hermeneutic circle, a symbol of the ongoing process of revision that allows a researcher to gain new understanding and insights because of foreconception or foresight (Peoples, 2020; Regan, 2012). Heidegger posited a researcher's observations of participants will revise continually the researcher's previous biases or knowledge (Peoples, 2020). The research of this study related most closely to Heidegger's hermeneutic interpretive philosophical framework.

Three additional theoretical philosophies informed this qualitative study and proved essential to understanding the phenomena assessed: Honneth's (1996) theory of recognition, critical race theory (CRT), and leadership theory. Peoples (2020) stated, "Theoretical frameworks exist in research because, to increase objectivity, a researcher must take others' thoughts into consideration" (p. 29). The use of Heidegger's hermeneutic philosophy and critical theories of recognition and CRT increased objectivity and assisted the researcher in a deeper understanding of participants' lived experiences and the phenomena studied (Peoples, 2020).

Critical Theory

The goal of critical theories is to identify root causes of inequities and propose practices that dismantle barriers (Honneth, 2007; Ladson-Billings & Donnor, 2008). Mellor (2015) defined critical theories of education as

> philosophical, political, and pedagogic responses to real world circumstances, which attempt to shift the purposes, scope, aims, and delivery of education to enable cultural and social transformation through the progressive growth of

> individuals. They pay particular attention to the situation of oppressed and marginalized groups and seek to contest the ideologies of dominant social relations and established needs, which proponents view as key to the reproduction and naturalization of current social and global inequalities. (p. 167)

Critical theories aim to identify underlying causes of inequities and to propose transformative practices that challenge and dismantle barriers, with a focus on empowering marginalized groups and disrupting dominant ideologies that perpetuate social and global inequalities (Honneth, 2007; Ladson-Billings & Donnor, 2008; Mellor, 2015). The first theoretical model guiding this research was Honneth's (1996) theory of recognition.

Recognition Theory

For this study, recognition was defined as validating the worth (dignity), experiences, talents, and potential of every individual, regardless of race, ethnicity, or gender through words and actions (Altmeyer, 2018; Giles, 2020; Hicks, 2019; Honneth, 2020). McQueen (2020) asserted, "Recognition can help form, or even determine, our sense of who we are and the value accorded to us as individuals" (p. 1). Honneth's theory of recognition maintains recognition precedes human development and serves as a catalyst to the confidence a person needs to act on their strengths and abilities (Honneth, 1996; Iser, 2019). Honneth (1996) described recognition as having less to do with one's opinion of oneself and more to do with the "universal dignity of persons" (p. xiv).

Hicks's (2019) research confirmed an important connection between recognition and dignity. Hicks (2019) explained recognition takes place when a person generously communicates words of praise, as it "validate[s] others for their talents, hard work,

thoughtfulness, and help, [and gives] credit to others for their contributions, ideas, and experience" (p. 19). Hicks (2013) defined dignity as "the glue that holds all of our relationships together" (para. 3) and "the mutual recognition of the desire to be seen, heard, listened to, and treated fairly; to be recognized, understood, and to feel safe in the world" (para. 7). In other words, dignity is the act of treating every person as if they have inherent value and worth (Hicks, 2013, 2019). Additionally, Fraser et al. (2003) said every human desires love, recognition of rights, and cultural appreciation. Honneth (1996) emphasized all people long for love, respect, and solidarity. Recognition given in these ways offers dignity and spurs individuals toward fulfillment of their potential (Hicks, 2013; Honneth, 1996; Iser, 2019).

Misrecognition is the lack of being seen and/or treated with equal dignity, and it happens when personal experiences, societal norms, and values do not reinforce a person's distinct dignity and worth (Honneth, 2007; Iser, 2019). Misrecognition destroys a person's self-esteem, making it challenging for individuals to find themselves or their work valuable (Iser, 2019). Honneth theorized the psychological harm of misrecognition contributes to social oppression, inequality, and injustice (McNay, 2008). Misrecognition has perpetuated the inequalities and injustices facing historically underrepresented students (Altmeyer, 2018; Benner, 2003; Clark, 2021; Fraser et al., 2003; Honneth, 1996; Kammler, 2012). Honneth's (1996) theory contends recognition is the prime mover of equality and justice. In addition to Honneth's theory of recognition, CRT proved essential to understanding the phenomena assessed.

Critical Race Theory

Over the last 30 years, CRT has been used as a cornerstone to expose racial prejudices, challenge unjust laws, and fight for equality in education for underrepresented groups (Delgado et al., 2017). The CRT movement is "engaged in studying and transforming the relationship among race, racism, and power" (Delgado et al., 2017, p. 3). CRT theorists argue racism so prevails in society most people do not recognize it (Delgado et al., 2017). A goal of CRT involves moving policymakers, leaders, and practitioners from theory and conversation to praxis (Saunders & Wong, 2020). CRT challenges racism within system structures, like law, politics, and education, by making the voice and experiences of underrepresented groups central to the fight against injustice (Patton et al., 2016). Through the use of counter-storytelling, parables, narratives, and autobiographies, CRT scholars help people understand existing social constructs of race in higher education (Taylor et al., 2015). Critical race theorists address racism and challenge both societal indifference and the status quo (Yosso et al., 2001). In addition to the theoretical framework used in this study, an understanding of leadership theory and practice is important. This research examined the intersection between a teacher's leadership theory and practice and recognition.

Leadership Theory and Practice

Researchers identified teacher leadership theory and practice as a strong contributor to student academic outcomes (Rashid et al., 2019). Rashid et al. (2019) stated, "Effective leadership of teachers is one of the main measures of academic achievement by students" (p. 360). Pedagogy is known as the practice of teaching and refers to the methods an instructor uses to create curriculum and run the classroom

(Montclair State University, 2022). A teacher's theory of leadership drives their practice/pedagogy (de Silva et al., 2018).

To comprehend the connection between leadership theory, practice and recognition, a thorough analysis of leadership theory proved crucial for this study. Four leadership theories were found to align with the theory of recognition: servant leadership, transformational leadership, social justice leadership, and strengths-based leadership. Servant leadership is a leadership philosophy emphasizing leaders' primary role as a servant to their team or organization (Greenleaf, 1970). Servant leaders prioritize their followers' well-being and growth (Greenleaf, 1970). Servant leaders focus on building strong relationships, empowering others, and fostering a collaborative environment (Greenleaf, 1970). Transformational leadership is a style involving inspiring and motivating followers to achieve a goal by encouraging innovation, creativity, and personal development (Bass & Riggio, 2006). Transformational leaders work to create a shared vision, challenge the status quo, and empower their team to reach their full potential (Bass & Riggio, 2006). This leadership approach aims to elevate the collective aspirations and performance of both the leader and their followers (Bass & Riggio, 2006). Social justice leaders advocate for equitable treatment, social change, and the elimination of systemic disparities within organizations and society at large (Kalamazoo College, n.d.).

Social justice leaders work to address issues of inequality, discrimination, and marginalization, often focusing on the well-being and empowerment of underrepresented groups (Kalamazoo College, n.d.) . This leadership style seeks to create a more just and inclusive environment (Kalamazoo College, n.d.). Strengths-based leaders focus on

identifying and leveraging individuals' strengths and positive attributes to enhance organizational performance and personal growth (Rath & Conchie, 2008). Leaders employing this approach focus on recognizing and developing their team members' unique talents, aligning these strengths with roles and responsibilities (Rath & Conchie, 2008). The goal is to create a thriving and productive work environment that capitalizes on individual strengths (Rath & Conchie, 2008). The theoretical framework applied in this study is significant to understanding the impact of recognition by a teacher on the persistence of historically underrepresented students.

Significance of Study

"All people deserve equal access to the future" (ASU GSV Summit, 2019). Historically, Black people, Hispanics, and Native Americans/Alaska Natives have faced extraordinary barriers to persisting at HEIs. In addition, these historically underrepresented groups continue to sustain a multitude of injustices and a lack of recognition of their inherent human worth and right to education (Bastedo et al., 2016; Jack, 2019; The New School, 2019). There are four ways this qualitative study added value to the body of existing literature. The first goal was to learn from participants' lived experiences and heritages to understand which factors impacted their academic persistence. The second goal was to build on existing research related to historically underrepresented students in higher education. The third goal was to establish whether a possible positive relationship exists between recognition by a teacher and students' ability to persist in higher education. Finally, this research hoped to inform professional development, teaching methods, and equitable pedagogy that could impact the positive trajectory of students' progress at the postsecondary level.

Definitions of Terms

This section includes a list of frequently used terms throughout the dissertation.

Access: Access denotes "ways in which educational institutions and policies ensure—or at least strive to ensure—that students have equal and equitable opportunities to take full advantage of their education" (Great Schools Partnership, 2014, para. 1).

Dignity: Dignity refers to the equal worth of every human being and "the mutual recognition of the desire to be seen, heard, listened to, and treated fairly; to be recognized, understood, and to feel safe in the world" (Hicks, 2013, paras. 3 and 7).

Educational Attainment: Educational attainment is the term used to describe the highest level of education an individual has completed, distinguishing it from their current level of schooling (U.S. Census Bureau, 2022).

Higher Education: Higher education refers to education past high school (e.g., a 2- or 4-year college or university; Thelin, 2019a).

Historically Underrepresented Groups: Historically underrepresented groups are "persons who are members of racial, ethnic, or gender groups that have been disproportionately underrepresented for a period of more than ten years" (Goforth, 2022, para. 3) and include Blacks, American Indians/Alaskan Natives, and Hispanics.

Low-income: Low-income is defined as "an individual whose family's taxable income for the preceding year did not exceed 150 percent of the poverty level amount" (U.S. Department of Education, 2021, p. 1).

Persistence: Persistence or persistence rates refer to "a student's ability to continue on to the next term" (Spears, 2020, p. 1).

Pedagogy: "Pedagogy is an encompassing term concerned with what a teacher does to influence learning in others" (Shah, 2021, p. 1).

Recognition: Recognition is defined as validating the worth, dignity, experiences, talents, and potential of every individual, regardless of race, ethnicity, or gender through words and actions (Altmeyer, 2018; Giles, 2020; Hicks, 2019; Honneth, 2020).

Socioeconomic: "Socioeconomic (social-economic) status is the position of an individual or group on the socioeconomic scale, which is determined by a combination of social and economic factors such as income, amount and kind of education, type and prestige of occupation, place of residence, and—in some societies or parts of society—ethnic origin or religious background" (American Psychological Association [APA], 2023, p. 1).

Wraparound Services: Wraparound services in education encompass comprehensive assistance that aims to address all aspects of students' needs, including academic, health, socioemotional, familial, financial, and logistical support, to provide a well-rounded and holistic support system (Cumming et al., 2022). The purpose of wraparound programs is to create equitable educational opportunities and remove systematic barriers among underrepresented groups. Scholarships, mentoring, leadership training, and student/career development services help meet the goals of wraparound programs (The Hunt Institute, 2020). Relevant wraparound programs explored as part of this research included TRIO, Act Six, Posse Foundation, and GEAR UP.

Limitations

All research has limitations (Babbie, 2015) affecting the interpretation and outcome of a study (Babbie, 2015; Creswell & Poth, 2017). The three limitations to this

study included sample size, population, and personal bias (Creswell & Poth, 2017). First, the researcher deliberately developed a methodology around a small sample size. Second, the research included only a specific demographic of historically underrepresented students—Black people, Hispanics, and Native Americans/Alaska Natives. Furthermore, there was no differentiation between Black Americans, African Americans, or Black individuals with diverse national origins. Last, the researcher's experience as a low-income female individual also may have generated a systematic bias (Ross & Zaidi, 2019). After exploring other research methodologies, the researcher concluded a qualitative hermeneutic phenomenological study would provide the most reliable results.

Organization of Study

This dissertation consists of five chapters. The introduction provided an overview of the dissertation subject/rationale, the theoretical framework, and a plan for the research. The second chapter includes a literature review of academic research. The third chapter overviews the methodology, along with the purpose statement, research questions, research design, population and sample, data collection and analysis, trustworthiness, rights of human subjects, and study limitations. The fourth chapter delivers a step-by-step analysis of the collected data. Last, the fifth chapter provides a discussion and conclusion of findings from the researcher's viewpoint.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Every person should have the right to an education; the denial of that right presents one of the greatest injustices in the world today (Executive Office of the President, 2021; McNay, 2008; United Nations, 2021). The United Nations Treaty,

known as the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights, affirmed the human right of education, promoted human dignity, and encouraged the democratic values education brings (United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, 1976). Article 13 declares: “Higher education shall be made equally accessible to all, on the basis of capacity, by every appropriate means, and in particular by the progressive introduction of free education” (United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, 1976, p. 5).

Unfortunately, past and current societal inequities have hampered this right to education (Saunders & Wong, 2020). Historically, and up to today, the U.S. educational system has served the wealthiest people in the nation consistently (Freire & Macedo, 2018). The systematic inequalities of the past could continue into the future until the root causes of the disparities confronting underrepresented groups are addressed (Agrait, 2022; Saunders & Wong, 2020). Advocates of historically underrepresented students encourage researchers to use their findings to promote a just and equal education system that gives everyone access to the education they desire (Ladson-Billings & Donnor, 2008). This qualitative hermeneutic phenomenological study sought to understand how teachers can impact the persistence of historically underrepresented students.

This literature review examines the prevalent theoretical framework including four leadership theories that could help address ongoing inequities facing historically underrepresented students. Last, this literature review provides an in-depth history of higher education in the United States and Washington State pertaining to historically underrepresented groups and then summarizes interventions undertaken on behalf of

historically underrepresented students in the United States—specifically in Washington State.

Theoretical Framework

Theoretical frameworks serve as an essential part of the design of qualitative research (Creswell & Poth, 2017). Historically, the lack of a foundational theory has been a common criticism of qualitative studies (Anfara & Mertz, 2014). Alongside this study's methodology, theoretical frameworks assist in guiding, developing, and conducting the research (Anfara & Mertz, 2014). Anfara and Mertz (2014) defined a theoretical framework as "as any empirical or quasi-empirical theory of social and/or psychological processes, at a variety of levels (e.g., grand, midrange, explanatory), that can be applied to the understanding of phenomena" (p. 15). Heidegger's hermeneutic philosophical framework (Peoples, 2020), along with two critical theories, Honneth's (1996) theory of recognition and CRT, guided this research.

Honneth's Recognition Theory

Honneth is a third-generation critical theorist who focuses on recognition theory (Corradetti, 2022). Critical theory takes a philosophical approach to confronting ideological, historical, and social injustices and structures (Corradetti, 2022; Honneth, 1993). Critical theory aims to unify theory and practice (Honneth, 1993). Honneth (2007) argued social philosophy proves necessary to diagnose and solve the problems of society. Social philosophy refers to the branch of philosophy that examines and analyzes various aspects of society, including its structures, institutions, values, and interactions (Honneth, 2007). Social philosophy aims to understand and address social issues, problems, and challenges that arise within a given society (Honneth, 2007).

According to Honneth (2007), social philosophy is essential because it provides the tools and insights needed to diagnose and propose solutions for the problems society faces. Social philosophy offers a framework for examining social relations, power dynamics, and the underlying causes of social injustice critically, thereby contributing to the development of strategies and theories aimed at improving and transforming society (Honneth, 2007). Critical theory relies heavily on an ethical foundation and social morality that moves from descriptive methods to prescriptive solutions (Honneth, 2007).

Honneth's theory of recognition built on the work of Hegel (Iser, 2019), who reasoned humans become autonomous individuals through mutual recognition of each other (Hegel & Findlay, 1977). Although Honneth (1996, 2007) agreed with the concept of mutuality, Honneth (1996, 2007) contended Hegel's theory failed to address the normative criteria of ethics and justice. Honneth (1996) argued the core of justice is rooted in a recognition of individual dignity. Honneth (1993, 1996, 2007) concluded the presupposition of communication between two or more persons is social recognition of personal identity, worth, and achievements. Ultimately, recognition serves as a fundamental aspect of identity and acts as an initial catalyst for promoting equality and justice (Honneth, 1996). Honneth (1996) asserted there are three forms of recognition: love, rights, and solidarity (see Table 1).

Table 1

Honneth's Conceptual Framework

Recognition	Self-relation	Sphere	Role	Disrespect	Integrity
Love	Basic self-confidence	Private	Private person	Abuse/harm	Physical integrity
Rights	Self-respect	State/society	Citizen	Denial of rights	Respect
Solidarity	Self-esteem	Civil society	Fellow citizen	Marginalization or insult	Social esteem

Note. From "Love, Rights, and Solidarity: Sports' Potential for Recognition," by W. Andersen, 2015, *Physical Culture and Sport. Studies and Research, 68*(1), p. 24 (https://doi.org/10.1515/pcssr-2015-0028).

Recognition is communicated verbally and nonverbally (Honneth, 2012). Through the conceptual framework of recognition, Honneth (1996) argued a person's identity formation can be affirmed and protected or denied and rejected. Recognition is understood "as a way of rationally responding to evaluative qualities we have learned to perceive in others" (Honneth, 2012, p. 85). Honneth (1996) cited love as the most important of the three forms of recognition. A healthy network of family and social relationship remains imperative to personal identity and to what critical theorists call the good life (Corradetti, 2022; Honneth, 1993). Ultimately, identity does not develop in isolation but through both internal and overt dialogue with others (Taylor, 1992). Social identity theory affirms a person's identity develops through family, societal views, race, culture, ethnicity, geographic location, and life experiences (Tajfel & Turner, 2004). In the end, healthy identity formation requires loving relationships and the affirmation of an individual's value and worth (Tajfel & Turner, 2004).

Honneth (1996) defined rights as the legal recognition and authority given to an individual within a community or legal system. Freedom, autonomy, political rights, and

accountability for moral actions are all important characteristics of rights (Honneth, 1996). Within the rights framework, Honneth argued respect of an individual's unique attributes and abilities is necessary to the person's development of self-respect. The United Nations (2022) described human rights as

> inherent to all human beings, regardless of race, sex, nationality, ethnicity, language, religion, or any other status. Human rights include the right to life and liberty, freedom from slavery and torture, freedom of opinion and expression, the right to work and education, and many more. (para. 1)

Rights recognize the value and dignity of a person (Australian Human Rights Commission, 2022; Honneth, 1996; United Nations, 2022). All people are entitled to civic and political rights as well as economic, cultural, and economic rights (Australian Human Rights Commission, 2022; United Nations, 2022).

Solidarity rests on the belief regarding the interconnectedness of all humans (Honneth, 1996). Solidarity offers esteem of another person's traits and abilities (Honneth, 1996). According to Honneth (1996), esteem promotes social significance and contribution and is a catalyst to self-worth, dignity, and integrity. Cherry (2022) argued "self-esteem is your subjective sense of overall personal worth or value . . . and self-respect describes your level of confidence in your abilities and attributes" (para. 1). Maslow's hierarchy of needs lists esteem as a basic human motivation (Greene, 2000). Maslow's theory suggests esteem and self-respect develop by the appreciation of others (Greene, 2000). Cast and Burke (2002) suggested "self-esteem is an outcome of, and necessary ingredient in, the self-verification process that occurs within groups, maintaining both the individual and the group. Verification of role identities increases an

individual's worth-based" (para. 1). In contrast to recognition, a lack of recognition has been shown to contribute to the inequalities and injustices historically underrepresented students face (Altmeyer, 2018; Benner, 2003; C. P. Clark, 2021; Fraser et al., 2003; Honneth, 1996a; Kammler, 2012). Honneth (2007) categorized any denial of recognition as disrespect or misrecognition.

Misrecognition

Misrecognition takes place when societal norms do not recognize a person's distinct dignity and worth (Iser, 2019). Misrecognition damages an individual's self-esteem to such an extent that it makes it difficult for them to find value in themselves or their work (Honneth, 2007). Honneth theorized the psychological harm of misrecognition contributes to social oppression, inequality, and injustice (McNay, 2008). Additionally, misrecognition may threaten a person's personality, identity, and self-determination (Honneth, 2021).

According to Honneth (2007), three forms of misrecognition exist: physical abuse, denigration, and degradation. Children who have early childhood abuse or maltreatment will more likely require enrollment in special education, repeat a grade, experience poverty, and have substance abuse (Lansford et al., 2021). Overall, individuals maltreated as children are two times as likely to experience higher levels of health concerns, criminal records, and economic instability as adults. Denigration, which Honneth (2007) defined as a denial of legal rights, can lead to an absence of personal and legal freedoms and a loss of moral self-respect; degradation occurs when others ignore a person's strengths and abilities and/or treat that person as inferior to others.

Degradation can leave psychosocial scars that prevent a person from progressing in life and in work (Honneth, 2007). Conversely, the practice of recognition influences students' self-respect, self-confidence, and self-esteem (Altmeyer, 2018; Fraser et al., 2003; Giles, 2020; Hicks, 2019; Honneth, 1996; Iser, 2019; Kammler, 2012; McNay, 2008; Taylor, 1992; Willig, 2012). Although Honneth's theory of recognition has gained credibility among academic professionals, it is important to examine the critique of Honneth's recognition theory.

Critique of Honneth's Recognition Theory

Honneth's (1996) theory of recognition has not gone without critique. Van Leeuwen (2007) argued "the logic of recognition of cultural identity also demands a non-evaluative recognition, namely a respect for difference" (para. 1). Van Leeuwen (2007) claimed a fourth dimension, social attachment, should complement Honneth's recognition framework. Van Leeuwen defined social attachment as personal identity and social/cultural respect or disrespect.

Rousseau (1755), Sartre (1943), and Althusser (1970) viewed recognition as a form of ideology (Iser, 2019, Neuhouser, 2008). The central thesis of Rousseau's theodicy of self-love was that a drive for recognition is a form of evil, rooted in pride and vanity (Neuhouser, 2008). Despite the evils of recognition, Rousseau believed a struggle for recognition is at the core of our humanness and an individual can cultivate it in healthy ways to increase their freedom and autonomy (Neuhouser, 2008).

In their essay on ontology, Sartre (1943) asserted recognition as affirmation can keep people from moving forward, therefore limiting individuals' freedom and ability to change and grow. This school of thought sees recognition as a form of oppression that

limits people's thoughts and actions to socially acceptable norms (Sartre, 1943). From a political perspective, Althusser (1970) argued recognition is not a form of emancipation but rather a way governments and authorities can control citizens' decision making (Iser, 2019).

Honneth (1996) described recognition as having less to do with one's opinion of oneself and more to do with the respect for the "universal dignity of persons" (p. xiv). Hick's (2013) theory of dignity contends one should understand respect and dignity separately. Respect is something one earns while dignity is something with which one is born (Hicks, 2013a). Hicks (2013) defined dignity as "the glue that holds all of our relationships together" (para. 3) and "the mutual recognition of the desire to be seen, heard, listened to, and treated fairly; to be recognized, understood, and to feel safe in the world" (para. 7). Hicks (2019) created a cultural model based on a phenomenological qualitative study, in which 1,000 people were interviewed and observed (ASU GSV Summit, 2019).

The patterns that emerged from these interviews are divided into two categories: 10 Essential Elements of Dignity (see Appendix F) and 10 Temptations to Violate Dignity (see Appendix G). Hicks's research confirmed an important connection between recognition and dignity. Recognition is one of the 10 essential elements for building a dignity culture because it is a practical and tangible way to offer dignity. Hicks (2019) explained recognition takes place when a person generously communicates words of praise, "validate[s] others for their talents, hard work, thoughtfulness, and help, [and gives] credit to others for their contributions, ideas, and experience" (p. 19). Throughout history, the dignity of underrepresented minorities has been disregarded (Schockman,

2019). Hicks's (2013) dignity model is important to this research because it shows how one can restore a person's dignity through the act of recognition.

Theorist Fraser asserted inequalities and injustices find their root in corrupt economic systems (Fraser et al., 2003). The redistribution paradigm considers the socioeconomic aspects of social justice and solves inequity issues by reallocating wealth, capacities, and other social goods through policy reform (Fraser et al., 2003). Fraser and Honneth (as cited in Fraser et al., 2003) argued for redistribution and recognition as the solution for an unjust world. In the end, Fraser et al. (2003) contended neither the redistribution paradigm nor the recognition paradigm will work on their own; both are needed to break systems of inequality. Changes to the problems of equality in education require an ethical foundation (Hegel & Findlay, 1977; Honneth, 1993). Recognition theory provides a construct for understanding the advancement and persistence of historically underrepresented students. Further, CRT plays a crucial role in understanding and changing the academic inequalities confronting historically underrepresented students.

CRT

CRT is a movement of scholars and leaders who "engage in studying and transforming the relationship among race, racism, and power" (Delgado et al., 2017, p. 3). CRT theorists argue racism is such a commonality in society that most people do not recognize it (Delgado et al., 2017). CRT challenges racism within system structures, like law, politics, and education, by making the voice and experiences of underrepresented individuals central to the fight against injustice (Patton et al., 2016). Table 2 shows six

critical race theories that address historically underrepresented groups and are relevant to this research.

Table 2

Critical Race Theories and Definitions

Theory	Definition
BlackCrit	BlackCrit helps to explain the demotion, contempt, and marginalization projected onto Blacks in educational institutions (Dumas & Ross, 2016).
LatCrit	"LatCrit acknowledges issues specific to Latina/o communities, such as immigration status, language, ethnicity, culture, and phenotype. LatCrit allows for a more defined research focus and has led to the development of racist nativism" (Solórzano et al., 2020, p. 61).
AsianCrit	AsianCrit has seven tenants analyzing how racism impacts the lives of Asian Americans both institutionally and personally (Hong, 2022).
TribalCrit	TribalCrit is a theoretical framework of nine tenants that helps understand and address issues between Indigenous Peoples and the U.S. federal government and educational system (McKinley & Brayboy, 2005).
WhiteCrit	WhiteCrit examines the invisible systems within White culture and White pedagogy that produce privilege and White supremacy (Applebaum, 2016).
FemCrit	FemCrit focuses on breaking down male-dominated hierarchies that do not foster equal learning environments and pedagogy (Lebrón, 2022).

Explanation of CRT

Although CRT serves as a tool to expose racism and other inequalities, CRT has been underused in educational practices (Amiot et al., 2020; de Silva et al., 2018). Only within the last 2 decades have scholars begun to view CRT through the lens of theory and practice or pedagogy in education (de Silva et al., 2018; Ladson-Billings, 2006; McKinley & Brayboy, 2005; San Pedro et al., 2021). For example, educational leaders use counter-storytelling, parables, narratives, and autobiographies to help people understand existing social constructs of race in higher education (Taylor et al., 2015). Although educational research has indicated a growing prevalence of race-conscious discussions, a deficiency persists in the realm of professional development aimed at equipping higher education leaders with strategies to foster equitable learning

environments and campuses conducive to students' academic achievement (Ladson-Billings & Donnor, 2008; Maxwell, 2022; Swanson & Welton, 2019).

Since its inception in the 1940s, leaders have used CRT to bring awareness, challenge unjust laws, and fight for equality for underrepresented groups (Delgado et al., 2017). Likewise, recognition theory aims to bring justice and equality to underrepresented groups (Hicks, 2013; Honneth, 1996). Used in conjunction, Honneth's (1996) theory of recognition and CRT aid the understanding of the impact of recognition by a teacher on historically underrepresented students who have persisted in higher education. In addition to this theoretical framework, the researcher of this study examined numerous leadership theories, finding four to correlate most closely with recognition and critical race goals and behaviors. The next section looks at these theories.

Critique of CRT

CRT has been indispensable in illuminating the systemic racism deeply entrenched within educational systems (Cobb, 2021; Delgado et al., 2017; Ray, 2023). However, several areas of ongoing debate in the academic community should be acknowledged (Ray, 2023; Taylor et al., 2015). First, some critics have suggested CRT's emphasis on the power dynamics between "White" individuals and "people of color" may at times risk oversimplifying complex social relations (Crenshaw, 1989; Steinmetz, 2020). Crenshaw (1989) argued such a perspective may neglect where race intersects with other social categorizations such as gender, class, and disability, leading to compounded disadvantage. Additionally, CRT's focus on systemic barriers has been critiqued for potentially overshadowing individual agency and resilience among students

of color, thus risking the perpetuation of narratives of victimhood (Harris, 2023; Perez & Salter, 2020).

The concept of "whiteness" as a social construct associated with privilege and systemic advantage, a cornerstone of CRT, is another area of contention (Sleeter, 2017; Taylor et al., 2015). Sleeter (2017) argued this might inadvertently homogenize those categorized as White, possibly overlooking the diversity of experiences within this group, including differences in socioeconomic status and immigration status, among other potential forms of marginalization. Critics have argued CRT's focus on widespread systems can sometimes assume that all people of color have the same experiences. This approach may unintentionally overlook the differences and unique experiences within racial and ethnic groups, not considering the important influence of factors like culture, location, history, and individual circumstances (Taylor et al., 2015).

Last, although CRT provides a robust theoretical framework for understanding racial inequities, critics express concerns about its practical application within educational settings, noting CRT does not always offer clear guidance on how to address these issues at a practical, classroom level (Ladson-Billings, 2006; Taylor et al., 2015). These critiques do not undermine the fundamental importance of CRT but instead aim to encourage a more nuanced application and understanding of its principles within the sphere of education (Ladson-Billings & Paris, 2021; Taylor et al., 2015). In addition to a review of literature on CRT, an examination of leadership theory and practice is important to answering the research questions of the study.

Leadership Theory and Practice

Leadership theory and practice within HEIs impact inequality issues and have been shown to decrease or increase the persistence, retention, and graduation rates of historically underrepresented students (Blackmore, 2009; Burris, 2019; Furman, 2012; Maxwell, 2022; O'Day & Smith, 2016; L. Patton et al., 2016; Shen et al., 2020; York-Barr & Duke, 2004). Although no one leadership theory solves all inequalities in higher education (Black, 2015), the research of this study evaluated four leadership theories with the potential to increase recognition and equal academic success. These theories include servant leadership, transformational leadership, social justice leadership, and strengths-based leadership. These four leadership theories were chosen because they share the dimensions of dignity, motivation, communication, listening, integrity, empathy, goal setting, influence, and behaving ethically, which aligned with this study's theoretical framework (Burris, 2019; Flynn, 2020; Greenleaf, 2015; Letizia, 2017; Rath & Conchie, 2008).

Other leadership theories traditionally practiced in academia were considered but were found to have a converse effect on equality issues in higher education. For example, hierarchical, autocratic, or control-and-command styles of leadership common to higher education have been shown to increase inequalities (Black, 2015; Fix, 2019). Black (2015) stated:

> In higher education, the development of learning communities, encouraging social change or inspiring in students a sense of being part of a global society, demands a much more adaptive and open sense of leadership which is contrary to the hierarchical command-and-control mind-set. (p. 56)

Additionally, the typical autocratic model of leadership was found to be too constraining and lacking the adaptive components needed to engage in effective change (Black, 2015, Fix, 2017). As a result, these styles of leadership in education are incongruent with the theoretical framework of this study and were not considered in this literature review. The first of four leadership theories reviewed in this chapter is servant leadership.

Servant Leadership

The concept of servant leadership, introduced by Greenleaf (1970), advocates for a fundamental shift in leadership paradigms. This change involves a leader prioritizing the needs, growth, and goals of their followers over their own interests, marking servant leadership as a moral and values-driven approach to leadership (Greenleaf, 2015). Bowman's (2005) assertion that servant leadership satisfies the universal human desire for acknowledgment, nurturing, and collective success, which proves especially relevant in the higher education context.

Servant leadership fosters an environment that not only encourages but also actively facilitates student success and high levels of achievement (Letizia, 2017). Servant leadership in higher education seeks to make each student feel seen, heard, and valued, ensuring their diverse experiences and perspectives are integrated into the fabric of the learning community (Bowman, 2005, Letizia, 2017). Furthermore, Letizia (2017) contended the core functions of higher education, such as pedagogy, research, planning, accountability, and assessment, can be reformed and improved significantly by applying servant leadership principles.

At the administrative level, an integration of servant leadership principles can have significant benefits for fostering inclusive decision making and empowering faculty

and staff to incorporate equity-focused practices into their work (Dahleez & Aboramadan, 2022). Studies have highlighted the positive outcomes of offering professional development opportunities centered around servant leadership in educational settings (Dahleez & Aboramadan, 2022). When administrators embrace a servant leadership approach, they prioritize the growth and well-being of their faculty and staff (Greenleaf, 2015). This leadership style emphasizes empathy, collaboration, and a focus on meeting others' needs (Greenleaf, 2015). By investing in professional development opportunities that target servant leadership, administrators signal their commitment to creating an inclusive and equitable educational environment (Letizia, 2017).

Professional development programs centered around servant leadership can equip faculty and staff with the knowledge, skills, and attitudes necessary for integrating inclusive practices into their work (Letizia, 2017). Through these programs, participants can gain insights into fostering diversity, promoting equity, and cultivating a culture of belonging in their respective roles (Letizia, 2017). By empowering educators to understand and address the unique needs and perspectives of diverse student populations, the institution can better cater to the diverse learning styles and backgrounds represented among its students (Letizia, 2017).

One of the significant advantages of adopting a servant leadership approach is its potential to enhance the teaching and learning processes within the institution (Peyton & Ross, 2022). Within the classroom context, servant leadership translates into a student-first approach, where students are empowered and their holistic development is facilitated (Peyton & Ross, 2022). By emphasizing student learning and success as the primary focus, administrators and educators can create an environment where students feel

supported, valued, and motivated to excel academically (Peyton & Ross, 2022). Servant leaders prioritize developing strong relationships with students and work to remove barriers that may hinder their educational journey (Bowman, 2005). As a result, educators become more attuned to students' individual needs, allowing for personalized and differentiated instruction that maximizes student engagement and achievement (Peyton & Ross, 2022).

Peyton and Ross (2022) argued this could involve employing teaching strategies that account for diverse learning styles and backgrounds, providing opportunities for students to lead classroom discussions or projects, and offering individualized support to students as they navigate academic challenges. By fostering a culture of active listening, empathy, and community building, leaders can ensure an inclusive and respectful environment conducive to intellectual exploration and personal growth (Greenleaf, 2015). Therefore, applying servant leadership in higher education can result in more equitable, inclusive, and effective learning environments, which may enhance the quality of education and promote higher levels of student success (Bowman, 2005; Letizia, 2017; Peyton & Ross, 2022). The second leadership theory examined in this chapter is transformational leadership.

Transformational Leadership

Transformational leadership focuses on the change and transformation of individuals through influence (Bass & Riggio, 2005). Democracy and equality are themes of transformational leadership (Northouse, 2015). According to Burns (1978), in the practice of transformational leadership, "leaders and followers help each other to advance to a higher level of morale and motivation" (p. 1). Transformational leaders express genuine interest in followers (Burns, 1978) and can serve as social architects who

challenge outdated systems and empower others to act (Bass & Riggio, 2005). Transformational leadership shares many similarities with servant leadership, social justice leadership, and strengths-based leadership such as vision, respect, and trust (Letizia, 2017). One main difference between transformational leadership and the other three leadership theories examined in this study is its concern with the pursuit of larger organizational goals, whereas the other three leadership theories have a focus on follower growth (Northouse, 2016).

Within HEIs, transformational leadership has been found to assist administrators in reaching equity goals, promoting engagement among faculty, and helping teachers facilitate classroom environments that motivate and impact students (Brazill & Ruff, 2022; Carlson & LaVenia, 2023; Sulea et al., 2017). Carlson and LaVenia (2023) found the "systemic leadership problems, mindsets, and climates . . . that keep colleges at the status quo" (p. 1) may be overcome by applying transformational leadership at the administration level. For example, representation of race among faculty and on campus has been named as a positive factor in persistence rates for historically underrepresented students who attend predominately White colleges or universities (Goforth, 2022).

Another study found teacher engagement was enhanced when administrators applied transformational leadership practices (Sulea et al., 2017). Finally, Brazill and Ruff's (2022) conclusions indicated employing "transformational leadership techniques within the educational setting" (p. 1), such as exemplifying behaviors, questioning established norms, fostering motivation, and more, aid students in comprehending concepts related to identity, cultivating trust in relationships, and internalizing implicit values.

Research established a link between transformational leadership and positive change within HEIs (Brazill & Ruff, 2022). When applied, a transformational leadership style can create more equitable environments on campuses and in classrooms (Carlson & LaVenia, 2023). Administrators can unify and inspire their institutions toward common goals by establishing a vision around DEI (Chu, 2019). Additionally, a transformational leadership style may enhance motivation, engagement, and performance, which can lead to heightened productivity and innovation among faculty (Ahmed et al., 2019). At the same time, administrator commitment to positive values can cultivate a nurturing organizational culture that boosts morale and bolsters the institution's reputation (Ahmed et al., 2019).

In the classroom, a transformational leadership style may foster growth and development and nurture future leaders (Hoque & Raya, 2023). Importantly, transformational leaders can champion DEI, ensuring HEIs are places where all individuals feel valued and respected (Hoque & Raya, 2023). Through these actions, transformational leaders can contribute significantly to the growth and advancement of higher education, helping institutions to better fulfill their mission (Brazill & Ruff, 2022; Carlson & LaVenia, 2023; Chu, 2019; Hoque & Raya, 2023). The third leadership theory examined in this chapter is social justice leadership.

Social Justice Leadership

Social justice leadership promotes the inherent worth and "dignity of all people and values every life equally. It calls for both personal reflection and social change" (Kalamazoo College, n.d., para. 1). Esposito and Normore (2015) believed social justice is the foundation for inclusive practices in education and argued this framework offers

the most effective strategies to support a historically underrepresented groups who face challenges in achieving academic success. Likewise, Young (1990, 2011) argued social justice leadership should encompass "all aspects of institutional rules and relations insofar as they are subject to potential collective action" (p. 16). Social justice leadership requires all stakeholders to engage in inclusive, democratic, transforming practices to influence and change the broken social systems that promote inequality (Blackmore, 2009).

A social justice leadership practice in colleges was shown to empower administrators and faculty to address proactively the unique challenges minority students face (Esposito & Normore, 2015). By prioritizing equity, inclusivity, and culturally responsive strategies, academic leaders can create an environment that supports and promotes all students' academic success and well-being, irrespective of their backgrounds or identities (Ladson-Billings & Paris, 2021; San Pedro et al., 2021). For administrators, applying social justice leadership may result in the development and implementation of equitable policies and practices within the college (Esposito & Normore, 2015). For example, adopting admissions policies that promote diversity, ensuring equal access to resources and opportunities, or changing grading systems that better support historically underrepresented students are three ways administrators can adjust school policies to help historically underrepresented students persist in their academic goals (Esposito & Normore, 2015).

Additionally, social justice leadership is known to cultivate inclusive environments (Burris, 2019). On campus, social justice leadership may foster a culture that values diversity, inclusivity, and cultural competence (Clark, 2021). Administrators

can encourage an inclusive environment by creating initiatives that promote cross-cultural understanding, celebrate diverse identities, and create safe spaces for dialogue and collaboration in which underrepresented students feel valued, supported, and empowered (Taylor et al., 2015). For example, Cinar and Nayir (2022) found students had a deeper sense of belonging when social justice leadership was a holistic part of the administration policy and faculty ethos.

In the classroom, social justice leadership also has been proven to promote inclusivity and equity while empowering students to reach their academic goals (Burris, 2019). By embracing inclusive teaching practices, addressing stereotypes and bias, facilitating difficult conversations, empowering student voice, developing culturally responsive curriculum, and fostering collaboration, educators can create a classroom environment that supports all students' holistic development and academic success (Burris, 2019; Ladson-Billings & Paris, 2021; Taylor et al., 2015). Although teachers may have good intentions to implement inclusive practices in the classroom, Lowery (2022) found teachers did not implement inclusive practices they learned in faculty development courses due to a fear of resistance or opposition. Lowery (2022) stated:

> A person's will (desire) to act likely decreases depending on the amount of risk involved, because of the fear that accompanies risk. As a result, well-intentioned leaders may devise a plan to create equity which they are willing to do when the plan is created but may decide not to go through with it when faced with resistance or opposition. (p. 1)

Whether at the administrative or faculty level, implementing social justice leadership takes courage (Lowery, 2022). The last theory examined in this chapter is strengths-based leadership.

Strengths-Based Leadership

Strengths-based leadership was developed by Clifton, a psychology professor at the University of Nebraska (Rath, 2007). As a professor and advisor of students, Clifton was interested in what differentiated students who graduated from college from students who dropped out of college (Rath, 2007). Clifton believed if educators focused on student strengths instead of weaknesses, students would feel a higher level of motivation and purpose to stay in school (Gallup, 2023). This belief led to the creation of the Clifton StrengthsFinder Assessment, which aimed to identify and measure individuals' natural talents and strengths (Rath, 2007). This assessment became a foundational tool in the strengths-based movement and has added to the body of research in the fields of business, education, personal development, and leadership (Gallup, 2023).

Strengths-based leadership holds several implications for higher education administrators (Rath & Harter, 2010). By adopting a strengths-based approach, administrators can create a more positive and supportive environment within their institutions (Mason, 2019). Rath and Conchie (2008) suggested administrators who work to identify the strengths and potential of faculty and staff through a strengths-based approach not only enhance individual satisfaction and engagement but also foster a sense of belonging, collaboration, and commitment within an organization.

Furthermore, strengths-based leadership can contribute to cultivating a more inclusive and equitable higher education environment (Asby & Shah, 2019). Asby and Shah (2019) stated:

> Often, when educators begin to discuss equity, their focus on what's "wrong" with the system or the child overshadows the strengths and abilities that allow a school to serve students or a student to make contributions to their school community. Collectively deciding that equity is helping all students reach their full potential keeps the focus on student strengths. (para. 4)

By recognizing and valuing individuals' diverse strengths and abilities, administrators can promote a culture of inclusivity that appreciates and harnesses the unique talents and perspectives of both faculty and students (Asby & Shah, 2019). A strengths-based approach also may help to mitigate biases and systemic barriers that impede the success of historically underrepresented groups and foster a sense of empowerment and agency among individuals within the higher education context (Linley et al., 2011).

In the classroom, applying strengths-based leadership may lead to higher student motivation and engagement (Clifton & Harter, 2003). Traditional education has focused on improving weaknesses, but Clifton and Harter (2003) argued shifting the focus from deficiencies to strengths can create a more supportive and engaging learning environment. Applying a strengths-based approach in the classroom may enhance teachers' learning strategies to meet students' individual needs (Clifton & Harter, 2003). This personalized approach to teaching and learning can promote student motivation, self-confidence, and a sense of achievement (Clifton & Harter, 2003).

Additionally, strengths-based leadership in the classroom may contribute to a positive and inclusive classroom culture (Asby & Shah, 2019). Lopez and Louis (2019) suggested when educators seek and highlight the strengths of each student, their actions foster a sense of appreciation and respect among peers. This approach helps students recognize and value their own unique abilities, promoting a growth mindset and enhancing their self-esteem (Lopez & Louis, 2019). Strengths-based leadership also has been shown to encourage collaborative learning and peer-to-peer support, creating a sense of community where students can learn from one another and contribute to each other's growth and success (Soria et al., 2019). Soria and Stubblefield (2015) found a "positive and significant relationship" (p. 1) between students' strengths awareness, their sense of belonging on campus, and their ability to persist to the next year of study. Overall, implementing strengths-based leadership in the classroom not only enhances student motivation, engagement, self-confidence, and persistence but also fosters a positive and inclusive classroom culture (Asby & Shah, 2019; Lopez & Louis, 2009; Soria et al., 2019; Soria & Stubblefield, 2015).

In conclusion, this overview of four relevant leadership theories illuminates that a teacher's leadership theory approach remains essential to the effective deployment of an equitable practice/pedagogy necessary to helping historically underrepresented students succeed. The theories of servant leadership, transformational leadership, social justice leadership, and strengths-based leadership pair best with the recognition theory and CRT framework used in this study. Ultimately, how an instructor engages with students in the classroom greatly impacts students' academic success and outcomes.

History of Higher Education in the United States

A look back at the history of U.S. higher education from the 17th century through the 21st century provides context for the access and outcome inequities that exist today. Further, this historical review details past actions taken to remedy these inequities, exposing the shortcomings of those actions and revealing the need for a new approach. Examining the history of U.S. higher education from the 17th century through the 21st century offers valuable context to understand present-day access and outcome inequities. This historical perspective sheds light on factors and events that have contributed to the existing disparities. Furthermore, a comprehensive review of past initiatives undertaken to address these inequities uncovers the limitations and inadequacies of those efforts, emphasizing the need for a fresh and innovative approach to address the persisting challenges in higher education effectively.

Historically Underrepresented Groups: 17th to 19th Century (1636–1900)

In the centuries following the establishment of the first colleges in the United States, upper-class White males were the main beneficiaries of postsecondary institutions (Bok, 2015; Chan, 2016; Thelin, 2019). For example, the first graduating class at Harvard University—the first college founded in the American colonies in 1636 (Harvard University, 2022)—was comprised of nine graduates, all White men (Cambridge Tribune, 1890). The graduates of that first class were called “young men of good hope” (Cambridge Tribune, 1890, para. 1); rather than receiving their diploma based on their grades, the men were given diplomas based on family rank.

HEIs in the United States, at that time, existed to educate and prepare male leaders for positions in the priesthood/ministry, public service, and government (Thelin,

2019). However, due to the high cost of college, only young men from elite families had access to higher education (Bylsma, 2015; Chan, 2016; Thelin, 2019; Thwing, 2019). Before the 20th century, time was a greater barrier to education than money (Thelin, 2019). Poor families could not afford to have their working sons gone for an extended time (Best Colleges Staff Writers, 2021). Throughout the 17th, 18th, and 19th centuries, higher education remained an exclusive opportunity for White men from affluent families (Blakemore, 2017; Eisenmann, 2007; Thelin, 2019).

Higher education, though originally established for the betterment of society, quickly became another divider in social and economic class (Thwing, 2019). During the 17th to 19th centuries, states allowing slavery enacted antiliteracy laws banning Black Americans from learning to read and write, and universities and colleges maintained policies that refused Black applicants ("Illegal to Teach Slaves to Read and Write," 1862; Rudolph & Thelin, 1991; H. A. Williams, 2009). In 1850, Harvard Medical School admitted three Black students but was then forced to withdraw their admission due to school rioting by White students (Rudolph & Thelin, 1991).

These injustices compelled Black churches and communities to endeavor to raise the social and economic status of underserved communities by starting Black colleges and universities on their own (Leak & Reid, 2010; Toldson, 2018). The first historically Black college and university (HBCU) was founded in Pennsylvania on February 25, 1837 (HBCU First, 2022). In addition to Black churches and abolitionists, the U.S. government created several colleges to serve Black students (Rose, 2017). Through the Morrill Land Grant Acts of 1892 and 1890, legislators supplied money to build 19 land-grant HBCUs

and required segregated schools to offer the same access to both Black and White students (Rose, 2017).

Although there are no formal national educational statistics before 1869 (NCES, 1993), 2,000 Black individuals were documented as having earned a college degree by 1900, including Black women who also began to see opportunities in higher education (Titcomb, 2011). By 1900, there were 78 Black colleges and universities in the United States (Titcomb, 2011). Students from ethnic groups not previously represented in higher education began to gain admittance to college starting in the late 1700s (NCES, 1993). Latino men from wealthy and prominent families were the first foreign students to attend American colleges (Garza, 2014). Francisco de Miranda of Venezuela was the first college student from abroad (Bevis & Lucas, 2007). Born to wealthy parents, Francisco de Miranda attended Yale University and, in 1784, became the first foreign student to graduate. He returned to Venezuela and later in life became the Supreme Chief of Venezuela. In 1894, 11 years after the University of Texas (Austin) opened, the first Mexican American, Manuel Marius Garcia, graduated with a bachelor's degree (Garza, 2014).

During the Gilded Age, which began in 1870, several colleges willing to serve American Indians received funds from religious groups (Schockman, 2019; Thelin, 2019). Thelin (2019) stated, "Such donors were generous in their support of programs designed to provide a Christian education to those they considered to be savages" (p. 15). This act of philanthropy was not based on a desire to provide equal access for education but on the missionary desire to Christianize American Indians by teaching students their language and customs were inferior (Teach for America, 2022). The establishment of

land-grant universities in 1862 disadvantaged Indigenous people by acquiring their land through treaties and cessions, frequently employing force or violence (Martin & Hipp, 2018; Nash, 2019). Access to higher education did improve for historically underrepresented groups prior to the 20th century (Nash, 2019). However, racism, sexism, segregation, and economic and social class barriers greatly limited the speed of progress toward equality (Schockman, 2019; Thelin, 2019; Thwing, 2019).

Historically Underrepresented Groups: 20th Century

The 20th century witnessed a significant expansion in both college enrollment and the number of HEIs, but elitism continued to prevail (NCES, 1993). During the first 30 years of the 20th century, college enrollment increased to 9 out of 100 people in the age category of 18- to 24-year-olds (NCES, 1993). This rate persisted until World War II when there was a substantial decrease in higher education enrollment as young men left college to fight in the war (NCES, 1993).

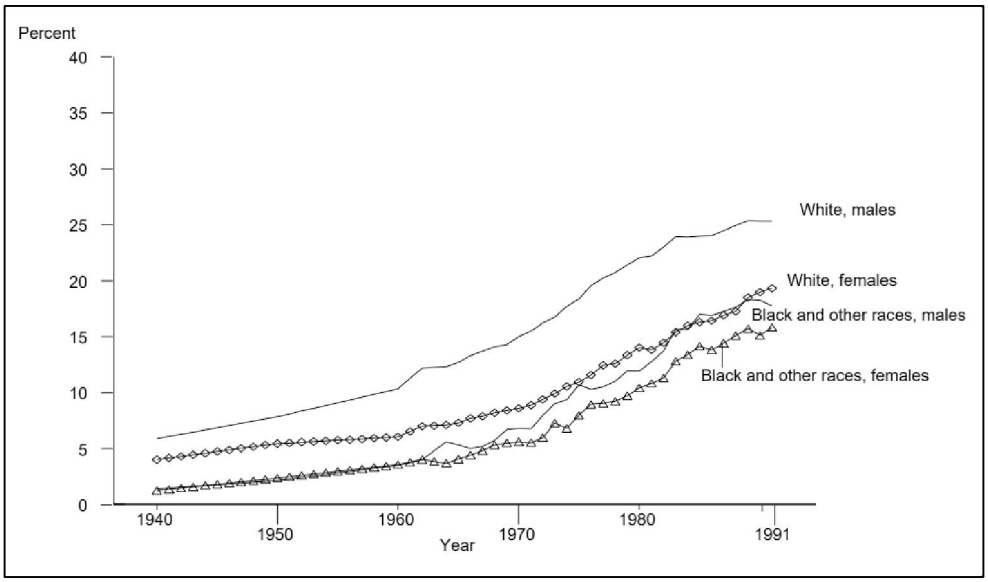
After World War II, the U.S. government engaged in more educational interventions during the Golden Age (1945–1970; Bok, 2015; Thwing, 2019). The Servicemen's Readjustment Act of 1944, also known as the GI Bill, made college accommodations and access available for returning veterans (National Archives, 2021). In addition, the Truman Commission (1947) put access and equality at the forefront of the national agenda (Gilbert & Heller, 2010). The objective of the committee was to double the total number of college bound students by 1960 and to work toward removing barriers that prevented underrepresented groups from attending (Burke, 2008; Gilbert & Heller, 2010). To achieve these goals, the Truman Commission put a heavy focus on federal funding and community colleges (Rudolph & Thelin, 1991; Thelin, 2019).

In 1965, President Johnson signed the Higher Education Act, created to increase access to higher education for low and middle-income families (National Trio Clearinghouse, 2003). The goal of the Higher Education Act of 1965 was to "strengthen the educational resources of our colleges and universities and [provide] financial assistance for students in postsecondary and higher education" (para. 1). Although the government and other influential organizations, like the Rockefeller Foundation, began to confront racial segregation, efforts toward desegregation by "state legislatures and state universities during the 1960s were largely a matter of halfhearted, token compliance" (Thelin, 2019, p. 304). Because of the lack of a clear plan and concerted effort by the states, educational inequities persisted.

Figure 1 displays the progress made in the percentage of students who earned a college degree in the latter portion of the 20th century. During this period, there was substantial improvement in graduation rates for all races and gender. However, the figure also reveals the ongoing inequity between White men and all other groups.

Figure 1

Educational Attainment in the United States (1940–1991)



Note. From A Half-Century Of Learning: Historical Census Statistics On Educational Attainment in the United States, 1940 to 2000: Tables, by U.S. Census, 2015. (https://www.census.gov/data/tables/time-series/demo/educational-attainment/educational-attainment-1940-2000.html). In the public domain.

Advances in the percentage of historically underrepresented students attending college in the 20th century required legal battles (Titcomb, 2011). Both setbacks and triumphs took place in the courtroom. In 1901, the Day Law prohibited interracial education in Kentucky (Kentucky Day Law, 1901). The Day Law remained in effect for several decades, and it was not until the landmark Supreme Court case *Brown v. Board of Education Topeka* in 1954 that racial segregation in public education was ruled unconstitutional. The Day Law serves as a historical example of state-sanctioned segregation and the challenges faced by marginalized communities in their fight for equal educational opportunities.

Alternatively, in 1948, in *Sipuel v. University of Oklahoma,* the U.S. Supreme Court ruled Black students had the same legal right to education as White students

(*Sipuel v. University of Oklahoma*, 1948). In addition to courtroom battles, protests and violence persisted on and off campuses throughout the early 1970s (Titcomb, 2011). In 1970, at Jackson State University, Black students protested against campus injustices, which led to 12 injuries and two deaths among Black students (Nowatzki & Schroeder, 2020). The last 20 years of the 20th century saw mixed government intervention on behalf of Black students. President Carter prioritized equal opportunity in education during his administration, signing executive orders for federal funding and support (The Jimmy Carter Presidential Library and Museum, 2022). In contrast, President Reagan viewed education as the responsibility of parents, teachers, communities, and states; as a result, he reduced federal funding (Fiske, 1982).

In addition to legal battles, voluntary policy changes by some institutions reduced discrimination. In 1935, Oberlin Collegiate Institute (now Oberlin College) implemented a resolution that read, "Resolved: That the education of the people of color is a matter of great interest and should be encouraged and sustained at the institution" (Pilgram, 2010; *The Lane Rebels Dismissions: A Cause for Freedom*, 1835, para. 4). Although Oberlin College was not the first to admit or graduate a Black student, they were the first to accept applications from Black students "without respect to race as a matter of official policy" (Titcomb, 2011, para. 3).

Unlike Black people and American Indians who were segregated by law, Hispanic students were separated, beginning in kindergarten, by language (MacDonald, 2020). States justified their behavior by creating "Mexican classrooms" with unqualified teachers for students who could not speak English (MacDonald, 2020). Ultimately, these policies created barriers for students to advance into high school and college

(MacDonald, 2020). As a result, at the beginning of the 20th century, only a small percentage of the wealthiest Hispanic men and women attended college.

Little government or legal intervention on the behalf of Hispanic students took place until 1946. At that time, in the case of *Mendez et al. v. Westminster School District in California*, Judge Paul J. McCormick ruled the right to equal education for Hispanic students was protected under the 14th Amendment (MacDonald, 2020). The Civil Rights Movement (1954–1968) helped to create more opportunity for Hispanic students in community colleges, 4-year colleges, and even Ivy League schools (MacDonald, 2020). Even with these advances, Hispanic students continued to face academic barriers through federal cuts to education support, the "English Only" movement, and the anti-immigrant groups that still exist (MacDonald, 2020).

In contrast to other racial groups, policies of the 20th century did little to improve higher education access for American Indians (Beck, 1999). A statistical study of American Indians students in 1932 reported there were fewer than 400 students in college and only 52 with college degrees in the United States (Beck, 1999). Federal and private studies of the 1960s and 1970s identified the crisis of inequalities facing the American Indian communities (Beck, 1999). These reports detailed how the educational system had failed this group (Beck, 1999). In 1978, the dropout rates in higher education for American Indians were exceedingly high compared to dominant races, ranging from 79% to 93% (Beck, 1999; Liebler, 2004).

One can attribute this statistic to various factors, including a persistently low quality of education available to American Indian students, lower income levels, limited representation of their cultural perspectives and needs within educational institutions, and

the pervasive influence of institutional racism (Beck, 1999; Liebler, 2004). These multiple factors combined to create significant barriers for American Indian students, hindering their academic progress and contributing to the disproportionate dropout rates observed during that period (Liebler, 2004). The gains of historically underrepresented groups in access to higher education in the 20th century were noticeable and substantial for a large portion of the historically underrepresented groups; however, the many law and policy changes enacted throughout the century failed to eliminate the educational inequities (Beck, 1999; Liebler, 2004; MacDonald, 2020).

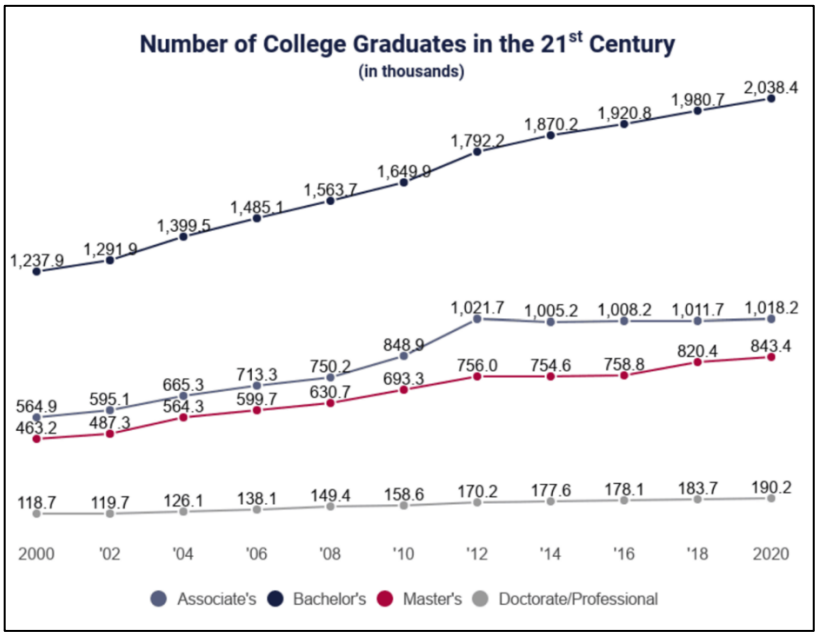
Historically Underrepresented Groups: 21st Century

Like previous eras, during the 21st century, higher education leaders have focused on expanding colleges and universities for the purposes of enlightenment, citizenship, and preparing students for the workplace (Bastedo et al., 2016; Bear & Skorton, 2018). The ethos of higher education has not changed, but the pedagogy of education has shifted to meet the growing needs of a digital age (Bear & Skorton, 2018). For example, schools are integrating science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) programs into traditional humanities and liberal arts schools to equip students for new jobs in technology and engineering (Bear & Skorton, 2018). Compared to the most popular degrees, like business and health care, degrees in computer and information sciences increased by 145% between 2019 and 2020, the largest increase over other degrees conferred by 4-year institutions (NCES, 2023). By 2022, STEM degree holders became the majority of college graduates (730,394 or 18.3%) and surpassed all other disciplines (Bouchrika, 2022).

Figure 2 shows the overall number of graduates in the 21st century. In recent years, more people in the United States have earned undergraduate degrees than ever before, but disparities in graduation rates among historically underrepresented students still persist (U.S. Census Bureau, 2022).

Figure 2

Educational Attainment in the United States (2000–2020)



Note. From College Graduation Statistics, by Education Data Initiative, 2023 (https://educationdata.org/number-of-college-graduates). In the public domain.

During the past 30 years, access to higher education has become more equitable between all racial/ethnic groups (Thwing, 2019). However, incongruency in outcomes persisted despite these gains (Templeton et al., 2016). The Center on Education (2022) reported U.S. colleges and universities still disproportionally serve the wealthiest

students, which increases the gap in opportunity for underrepresented students. The COVID-19 pandemic also contributed to the disparity in advancement between Whites and underrepresented groups in postsecondary institutions (Best Colleges Staff Writers, 2021; Clayton, 2021). The pandemic not only resulted in a lockdown but also created a lockout for individuals already facing economic challenges (Flaming et al., 2021). Furthermore, the national attainment statistics by populations (ages 25–64) show Asian or Pacific Islanders graduated at a rate of 65.8% and White students graduated at a rate of 50.2%, whereas Black students graduated at 34.2%, Hispanic students at 27.8%, and Native American or Alaska Native students at 25.4% (Lumina Foundation, 2023).

21st Century Interventions in the United States

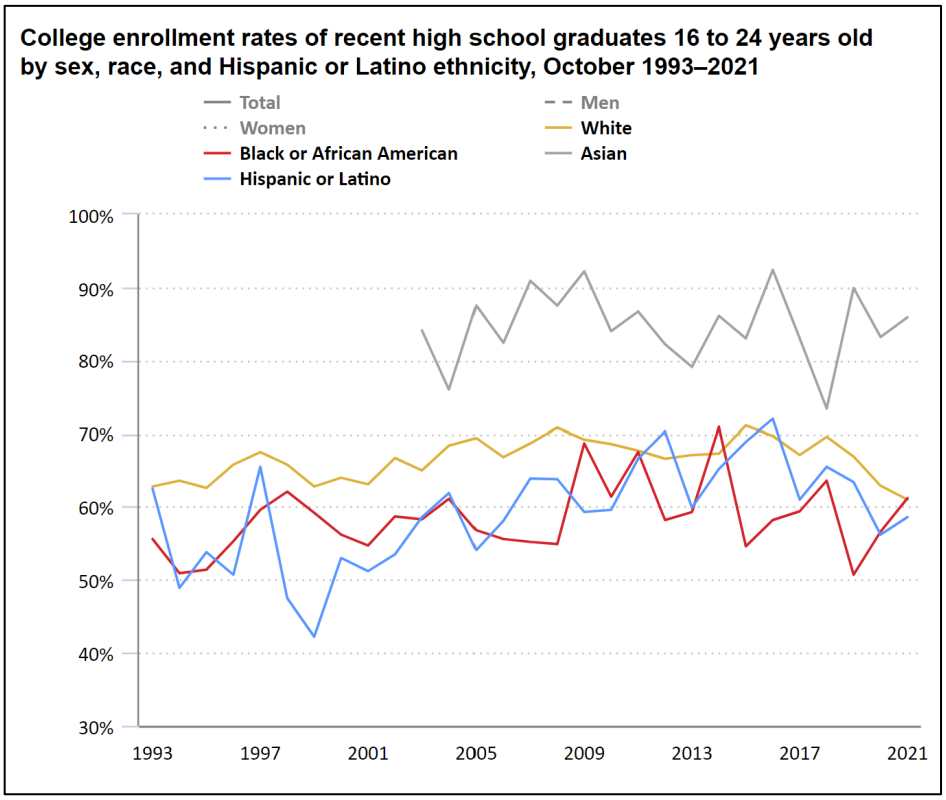
The 21st century brought an influx of new public and federal interventions to higher education on behalf of historically underrepresented groups (Best Colleges Staff Writers, 2021). Private organizations, like the National College Attainment Network (2022), have worked to reform federal policies to make financial aid more attainable for historically underrepresented students. Interventions by the federal government have included federal aid and loans, loan forgiveness plans, and laws like the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA; U.S. Department of Education, 2022) and TRIO (Federal TRIO Program, 2022). ESSA is a federal education law in the United States that was enacted in 2015 (U.S. Department of Education, 2022). It replaced the No Child Left Behind Act and aimed to improve the quality of education for all students. ESSA provides states with more flexibility in designing their own education systems while still holding them accountable for ensuring all students, particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds, receive a quality education (U.S. Department of Education, 2022).

The TRIO Student Success program is dedicated to addressing the needs of students facing various challenges by offering grants and initiatives that facilitate their access to and completion of higher education (Federal TRIO Program, 2022). With a distinct emphasis on identifying and supporting students who may require additional assistance, TRIO aims to bridge the gaps historically underresourced students encounter throughout their education (Federal TRIO Program, 2022). By providing a range of resources and programs, TRIO endeavors to empower these individuals to enroll in and complete a postsecondary degree successfully. The program aligns with its mission to foster educational equity and opportunity, helping students overcome barriers and achieve their academic aspirations (Federal TRIO Program, 2022). Through these interventions, both public and private, a concerted effort is underway to cultivate greater equity, access, and success in higher education for historically underrepresented groups.

Figure 3 shows college enrollment by race between the years of 1993 and 2021 (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2020). Native Americans are not represented in this research. As the graph displays, interventions made by private foundations and local/federal programs have helped to increase access to higher education for historically underrepresented groups in the last 30 years.

Figure 3

College Enrollment Rates (1993–2021)



Note. From TED: Economics Daily, by U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2020 (https://www.bls.gov/opub/ted/2020/66-point-2-percent-of-2019-high-school-graduates-enrolled-in-college-in-october-2019.htm). In the public domain.

The overview of the history of U.S. higher education provides context and insight into the inequities that have developed and still exist for historically underrepresented students. Because this research focused on historically underrepresented groups in Washington State, an investigation of Washington State's past and current policies and actions to improve access and outcomes in education is necessary.

History of Higher Education in Washington State

The first two colleges established in Washington State were the University of Washington (UW) and Washington State University (WSU; Garcia-Hanson & Francis, 2021). UW, founded in 1861, became a land-grant institution under the Morrill Act of 1862 (Garcia-Hanson & Francis, 2021). Although the university was designated initially as a territorial university, it later received land-grant status and expanded its educational offerings in various fields, including agricultural and mechanical sciences (Washington State Board of Community and Technical Colleges [WSBCTC], 2021).

WSU, originally known as the Washington Agricultural College and School of Science, was established in 1890. It was designated as a land-grant institution under the provisions of the Morrill Act of 1862. The primary focus of WSU was to provide education in agriculture, mechanical arts, and other practical subjects (WSBCTC, 2021). Both UW and WSU have played significant roles in higher education, research, and community engagement in Washington State as land-grant institutions (Garcia-Hanson & Francis, 2021; WSBCTC, 2021). WSU has six public colleges/universities and over 300 private, independent, and career postsecondary schools (WSBCTC, 2021).

The national goal for college completion for people between the ages of 25 and 64 is 60% by the year 2025 (Lumina Foundation, 2023). The Lumina Foundation (2023) reported Washington State exceeded the average, at 53.7%, but will fall short of reaching the goal of 60% without further intervention. The Lumina Foundation (2023) stated:

> To reach state goals, the state will not only have to maintain current rates of attainment but also significantly increase the number of people who enroll in programs and earn all types of credentials beyond high school. With the inclusion

> of workforce certificates (beginning in 2014) and certifications (in 2018), Washington's overall rate of educational attainment has increased by 15.8 percentage points since 2009. (para. 4)

To achieve the goal of increasing inclusivity in education, it is important to pursue innovative strategies such as implementing inclusive pedagogy, setting clear learning outcome goals, and involving stakeholders from the community and organizations (Lumina Foundation, 2023). Despite Washington State's status as a leader in college attainment, notable disparities remain in terms of ethnicity and race (Lumina Foundation, 2023).

Segregation of Historically Underrepresented Groups

Segregation beginning in elementary school created a significant barrier for historically underrepresented students in Washington State (Clark, 2005). Although segregation was not implemented due to an act of law as in other states, it became a reality for Blacks, Hispanics, and Native Americans because of other societal factors (Clark, 2005; Segregated Seattle: Seattle Civil Rights and Labor History Project, 2022). Due to an overt and covert system of racism, historically underrepresented groups in the state have experienced segregation stemming from limited housing options and a lack of educational opportunities (Clark, 2022). Historically underrepresented students have attended the poorest schools employing the least qualified teachers and lacked parental support (Clark, 2022). In the late 1950s and early 1960s, several civil rights groups attempted to desegregate schools within the district of Seattle (Segregated Seattle: Seattle Civil Rights and Labor History Project, 2022).

The Seattle School Boycott of 1966 was one example of an action the community took to stand up for equal education (Clark, 2005). The boycott's goal was to convince the Seattle School District to meet two requirements: (a) "develop and publish a comprehensive plan to integrate the schools within a reasonable period of time" (para. 6) and (b) "begin immediately a program of compulsory in-service training for all school personnel in human relations with an emphasis on the understanding and acceptance of racial minorities in previously all-White schools" (para. 6). The Seattle School Boycott succeeded in bringing public awareness to the overlooked problem of segregation but did not resolve the issues facing historically underrepresented students.

In 1972, the Seattle City Public Schools, alongside the Washington State Supreme Court, implemented the Middle School Desegregation Plan (Clark, 2005). This plan mandated busing of minority students to middle schools in neighborhoods further away (Judge, 2007). By 1978, due to controversies over this policy, the school board dismantled the busing plan and replaced it with an open enrollment policy for middle school and high school students (Judge, 2007).

Segregation is a complicated and complex problem. This issue still persists in Washington State (Judge, 2007). Action in the form of professional training, strategic planning, and advocacy on behalf of historically underrepresented groups is needed to help address these injustices (Clark, 2005; Judge, 2007; Washington Student Achievement Council [WSAC], 2021).

Current Interventions in Washington State

It is estimated that 70% of all jobs in Washington State require education beyond high school, and two thirds of all prospective jobs require an associate degree or

certificate (WSAC, 2021). To avoid substantial social and economic ramifications of the educational inequities facing historically underrepresented students, Washington State has made educational opportunities and attainment a priority through both policies of state agencies and legislation (WSAC, 2021). The WSAC was established as a state agency to work to close the achievement gap. The WSAC (2022) has three functions: (a) "lead statewide strategic planning to increase educational attainment," (b) "administer programs that help people access and pay for college," and (c) "advocate for the economic, social, and civic benefits of higher education" (para. 1). The Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs (GEAR UP) is one of the federal programs WSAC (2022) administers. GEAR UP's (2022) purpose is to expand the total number of low-income students in postsecondary institutions by preparing them financially, academically, and socially.

In 2019, state legislators passed the Workforce Education Investment Act, which invested $373.8 million into student aid, operations, compensation, and other programs (WSAC, 2021). Unfortunately, during the 2-year period from 2019 to 2021, Washington colleges and universities saw a dropout rate of 7%, translating to around 60,000 fewer students (Sharpiro, 2022). Sharpiro (2022) attributed much of the decline to the COVID-19 pandemic, which disproportionately impacted historically underrepresented students. In addition to state intervention, private groups instituted reform efforts and student support services, forming wraparound programs like ActSix (2022) and The Posse Foundation (2022), programs striving to identify potential leaders from underrepresented groups. These programs also provide scholarships and support services to help students transition from high school to college and remain in school until they graduate. In

conclusion, by prioritizing equitable access, support, and retention in higher education, Washington State can strive toward addressing historical injustices and empowering historically underrepresented students, ensuring their success, and contributing to a more inclusive and prosperous society.

Academic Inequalities

Within the U.S. educational system, academic inequalities play a pivotal role in determining the access individuals have to quality learning experiences (Bastedo et al., 2016). Academic disparities begin in elementary school and significantly shape a person's ability to pursue advanced studies (Glater, 2018). This section explores the relationship between economic, structural, and social disparities, focusing on how historically underrepresented students, such as Black people, Hispanic individuals, and Native American/Alaska Native populations, bear a disproportionate burden of reduced educational opportunities and hindered social mobility due to these existing inequalities (Ladson-Billings & Paris, 2021).

Academic Inequalities – Economic

The concept of economic inequalities, marked by the unequal distribution of financial resources and opportunities, has profound implications for higher education (IZA World of Labor, 2023). Historically, in the United States, economic inequalities have had profound effects on historically underrepresented groups (Creamer, 2020). Underrepresented groups have higher levels of poverty and limited social mobility, which have subsequently hindered their educational advancement (Creamer, 2020). In 2020, the poverty rate among non-Hispanic Whites was 8.2%, whereas Hispanics had a poverty rate of 17% (U.S. Census Bureau, 2022). Black people had a poverty rate of 19.5% and

Native Americans and Alaskan Natives faced the highest level of poverty at 25% (IWGIA, 2023; U.S. Census Bureau, 2022). A child born into an American low-income family has a 13% chance of advancing their economic status (Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, 2020).

Poverty impacts a person's socioeconomic status (APA, 2023a). Socioeconomic status (SES) refers to an individual's or a family's position in the societal hierarchy based on factors such as income, education, occupation, and access to resources (APA, 2023b). People of color—particularly Black individuals, Hispanic persons, Native Americans, and Alaska Natives—are disproportionately affected by lower SES due to historical and systemic disparities (APA, 2023a). There are several ways one's socioeconomic status impact educational pursuits (Navarro-Carrillo et al., 2020). First, limited financial resources often restrict access to quality educational opportunities, including tuition for higher education (APA, 2023a). Furthermore, lower SES can correlate with reduced parental expectation and availability due to work demands, affecting parental involvement in education and potentially hindering academic support at home (Chen et al., 2018). Alternatively, Tompsett and Knoester (2023) found:

> Parents with higher SES are more likely to expect their children to attend college, but they also are more likely to confer tangible benefits and resources to them that enhance educational expectations and achievements. These include educational resources (e.g., books, computers), experiences (e.g., learning opportunities), and interactions (e.g., conversations). For example, higher educated parents are more likely to read to their children at a young age, which encourages reading and translates to increased performance in school. (p. 2)

Chen et al. (2018) found students with lower SES had less motivation and lower reading scores which may limit a student's ability to succeed and persist in his/her education.

The COVID-19 pandemic of 2020 also played a significant role in widening the gap between lower SES families and higher SES families in education (McElrath, 2020; Simon, 2021). Limited access to technology for historically underrepresented groups created a digital divide (Ong, 2020). During the spring closures of 2020, the percentage of households experiencing limited digital access stood at 42%, a figure that gradually decreased to approximately 31% in the fall of 2020 (Simon, 2021). Households with school-age children belonging to the Black and Hispanic communities were 1.3 to 1.4 times more likely than their White counterparts to confront constraints in accessing computers and the internet (Simon, 2021). Moreover, over 40% of low-income households faced restricted digital access (Simon, 2021). Research suggested the average student endured an estimated loss exceeding half a school year's progress in mathematics and nearly a quarter of a school year's progress in reading (Vazquez Toness & Lurye, 2022). District averages in some cases surpassed double or even more severe declines in these metrics (Vazquez Toness & Lurye, 2022).

Last, an unequal allocation of educational resources contributes to the disparities facing historically underrepresented students (Knight, 2017). An analysis of the current education system in the United States revealed a funding gap between public schools serving low-income students and students of color and schools serving predominantly White demographics (I. Morgan & Amerikaner, 2018). Teach for America (2019) reported Black, Hispanic, Native American, and Alaska Native students "receive roughly $1,800 less per student in state and local funding than those serving the fewest students of

color" (para. 7). These economic inequalities have a significant position in influencing the extent to which individuals can access high-level learning opportunities, subsequently impacting their pathways toward college and are a catalyst for structural inequalities (Bastedo et al., 2016; Creamer, 2020; Ladson-Billings & Paris, 2021).

Academic Inequalities – Structural

Structural inequities in education refer to systematic and persistent disparities in educational opportunities, resources, and outcomes that arise from institutional policies and practices (Amadeo, 2022; Bailey et al., 2021; Naylor & Mifsud, 2020). These inequities are rooted deeply in societal structures and often perpetuate disadvantages for historically marginalized groups, affecting various aspects of education, including funding, curriculum access, tracking, teacher quality, and representation (Amadeo, 2022; Bailey et al., 2021; Ladson-Billings, 2006; Naylor & Mifsud, 2020).

Spector (2019) identified the significant influence of racial segregation within school districts on the phenomenon of achievement gaps. Spector argued it is not the racial composition of schools but rather the prevalence of school poverty among underrepresented groups that leads to structural inequalities. These findings revealed the role of school poverty rates in explaining observed disparities in academic achievement (Bailey et al., 2021; Spector, 2019). Students from low-income neighborhoods experience an education that is notably inferior quality compared to their peers from more affluent areas (Bailey et al., 2021; Spector, 2019). For example, students from low-income areas were found to have 37% reduced math scores than students from middle or high-income neighborhoods (Spector, 2019).

Structural inequalities tied to socioeconomic contexts also hinder access to high-quality curricula in economically disadvantaged schools (Spector, 2019). Morgan (2020) noted the scarcity of advanced academic offerings like Advanced Placement (AP) or honors courses in low-income school districts, which may hinder students' exposure to rigorous educational pathways and potential college credit. Similarly, fiscal constraints in a school district can lead to limited availability of elective courses such as the arts, foreign languages, and computer sciences (Morgan, 2020).

Moreover, students from low-income schools have reduced access to science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) classes, which have become some of the fastest growing careers in the United States (Common Wealth Institute, 2023). Inadequate funding extends to extracurricular activities, such as clubs, sports, and other student services (Common Wealth Institute, 2023). Additionally, low-income school districts are more likely to have outdated educational materials and technologies (Spector, 2019). Collectively, limited and outdated curricula contribute to the already present academic disparities low-income and underrepresented populations experience (Spector, 2019).

Another structural inequality is the system of "tracking" in educational institutions (Bailey et al., 2021; Van de Werfhorst, 2019). Tracking in educational institutions refers to a practice by which students are categorized or separated into distinct academic paths or classes based on perceived levels of ability, achievement, or potential (Van de Werfhorst, 2019). The primary goal of tracking is to tailor instruction to students' perceived needs and capabilities, offering a customized educational experience (Van de Werfhorst, 2019). However, this practice has been subject to criticism due to its

potential to reinforce disparities and perpetuate educational inequalities among historically underrepresented groups (Bailey et al., 2021).

Tracking may result in unequal distribution of resources, opportunities, and educational outcomes among different groups of students (Bailey et al., 2021; Van de Werfhorst, 2019). Conversely, proponents of tracking assert its utility in providing gifted students with tailored educational opportunities to foster their exceptional growth and achievement (Van de Werfhorst, 2019). Segregation in schools, which persisted until the mid-20th century, underscores the historical dimensions of these inequities (Amadeo, 2022).

Additional factors perpetuating educational disparities in low-income districts stem from the presence of less qualified educators and a deficiency of ethnic diversity among teachers. According to Chu (2019), students originating from poor neighborhoods and those with low-income backgrounds receive instruction from educators who have less experience, fewer certifications aligned with their respective fields, and diminished effectiveness compared to peers from more affluent neighborhoods. Furthermore, the deficiency of representation from historically marginalized demographics within higher education faculty exacerbates educational inequality (Ladson-Billings & Paris, 2021). Although student diversity is on the rise, this shift is not mirrored in faculty composition (Grawe, 2021). Predominantly, the teaching cohort is comprised of White instructors (71.1%), followed by Asian (9.9%) and Hispanic or Latino representation (9.3%; Zippia, 2021).

Research showed faculty representation plays a part in the achievement level of historically underrepresented students (Taylor et al., 2015). Having a diverse faculty who

act as role models and mentors, embodying successful trajectories within academia and professions, has been proven to motivate underrepresented students to persist in school (Ladson-Billings, 2006). Beyond inspiration, a diverse teaching cohort may bring culturally relevant perspectives and a pedagogy that resonates with and engages students, promoting an inclusive and responsive learning environment (San Pedro & Kinloch, 2017). The presence of faculty who share ethnic or racial backgrounds can also foster a sense of belonging, confidence, and academic commitment among underrepresented students, often leading to improved learning outcomes and higher graduation rates (Ladson-Billings & Paris, 2021; San Pedro et al., 2021; Taylor et al., 2015).

Steele (2011) asserted a diverse faculty enriches academic discourse by introducing varied viewpoints and contributes to the reduction of stereotype threat—anxiety arising from negative stereotypes—ultimately enhancing student performance. Further, diversifying faculty may be more likely to address implicit biases and enhance equitable treatment for historically underrepresented students (Steele, 2011). In sum, a diverse faculty can help increase retention and graduation rates and foster an inclusive learning environment for historically underrepresented students (Fisher et al., 2019).

Academic Inequalities – Social

Historically underrepresented students face challenges beyond economic and structural inequalities (Jack, 2019). Social inequalities encompass unequal treatment of students based on their socioeconomic status or racial/ethnic backgrounds (Russell Sage Foundation, 2023). These inequities have a substantial influence on students' pursuit of postsecondary education, including application, attendance, and completion stages (Bastedo et al., 2016). Particularly pronounced among underrepresented college students,

social pressures and inequities give rise to identity contingencies and stereotype threats, which significantly hinder students' ability to persist in their education (Quinnez, 2021; Spencer et al., 1999; Steele, 2011; Steele & Aronson, 1995).

Identity contingencies refer to circumstances arising from an individual's identity, such as race, class, or gender, which can create challenges and obstacles in various aspects of their life, including education (Quinnez, 2021; Spencer et al., 1999; Steele, 2011; Steele & Aronson, 1995). These contingencies can result from societal biases, stereotypes, and structural inequalities, and they often intersect to impact an individual's social identity (Quinnez, 2021; Spencer et al., 1999; Steele, 2011; Steele & Aronson, 1995). Social identity pertains to how individuals construct their self-perceptions based on their affiliation with various social groups. (Leaper, 2011). Steele (2010) stated:

> By imposing on us certain conditions of life, our social identities can strongly affect things as important as our performances in the classroom and on standardized tests, our memory capacity, our athletic performance, the pressure we feel to prove ourselves, and even the comfort level we have with people of different groups—all things we typically think of as being determined by individual talents, motivations, and preferences. (p. 4)

Stereotype threat, on the other hand, is a psychological phenomenon where individuals from stereotyped groups experience anxiety and pressure in situations where they fear their words or actions may confirm negative stereotypes about their group (Quinnez, 2021; Spencer et al., 1999; Steele, 2011; Steele & Aronson, 1995). The fear of confirming a stereotype can impair cognitive functioning, focus, and motivation and lead

to underperformance in academic settings (Quinnez, 2021; Spencer et al., 1999; Steele, 2011; Steele & Aronson, 1995).

When a first-generation, low-income, underrepresented student advances into higher education, they may find it hard to navigate the complexity of the academic system (Gibbons et al., 2019). Jack (2019) called these underresourced students "doubly disadvantaged," citing several inequalities that may lead to feelings of stress and social isolation. For example, a lack of college readiness, family support, financial stability, food/shelter, and a lack of racial representation impacts students' social identity and can make it hard to persist and graduate (Gibbons et al., 2019). These factors contribute to higher dropout rates for underrepresented groups than groups from more affluent backgrounds (Masterson, 2022).

In conclusion, education is a human right that creates an opportunity for both social and economic advancement, reduces poverty, decreases social inequities, empowers marginalized populations, and helps underrepresented people live to their fullest potential (United Nations, 2021). Economic, structural, and social inequalities continue to be a critical, multilayered problem leading to lower persistence and graduation rates for underrepresented populations, a problem policymakers and educational leaders need to address (Bastedo et al., 2016).

The Persistence of Historically Underrepresented Groups

Although admission of underrepresented students at postsecondary institutions in the United States has increased, a review of history revealed a continuum of disparity in persistence and retention rates between underrepresented students and majority students (Loeb & Hurd, 2019). Persistence has been defined as students' ability to continue onto

the next term, whereas retention addresses an institution's ability to maintain a student (National Student Clearinghouse Research Center, 2022; Spears, 2020). This study addressed historically underrepresented students' ability to persist. Academic research has identified several barriers to persistence for historically underrepresented groups.

Scholars have cited rising tuition costs as one main reason students discontinue, but cost is only one barrier (Masterson, 2022; Snider, 2018). For example, a Complete College America (CCA, 2022) report indicated dropout rates of historically excluded students are higher because these students are more likely to attend college part time due to work schedules and family obligations. To close the persistence gap, the CCA recommended institutional reforms addressing the needs of part-time students, like scheduling classes outside traditional hours and creating adult learning programs for working adults. Convergent quantitative and qualitative findings have indicated historically underrepresented students perceived a lack of institutional resources and social and intellectual capital as barriers to advancement and persistence in higher education (Davis et al., 2018; Loeb & Hurd, 2019; McCallen & Johnson, 2020).

Loeb and Hurd (2019) argued students face "additional challenges when they reach college including alienation, culture shock, stigmatization, discrimination, and other marginalizing experiences" (p. 150), which lower a student's sense of status (SSS) and ability to persist in higher education. Loeb and Hurd (2019) defined SSS as "perceived social standing relative to a given social group" (p. 151). The link between SSS and students' self-confidence in academics and ability to persist may indicate a rise of SSS could impact students' achievements and outcomes positively (Loeb & Hurd, 2019). Research also confirmed educational leaders (i.e., faculty) play a significant role

in student success by "imparting intellectual capital and institutional resources critical to navigating the higher education environment" (McCallen & Johnson, 2020, p. 320).

Conclusion

This literature review demonstrated a need for new approaches to address the injustices of inequalities in higher education (B. Clark, 2005; Ladson-Billings & Anderson, 2021; Maxwell, 2022). Decades of interventions by private foundations, federal government, and state government have focused on reallocating wealth, capacities, and other social goods through policy reform (Bastedo et al., 2016; Fraser et al., 2003). These efforts have made an impact on access to education for historically underrepresented students but have not resulted in equity in the area of persistence (NCES, 1993; U.S. Census Bureau, 2019). Even with these advances, historically underrepresented individuals continue to have lower graduation rates than students from other groups (Crumb et al., 2019; Jones, 2013; U.S. Census Bureau, 2019).

Both recognition theory and CRT argue the human race cannot achieve equality until all individuals are treated with equal dignity and worth (Delgado et al., 2017; Fraser et al., 2003; Honneth, 2007; Steele, 2011). Researchers and educational leaders have agreed change must move from theory and conversation to practice (Swanson & Welton, 2019). The persistence of inequity in higher education calls for educational leaders to have a balanced approach to change through both policy modifications and relevant leadership practice. More research remains necessary to provide new strategies for higher education leaders to help break existing barriers to advancement and persistence among historically underrepresented students (Abes et al., 2019; Clark, 2021; Patton et al., 2016). For these reasons, this qualitative hermeneutic phenomenological study sought to

understand and describe the impact of recognition by teachers on historically underrepresented students who have persisted in higher education.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

This chapter outlines the research approach and rationale for this study and explains why a qualitative hermeneutic phenomenological method was helpful in understanding how recognition impacts the persistence of historically underrepresented students in higher education. Chapter 3 includes the hermeneutic phenomenological approach, a philosophical overview, introduction to the researcher, purpose statement, research questions, research design, population and sample, data collection and analysis, trustworthiness, rights of human subjects, limitations, and a summary.

Heidegger's Hermeneutic Philosophy

This study used a qualitative hermeneutic phenomenological approach, studying people's lived experiences in the world (Peoples, 2020). A qualitative approach best identifies cultural, systematic, and societal issues or problems because it "addresses socio behavioral factors such as cultural norms, ethnic identities, gender norms, stigma, and socioeconomic status" (Mack et al., 2011, p. 8) by elevating the voice of underrepresented groups. Two main types of phenomenology foundational philosophies, also called phenomenology frameworks or philosophical frameworks, exist: (a) Husserl's (1859–1938) transcendental or descriptive framework and (b) Heidegger's (1889–1976) hermeneutic or interpretive framework (Peoples, 2020). Recognized as the founder of phenomenology, Husserl argued research is only valid when researchers can suspend judgment, acting as outside impartial observers (Tassone, 2017). Husserl believed "bracketing," a term to describe the suspension of judgment, would lead to a valid and reliable analysis of the phenomenon (Peoples, 2020).

Heidegger, on the other hand, argued it is impossible for researchers to separate themselves from the world, and their lived experiences lead to understanding (Peoples, 2020). Heidegger proposed the hermeneutic circle as a solution to Husserl's concept of bracketing (Sloan & Bowe, 2014). The hermeneutic circle reflects the ongoing revisionary process that builds new understanding and knowledge from foreconception or foresight (Peoples, 2020; Regan, 2012). In this way, researchers revise their judgments, biases, or previous understanding as they gain emerging information from participants (Peoples, 2020). The hermeneutic circle looks at the world through the epistemology of interpretivism (Gray, 2021). Brown (2015) wrote, "Interpretivists are interested in specific, contextualized environments, and acknowledge that reality and knowledge are not objective but influenced by people within that environment" (para. 6). Interpretivism asserts researchers are never removed from the research, making data analysis subjective (Gray, 2021).

The research of this study related closely to Heidegger's hermeneutic interpretive philosophical framework, and a qualitative hermeneutic phenomenology approach aligned with the goals of this research study. A qualitative hermeneutic approach remained essential to the outcome of this research study because it gathers descriptive information, opposed to a quantitative approach, which gathers numerical data (Creswell, 2014). A qualitative phenomenological method does not begin with a hypothesis but instead aims to understand experiences through participants' "first-person point of view" (Gallagher, 2012, p.1). The researcher of this study required an understanding of students' behaviors, beliefs, feelings, perspectives, and cultures (Rahman, 2020) to

answer this study's research question: How does recognition impact the persistence of historically underrepresented students in higher education?

Heidegger's philosophy of hermeneutic phenomenological research aids in understanding students' behaviors, beliefs, feelings, perspectives, and cultures because it centers around the concept of *Dasein* or being (Kakkori, 2020; Peoples, 2020). Horrigan-Kelly et al. (2016) asserted "one of the central tenets of Heidegger's philosophy acknowledges existence as 'being in the world'" (para. 6), understood as embeddedness and inseparability from the world. Heidegger argued Husserl's idea of bracketing inhibits researchers' ability to understand how participants experience and make sense of their world (Heidegger & Schmidt, 2010; Kakkori, 2020; Peoples, 2020). The concept of "being in the world" is important to understanding the phenomenon of recognition and its potential impact on historically underrepresented students in higher education (Horrigan-Kelly et al., 2016).

Through an interpretivism perspective, this researcher sought to obtain an understanding of a unique phenomenon related to a specific population (Creswell, 2014). Therefore, qualitative hermeneutic phenomenological philosophical principles alongside a rigorous methodology made this approach well suited for this research study (Mertens, 2014). Heidegger's philosophy, when combined with recognition and CRT, provided a solid foundation for this research.

Philosophical Worldview

All research involves an "intersection of philosophy, research designs, and specific methods" (Creswell, 2014, p. 5). A researcher's worldview can have a profound effect on the research process and outcomes (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Gray (2011)

defined worldview as “a collection of attitudes, values, stories, and expectations about the world around us, which inform our every thought and action” (para. 5). Capaldi and Proctor (2005) asserted the researcher’s worldview—not the method—dictates the fundamental difference between qualitative and quantitative research. Therefore, it is important to share the worldview that influenced this researcher’s decisions related to the design of the dissertation’s research approach and process.

A transformative worldview stands at the intersection of research and social change (Mertens, 2014) and advocates for “an action agenda for reform that may change lives of the participants, the institutions in which individuals work or live, and the researcher’s life” (Creswell, 2014, p. 9). A transformational worldview focuses on a central phenomenon or social issue such as inequality or empowerment issues (Creswell, 2014). Data collection is achieved collaboratively, providing “a voice for these participants, raising their consciousness or advancing an agenda for change to improve their lives” (Creswell, 2014, p. 10).

San Pedro and Kinloch (2017) argued “co-constructing knowledge, co-creating relationships, and exchanging stories are central to educational research” (p. 1) and practice. Listening and engaging through an exchange of stories creates opportunities for both the practitioner and the student/participant to connect in a way that is not possible in traditional research (San Pedro et al., 2021). A transformative worldview aids the researcher in their understanding of students’ racial, ethnic, and cultural histories, which can lead to lasting social change. Additionally, an introduction to the researcher is necessary to understand what guided their decision making and practice.

About the Researcher

As the researcher for this qualitative study, I brought my own experiences to the work as a historically underrepresented individual. I grew up in a low-income, single-parent household and faced financial and physical barriers that delayed my college education for over a decade. I was also a low-income, first-generation college graduate. Having these experiences as a historically underrepresented student who was a low-income, first-generation student with a dis/ability may create assumptions or biases about the topic I investigated in this study.

Although I share commonalities of being a low-income, first-generation student with a dis/ability with students I interviewed, it is important to acknowledge I am not a person of color and do not, under any circumstance, pretend to understand the compounding challenges and barriers facing students of color. I acknowledge my White privilege, which Kendall (2002) defined as "having greater access to power and resources than people of color [in the same situation] do" (p. 1). Recognizing my White privilege was important in conducting this research because it allowed me to approach the study with a critical lens and strive toward creating more equitable and inclusive spaces in higher education.

My passion is to see every student persist and achieve academic success in higher education. To ensure the trustworthiness of this research, I applied respected theoretical and philosophical frameworks. Through a hermeneutical interpretivism perspective, I acknowledged and embraced my unavoidable and valid subjectivity in conducting this research (Peoples, 2020).

However, I also took a critical social theory approach through the lens of Collins's (1991, 2000) Black feminist social theory, which prioritizes four intentions for research: (a) using concrete experiences as a criterion of meaning, (b) incorporating dialogue to assess knowledge claims, (c) embodying the ethics of caring, and (d) practicing the ethics of personal accountability. Collins (1991) argued individuals who have lived through the experiences being studied are more credible and believable than those who have simply read about them. Collins also emphasized the importance of dialogue to understand the meaning of a phenomenon. Ladson-Billings (2021) added the ethics of caring includes both affective connections between people and a greater sense of commitment to how scholarship and pedagogy can impact people's lives. Although I have not lived through the experiences of someone who is a person of color, I have experienced the impact of poverty on my ability to access, and persist in, higher education. These circumstances have led me to care deeply about the success of every student.

Last, Collins (1991) asserted the ethics of personal accountability requires the researcher's commitment to the philosophical position of the participant to remove bias and gain a comprehensive understanding of their lived experiences. As a result, although some bias may be present in a qualitative hermeneutic design, my related personal experiences may also benefit the design and contribute to a deeper understanding of participants' experiences. With a solid understanding of the research background and the context in which this study is situated, the focus now turns to the research design, which outlines the methodology and approach employed to investigate the research questions and achieve the objectives of this dissertation.

Research Design

This study applied a qualitative hermeneutic phenomenological approach. Although multiple methods exist in educational research, hermeneutic phenomenological serves as a common philosophy in qualitative research (Kakkori, 2020; Seidman, 2019). Oerther (2020) defined hermeneutic phenomenology as a "qualitative research method that allows researchers to study how experiences, traditions, and culture shape ordinary, everyday practices" (p. 1). A qualitative hermeneutic phenomenological approach provides information about personal experiences that helped to answer this study's research question (Armstrong, 2012; Creswell & Poth, 2017; Seidman, 2019). Through this approach to design, the researcher can come to an understanding of a phenomenon by drawing on participants' stories (Oerther, 2020). Furthermore, a hermeneutic phenomenology approach allows researchers to articulate and describe how everyday experiences and practices impact students' ability to persist and achieve academic success in higher education (Oerther, 2020; Peoples, 2020).

The researcher also considered a narrative approach for this study (Creswell & Poth, 2017). Although similar in design and used to understand participants' cultures and experiences, one difference between phenomenology and narrative disqualified a narrative approach from this research (Moustakas, 1994). A narrative approach focuses on gaining information about an experience whereas phenomenological research makes the phenomena central (Creswell & Poth, 2017; Moustakas, 1994; Rahman, 2020). In this case, the use of narrative helped the researcher understand the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994). Therefore, a narrative approach did not meet the requirements for explaining the phenomena of recognition as related to historically underrepresented students' lived

experiences (Peoples, 2020). Having established the research design, the next section delineates the purpose statement, providing the objectives guiding this study and offering a clear direction for the study's data collection and analysis.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative hermeneutic phenomenological study was to understand and describe the impact of recognition by teachers on historically underrepresented students who have persisted in higher education.

Research Questions

This qualitative hermeneutic phenomenological study sought to advance previous research on historically underrepresented students by focusing on the impact of recognition by teachers on students' ability to persist. The primary question asked in this study was: How does recognition impact the persistence of historically underrepresented students in higher education? The subsidiary questions included the following:

RQ1. What leadership theories or practices, if any, impact the persistence of historically underrepresented students in higher education?

RQ2. In what ways, if any, have historically underrepresented students experienced recognition by a teacher?

RQ3. In what ways, if any, have historically underrepresented students experienced misrecognition by a teacher?

RQ4. What is the effect of recognition or misrecognition on the persistence of historically underrepresented students in higher education?

Population

This study focused on historically underrepresented students within the context of higher education. The term "historically underrepresented students" refers to those students who belong to racial or ethnic groups that have been disadvantaged and have traditionally had lower enrollment and graduation rates in higher education compared to other groups (Goforth, 2022). This population can include, but is not limited to, individuals who identify as Black, Hispanic, Native American, Pacific Islander, first-generation, and low-income students (Goforth, 2022).

Students chosen for this research attended a 4-year college or university in Washington State. Within this population, the study sought to explore the impact of teacher recognition on student persistence and, in doing so, contribute to the broader understanding of factors influencing the success and retention of historically underrepresented students in higher education.

Sample

The Northwest University Institutional Review Board approved the methodology for this research. The researcher then recruited participants by connecting with persons within postsecondary wraparound programs who acted as gatekeepers (Seidman, 2019). Andoh-Arthu (2020) defined gatekeepers as "essential mediators for accessing study settings and participants within social research" (para. 1). Within an organization, gatekeepers have the power to grant or deny an invitation to research (Andoh-Arthu, 2020; Seidman, 2019). Gatekeepers remain essential for the protection of human participants and were an important part of this research (Andoh-Arthu, 2020; Creswell & Poth, 2017; Seidman, 2019).

The researcher emailed an invitation (see Appendix A) to persons who acted as gatekeepers within eligible wraparound programs. Once the gatekeeper identified a potential participant, the gatekeeper sent the participant an information packet including (a) a letter of invitation (see Appendix B), (b) an informed consent form (see Appendix C), (c) the interview protocol (see Appendix D), and (d) a selection criteria checklist (see Appendix E). This packet included information on the purpose of the research and what the participant could expect if they chose to participate (Mack et al., 2011; Peoples, 2020; Seidman, 2019).

This study used a criterion i purposeful sampling approach, which involves selecting "cases that meet some predetermined criterion of importance" (Palinkas et al., 2015, p. 17). By using a purposeful sampling design, the researcher of this qualitative study could "learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose" (Patton, 2001, p. 46). This study did not discriminate based on gender or dis/ability. The sample was selected based on the criteria of this purposeful design. Due to the large sample size of historically underrepresented groups in U.S. higher education (43.9% reported in 2020 by the Educational Data Initiative), this researcher drew from a sample of 15 students—nine female students and six male students—who had participated in wraparound programs at seven different 4-year colleges or universities in Washington State.

Participants were selected if they met the following criteria: (a) 18 years or older, (b) identified as a Black individual, Hispanic individual, or Native American/Alaska Native, (c) enrolled in a 4-year university or college in Washington State, (d) a current or past participant in a higher education wraparound program, and (e) willingly agreed to participate in this study and complete a voluntary consent form (see Appendix E). The

researcher chose Washington State for this study based on a review of literature that revealed a need for research and strategies to address inequalities facing underrepresented students (Kwakye & Deane, 2022). In sum, this study's careful participant selection and comprehensive methodology provided a solid basis for investigating the experiences of historically underrepresented students in Washington State's postsecondary wraparound programs.

Data Collection

This qualitative research study was designed with a hermeneutic phenomenological approach using multiple sources of data collection instruments. The "researcher is the key instrument" (Creswell, 2014, p. 185) as the designer, collector, and decoder of information. The researcher chose one-on-one interviews to investigate and identify any association between two sets of phenomena: the impact of recognition and persistence in higher education (Bazeley, 2013).

The researcher also used a semistructured interview procedure to create interview questions relevant to the study's purpose (Peoples, 2020). Researchers use a semistructured interview protocol to facilitate flexibility and adaptability in the interview process, allowing for in-depth exploration of the research topic while providing a framework for consistent and relevant interview questions (Peoples, 2020). The researcher designed the interviews to include open-ended questions with the purpose of identifying themes and understanding each participant's experience (Creswell & Poth, 2017; Seidman, 2019). Appendices C and D, respectively, contain a sample of the consent form and interview protocol for these interviews.

The researcher employed the video meeting platform, Zoom, for one-on-one interviews and used it for three reasons: (a) to allow participants an interview option that met their comfort level and schedule, (b) to remove the barrier of geography so more students could participate, and (c) to allow the researcher to conduct this research in a timely manner. A saturation point was reached after the researcher had conducted 11 interviews (Peoples, 2020). Saturation is a key concept in qualitative research that refers to the point at which the researcher has collected enough data to have an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon studied (Bazeley, 2013).

Charmaz (2014) defined saturation as "the point at which no new properties, dimensions, or relationships are found in the data, and the categories are saturated with properties and dimensions" (p. 43). Therefore, the purpose of demonstrating saturation is to show that the researcher thoroughly explored the research topic and that further data collection will unlikely yield new insights or perspectives (Creswell & Poth, 2017). With the data collection methods described, the following section outlines the process of analyzing the gathered data to address the research questions.

Data Analysis

To analyze data, the researcher transcribed the one-on-one interviews using Otter and then read and edited the transcripts to check for accuracy (Bazeley, 2013). To ensure rigor, the researcher used member checking to confirm the validity of the interview content by sending a copy of the transcript to participants for feedback (Creswell & Poth, 2017). The researcher then created coding sheets for each interview question with codes, categories, themes, definitions, quotes, research questions, and sources (Creswell, 2014; Seidman, 2019). Following creation of the coding sheets, the researcher completed two

rounds of coding using an inductive method to identify patterns, concepts, and themes that emerged naturally from the content (Creswell & Poth, 2017). Coding in rounds aligned with Heidegger's hermeneutic circle in which researchers revisit themes in the data to add knowledge and make necessary revisions to findings (Peoples, 2020).

The first round of coding took place within 48 hours of each interview, with a second round taking place after completion of all data collection from the one-on-one interviews and completion of member checking (Saldana, 2009). The researcher used descriptive (e.g., "family legacy," "academic support") and interpretive codes (e.g., "self-limiting beliefs," "sense of belonging") to tag sections of text relevant to the research question (Peoples, 2020). The researcher also noted codes that were expected, surprising, and unusual (Creswell, 2014). The researcher then refined the codes and calculated how many times each participant spoke about each descriptive and interpretative code.

Three themes emerged as significant to answering the study's research questions: (a) teacher recognition and its influence on persistence, (b) the impact of teacher leadership styles on student academic success, and (c) academic inequalities and the misrecognition of historically underrepresented students. The researcher also identified three additional themes not related to the research questions of this study. Although these additional themes did not align with the study's purpose, they were relevant to research on access and persistence of historically underrepresented students and will be discussed in Chapter 5.

Trustworthiness

The purpose of qualitative research is to understand participants' lived experiences related to the questions examined (Creswell & Poth, 2017). This goal creates

a potential relationship between the researcher and participants that can lead to an inaccurate recording of details or researcher biases (Creswell & Poth, 2017). Noble and Smith (2015) stated qualitative research is "frequently criticized for lacking scientific rigor with poor justification of the methods adopted, lack of transparency in the analytical procedures and the findings being merely a collection of personal opinions subject to researcher bias" (p. 1). Despite these criticisms, qualitative research is a valuable approach for gaining in-depth understanding and generating new insights (Creswell & Poth, 2017).

To establish trustworthiness, the researcher followed Lincoln and Guba's (1985) four dimensions criteria:

1. Credibility: to establish confidence that the results (from the perspective of the participants) are true, credible, and believable.
2. Transferability: to extend the degree to which the results can be generalized or transferred to other contexts or settings.
3. Dependability: to ensure the findings of this qualitative inquiry are repeatable if the inquiry occurred within the same cohort of participants, coders and context.
4. Confirmability: to extend the confidence that the results would be confirmed or corroborated by other researchers. (Stahl & King, 2020, p. 27)

First, credibility was established through member checking. Second, transferability was ensured through a purposeful sampling strategy. Third, dependability was accomplished by creating an audit trail that included a detailed record of the research process, including data collection, coding, and analysis steps. Last, confirmability was established through

the practice of reflexivity by the researcher who spent time through the research process reflecting on her own biases and preconceptions.

Additional strategies used in this qualitative study to create trustworthiness included corroborating evidence through triangulation of multiple data sources (interviews and existing research/secondary sources) member checking, clarification of researcher bias, and data saturation (Creswell & Poth, 2017).

To increase the level of trustworthiness, the researcher asked participants to take part in member checking, consisting of a technique in which the researcher returns the interview transcripts to participants to check for accuracy of the researcher's interpretation of their experience (Birt et al., 2016). Last, the researcher gave careful attention to data saturation, whereby no new data, themes, or patterns arose after 11 one-on-one interviews (Peoples, 2020). These measures contributed to the trustworthiness and rigor of the findings, enhancing the overall validity and reliability of this study and protecting the students who participated.

Protection of Human Subjects

The protection of human subjects is essential in qualitative research (Babbie, 2015; Creswell & Poth, 2017). The researcher must put ethical standards in place to safeguard participants from harm. Orb et al. (2000) defined ethics as doing good and avoiding harm. It remains critical that participation is voluntary and that the researcher keeps participants' experiences confidential (Babbie, 2015; Orb et al., 2000). Principles of "respect for persons, concern for welfare, and justice" (Creswell & Poth, 2017, p. 54) and ethical considerations must take place at every stage and guide all research.

To ensure the protection of human subjects in this qualitative study, the researcher worked closely with the Northwest University Institutional Review Board for approval of this research methodology (Creswell & Poth, 2017). Once approval took place, the researcher contacted persons who acted as gatekeepers in eligible wraparound programs by email or phone, using the script in Appendix A. If the gatekeeper agreed to help in this research, the researcher emailed a participant packet to the gatekeeper.

To ensure protection of participants, the letter of invitation included a complete description of this study's purpose, procedures, risks, inconveniences, discomforts, potential benefits, and participant confidentiality (Babbie, 2015; Creswell & Poth, 2017). The purpose of informed consent is to establish "a norm in which subjects base their voluntary participation in research projects on a full understanding of the possible risks involved" (Babbie, 2015, p. 64). The researcher included an audio release section on the informed consent form (see Appendix C) to notify participants that the one-on-one interviews would be recorded (Office of Research Integrity, 2021). The informed consent form also contained a destruction timeframe for the data and the name and contact person of the faculty advisor for this study who would have access to the recordings while they are stored (Research Administration, 2015). Additionally, the researcher applied pseudonyms (e.g., P1, P2, P3) to identify each participant to ensure confidentiality (Babbie, 2015).

Protection of participants' personal data and interview transcriptions remains imperative. The federal Institutional Review Board (2019) requires retention of research records for at least 3 years after completion of the research (45 CFR 46). The informed consent form disclosed the destruction date of records. Additionally, data were stored in a

secure location (Office of the Commissioner, 2019), kept in a locked office on the Northwest University campus. For this research study, a Northwest University institutionally secured laptop within a One-Drive Personal Vault encrypted and password protected with two-factor authentication (Office of the Commissioner, 2019) maintained data files. Having established the necessary protocols for the protection of human subjects, it is important to consider the limitations inherent in this study that may have impacted the generalizability and interpretation of the findings.

Limitations

All research has limitations that can influence the interpretation and outcome of a study (Babbie, 2015; Creswell & Poth, 2017). This section provides full disclosure of the limitations to communicate transparency and provide context for the reader (Ross & Zaidi, 2019). This qualitative research study had three primary limitations: sample size, population, and personal bias (Creswell & Poth, 2017). The researcher's conscious inclusionary decisions in developing a methodology around a small sample size, a demographic of historically underrepresented students, and the researcher's personal experience as a historically underrepresented student and familiarity with two of the colleges used in the sample may have produced a systematic bias (Ross & Zaidi, 2019). The researcher examined alternative approaches but determined a qualitative hermeneutic phenomenological study would provide the most trustworthy and robust results due to the opportunity to understand participants' lived experiences.

Summary

This chapter provided a rationale and outline of the research design taken in this study and explained why a qualitative hermeneutic phenomenological approach proved

necessary to answering the research questions. Specifically, the chapter contained the researcher's philosophical overview, introduction to the researcher, purpose statement, research questions, research design, population and sample, data collection and analysis, trustworthiness, rights of human subjects, and limitations of this study.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

Chapter 4 presents and explains the themes and key findings of this qualitative hermeneutic phenomenological study. To guide the reader's understanding of the main themes and the findings, Chapter 4 begins with the purpose statement, research questions, and an outline of the research method and data collection procedure, an overview of participant demographics and characteristics, key findings, and conclusions. The three main themes discussed in this chapter emerged based on an analysis of the one-on-one interviews using a hermeneutic approach drawing on Heidegger's philosophical principles (Peoples, 2021).

The three main themes included (a) teacher recognition and its influence on persistence, (b) the impact of teacher leadership styles on student academic success, and (c) academic inequalities and the misrecognition of historically underrepresented students. The researcher identified three additional themes not related to the research questions of this study. Although these additional themes did not align with the study's purpose and research questions, they were relevant to research on access and persistence of historically underrepresented students and will be discussed in Chapters 4 and 5.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative hermeneutic phenomenological study was to understand and describe the impact of recognition by teachers on historically underrepresented students who have persisted in higher education.

Research Questions

This qualitative hermeneutic phenomenological study sought to advance previous research on historically underrepresented students by focusing on the impact of recognition by teachers on students' ability to persist. The primary question asked in this study was: How does recognition impact the persistence of historically underrepresented students in higher education? The subsidiary questions included the following:

RQ1. What leadership theories or practices, if any, impact the persistence of historically underrepresented students in higher education?

RQ2. In what ways, if any, have historically underrepresented students experienced recognition by a teacher?

RQ3. In what ways, if any, have historically underrepresented students experienced misrecognition by a teacher?

RQ4. What is the effect of recognition or misrecognition on the persistence of historically underrepresented students in higher education?

Research Method and Data Collection Procedure

This study used a qualitative hermeneutic phenomenological approach, which is commonly employed in educational research (Kakkori, 2020). The researcher obtained data through one-on-one interviews employing the virtual meeting platform, Zoom. The researcher used the Otter.ai application to record and transcribe the interviews. Interviews lasted between 32 and 69 minutes. As the main instrument, the researcher analyzed the audio-recorded interviews using a phenomenological qualitative research method supported by Heidegger's hermeneutic philosophy (Creswell & Poth, 2017; Peoples, 2020; Saldaña, 2009).

Three hermeneutic concepts, *Dasein*, foresight/foreconception, and the hermeneutic circle, were applied in the interpretation of this research. *Dasein* refers to the idea of human existence as a whole rather than as a collection of isolated experiences (Gadamer, 2013). This notion stresses the interconnectedness of all aspects of human experience, including historical, social, cultural, and physical factors (Gadamer, 2013; Heidegger & Schmidt, 2010; Peoples, 2020). The researcher employed a *Dasein* perspective to understand the broader context of participants' lives, including their historical background, family of origin, race/ethnicity, and culture (Heidegger & Schmidt, 2010) that shaped their experiences in higher education.

Foresight or foreconcept refers to the preconceptions and/or pre-understanding the researcher brings into data analysis (Peoples, 2020). This concept recognizes the researcher will inevitably approach the data with certain biases and assumptions, which can influence their interpretation of the data (Peoples, 2020). In this study, the researcher acknowledged preconceived ideas she had about the research topic due to her life experiences as a low-income student who did not have access to college until she was an adult learner. Therefore, it was important for the researcher to reflect on her assumptions and bias and strongly consider how they might have influenced her interpretation of the data (Bazeley, 2013; Peoples, 2020).

The hermeneutic circle refers to the iterative process of interpreting a text or data set by moving between the specific elements and the larger context they belong to (Gadamer, 2013; Sloan & Bowe, 2014). For this study, the research moved back and forth between reading and listening to transcripts to highlighting significant words and passages while considering the broader context in which they were situated (Peoples,

2020). This method afforded a new understanding of the data while illuminating codes, categories, and themes that made up the findings and discussion in this dissertation (Bazeley, 2013; Peoples, 2020).

Research Participants

Fifteen students from seven Washington State 4-year colleges or universities were represented in this study. The researcher used a criteria checklist to screen participants (see Appendix E). For this study, the researcher selected participants if they met the following criteria: (a) 18 years or older; (b) from a historically underrepresented group (Black, Hispanic, or Native American/Alaska Native); (c) enrolled in a 4-year university or college in Washington State; (d) current or past participant in a higher education wraparound program; and (e) willingly agreed to participate in this study and complete a voluntary consent form (see Appendix E).

Due to the large sample size of historically underrepresented groups in U.S. higher education, the researcher based selection on a purposeful design (Creswell & Poth, 2017). Table 3 provides a demographic summary of participants and indicates six male participants and nine female participants ranging from ages 18–22 participated in this study. Additionally, two students identified as Black, four as Native American, and nine as Hispanic or Latino. To protect participants' identity, the researcher used pseudonyms (Seidman, 2019).

Table 3

Description of Participants

Participants	College	Major	Race	Gender	Age
P1	4-Year Public	Sports science	Hispanic	M	20
P2	4-Year Public	Business	Hispanic	F	22

P3	4-Year Private	Business	Hispanic	F	22
P4	4-Year Public	Nursing	Black	F	21
P5	4-Year Public	Business	Hispanic	M	20
P6	4-Year Private	Education	Hispanic	F	18
P7	4-Year Public	Business	Native American	F	22
P8	4-Year Private	Political science	Hispanic	M	22
P9	4-Year Public	Human services	Black	F	20
P10	4-Year Public	Engineering	Native American	M	18
P11	4-Year Private	Business	Hispanic	F	20
P12	4-Year Private	Computer science	Native American	F	22
P13	4-Year Public	Design	Hispanic	M	20
P14	4-Year Public	Education	Native American	F	20
P15	4-Year Public	Nursing	Hispanic	M	19

Demographic data were provided voluntarily by study participants who had the freedom to self-identify their college/university, degree, race/ethnicity, gender, and age. All participants identified as historically underrepresented students who had persisted in higher education in Washington State. Participant demographic information indicated the study encompassed individuals with different race/ethnicity, genders, and educational experiences. Study participants' diverse backgrounds provided a rich foundation for exploring the shared experiences that emerged during the qualitative phenomenological analysis.

Themes: Shared Experiences

Participants' shared experiences served as the foundation of this qualitative phenomenology, helping the researcher understand the complexities of human experience and perception (Horrigan-Kelly et al., 2016). Shared experiences refer to aspects of participants' lives that are relevant to the research question and phenomenon being studied (Bazeley, 2013). By using a hermeneutic analysis of the narratives participants shared, the researcher gained an understanding of the common lived experiences among historically underrepresented students who have persisted in higher education. The common understanding in this study includes cultural background, ethnic identity,

socioeconomic status, academic history, and other relevant factors participants have in common.

This study employed one-on-one interviews to collect data, which the researcher analyzed through duplicate words, codes, categories, similar phrases, and direct quotes to identify recurring patterns and themes (Creswell & Poth, 2017). Table 4 presents a list of the three main themes and subthemes that emerged from the analysis of the data: (a) teacher recognition and its influence on persistence, (b) the impact of teacher leadership styles on student academic success, and (c) academic inequalities and the misrecognition of historically underrepresented students.

Table 4

Themes and Subthemes

Theme	Subthemes
Theme 1: Teacher recognition and its influence on persistence	Teacher impact on college decisions Teacher–student connectedness Words of affirmation Misrecognition
Theme 2: The impact of teacher leadership styles on student academic success	Servant leadership Transformational leadership Social justice leadership Strengths-based leadership
Theme 3: Academic inequalities and the misrecognition of historically underrepresented students	Economic Structural Social

The three themes revealed in this research answered the study's research questions and illustrated the experiences and impact of recognition in participants' lives. Table 5 displays the frequency with which participants discussed each theme, highlighting the relevance of each theme to participants' experiences.

Table 5

Participant Shared Experiences

Participants	Theme 1	Theme 2	Theme 3
P1	6	3	1
P2	15	10	1
P3	12	4	4
P4	1	1	13
P5	12	9	5
P6	9	3	3
P7	11	6	4
P8	6	2	4
P9	9	6	5
P10	5	5	4
P11	7	4	2
P12	6	5	7
P13	7	3	3
P14	15	1	1
P15	8	1	1
Totals	129	64	59

Note. The numbers in this table are representative of how many times a participant spoke about an individual theme.

Last, three additional themes arose from the data that will be discussed in the findings and discussion section of this study: (a) access to higher education through academic services, (b) family influence on future orientation, and (c) historically underrepresented students' motivation to pay it forward. Although these three additional themes did not align with the research questions of this study, they are relevant to academic research on historically underrepresented students and therefore important to report and discuss.

Theme 1: Teacher Recognition and Its Influence on Persistence

This theme describes the commonalities of how recognition by a teacher influenced persistence among historically underrepresented students. Fourteen of 15 participants spoke about the impact of recognition by a teacher on their desire and ability

to persist in higher education. This recognition was expected due to the intentionality of the interview questions. Fourteen participants recalled memories of teachers in grade school, middle school, and high school who influenced their lives and their ability to advance to college and persist. This section begins with an analysis of the finding on teacher recognition followed by its four subthemes: (a) teacher impact on college decisions, (b) teacher–student connectedness, (c) words of affirmation, and (d) misrecognition by a teacher.

Recognition

Study participants spoke about the impact of recognition from a teacher on their ability to persist 129 times. For this study, recognition was defined as validating the worth (dignity), experiences, talents, and potential of every individual, regardless of race, ethnicity, or gender through words and actions (Altmeyer, 2018; Giles, 2020; Hicks, 2019; Honneth, 2020). The theme, teacher recognition and its influence on persistence, was expected due to the purpose of this research. Students used phrases like “they expressed interest,” “he/she saw me,” “I felt validated,” and [my teacher] “saw my potential” and “gave words of affirmation” to describe the feeling of recognition by a teacher. When asked the question, “Can you describe a time you felt recognized by a teacher?,” 14 of 15 participants recalled stories of teachers validating their worth (dignity), experiences, talents, and potential through words and actions.

Two participants described the emotional impact of being recognized publicly for their achievements. Participant 1 shared a personal story of being called up in front of everyone during his high school graduation ceremony to receive an award from his teacher. He described the moment as emotional, highlighting the close relationship he had

developed with his teacher over the years. This student's emotional response to the recognition suggested it was a significant and meaningful event for him. He felt like a good person and was proud of his accomplishments. This recognition also confirmed his efforts and respectful behavior had not gone unnoticed. Participant 1 explained:

> [Thinking of a time when I was recognized] It was a pretty emotional moment for me and [my teacher] because I [filler words], I've known him for a while. He'd seen me grow up and I'd had him for [filler words] three different classes in those six years. So, he and I were close, and it was the last week of high school [filler words]. [My teacher] called me up in front of everyone during the graduation ceremony and gave me this award and that just made me feel like a good person because I'd always been really respectful to him, and I feel like I put in [filler words] good effort in his classes. So that was pretty cool to get recognized for that. He knew I was an athlete and knew I was going to run in college. Yeah, that was definitely a time when I felt recognized by a teacher.

Similarly, Participant 15 shared an experience of being recognized publicly for his work, describing it as a "surprising" and "exciting moment" that validated his efforts. The words this student used to tell his story of public recognition suggest this recognition had a significant impact and affirming effect, giving him a sense of pride in his work. Overall, these students' stories highlight the importance of public recognition in motivating and affirming students' efforts. The emotional impact of being recognized publicly seemed to reinforce participants' sense of self-worth and pride in their accomplishments, leading to continued motivation and success and the power of being seen, a validating factor for students.

Several participants described the feeling of "being seen" as a motivator to persist. Participants 2 and 6 shared stories of teachers who recognized their struggles and stepped forward to encourage their potential, which made the students feel heard, seen, and validated.

A female individual, Participant 2, described how her teacher noticed her struggles with depression and challenged her to work on her mental health if she wanted to achieve the higher education goals she dreamed of accomplishing. This recognition and challenge were significant for this student, who was considering dropping out. The teacher's expressed interest in her future was a wake-up call that motivated her to keep going. Participant 2 recalled this story:

> He [my teacher] saw me. I was really depressed that semester, and I would show up to his class in my pajamas every day. And I would have rolled out of bed and just [filler words] sit there and doodle all day, like all of the class and I was trying to participate but I [filler words] mentally and emotionally out, I just couldn't. But I showed up. And one day he pulled me aside after class and was like, [student's name], I recognize that you are extremely depressed. And I know that you want to go further in your education (because I had shared with him that I wanted to go on to get my master's and possibly PhD one day) and he was like, if you want to go that far in your education, you have to, you must work on your mental health. And that was the first time I had a professor or teacher ever kind of call me out a little bit but also challenged me to take a step up and go further. I was actually thinking about dropping out. So that was kind of a wake-up call for me.

This quotation demonstrates how when students perceive they are being listened to, acknowledged, and confirmed, their persistence is strengthened.

Similarly, another female student shared a story of feeling validated and seen, despite considering herself too introverted to stand out in class. This individual was surprised when a teacher offered her a job and acknowledged the effort she put into her classwork. Participant 6's teacher saw her diligent nature in her writing and attentiveness in class. This recognition was especially meaningful for this student, who viewed herself as quieter and more reserved than other students. Participant 6 shared these words:

> [My teacher] mentioned that she had been noticing me. She said she recognized the way I converse with people and how I carry myself. To my surprise, she offered me a job position at school. I felt validated and seen because I didn't think she would notice me in class as I didn't speak much. Though I sat in the front, there weren't many opportunities for me to speak out. Through my writing and her perception of me from afar, she saw some potential in me, which made me feel recognized. Her offer for the job position warmed my heart because I realized I wasn't just another person in that class.

These stories of two female participants show that, for students, having someone see them helped them feel empowered.

Participants 5, 10, and 12 spoke about the power of being seen and recognized for their potential, talents, and abilities and that specific recognitions significant impact on their motivation to persist. Participant 5 emphasized the importance of having teachers and mentors who recognized and pushed forward his strengths and potential, and how

this recognition gave him the confidence to believe in himself and his abilities, empowering him to persist. This student explained:

> When a teacher or mentor recognizes your potential and supports you, it can be really empowering. It gives you the confidence to believe in yourself and your abilities. I have had a few teachers and mentors who took the time to get to know me and my background and who encouraged me to pursue my goals. That kind of recognition and support really made a difference in my experience as a student, and I think it played a role in my ability to persist.

The story of this student highlighted the impact of supportive teachers and mentors who recognized his strengths and potential, giving him the confidence to persist and believe in himself.

A female individual, Participant 10, shared a story of a teacher she had in her freshman year who validated her intelligence through the act of recognition. The reference to the race/ethnicity of this specific teacher is important because this student had never had a teacher of color before this class. This student explained: “She was a Hispanic teacher. And she was also [filler words] a mentor and it was the first time I really felt like my intelligence was recognized or validated. She really valued the points that I brought to the table.” Similarly, Participant 12, who considered herself a double minority as a woman of color in a predominantly White college majoring in the predominantly White male-dominated field of computer science, felt validated when a teacher she had never had for a class acknowledged her hard work and offered her a job as a research assistant. Additionally, this student recalled feeling “pretty validated as a

computer science student, especially, you know, being a woman in STEM." Recognition in the form of validation was a driver of motivation for these four students.

Participants 8, 9, 11, and 12 said recognition gave them a feeling of pride, a feeling of respect, and a sense of belonging. Participants 8 and 9 both expressed feelings of gratitude for teachers who recognized their hard work. Likewise, a female student, Participant 9, said, "Honestly, if [a teacher] is telling me what I can work on and telling me, what I'm [filler words] getting better at [filler words,] that's going to strengthen my skills." A male student, Participant 11, said his teachers recognized him through the act of respect. Finally, Participant 12, a female student, shared how the act of recognition validated her intelligence and gave her a sense of belonging:

> When I felt recognized by a professor . . . it felt like I had a reason to be here more than just trying to keep food on my table in the future. It made me feel like I belonged in higher education . . . it was the first time it really felt like my intelligence was recognized or validated.

Overall, these participants' quotes highlight the impact teacher recognition on students' ability to persist in higher education, but it is important to acknowledge the one student who did not feel recognized by a teacher. Participant 4 left the traditional school system after her fifth-grade year due to illness and the onset of a physical disability. These circumstances greatly impacted her level of interaction with teachers/professors and make her lived experiences distinct from the other participants. Still, the data show recognition can provide students with a sense of belonging, validation of their abilities, and motivation to pursue their dreams in college and beyond. Further investigation of the

finding revealed four subcategories: (a) teacher impact on college decisions, (b) teacher–student connectedness, (c) words of affirmation, and (d) misrecognition by a teacher.

Teacher Impact on College Decisions. When asked, "What influence, if any, did a teacher have on your decision to attend college?," six students told stories of how a teacher's words and actions had impacted their decision and ability to attend college. Participant 1 shared how his coach, who was also a teacher, made him aware of college and scholarship opportunities, and how their words and encouragement helped him move forward in his education. Another student explained how teachers helped her overcome the financial obstacle of going to college by asking questions, expanding her thought process, and providing resources for financial aid. Participant 3 explained:

> I was very conscious of [family] finances. My parents tried to hide it from me. So, I think in the back of my mind, I didn't want my parents to have to pay for this. I didn't know how I would do it—to pay for school, stuff like that, but my teachers asked the questions, I think that was the greatest influence in terms of [filler words] explaining my options. So, they [teachers] had a lot of influence in terms of expanding my thought process on how that would be possible for me, and even just giving me the links on where to apply for FAFSA was helpful.

Similarly, Participants 2, 6, 7, and 8 all expressed gratitude for teachers who expressed belief in their ability to attend and succeed in school. For example, Participant 2 described how an English teacher's words gave her the confidence to pursue college. She said:

> I had one teacher in my ninth- and 10th-grade years, who was an English teacher, and she always champion[ed] me, spoke life into me and, called out the good in everything that I did. And it made me realize like, oh, I could do this.

These participants' stories revealed the impact words and encouragement can have on a student's self-belief and self-determination.

Participants 6 and 7 shared how their teachers in high school provided relevant and tangible help that enabled them to prepare for college. Participant 6 shared how one of his teachers asked questions about the students' dreams for the future and then tailored lessons and class projects to students' interests and strengths. For example, if a student loved art, this teacher would offer a related art project, or if a student had a passion for writing, this teacher would offer a creative writing project. Participant 7, a female student, told several stories of high school teachers whose words and deeds also influenced her college decision. For example, her English teacher went above and beyond her job description to read every scholarship essay. This student credited this teacher's words and actions to her ability to apply and be accepted into college. Participant 7 recalled:

> [Teachers in high school] would say, "You are meant to go to college, go to college." A lot of them did my letter writing, or they pushed me to keep going. My English teacher read my essays for every single scholarship and every single application I did, and there was no hesitation.

These students acknowledged the critical role of their high school teachers in helping them prepare for college, with examples including tailored lessons and projects based on student interests and help with scholarship and college applications.

Similarly, Participant 13 recalled how his teacher's words and actions propelled him forward into his college career by helping him build his portfolio and make connections to prospective schools:

> Our teachers affirmed us by [filler words] giving us more encouragement and developmental of growth, but also, one on one experience—giving us advice, as well as [filler words] giving us like possible interests of [filler words] what we could do with that and also giving us ideas where we could grow. That really helped with [filler words] building up [filler words], portfolios, resumes, and building connections to where we could use those connections for a possible college career too.

These findings illustrate how teachers helped students move forward on their education journey by going beyond in-class instruction.

Conversely, seven participants did not cite teachers as the main motivator for attending college. Four of these participants credited parents, two participants referred to television and media, and one participant cited self-determination as the main motivating factor for attending college. For Participant 1, his parents were the biggest influence in his decision to go to college. He said, "I kind of just knew early on [filler words] from conversations with my parents that college was the right path for me." Likewise, a female student, Participant 4, said:

> I don't think any teachers ever had any impact [on my decision to go to college]. As a child, college . . . wasn't necessarily a requirement . . . but it was definitely [filler words] the primary option, and then after that, [filler words] my only option.

Moreover, one female student, Participant 14 said her parents had always expected her to go to college; it was important to them that she get a degree after high school.

Participants 5 and 9 noted television or media as an influencer in their college decision. Participant 5 said, “People like scientists Bill Nye the Science Guy, Neil deGrasse Tyson, and others [helped me persist].” Participant 9 recalled watching television shows and movies highlighting teenagers going to college. These shows inspired her as a young girl to go to college. Participant 11 did not attribute her decision to attend college to an academic program, teachers, or parents; instead, she attributed it to the mental representation of seeing college students and self-determination. This female individual shared neither of her parents went to college nor did they have any expectations for her to go to college. This student credited her desire and determination to attend college to seeing the college students in the café and deciding she wanted that life. For these seven students, parents, media, and self-determination influenced their decisions to go to college.

Although teachers were not noted as influencers in the decision-making process for these seven students, several spoke about the impact of affirmation, encouragement, and accountability they received from teachers. For example, Participant 3 said, “I will forever be grateful for that amazing teacher” who held her accountable for getting her work done. Participant 5 said, “There were also several teachers who were inspiring in how they taught and had a level of awareness on how to help students through their studies.” Participant 14 said, “Teachers did not impact my decision, but they were affirming and encouraging.” Although these seven students’ teachers did not play a role

in their decision to go to college, the teacher–student connectedness/relationship influenced their ability to persist in school.

Teacher–Student Connectedness. All study participants shared stories of teacher–student connectedness/relationships, and many gave tangible examples of how teachers connected with students and helped them persist in higher education. For example, communication, empathy, creativity, flexibility, adaptability, caring, availability, and genuine interest were some of ways students described their teachers during the interview. Participant 6 spoke about the impact of professors who "took the initiative to get to know their students on a personal level, beyond typical teacher–student interactions." Several other participants told stories of how teachers expressed genuine interest in their lives and took the time to help them meet their academic goals. Consistently, participants identified teacher–student connectedness as a reason for their ability to persist in education. Participant 5, a male student, recalled his experience:

> I have had a few teachers and mentors who took the time to get to know me and my background and who encouraged me to pursue my goals. That kind of recognition and support really made a difference in my experience as a student, and I think it played a role in my ability to persist.

In this narrative, the student highlighted the importance of a teacher–student relationship to encourage and equip them in their desire and ability to stay in school.

Participant 5 explained how the recognition and support he received from teachers and mentors made a significant difference in his experience as a student, and he believed it played a vital role in his ability to persist. Similarly, Participant 12 shared about two teachers who "saw her potential" and took her "under their wings" as "informal mentors."

Participant 13 said, “One of the things that helped me persist was the strong connection with my teachers.” Participant 14 underscored the impact of teachers who took the time to know their students:

> I think when a teacher tries to get to know their students right off the bat. I think that creates [filler word] a relationship. I think developing a relationship really helps how you finish up it helps me like I can keep going in the class.

These quotes illustrate how teacher–student connectedness and mentorship increase students’ sense of worth and help them persist in school.

The impact of teachers who expressed genuine interest and made time for students was evident throughout the data collection and analysis process. Two students shared stories of teachers who set up check-ins and offered personal support that helped them stay on track. Participant 9 remembered a teacher who set up midquarter check-in meetings that helped her stay on track. Additionally, Participant 2 shared:

> Having really awesome professors who care and take the time out of their day to even get to know me on a human level, not just a student/teacher level [helped me persist], and they’re like, “Hey, I see that you haven’t turned in an assignment for three weeks. Like, let’s talk about what’s going on in your life.”

Another student spoke about how teachers provided not only academic support but also outside-of-classroom support that made students feel welcomed and supported. Participant 15 explained:

> [My teachers] really wanted to work alongside students and me to help us reach our goals and to achieve them in the classroom. [They] also provided support for

> outside-of-classroom things as well. And so, they were [filler words] a good role model and they really helped students' [filler words] feel more welcomed as well.

Throughout the interview process, students spoke about the impact of teacher care and flexibility on their capacity to persist.

One female student told a story of a teacher who exhibited care and compassion at a time when she was struggling in school by adjusting the due date for an assignment. Participant 6 said, "If my teacher had not allowed me to turn in the assignment late, I would have failed. I was already down and that would have like, set me back a lot." Likewise, Participant 11 shared how a teacher's flexibility and connectivity to students helped her succeed. She explained:

> I would say allowing some flexibility in things like lesson plans are a huge thing. Sometimes, [filler words] some things don't quite click. One of the best professors I've ever had [filler words] a really good connection with all of her students. [For example],
>
> last week . . . I was so busy and confused about the assignment, I sent [my professor] a text at midnight, and after 5 minutes she reply back to me.

In every example, students shared how teacher–student connectedness/relationships helped them persist in higher education. Additionally, students' quotes in this section illustrate how important words of affirmation are to teacher–student connectedness/relationships.

Words of Affirmation. When asked the question, "In what ways have you felt affirmed by a teacher as a college student?," all but one participant (Participant 4) recalled stories of being affirmed by a teacher in higher education. Significantly, students

spoke about how affirmation helped them persist, even though the topic of persistence was not part of the question. Affirmations of student potential and/or talents were prominent among most participants' lived experiences. Participants 1, 2, 3, 5, and 6 shared stories of how a teacher's affirmation of their talents, potential, and abilities had a profound impact on their motivation to persist in college. Participant 1, a male student, shared words of affirmation were one of the "biggest influences" in his decision to attend and continue in college. Participant 2 recalled a professor who made a point to affirm her talent and respectfully challenge her to work harder. In her own words, she shared:

> . . . you're good at what you're doing, and I want you to go further, and I want you [he would challenge me] to do more work than what he was giving my peers to do because I could do what my peers were doing. So, I felt really affirmed in what I was good at because he did that.

This student went on to share how the words, "stellar students," helped to recognize and motivate students, and she felt positive affirmation could change a student's life.

Participants 3, 5, and 6 shared stories of how their teachers affirmed their abilities and recognized their efforts, which in turn motivated them to continue pursuing their goals. They also spoke about the positive impact this recognition had on their academic performance and overall well-being. Participant 3 described her professor as "amazing," someone who was understanding and affirming of her choice to attend college. A male student recalled the story of an accounting professor who affirmed his abilities. Participant 5 said:

> [This professor] saw a lot of potential in me and made the point [to tell me]. He even asked me if I wanted to change majors. I was good at accounting, and I was

> tutoring people whose major was in the class. Having him ask me if I wanted to switch majors because I'd be good at it was really affirming.

Participant 6 shared an impactful moment when a teacher told her, "Your leadership ability is evident. And don't let anyone tell you that you can't do it."

Several other participants shared about the impact of teacher affirmation, describing how it increased their sense of belonging and confidence, and changed their self-perception. For example, referring to herself as a minority, Participant 7 described a time when she felt lost as a new student on campus. A teacher's affirmation helped her feel like she belonged, build her confidence, and helped her stay. Participant 7 said, "This teacher gave me affirmation and words of encouragement, like, 'You're meant to be here' [filler words] and I was like, you're right. I am here. I was called to be here." Participant 8 spoke about how honest feedback and affirmation of her writing ability helped her stick it out and keep going. Similarly, Participant 10 said, "I stuck it out and kept trying" due to a teacher's encouragement and praise. These stories and quotes illustrate the power of affirmation to help prevent students from quitting.

Other students in this study shared similar stories about the power of affirmation that helped them persist in their educational pursuits. Participants 10 and 14 recalled how affirmation helped to build confidence, and a male student, Participant 7, shared how affirmation changed his self-perception, built his confidence, and helped him stay in school. Participant 15 underscored the experiences of other students when he said:

> [Words of affirmation] shaped . . . my perception of myself and how I can be a good student and [filler words] opened me up to know I was capable of being a

> good student and being in the class. I think having them as a professor has helped me stay in school because I've had that relationship with that teacher.

In this study, participants emphasized the importance of affirmation in building confidence, shaping self-perception, and ultimately helping them persist in their educational pursuits.

Contrary to the collective memory of most students in this study, Participant 4 could not recall a time when she received words of affirmation from a teacher. She said, "I honestly can't think of any examples [of teachers who affirmed me]." Participant 4 seemed pragmatic about this statement as she described her educational journey as "less than conventional" due to an illness and onset of a dis/ability at the end of her fifth-grade year. This illness and dis/ability made it impossible to attend a traditional school environment. Outside Participant 4's experience, it was evident from the mutual understanding of the other participants that positive words of affirmation greatly impacted their self-perception, confidence, and ability to persist in higher education. Adversely, negative words and misrecognition also impacted this study's participants and led them to question if they belonged in higher education settings.

Misrecognition

Misrecognition is defined as the lack of being seen and/or treated with equal dignity, and it happens when personal experiences, societal norms, and values do not reinforce the distinct dignity and worth of a person (Honneth, 2007; Iser, 2019). Iser (2019) argued misrecognition is damaging to a person's self-esteem and self-identity, making it challenging for individuals to find themselves or their work valuable. Several participants shared stories of misrecognition and its impact on their decision-making

process and their self-identity. For example, Participant 2 told a story about two teachers that highlights the impact of both positive and negative sides of recognition and their impact on a student's self-perception and academic success. The participant described how one teacher's affirmation and recognition of her abilities had a powerful effect on her, while another teacher's constant criticism and lack of belief in her abilities had a detrimental impact. This female individual emphasized the influence of having positive experiences with teachers who provide encouragement, affirmation, and recognition on her ability to persist in college. Participant 2 explained:

> I mentioned an English teacher I had, who said like you're a stellar student, and at the exact same time I had that teacher, I also had a teacher who every single day, told me I wasn't worth anything [and] that I wasn't going to go far because I couldn't get my assignments in. And I should fail her class. And a couple years later, I saw her, and she was mocking me, [asking if] I had even passed her class yet; had even retaken it. . . . I think the negative experiences are just as important as the positives because when you see which you see in these two different teachers. One was speaking life into me . . . and one was being very detrimental. Had I not had a teacher who is speaking life I probably would have fully believed everything from this other teacher.

This student's contrasting experiences with two teachers highlight the impact negative and positive recognition can have on historically underrepresented students' self-perceptions and academic success.

Participant 4 recounted a personal experience with misrecognition as a student in a wheelchair in which she described feelings of isolation, exclusion, and loneliness.

Participant 4 said, “People don’t know how to deal with me as a student and [filler words] I am very separated from the rest of the class. Most of my professors, I’ve never even spoken to.” Similarly, Participant 5 spoke of feelings of isolation and exclusion as a minority on campus. This student described these feelings:

> [College] has been challenging at times. I have often felt like I didn’t belong or like I wasn’t as prepared as some of the other students. I felt like my professors didn’t really understand my background or the challenges that I faced as a first-generation college student.

Participant 5 told a story about one professor who was a “deterrent” to his college future. He shared:

> There was a teacher at my high school who was the head of the International Baccalaureate program. And he made it his mission to make [sure] people didn’t do Running Start but rather went to IB. Regardless of whether or not it was a good fit for them. So, I missed out on a year of going to Running Start because I did IB, and I didn’t do what I was planning on doing.

Fortunately, the story did not end there. Like other students in this study, Participant 5 tapped into teachers and academic services on campus and successfully moved forward in his academic goals. Despite the challenges some students faced, such as misrecognition by a teacher, students in this study found ways to persist by accessing other resources. Another way students found to overcome misrecognition was through the phenomenon of spite motivation.

Spiteful Motivation. Surprisingly, the phenomenon of spiteful motivation emerged in the data and seemed a catalyst for students to overcome misrecognition and

persist in their academic goals. For this study, spiteful motivation was defined as a "motivation to achieve a goal, driven by a desire to prove wrong someone who expressed low expectations or disapproval toward the individual" (Studzinski et al., 2019, p. 47). Two female individuals talked about how misrecognition by a teacher/professor motivated them "to prove them [the teacher/professor] wrong." Both participants apologized for wanting "to prove them wrong" before telling their stories. Participant 9 explained:

> I know a few people who didn't really have much faith in me. People didn't think I could do it. It just motivated me to, just do better. I don't know if that makes sense. Even to this day, sometimes I hear people say they are surprised I've made it this far or stuff like that. I don't [filler words] take it too personally. I'm more so I'm like, I'm going to prove them wrong in the future.

This individual discussed how being underestimated by a teacher motivated them to work harder and prove her doubter wrong.

Participant 12 shared a similar story about misrecognition in the first class of her 1st year of college. This student's main motivation for pursuing higher education was to escape poverty. When she heard her professor say, "You'll end up where you started," she felt defeated. This student explained how these words became the driving force to prove the professor wrong. Participant 12 shared this story:

> In my first class my freshman year . . . the first thing that she [the professor] said when she walked in after she introduced herself was that according to research, most college students will end up where they started in life. So, similar income brackets and similar places. As I mentioned before, my main motivation for

> higher education was attempting to escape poverty. And so, hearing that college would end up being a wash and I would end up once again in poverty was extremely demotivating. The words, "You'll end up where you started" from a [this] professor; those negative words motivated me to prove her wrong.

These two women's experiences illustrate the power of spite motivation and its ability to help a student overcome misrecognition and prove they can achieve their goals despite the odds. They also underscore the impact a teacher's words can have on students' motivation and self-belief. The stories and quotes presented in this section display the common understanding of participants in this study and show recognition and misrecognition are deeply impactful on the lives of historically underrepresented students. It is also important to consider the impact of a teacher's leadership style on student academic success.

Theme 2: The Impact of Teacher Leadership Styles on Student Academic Success

Teacher leadership styles refer to the approach a teacher takes to leadership roles and responsibilities (Black, 2015). This study evaluated how four different leadership styles impact the persistence of historically underrepresented students. The four leadership styles under investigation included (a) servant leadership, (b) transformational leadership, (c) social justice leadership, and (d) strengths-based leadership. In this study, students were asked, "Thinking of a teacher whom you received recognition from, which of the following statements describes his or her teaching style?" The students were then asked to choose 1 of 6 statements that describe four leadership styles: (a) expressed genuine interest, (b) motivated students to reach their goals, (c) promoted inclusion in the classroom, (d) stood against discrimination, (e) promoted social change in/out of the

classroom, and (f) focused on building students' strengths verses fixing students' weaknesses. Students spoke about this theme a total of 59 times.

Although participants spoke about each of these four leadership styles as impacting their learning experience, no definite leadership style emerged in the data. Alternatively, the data analysis identified teacher recognition and specifically, teacher–student connectedness, as having the largest influence on academic persistence in this study. Therefore, a review of findings on leadership style remains necessary and important to the understanding of how historically underrepresented students persist in higher education. Chapter 5 discusses the relationship between teacher–student connectedness and teacher leadership styles.

Servant Leadership

According to Greenleaf (1970), servant leaders prioritize the needs of their followers, providing support and guidance to help them grow and reach their full potential. When teachers adopt this approach, students become empowered, which leads to greater levels of success. Participants spoke about the genuine interest of teachers/professors 22 times during the interview process. Participant 5 spoke about a teacher who "was genuinely interested." This student described their teacher's leadership as someone who asked questions, helped him set goals for the future, and held him accountable. Participant 7 remembered a teacher whose genuine interest made him feel seen, and Participant 8 told a story of how a teacher who showed the traits of a servant leader by showing genuine interest impacted his life:

> I oftentimes will be surprised [by this teacher]. It could be a few months later, and he will still remember certain details of you that you didn't think he will

> remember because he, you know, he's your teacher. [This teacher] has so many other students, but it seems like this teacher, he makes sure to remember the details, and that's something I really appreciate.

These three students shared relevant stories of how a teacher's servant leadership traits, including showing genuine interest and remembering personal details, significantly impacted their lives.

Participant 10 recalled a story of a teacher whose expressed interest confirmed his strengths and interests. Participant 10 shared how surprised he was that his high school English teacher could identify his career aspirations through a mediocre English paper. When Participant 10 expressed interest in engineering, his teacher's affirmation, and agreement that it "seems right" validated Participant 10's interests and strengths. Participant 10 stated this teacher did not criticize him for his lack of writing talent but instead provided him with a sense of confirmation that he was on the right career path. The next section explores the theme of transformational leadership and its impact on historically underrepresented students.

Transformational Leadership

Transformational leadership focuses on the change and transformation of individuals through influence (Bass & Riggio, 2005). In this study, students were asked to identify the leadership style of a teacher who had recognized them by choosing from a list of leadership traits representing the four styles of leadership being examined. Transformational leadership received the least number of comments. Ten students spoke about a teacher, coach, or advisor who worked to "motivate them toward their goals."

Overall, students in this study expressed feeling inspired and encouraged by teachers who exhibited a transformational leadership style.

Notably, during the interview process, students unanimously described recognition, teacher–student connectedness, and words of affirmation as motivating.

Although a transformational leadership style was not identified as a predominate style of leadership in this study, a teacher with a transformational style of leadership may use recognition in its various forms to inspire a student to reach their goals. Although transformational leadership focuses on inspiring others to change, social justice leadership emphasizes equity, inclusion, and advocacy for historically underrepresented groups. Therefore, it is important to explore how these two leadership theories connect and diverge from other leadership styles and the phenomenon of recognition.

Social Justice Leadership

Social justice leadership promotes the inherent worth and "dignity of all people and values every life equally and calls for both personal reflection and social change" (Kalamazoo College, n.d., p. 1). Participants talked about the traits of a social justice leader 17 times. These descriptions included promoting inclusiveness, standing against discrimination, and promoting social change inside or outside the classroom. Participant 2 recalled a teacher who was "phenomenal at promoting inclusion in the classroom, stood against discrimination, and promoted social change in and out of the classroom." Participant 2 shared this story:

> It didn't matter what you believed, or who you were, your race, gender, or sexuality. She [filler words] stood right beside you. And she was like, I am going to see that you feel included here and that no one's going to discriminate against

> you . . . we went to events outside of school, that was part of all of this for promoting social changes. There's this thing [event] in Washington called, We Day. [filler words] That was the teacher that I attended it with. And it's [the event] was all about promoting social change and standing against discrimination.

Similarly, Participant 3 told a story of a teacher who made a significant impact on her college experience by promoting social change. Participant 3 expressed admiration for the teacher's initiative in identifying flaws in the school's systems and acting by either creating or joining committees aimed at facilitating students' success. This student expressed a deep respect for this teacher who would take time to meet with students who were outside her classroom and her program if they were struggling.

A female student studying to become a teacher recounted the memory of an education and equity class she took as a 1st-year student that had a lasting impact on her life. She remembered how her teachers emphasized the importance of equality in education. Participant 12 explained:

> [My teachers] affirmed the importance of equality in education. In my freshman year I took an education and equity class. And in that class, I learned a lot about making sure that the education that we give is for everyone and that we give everyone equal status and opportunity.

These stories emphasize the importance of the teacher's role in promoting and advocating for inclusion and social change in the classroom and on campus. The importance of the teacher's role in honoring and protecting the dignity of students is further emphasized by strength-based leadership, which recognizes and nurtures the strengths and potential of

every student, ultimately creating a more positive and equitable learning environment (Rath & Conchie, 2008).

Strengths-Based Leadership

Strengths-based leaders recognize and develop the strengths and potential in every student, which creates a more positive and equitable learning environment (Rath & Conchie, 2008). Participants in this study spoke about the traits of strengths-based leadership 15 times.

Participant 5, among others, gave examples of strengths-based leadership throughout his interview. This student told stories of how his teachers saw his strengths and encouraged him to work toward them, even adjusting curriculum and assignments to help him thrive and succeed in class. Participant 5 was also given opportunities to build his strengths by tutoring other students in his chosen subject.

Participants 2 and 11 also talked about the difference a teacher made in their lives when they recognized their strengths in a specific subject and helped them to refine those strengths. Participant 6 shared about a teacher who taught about strengths in the classroom. This female student described this teacher's curriculum and recalled her experience in the classroom: "She encouraged us to differentiate which category [strength/talent] we fall under for different subjects and how to apply that knowledge to our everyday lives as college students. I found her approach inspiring and beneficial." Throughout the interview process, students described the profound difference it made when a teacher recognized, encouraged, and promoted their strengths and abilities. Participants emphasized how this leadership trait had a profound impact on their confidence, motivation, self-esteem, self-determination, and academic success. The last

prominent theme that emerged in this study was "historically underrepresented students' motivation to pay it forward," which reflects students' beliefs and goals for their futures.

Theme 3: Academic Inequalities and the Misrecognition

Academic inequalities refer to the disparities and inequities within the educational system, affecting various aspects of students' academic experiences, opportunities, and outcomes (Daniels et al., 2021). These inequalities can manifest in different forms, such as access to quality education due to economic, structural, and social factors. Historically underrepresent groups, who belong to disadvantaged groups based on factors such as race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, or first-generation college students, are more likely to face academic inequalities than White students (Daniels et al., 2021). Throughout the interviews, without solicitation, all study participants gave a personal account of the academic inequalities they faced as historically underrepresented students. Individual participants talked about one or more of three different types of academic inequalities (i.e., economic, structural, social) 64 times.

Economic

Economic inequalities refer to the disproportionate distribution of opportunity due to income (IZA World of Labor, 2023). Several participants spoke about money as both a motivator and a deterrent to their educational pursuits. Participant 4 said, "Anxiety, the prospect of abject poverty, living on $4 a month for the rest of my life, not having access to medical care, all those things motivate me." Likewise, Participant 12 said her motivation to go to college was "Escaping poverty . . . not ending up where I started." Like other students in this study, Participant 15 indicated he felt motivated by what college can buy: "a good job" and "a better life."

Other students spoke about the value of college, the struggles to pay for college, and the debt they fear they will accrue by the time they graduate. Participant 12 spoke about the expense of housing on campus and the days she went without meals because she had to choose to pay for housing or pay for food. Participant 13 considered joining the U.S. military for the benefit of free tuition. Lastly, Participant 15 told the story of when he was unable to afford a book for a class. Without the intervention of a teacher who loaned him the book, Participant 15 thought he would have struggled in—or worse, failed—the class. The economic inequalities historically underrepresented students face often interconnect with broader structural inequalities impacting their educational experiences and outcomes.

Structural

Structural inequality refers to the unequal opportunities or privileges one person receives over another (Naylor & Mifsud, 2020). Participants described two different types of structural barriers during the data collection process, institutional barriers, and a lack of representation. When asked the question, "Can you describe any attitudes, beliefs, or biases that made you question your ability to attend or stay in college?," three participants offered firsthand accounts of institutional barriers, and 15 students spoke about the lack of representation in their 4-year college or university.

Institutional Barriers. Program structure and physical access to dorms, classrooms, and teachers were two institutional barriers students discussed. One female individual in this study described program design that did not meet the needs of first-generation, low-income students. Participant 3 recounted a college program that did not meet the needs of most enrolled students who were first-generation, low-income

individuals who worked full time and had families, making it nearly impossible to graduate. This student said she felt “taken aback” at the level of work this college program expected from working adults in her cohort. Referring to the academic program, she said, “Oh my gosh, this is like so much, because we would do program classes and then we would do general education classes. It was overwhelming.” She acknowledged this experience may not be defined as an attitude, belief, or bias, but it made her question her ability to attend or stay in school.

Participant 4 described the institutional barrier she faced as the only student on campus in a wheelchair. Access to dorms, classrooms, and the cafeteria present barriers to building relationships with other students and her teachers. This female interviewee described her first year in college as painful and isolated. As a person in a wheelchair, limited physical access made it hard to take advantage of in-person classes, social clubs, or teacher’s office hours. She shared if there was access to a classroom, her wheelchair would seldom fit under a desk, which relegated her to the back of the room, excluded from classroom discussion. Participant 4 stated:

> People don’t know how to deal with me as a student, and [filler words] I am very separated from the rest of the class. Just like, there are no desks that I can sit up for in the back. So, I don’t get as much interaction or support. It makes it more difficult to attend.

Whether it was an inequitable college program or the physical limitations of campus infrastructure, Participants 3 and 4 described institutional barriers that made it difficult for them to persist in college. Another institutional barrier students described was representation.

Representation. Without being asked, individuals in this study shared 15 times during the interview process what it felt like to be a historically underrepresented student on campus. Several participants spoke of the "culture shock" of attending a PWI. Participant 7 shared, "For me, just coming from a diverse high school and then transitioning to a predominantly White institution was an extreme culture shock. I was like, I don't know what I'm supposed to do." Similarly, one female 1st-year student, Participant 6, stated:

> When I got to college, I knew people who seemed so much more efficient, smarter, and capable of things that I was struggling with. This made me feel a little uneasy. Additionally, learning a new work ethic was difficult because it was a new scenery, and I was living on campus instead of going back home afterward. Sometimes, I lost belief in myself.

Moreover, Participant 7 articulated the feeling of culture shock she experienced when entering a PWI as "understanding that other people think differently than I do, because of their background. It was hard." In addition to the culture shock students in this study experienced, a lack of representation among other students and faculty made the college experience more challenging.

One interviewee, Participant 8, said, "I don't see a lot of my people who look like me, in my college. And none of the teachers looked like me, so that was another thing." Two female participants confirmed these collective memories. Participant 12 detailed her experience at a PWI:

> Yeah, so [name of college] is a very White university demographically. There are very few students of color especially. I mean, I guess I have kind of a unique

> background being half Native and half Arab, but there definitely were not. I could probably count the number on one hand as the number of other Native American students there. And so, there were definitely some implicit biases. I think, sometimes almost a little too nice. Like I was never called a slur. But I think people underestimated me and what I was able to bring to the table because of my skin color.

Likewise, Participant 14 described the double disadvantage of being both a person of color and a woman in her college and her potential work field of education. Fighting this stereotype not only for herself "but for my people" motivates this student to keep me going.

Other students talked about the absence of diversity in teaching staff and faculty. Participant 2 told of the importance and impact of having a teacher of color in her life:

> My teacher immigrated to the United States. [filler words] He was the first professor that I had who openly talked about their story in education and how he was the first in his family to ever get higher education. [filler words] He recognized how important it was to motivate students to reach their goals . . . positive affirmation can change a student's life, especially if you're not getting it anywhere else.

Participant 13, a male student, described how he was profoundly affected by his club advisor, a Latinx male. Participants' quotes and experiences highlighted in this section demonstrate the significant impact of institutional barriers and underrepresentation in academic inequality on students' sense of belonging, and their ability to persist. The third and last academic inequality study participants described was social inequalities.

Social

Social inequalities refer to the unequal treatment of a student based on their social/economic status or race/ethnic group (Russell, 2023). Russell (2023) argued social inequalities can limit learning opportunities, leading to lower levels of achievement for disadvantaged students. Participant 4 talked about the social inequalities she faced as a person of color with a dis/ability: “These cultural differences can make it challenging to relate to others and can leave some individuals feeling lonely or excluded.” Another female student, Participant 6, shared how she lost self-confidence her 1st year at a PWI because she saw others who were more prepared, and in her perception, smarter and more capable.

Several other students emphasized the need for leaders to understand what it feels like to be a person of color at a PWI. Participant 12 observed, “I would say my experience as a poor Brown, first-time college student or first-generation college student might vary pretty differently from someone poor and White or middle class and Brown.” This student connected these concepts by telling this story:

> I felt misheard as a female student and [filler words] a Brown student. [filler words] In the liberal arts classes I am Brown and therefore bad, but then in the STEM class, I am a girl and therefore bad. It would make that a lot worse because as I’m sure you’ve heard, as a minority, when things aren’t going well for you, it becomes a huge problem. You know, [filler words] you don’t get a break. Like, oh, they’re having a hard day, or they haven’t had a meal in three days—versus you know, if I were a White male student, I think people probably would be more willing to give me a bit more grace.

What was evident among the collective stories of this study's participants is that academic inequalities appear to be invisible to White students and teachers in higher education. As Participant 8 observed, "I [filler words] got the sense [filler words] there's a change that needs to happen. There's something wrong with the system." One way colleges and universities can create equitable environments is through teacher leadership.

Additional Themes

Three additional themes emerged in the data collection and analysis process: (a) access to higher education through academic services, (b) family influence on future orientation, and (c**)** historically underrepresented students' motivation to pay it forward. Although these three additional themes do not answer the research questions of this study, they do align with current research in higher education concerning historically underrepresented groups and may be helpful in the quest for equitable change in HEIs. Therefore, findings of this research are important to disclose. In this study, students spoke about the impact of academic service 20 times, family influence 50 times, and their motivation to pay it forward 28 times.

Access to Higher Education Through Academic Services

The terms "academic services" and "wraparound services" used in this study refer to comprehensive assistance addressing students' diverse needs, such as academic, health, socioemotional, familial, financial, and logistical support (Cumming et al., 2022). The intent of academic services and wraparound programs involves creating equitable educational opportunities and removing systematic barriers among underrepresented groups. Scholarships, mentoring, leadership training, and student/career development services help meet the goals of wraparound programs (Cumming et al., 2022). Nine of 15

participants credited an academic service/program or a school advisor for providing awareness and resources allowing participants to attend a higher education institution.

Additionally, participants shared the impact federal and state initiatives, academic services, wraparound programs, and school advisors had on their ability to persist in their educational goals. Participant 5 described feeling unseen by teachers as a person of color but found support and equality as a first-generation and low-income student through a federal program called TRIO. Participant 12 described a similar experience with a federal program that started in middle school and provided a scholarship for low-income students. This program set benchmarks for students to meet throughout their primary school years and required students to complete honors classes.

A significant number of participants pointed out the instrumental role of advisors and wraparound program coordinators in helping them persist in college. Participant 7, a female student, expressed the challenges of transitioning from a diverse high school to a PWI, stating the campus coordinator of the wraparound program and the program itself was a crucial resource that helped her persist in college. This student said:

> For me, just coming from a diverse high school and then transitioning to a predominantly White institution was an extreme culture shock. [filler words] I don't know what I'm supposed to do. So just having the campus coordinator of [wraparound program] and the program itself helped me persist in college.

Similarly, Participant 9, a female student, shared how her high school college advisor presented her with resources and answered her questions, which helped her advance into college.

Participant 8, a male student, also shared his own experience with a wraparound counselor who stayed with him throughout his 4 years in high school, acting as a college counselor and pushing him to learn about colleges. This individual described this counselor as someone who went above and beyond his expectations to help him succeed by writing his recommendation letter and exposing him to higher education through campus tours. Participant 8 explained:

> I had a [counselor/teacher] who pushed me to do a lot of things that you know, otherwise I wouldn't do. The [name of wraparound program] is in some Washington schools. It's [filler word] a college preparation, advanced class. You would have a teacher that stayed with you throughout the four years that you were at high school, basically being your college counselor in a way. My counselor, his name was [counselor's name]. He wrote my recommendation letter, and he was great because he pushed us to learn about colleges and we did a couple field trips with him.

Overall, the experiences these students shared highlight the important role advisors and wraparound program coordinators play in providing instrumental support and resources that help students persist in college. Although advisor and wraparound program support were found to be critical factors in promoting student persistence, another key theme that emerged from this study was the influence of family influence on future orientation.

Family Influence on Future Orientation

Family influence refers to the ways in which family dynamics, values, beliefs, and socioeconomic circumstances shape the educational experiences and outcomes of historically underrepresented students (Thunig, 2022). Future orientation or a "desire for

a better life" is a concept referring to an individual's beliefs and attitudes about their future, including their goals, aspirations, and expectations (S. Schwartz et al., 2013). Families play a crucial role in the academic journey of students, impacting their motivation, aspirations, educational choices, and outcomes (Thunig, 2022). All participants shared stories of how parents and family influenced college decisions and their motivation to stay in college. What emerged from the data was two subcategories: legacy motivation and ethnic identity.

Legacy Motivation. The phenomenon of "legacy motivation," also known as "family obligation," occurs when individuals are driven to succeed to improve their lives and the lives of their family members (Thunig, 2022). Several participants described the phenomenon of legacy motivation in detail. Participant 5 shared a story of his father and how his father's life influenced his decision to go and stay in college:

> My father didn't have the opportunity to go to college himself. He grew up in a low-income family and had to start working at a young age to support his family. He did a lot of manual labor jobs and didn't have many options for advancement. He always emphasized to us how important it was to get a good education so that we wouldn't have to struggle the way he did. His message was clear that education was the key to success and that he wanted us to have better opportunities than he did.

Likewise, Participant 7, a female student, said, "My parents . . . did not attend college when they were my age. My mom felt like there needed to be more to life than just working at fast food." Throughout the interview, Participant 7 spoke about the motivation she felt to have a different life than her parents had.

Reflecting on his family's heritage and lack of opportunities without an education, another student cited his family as his main motivation to go and stay in college. Participant 8 shared this story of his family of origin:

> There is a fear of deportation in my family, and there was a fear of my family members losing their jobs, or getting injured and they can't work. I didn't have a backup plan. From what I understand, a lot of my peers at college did. You know if it didn't work out, they could simply move back home; they'd be fine. But from my perspective, if I didn't make it through college, my family would not do well. And so, my attitude is, I need to make it. Yeah, my sister had the same attitude that we needed to make it because we had nothing. So, we kind of doubted our ability to stay in college. We weren't firm. You know, we lacked confidence that we could stay in college because anything could have happened.

Participants 5, 7, and 8 all highlighted the profound influence of their families in their pursuit of higher education, emphasizing the importance of education as a pathway to a better future, overcoming socioeconomic barriers, and providing support and motivation to persevere despite the challenges they faced. Having "a better life" was a theme throughout the interviews, and participants were motivated to "payback" their parents for the sacrifices their parents had made on their behalf. Participant 1 said he was motivated to persist because of the focus and dedication of his parents to helping him get a college degree, elaborating, "I think it'd be awesome for me to [filler words] grow up and then be able to pay all that back. Whether it's taking care of them or helping to take care of my new sister [filler words], that'd be awesome." These quotes illustrate the influence of family in these three participants' lives.

Along with a better life, other participants emphasized the importance of making their families proud. Participant 9 said her motivation to keep going is to "get a really nice career, [filler words] and show [my] family that [I've] made something of what they invested in." Another student spoke of the pressure she felt as a first-generation student not to disappoint her parents and was deeply moved and motivated to be a role model for her younger siblings (Participant 14). Likewise, Participant 15 said he was motivated to "have a better job and . . . earn more money and possibly have a better life. Also, to make [filler words] myself proud, and to make my family proud." Participant 3 emphasized her parental support but shared divergent and negative comments from relatives that made her question her decision to go to and stay in college. Her relatives openly questioned her decision to pursue higher education. They told her it would be "really hard" and "time consuming" and challenged her role as a woman in business and as a mother. One of Participant 3's relatives said:

> Are you sure you want to pursue this? You know, it's really hard [filler words], the glass ceiling for women, and you have to work super hard and [filler words], as a woman in the business field . . . it's very difficult. [filler words] It consumes your time and, [filler words], how do you plan on balancing that [college] with being a mom and a wife and remember your role in the household?

While sharing this personal account of her relatives' negative comments, Participant 3 expressed feeling inner conflict and guilt about her decision to pursue a college degree.

This section illustrates how the phenomenon of legacy motivation influenced the decision making and persistence of students in this research study. Students shared stories of mothers, fathers, and other relatives who worked hard but had limited opportunities for

education or economic advancement. Witnessing these hardships motivated participants to succeed, not only for themselves but also for their family members. Several participants spoke of their desire to get a good job, to make their parents proud, and pay them back for their sacrifices. Although some participants received divergent messages about the value of higher education, legacy motivation continued to be a strong driver for their persistence in college. Another family-related theme that emerged was ethnic identity.

Ethnic Identity. Ethnic identity refers to the sense of connection and belonging that individuals feel to their culture or ethnic group (Umaña-Taylor et al., 2014). A person's ethnic identity shapes their beliefs, values, and behaviors (Redding, 2019; Umaña-Taylor et al., 2014). Ethnic identity can play an important role in promoting positive outcomes for individuals, including greater psychological well-being, academic achievement, and social support (Phinney et al., 2001). For individuals in this study, connecting with their ethnic background provided a sense of pride and empowerment that can help to counteract experiences of discrimination and other inequalities (Meca et al., 2020). For example, one female and one male participant expressed their individual desire to promote community and equality for historically underrepresented students on their college campus.

Participant 6 spoke of her desire to represent her ethnicity and push forward equality on campus. She took on leadership roles in the classroom and helped others with assignments. Throughout the interview, she emphasized the importance of community and detailed her experience as a Hispanic female at a PWI:

> It's important to me to represent my ethnicity and push forward equality on campus. In college, I take on leadership roles in the classroom, such as being the first one to speak up if there's a question or helping others with an assignment. Community aspects are very important to me.

In this narrative the student expressed her commitment to promoting equality and representing her ethnicity on campus by actively taking on leadership roles, and prioritizing community.

Similarly, Participant 13, who also attended a PWI, emphasized the need to bring students from underrepresented groups together on campus, creating a sense of community and belonging. This interviewee described his experiences as a member of ethnic leadership teams and student center clubs and as a board member in one of them. Participant 13 emphasized:

> I want to give a sense of community not only my heritage but like other minorities in the area. And I've often had that as a driving factor of, you know, bringing a sense of community to the college education at [school name] and a sense of belonging. And yeah, just helping whatever I can. I'm on a few ethnic leadership teams. I attend a few ethnic student center clubs, as well as I am [filler words] a board member for one of them too.

Throughout the interviews, participants expressed a need for community with people who looked like them and came from similar backgrounds. Likewise, when students tapped into multicultural clubs and communities, they felt more connected to their colleges and more confident in their ability to succeed. With an understanding of the role of ethnic identity in shaping students' journey in college, attention can now turn to the broader

issue of academic inequalities, which are rooted in the problem of misrecognition as evidence by participants' discussion of economic, structural, and social inequalities during the interviews (Fraser et al., 2003; Honneth, 1996).

Students' Motivation to Pay It Forward

"Paying it forward," also called "reciprocity," refers to the practice of repaying an act of assistance or kindness by providing similar help to others (Gray et al., 2014). Without solicitation, participants spoke about the idea of paying it forward 11 times. Paying it forward was a surprising concept that emerged from the data. When speaking about the future, several students spoke about their purpose and the act of paying back what they had received. Paying it forward was a motivating factor for several participants. Participant 3 said she dreamed of

> being able to lead others in such a way that it shows them their potential, and then they can then live the life that God has called them to live. And then the cycle continues. [Filler words] It starts with one person, but the ripple effects can be generations of kids.

Similarly, Participant 5 was motivated "by the idea of being able to make a positive impact in my chosen field and contribute to society in a meaningful way." Participant 6 said she would like to "be the teacher that I had wished for, one who takes the initiative to connect with students and make them feel seen and heard in the classroom."

Likewise, Participant 7, a female individual, said she wanted "to be that help that somebody was for me when I was in college," and Participant 8 said he wanted to "give back to the community." Participant 8 expressed a desire to do some mentoring in his church and community. This male student believed having strong mentors in his life

made a difference in his self-esteem, his confidence, and his ability to dream for the future. He went on to explain:

> I think what I was given that most students weren't given is a mentor. I had several. I had a lot of people to look up to. And I think some people just don't have that at all. And it gives them low self-esteem and low self-confidence, which is an issue in their lives because they don't see themselves succeeding because they don't see other people who look like them succeeding.

Similarly, Participant 13 said he was motivated to pay it forward by creating a "sense of community" and a "sense of belonging" for other minorities who attend his predominately White university a "driving factor." Moreover, Participant 14, a female student, said she was motivated to persist in college so she could "inspire future students." To conclude, the concept of paying it forward emerged as an additional theme among participants, reflecting their desire to make a positive impact on society. The notion of creating a ripple effect of support, mentorship, and empowerment resonated with participants, who recognized the importance of having received assistance and guidance themselves. Their motivation to pay it forward was driven by a genuine desire to uplift future generations, foster a sense of community and belonging, and address the inequalities and barriers they had experienced. Largely, a better future and an opportunity to pay it forward were motivators for each student who participated in this study.

Conclusion

In conclusion, Chapter 4 of this qualitative hermeneutic phenomenological study presented and explained the key findings and themes that emerged from the analysis of one-on-one interviews. The purpose statement, research questions, research method, and data collection procedures were outlined to provide a clear context for understanding the

findings. The chapter delved into participant demographics and characteristics, highlighting participants' diverse backgrounds and experiences. Three main themes were identified and discussed: (a) teacher recognition and its influence on persistence, (b) the impact of teacher leadership styles on student academic success, and (c) academic inequalities and the misrecognition of historically underrepresented students. These themes revealed the complexities and challenges historically underrepresented students face within the educational system.

The researcher identified three additional themes not related to the research questions but still relevant to the broader research on access and persistence of historically underrepresented students. These themes reveal the complexities and challenges historically underrepresented students face within the educational system. The additional themes that emerged in the data collection and analysis process were: (a) access to higher education through academic services, (b) family influence on future orientation, and (c) historically underrepresented students' motivation to pay it forward.

Overall, findings of this study suggest recognition by a teacher can have a significant influence on encouraging persistence among historically underrepresented students. The themes that emerged from the data highlight the importance of teacher recognition, teacher leadership, addressing academic inequalities and misrecognition, academic services, family support, and social responsibility in promoting student persistence and success. Chapter 5 of this dissertation discusses the researcher's interpretations of all six themes.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

The purpose of Chapter 5 is to interpret the research findings by summarizing and analyzing the results from the author's perspective, showing how the findings are relevant to the larger body of literature. Chapter 5 includes the purpose statement, research questions, a summary and discussion of findings, the significance of the study, implications, the study limitations, and recommendations for future research. Chapter 5 closes with a summary of the study's major conclusions and reflections.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative hermeneutic phenomenological study was to understand and describe the impact of recognition by a teacher on historically underrepresented students who have persisted in higher education.

Research Questions

This qualitative hermeneutic phenomenological study sought to advance previous research on historically underrepresented students by focusing on the impact of recognition by a teacher on students' ability to persist. The primary question asked in this study was: How does recognition impact the persistence of historically underrepresented students in higher education? The subquestions included:

RQ1. What leadership theories or practices, if any, impact the persistence of historically underrepresented students in higher education?

RQ2. In what ways, if any, have historically underrepresented students experienced recognition by a teacher?

RQ3. In what ways, if any, have historically underrepresented students experienced misrecognition by a teacher?

RQ4. What is the effect of recognition or misrecognition on the persistence of historically underrepresented students in higher education?

Data Collection and Analysis

This qualitative research study used a hermeneutic phenomenological approach to investigate the association between recognition by a teacher and the persistence of historically underrepresented students in higher education by listening to the collective narrative of participants (Peoples, 2020). Semistructured one-on-one interviews were used to collect data from 15 participants (Bazeley, 2013). Saturation was reached by the 11th interview.

To analyze data, the researcher transcribed the one-on-one interviews using Otter and then read and edited them to check for accuracy (Bazeley, 2013). To ensure rigor, the researcher used member checking to confirm the validity of interview content by sending a copy of the transcript to participants for feedback within 24 hours of the interview (Creswell & Poth, 2017). The researcher then created coding sheets for each interview question with codes, categories, themes, definitions, quotes, research questions, and sources (Creswell, 2014; Seidman, 2019). Following creation of the coding sheets, the researcher completed two rounds of coding using an inductive method to identify codes, categories, and themes (Creswell & Poth, 2017).

The first round of coding took place within 48 hours of each interview, with a second round after completion of all data collection from the one-on-one interviews and completion of member checking (Saldaña, 2009). The researcher used both descriptive

and interpretive codes, and noted the expected, surprising, and unusual codes (Creswell, 2014). The researcher then refined the categories, and three main themes and three additional themes emerged, discussed next in this chapter.

Discussion of Findings

The discussion of findings section in this chapter provides a detailed analysis and interpretation of the research findings as they relate to existing literature and theories in the field. This segment begins with a restatement of the theoretical framework and relevant literature on leadership theory and practice. It concludes with an examination and interpretation of the findings through the lens of the research questions and the convergence and divergence of academic literature. There are three main themes and three additional themes discussed in this chapter: (a) teacher recognition and its influence on persistence, (b) the impact of teacher leadership styles on student academic success, and (c) academic inequalities and the misrecognition of historically underrepresented students. The three additional themes that emerged were (a) access to higher education through academic services, (b) family influence on future orientation, and (c) historically underrepresented students' motivation to pay it forward.

Theme 1: Teacher Recognition and Its Influence on Persistence

The first main theme that emerged from the data addressed teacher recognition and its influence on persistence. Teacher recognition fell into four subcategories: (a) teacher impact on college decisions, (b) teacher–student connectedness, (c) words of affirmation, and (d) misrecognition by a teacher. Teacher influence through the act of recognition was expected due to the research purpose and questions. This theme answered the primary question of this study along with three subsidiary questions: RQ2,

RQ3, and RQ4. The researcher also identified two unexpected phenomena in the discussion of recognition and misrecognition by a teacher: teacher–student connectedness/relationship and the phenomenon of spiteful motivation. The phenomenon of spiteful motivation emerged through stories of misrecognition by a teacher. The four subcategories and two unexpected phenomena of this theme are discussed in this section.

Teacher Impact on College Decisions

When asked about the influence of teachers on their resolve to attend college, six students shared stories of how a teacher's words and actions impacted their decision. Perna and Li (2019) indicated teachers can play an instrumental role in influencing historically underrepresented students' decisions to attend college by providing academic and emotional support, guidance, and encouragement. Additional research found positive teacher–student connectedness and relationships can improve student motivation, engagement, and academic outcomes, which can increase the probability of college enrollment and persistence (Sturdivant, 2020).

Furthermore, teachers who provide students with information about college opportunities and resources (e.g., financial aid, scholarships) also can impact students' decisions to attend a higher education institution positively (Perna & Li, 2014). On the other hand, misrecognition of students by a teacher's negative attitudes, stereotypes, or biases, such as low expectations or assumptions about their academic abilities and lack of affirmation, can contribute to lower academic achievement, decreased motivation, and a reduced likelihood of college enrollment (Estrada et al., 2016).

Student participants shared stories of how their teachers influenced their decision to attend college positively. During the interviews, participants described how a teacher's

recognition and affirmation of their strengths and abilities had a significant influence on their ability to envision themselves attending college. Furthermore, some students mentioned how a teacher provided concrete college resources, such as financial aid and scholarship information, as well as assistance with college applications and entrance essays. In contrast, some students talked about how feeling unrecognized by a teacher caused them to doubt their ability to succeed in their pursuit of higher education. However, in these cases, having a teacher who affirmed their ability and decision to attend college prevented their dreams from being derailed.

Overall, findings from this study highlight the critical role teachers can have in college decisions. Positive teacher–student connectedness/relationships, recognition, and affirmation of students' strengths and abilities, along with providing college resources are all factors that can influence students' decision-making processes positively (Sturdivant, 2020). In contrast, negative teacher attitudes and biases can have detrimental effects on students' decision to enroll in college (Sturdivant, 2020). The second subcategory for the teacher recognition theme relates to teacher–student connectedness.

Teacher–Student Connectedness

Surprisingly, without solicitation, all 15 students shared stories about the phenomenon of teacher–student connectedness with tangible examples like communication, empathy, creativity, flexibility, adaptability, caring, availability, and expressing genuine interest. Teacher–student connectedness, also referred to as teacher–student relationships, encompasses the positive relationship and sense of belonging students experience with their teachers or professors (Sturdivant, 2020). This connection is known to have a positive impact on student learning, as evidenced by increased

engagement, persistence, retention, and overall academic outcomes (Mensah & Koomson, 2020). Teachers can establish this bond with their students by "demonstrating empathy, providing positive feedback, and maintaining an interactive dialogue in a trusting environment" (Sturdivant, 2020, p. 18). All 15 students in this study shared the positive impact of teacher–student connectedness when a teacher demonstrated empathy, provided feedback, and encouraged communication.

Wentzel (2016) added positive teacher–student connectedness proves important for promoting a range of other student outcomes, such as motivation, academic achievement, and social-emotional development. Conversely, Wentzel argued the mechanisms through which these relationships operate may vary depending on the context and the population of students, which may cause favoritism or misrecognition of underrepresented groups. Moreover, Neal et al. (2011) and Saucier et al. (2022) noted student perceptions play a role in teacher–student relationships. Students who perceived a positive relationship with a teacher are more likely to be motivated, engaged, and committed to learning, which also increases their sense of belonging (Neal et al., 2011; Saucier et al., 2022).

Drawing on Honneth's recognition theory, Zembylas (2016) argued recognition is essential to a positive teacher–student relationships, and it is imperative that teachers develop the skills of recognizing students' unique identities and incorporating ethnic backgrounds and experiences into classroom learning. Moreover, CTR scholars, Ladson-Billings and Paris (2021), recommended a cultural relevant pedagogy (CRP) that incorporates diverse cultural experiences into curriculum and instructional practices. Ladson-Billings and Paris argued CRP emphasizes inclusiveness, respect, and

recognition of students' backgrounds, which leads to a positive teacher–student relationship. In addition to teacher–student connectedness, students in this study said words of affirmation were pivotal motivators in their ability to persist and succeed in higher education.

Words of Affirmation

Affirmation is a crucial aspect of recognition (Honneth, 1996). When asked the question, "In what ways have you felt affirmed by a teacher as a college student?," all but one participant recalled stories of being affirmed by a teacher in higher education. Nearly all participants talked about experiencing affirmation from their teachers in primary, secondary education, and higher education. Students discussed how affirmations had a positive impact on their persistence, even though persistence was not the focus of the question. Many students reported their teachers had affirmed their potential and talents, which was a recurring theme among participants' lived experiences.

According to Honneth (1996), words of affirmation (e.g., acknowledgment, appreciation, praise) are critical for building self-esteem and self-respect as well as for fostering positive social relationships. Yeager and Walton (2011) found small social-psychological interventions, like words of affirmation—"that is, brief exercises that target students' thoughts, feelings, and beliefs in and about a school—can lead to large gains in student achievement and sharply reduce achievement gaps even months and years later" (p. 267). Although some have criticized these methods for not teaching academic content, what a student believes about their potential can lead to higher engagement, a feeling of belonging, and improved academic outcomes (Yeager & Walton, 2011). In classroom environments lacking words of affirmation/recognition, individuals in this study

expressed feelings of alienation, humiliation, and resentment, which can lead to internal and social conflicts and other injustices. Honneth (1996) called this phenomenon misrecognition.

Misrecognition

Honneth (2007) noted three forms of misrecognition: physical abuse, denigration, and degradation. Lansford et al. (2021) found low-income students are twice as likely to experience misrecognition in these forms. In this study, students expressed feelings of degradation (Honneth, 2007). Asyidah (2020) defined degradation as "a phenomenon of a decrease in the character of a person or group of people" (p. 1). For example, Participant 12 said, "I think people underestimated me and what I was able to bring to the table because of my skin color." The act of degradation can leave psychosocial scars, harming a person's self-identity and preventing him or her from progressing in life and/or in work (Honneth, 2007). Conversely, the practice of recognition has been shown to influence students' self-respect, self-confidence, and self-esteem (Altmeyer, 2018; Fraser et al., 2003; Giles, 2020; Hicks, 2019; Honneth, 1996; Iser, 2019; Kammler, 2012; McNay, 2008; Taylor, 1992; Willig, 2012).

Other participants also recounted experiences of misrecognition and how those experiences affected their decision-making process. Critical race theorists and scholars, San Pedro et al. (2021), Ladson-Billings and Paris (2021), and Paris (2012) confirmed historically underrepresented individuals often face misrecognition in the classroom due to linguistic and cultural differences. Further, marginalized students do not receive instruction from teachers at the same curriculum level as majority races, which disregards

their capacity to learn (Ladson-Billings & Paris, 2021). These types of misrecognition can lead to disengagement and behavior problems in the classroom (Paris, 2012).

Data from this study revealed the unexpected phenomenon of "spiteful motivation," by which the experience of misrecognition catalyzed two students to persist in their academic goals. For this study, spiteful motivation was defined as a "motivation to achieve a goal, driven by a desire to prove wrong someone who expressed low expectations or disapproval toward the individual" (Studzinski et al., 2019, p. 47). Further research has confirmed negative experiences, such as racism, discrimination, microaggressions, and feelings of alienation, can motivate students to persist in their academic goals and can also develop and/or increase resiliency in historically underrepresented students (Daniel, 2018; Mulvey et al., 2022; Yosso et al., 2001). Another motivational factor in the lives of historically underrepresented students is the impact of teacher leadership styles.

Theme 2: The Impact of Teacher Leadership Styles on Student Academic Success

The second most talked about theme in this study was the impact of teacher leadership styles on student academic success. This study examined four different leadership styles and the influence on the persistence of historically underrepresented students. Those four leadership styles included (a) servant leadership, (b) transformational leadership, (c) social justice leadership, and (d) strengths-based leadership. This theme addressed RQ1: What leadership theories or practices, if any, increase the persistence rates of students in higher education?

Teacher leadership styles refer to the approach a teacher takes to leadership roles and responsibilities (Black, 2015). Leadership styles are a factor in promoting greater

equity and inclusion by creating an institutional culture that values diversity, fosters inclusive practices, and promotes equity in access to resources and opportunities (de Silva et al., 2018). Pedagogy, on the other hand, refers to the teaching practice and methods instructors use to design curriculum and manage the classroom (Freire & Macedo, 2018). A teacher's leadership theory informs their pedagogy and practice (de Silva et al., 2018). Hoy et al. (2016) argued further attention must be given to teacher leadership at the administration level, demonstrated to enhance equitable environments and result in positive student outcome. Therefore, an examination of teacher leadership proved essential to understanding the relationship between leadership theory and practice with the phenomenon of recognition.

Although participants in this study spoke about the impact of each of the four leadership styles examined in this study, the data did not identify a clear relationship between a specific style of leadership, the phenomena of recognition, and student persistence. Instead, participants attributed their persistence to teacher practices that led to teacher–student connectedness/ relationship. Findings of this study aligned with previous research indicating no one leadership style can address the academic inequalities facing historically underrepresented students (Rashid et al., 2019; Shen et al., 2020). Although leadership styles remain important, creating greater equity and inclusion in higher education that leads to higher persistence and graduation rates entails a multifaceted endeavor (Rashid et al., 2019). This study found a teacher leadership style that facilitates a healthy teacher–student connectedness may serve as an important contributor to creating more equitable classrooms that lead to student success. In this

case, all four leadership styles examined in this study have the potential to encourage persistence through teacher–student connectedness/relationship.

Some leadership styles, however, can hinder teacher–student relationships. For example, Chang et al. (2019) found teachers who exhibit a laissez-faire leadership style, characterized by a lack of guidance and direction, may not prove as successful in establishing positive relationships with their students. Similarly, an authoritarian leadership style, characterized by rigid rules and control, may not facilitate positive relationships between teachers and students and may increase dropout rates (Chang et al., 2019; de Silva et al., 2018; Northouse, 2015). Freire and Macedo (2018) argued traditional methods of teaching, like an authoritarian style, can create an oppressor/oppressed relationship between teachers and students, which can further academic inequalities and injustices.

On the other hand, the leadership styles identified in this study impacted the students in a positive way, which aligns with current research on the topic. For example, the ideals of empathy and service emphasized by a servant leadership style have been shown to facilitate positive teacher–student relationships (Bowman, 2005). Similarly, a transformational leadership style, which emphasizes vision and inspiration, can motivate students, helping them reach their academic goals (Sulea et al., 2017).

Additionally, social justice leadership, known for its emphasis on inclusion and social change, inside and outside the classroom, can help students feel they belong, which can increase retention and persistence (Burris, 2019). Last, strengths-based leadership emphasizes the skill of recognizing and identifying a student's potential, talents, and abilities, which can enhance the teacher–student relationship and students' successful

outcomes (Asby & Shah, 2019; Lopez & Louis, 2009). In addition to leadership styles, study participants emphasized the impact of academic inequalities on historically underrepresented individuals.

Theme 3: Academic Inequalities and the Misrecognition

The last main theme, academic inequalities and the misrecognition of historically underrepresented students, had three subcategories: (a) economic inequalities, (b) structural inequalities that include institutional barriers and representation, and (c) social inequalities. Without solicitation, participants described feeling undervalued, marginalized, and misrepresented in academic settings. Further, participants emphasized the need for leaders to hear and understand the obstacles and barriers still facing historically underrepresented students. Although progress has been made in access to higher education, past and present interventions have not solved the problems of academic inequalities for historically underrepresented students (Bastedo et al., 2016; Cahalan et al., 2020; Creamer, 2020; Ladson-Billings & Donnor, 2008).

Historically underrepresented individuals continue to have lower graduation rates than students from other groups (Crumb et al., 2019; Jones, 2013; U.S. Census Bureau, 2019). Scholars have widely agreed new approaches are needed to end the disparities underrepresented students face (Bastedo et al., 2016; Cahalan et al., 2020; Center on Education and the Workforce, 2022; Jones, 2013). Change is unlikely unless the root cause of academic inequalities is addressed (Ladson-Billings & Donnor, 2008; Honneth, 1996).

Fraser et al. (2003) and Honneth (1996) argued the root cause of all inequality is misrecognition. Honneth claimed social justice issues like academic inequalities require

recognition of an individual's dignity and worth, and lack of recognition can lead to feelings of marginalization and exclusion. Hicks and Tutu (2021) agreed recognition is one way people can honor another individual's dignity and combat injustices. Hicks (2021) stated:

> Our universal yearning for dignity drives our species and defines us as human beings. It's our highest common denominator, yet we know so little about it. It's hard for people to articulate exactly what it is. What they do know is more like an intuition or sixth sense. "Yes, dignity is important," people tell me, but they come up short when I ask them to put their intuition into words. What people usually say is that dignity is respect. I get that response every time I ask an audience. But dignity is not the same as respect. Dignity, I argue, is an attribute that we are born with—*it is our inherent value and self-worth*. . . . Respect is different. Although everyone has dignity, not everyone deserves respect. Respect must be earned. . . . Dignity is something we all deserve no matter what we do. It is the starting point for the way we treat one another. To clear up any confusion, I think it is imperative to respect each other's dignity. (p. 2)

From a biblical perspective, human dignity originates from God because people are made in God's own image and likeness (Gen 1:26–27). Until dignity for all people is realized, the power and hierarchy structures maintaining a cycle of inequalities for historically underrepresented groups will likely be maintained (Ladson-Billings & Donnor, 2008; Hicks, 2021; Honneth, 1996).

Findings of this study highlight the continued presence of academic inequalities and the misrecognition of historically underrepresented students in higher education. The

subcategories of economic inequalities, structural inequalities, and social inequalities underscore the multidimensional nature of these disparities. Participants' experiences of feeling undervalued and marginalized, coupled with the persistent gaps in graduation rates, demonstrate the pressing need for leaders to continue to address these challenges (Maxwell, 2020). Existing interventions have fallen short of fully addressing the root causes of these inequalities, necessitating new approaches and a deeper understanding of the role of recognition and dignity in promoting social justice (Crumb et al., 2020; Ladson-Billings & Paris, 2021).

As scholars have argued, the recognition of individuals' inherent dignity and worth is crucial in combating injustices and fostering inclusivity (Hicks, 2021; Honneth, 1996). Until all individuals are afforded the dignity they deserve, the power structures that perpetuate academic inequalities will persist (Hicks, 2021; Honneth, 1996; Ladson-Billings & Donnor, 2008). Three additional themes revealed in this study are relevant to the dialogue around historically underrepresented groups.

Additional Themes

Three additional themes emerged in this study: (a) access to higher education through academic services, (b) family influence on future orientation, and (c) historically underrepresented students' motivation to pay it forward. Although these themes do not answer this study's research questions, they are relevant to the dialogue in academic literature about historically underrepresented groups. In this study, students spoke about the impact of academic service 20 times, family influence 50 times, and their motivation to pay it forward 28 times.

Access to Higher Education Through Academic Services

Participants in the study emphasized the importance of academic services, wraparound programs, and advisors who provided tutoring, mentoring, academic advising, and scholarships. Participants shared how academic services helped them learn about the opportunity of higher education, navigate the application system, and succeed in their classwork. The impact of academic services and/or wraparound programs was expected because all students in this study had participated in an academic service/wraparound program. Academic services have been both praised and criticized by scholars and education leaders.

Some studies have suggested academic services can help create greater equity, and others have argued they may exacerbate existing inequalities. Camarillo (2020) and Tinto (2006) found academic services, such as tutoring, mentoring, and financial aid, can help increase access to educational opportunities for disadvantaged groups, such as low-income, first-generation, and historically underrepresented students. Additionally, Kirui and McGee's (2021) results suggested interventions like scholarships, mentoring, and academic and psychosocial support increase access, persistence, and graduation rates. Kim et al. (2021) found wraparound programs like GEAR UP increased student awareness and access to higher education opportunities through college visits, financial aid counseling, and test preparation. Last, McDonough and Calderone (2019) found academic advising significantly improved students' academic performance and retention. These studies showed academic services, wraparound programs, and advising can contribute significantly to the academic success of historically underrepresented students and create greater equity in education.

Conversely, Duncheon (2021) argued academic services may reinforce existing inequities and create more barriers for already disadvantaged students. For example, Knifsend and Graham (2012) and Duncheon (2021) found academic services may benefit advantaged students more than historically underrepresented students because high-achieving students are more likely to take advantage of these types of services. Additional research has found, although academic services were helpful to some students, these services were not sufficient to address the systematic barriers facing low-income and first-generation students who often were stigmatized, contributing to further discrimination (Duncheon, 2021; Ovink & Veazey, 2011, 2020; Ozaki & Parson, 2021). Thus, although academic services provide relief for many individual students, they may not address the root causes of educational disparities. Although findings of this research were limited due to the criteria for participation, students' responses support previous studies that have found academic services, wraparound programs, and advisors beneficial in assisting historically underrepresented students in successfully transitioning to and persisting in HEIs.

At the core of academic services and wraparound programs is the belief that all students have a right to education regardless of race, ethnicity, gender, social-economic status (Burke, 2019). The ethos of academic services and wraparound programs parallel with the work of critical race theorists and scholars by "reject[ing] the dominant narrative about the inherent inferiority of people of color and the normative superiority of White people" (Dixson & Rousseau Anderson, 2018, p. 121). In this study, students shared they felt recognized as individuals with equal worth and ability by the advisors and coordinators of academic services and wraparound programs.

These feelings of equal worth participants expressed are consistent with the assertions of Honneth's (1996a) recognition theory. Overall, research has shown academic services can increase access to educational opportunities and improve academic outcomes for disadvantaged students (Camarillo, 2020; Dixon et al., 2023; Kirui & McGee, 2021; McCallen & Johnson, 2020; Tinto, 2006), in alignment with this study's findings. Building upon the finding on access to higher education through academic services, the following section discusses how teacher recognition influenced student persistence.

Family Influence on Future Orientation

The second additional theme that emerged in this study was family influence on future orientation. Participants' experiences revealed family influence, including the phenomenon of legacy motivation and the development of ethnic identity, had a significant influence on their perseverance and future orientation. Research has affirmed a sense of future orientation serves as an important factor in motivating students to persist and succeed in higher education (Peng & Zhang, 2022; Seginer, 2018). A student who has a future orientation will more likely have a positive, long-term plan and outlook for their life (Peng & Zhang, 2022). A future orientation can create a sense of purpose, self-determination, and a drive to persevere when obstacles arrive (Seginer, 2018). The theme of family influence on future orientation consists of two subcategories: legacy motivation and ethnic identity.

Legacy Motivation. According to Thunig (2022), with the phenomenon of "legacy motivation" or "family obligation," individuals feel driven to succeed not only for themselves but also for their family members. This type of motivation often arises in

response to the challenges and obstacles their family members have faced. Thunig noted one can commonly observe legacy motivation among first-generation college students, who may feel a sense of responsibility or obligation to succeed and to provide a better future for their families. In this study, several participants described the phenomenon of legacy motivation as a factor in their ability to persist in higher education.

Although legacy motivation can be a positive motivating factor providing a student with social–emotional support and direction, Sturdivant (2020) noted family obligation can produce stress, anxiety, and burnout in historically underrepresented students. A few students in this study discussed the pressures of being a first-generation student and the impact on their emotional well-being but overall, findings of this study confirmed the positive impact families can have on historically underrepresented students' motivation and persistence. Another influential motivator in the persistence of students in this study is related to ethnic identity.

Ethnic Identity. As Umaña-Taylor et al. (2014) noted, ethnic identity is the sense of connection and belonging individuals feel toward their culture or ethnic group. Developing a strong sense of ethnic identity can promote positive outcomes for individuals, such as greater psychological well-being, academic achievement, and social support (Phinney et al., 2001). For historically underrepresented groups, connecting with their ethnic background can provide a sense of pride and empowerment that can counteract experiences of discrimination and other inequalities (Meca et al., 2020).

In this study, participants confirmed the importance of connecting with their ethnic background, saying it provided them with a sense of belonging, support, and confidence. Ethnic identity also motivated some students who wanted to provide a place

of connection on campus for other ethnic minorities. Conversely, Umaña-Taylor et al. found ethnic identity may be used as a tool for exclusion or discrimination, both within and outside one's own ethnic or racial group. Overall, this study observed ethnic identity as a positive motivator and influencer on participants' ability to persist in their education. The last additional theme impacting the academic outcomes of historically underrepresented students was the motivation to pay it forward.

Students' Motivation to Pay It Forward

The final theme that emerged from this study addressed historically underrepresented students' motivation to pay it forward. Participants in this study expressed a desire to give back to their communities what they had received. As with the other five themes in this research study, recognition sits at the core of what motivates historically underrepresented students to pay it forward. Honneth (1996) contended recognition from others builds a sense of purpose and helps a person find their work fulfilling and, ultimately, a good life. Peng and Zhang (2022) argued students who have a clear vision and purpose or a feeling of social responsibility have improved academic outcomes. Likewise, Astin and Astin (2012) emphasized social responsibility, collaboration, and community engagement as key factors to persistence and success. Moreover, Green and Wright (2017) and Aronson et al. (2002) suggested empowerment through goal setting techniques can help students maintain a positive outlook for the future and can help historically underrepresented students overcome the negative stereotypes and discrimination that can be obstacles to persistence.

The desire for an improved life and a commitment to pay it forward emerged as noteworthy and compelling motivating factors for the students participating in this study.

These findings align with previous research highlighting the role of recognition, empowerment, and collaboration in promoting personal growth and academic success (Peng & Zhang, 2022). By recognizing students' strengths and abilities, helping them set clear goals for the future, and fostering a sense of social responsibility, teachers can aid underrepresented students in overcoming obstacles and achieving their academic goals (Peng & Zhang, 2022). In conclusion, these findings suggest fostering a desire for a better life and a sense of social responsibility can serve as motivating factors for student persistence and success.

Significance of Study

No student should be underestimated because of the color of their skin or their social-economic background (Participant 12). Throughout U.S. history, historically underrepresented groups such as Black people, Hispanic individuals, and Native Americans/Alaska Natives have faced extraordinary barriers to attending a higher education institution (Creamer, 2020). Academic inequalities have been addressed by politicians and higher institution leaders through policies targeting socioeconomic issues (Thwing, 2019). Although access to higher education has progressed, lower retention rates among historically underrepresented groups persist (Creamer, 2020). In addition, people from these historically underrepresented groups continue to sustain a multitude of injustices and a lack of recognition of their inherent human worth and right to education (Bastedo et al., 2016; Jack, 2019; The New School, 2019).

Findings of this research have theoretical, social, and practical significances. Previous academic research has taken a high level approach to recognition theory through a review of literature and/or critique of recognition scholars (Allen, 2016; Carleheden et

al., 2012; Giles, 2020; Iser, 2019; Willig, 2012) along with an examination of the impact of recognition and misrecognition on individuals and society as a whole (Epstein, 2018; Giles, 2020; Hey, 2011; Huttunen & Heikkinen, 2004; Waterton & Smith, 2010). Some researchers have focused on the impact of recognition on identity and agency (Chari, 2004; McNay, 2008; Puolimatka, 2018; C. Taylor, 1992). Few have focused on the implications of recognition or misrecognition by a teacher in education (Zembylas, 2016) as set forth by this study's research questions.

Socially, findings of this research highlighted a core component of inequality—misrecognition and the devaluation of historically underrepresented groups. Recognition theory is necessary to understanding academic inequities and essential to challenging existing power structures and promoting social change (Honneth, 1996). Finally, through an examination of leadership theory and practice, this research has practical significance by highlighting the importance of teacher–student connectedness on students' motivation to persist in college.

Although educational research has demonstrated a growing trend of race-conscious discussions, a deficiency persists in providing higher education leaders with professional development strategies that foster equitable environments in both classrooms and campuses (Ladson-Billings & Donnor, 2008; Maxwell, 2022; Swanson & Welton, 2019). As an illustration, in various HEIs, diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) training often encompasses subjects such as stereotypes, microaggressions, and inclusive pedagogy (Maxwell, 2022). These lessons have extended theoretical knowledge along with offering tangible strategies that can create more inclusive classrooms, but these efforts must continue until all inequalities are righted. The practical significance of this

study could add to existing DEI professional development efforts for faculty, teaching methods, and equitable pedagogy that may impact the positive trajectory of a student's progress at the postsecondary level. Based on the findings of this research, implications for practice and suggested leadership development training and pedagogical considerations will be discussed in the next section.

In sum, the significance and uniqueness of this study lies in the investigation of the impact of recognition by a teacher on historically underrepresented students who have persisted in higher education at 4-year colleges or universities in Washington State. By using Heidegger's hermeneutic phenomenological philosophy, Honneth's recognition theory, CRT, and leadership theory and practice, this study offers a distinctive perspective on the experiences of underrepresented students in higher education. Through an examination of the shared lived experiences of participants in this study, the findings advance the literature by highlighting the influence of recognition and misrecognition by a teacher on the lives of historically underrepresented college students in Washington State, offering a new perspective on teacher leadership and pedagogical practices.

Implications

Increasing persistence and retention rates is one of the most significant challenges for higher education leaders today (Lynch, 2023). In a personal communication with one of the university leaders who acted as a gatekeeper for this research, this leader said, "The huge issue and biggest need is for faculty development that leads to higher persistent and retention rates." Findings of this study have important implications for administrators and educators who seek to improve persistence and retention rates among historically underrepresented groups in higher education. By identifying and

understanding the multilayered factors that contribute to student persistence and success, administrators and educators can develop strategies and pedagogies to better support underrepresented students in their academic pursuits (Banks & Dohy, 2019).

Findings of this research assert the persistence of historically underrepresented students is not only a matter of socioeconomics but also a matter of treating each person with equal recognition, dignity, and worth (Hicks, 2021, Honneth, 2006). Consistently, students in this study shared stories of the impact of both recognition and misrecognition by a teacher on their preserved ability to persist in college. When recognized, students felt motivated to continue in their academic goals. Further, the research of this study emphasized recognition increased a sense of belonging and inclusion in the classroom and on campus. Conversely, misrecognition perpetuated feelings of alienation and the desire to drop out of school. To meet higher education persistence and retention goals, administrators must be intentional and set long-range goals to overcome existing inequities in colleges and universities (Pinkett, 2023). By considering the voices of the historically underrepresented students in this study, administrators can use these findings to identify and address gaps in leader development and take steps to add recognition theory to existing diversity and inclusion training and practices (San Pedro et al., 2021).

The lived experiences recorded in this research could aid educators in a deeper understanding of the disparities facing historically underrepresented students and what they need to overcome them. Findings of this study also suggest leadership style impacts teacher–student connectedness, which was proven to lead to better academic outcomes (Shen et al., 2020). Last, this study may help teachers develop and implement new methods of teaching and interaction that increase teacher–student connectedness, a sense

of belonging in the classroom, and ultimately motivate historically underrepresented students to persist in their academic goals (Ladson-Billings & Paris, 2021). Based on these implications and the overall findings of this research, the next section provides suggestions for leadership development training for faculty of HEIs.

Recommended Leadership Development Training

In this study, the students underscored the necessity for leaders to comprehend their unique experiences as historically underrepresented students, along with the hurdles they encounter in their collegiate journey. Each theme that emerged from this research emphasized the need for extended discourse and leadership training. These measures could enhance comprehension, foster empathy, and develop practical skills that may help to mitigate the academic disparities faced by historically underrepresented students. Based on the research, the author of this study suggests five lessons for faculty leadership development: (a) Honneth's recognition theory, (b) Hick's dignity model, (c) leadership practice and teacher–student connectedness, (d) Ladson-Billings's CRP, and (e) data-driven DEI. A brief overview of these five lessons is given here, and a sample leadership development training workshop outline is provided in Appendix H.

An examination of Honneth's (1996) recognition theory affords educational leaders the opportunity to learn the difference between redistribution and recognition and their individual impacts on inequalities in higher education. Redistribution sees social justice issues through a socioeconomic lens and solves those issues by reallocating wealth, capacities, and other social goods through policy reform (Fraser et al., 2003). Recognition theory, on the other hand, asserts the core of social injustice is misrecognition (Fraser et al., 2003). Misrecognition, then, refers to situations where

individuals or groups are denied the recognition individuals need to develop their identities fully and to thrive in their social contexts (Honneth, 1996).

Misrecognition can occur in various ways, such as disrespect, disregard, or maltreatment (Honneth, 1996). It could also involve the denial or devaluation of certain identities and experiences, leading to feelings of worthlessness, social exclusion, and even psychological harm (Fraser et al., 2003). In this sense, misrecognition is not simply about not being seen or noticed, but rather about being seen incorrectly or in a diminished or devalued way (Honneth, 1996). According to Honneth (1996), this kind of misrecognition is a form of injustice because it undermines individuals' ability to develop their identities and participate in social life fully. An understanding of recognition theory could aid educators in facilitating dialogue and increasing a sense of belonging in the classroom.

Hicks's (2021) dignity model emphasizes the importance of understanding and acknowledging the inherent worth of all individuals. Like recognition theory, when we treat others with dignity, recognize their rights, and acknowledge their perspectives, it is possible to create an environment conducive to dialogue, understanding, and conflict resolution (Hicks, 2021, Honneth, 1996). Hicks also emphasized the need to acknowledge violations of dignity and to apologize when we have violated the dignity of others, which is part of creating a culture of dignity that can help prevent conflicts and facilitate resolution when conflict does arise. Hicks's approach is useful for both leadership development and in classroom settings. Understanding and implementing the dignity model can help address underlying issues among faculty, teams, and students

such as feelings of disrespect or humiliation, which often fuel conflict and social injustices (Hicks, 2021).

A teacher's leadership theory and practice has been proven to impact student academic outcomes (Shen et al., 2020). Findings of this research showed a connection between a teacher's leadership style, teacher–student connectedness, and a student's motivation to persist in their education. Therefore, understanding personal leadership styles and the potential impact on student's academic achievement is important and may lead to improved teacher–student connectedness, classroom pedagogies, and student success.

Ladson-Billings (2021) is a critical race scholar who created a CRP for administrators and educators. Ladson-Billings suggested lower academic achievement among historically underrepresented students is not due to inadequate curriculum or students' ability to learn but rather the inability of administrators and educators to translate academic research into practice. Ladson-Billings (2021) defined CRP as

> a pedagogy that empowers students intellectually, socially, emotionally, and politically by using cultural referents to impart knowledge, skills, and attitudes. These cultural referents are not merely vehicles for explaining the dominant culture; they are aspects of the curriculum in their own right. (p. 4)

CRP offers a new approach for administrators and educators to understand the phenomena of exemplary pedagogical practice that can add in engagement and inclusive classroom communities (Ladson-Billings, 2021).

Last, data-driven DEI training is recommended for all higher education administrators and faculty not currently participating. Pinkett (2023) suggested five steps

for data-driven DEI: (a) DEI Inventory for Organizations—Seek Understanding, (b) DEI Imperatives—Determine Priorities, (c) DEI Insights—Identify "What Works," (d) DEI Initiatives—Take Action, and (e) DEI Impact—Evaluate Results. Assessments, metrics, and analytics remain essential to measuring the impact of equity efforts on campus and in the classroom (Pinkett, 2023). For example, faculty or class evaluations could expand to include topics proven to help students achieve their personal academic goals like teacher–student connectedness, representation, or students' sense of belonging in the classroom (Shen et al., 2020).

Common DEI metrics might include demographic data (e.g., race/ethnicity, gender, age), inclusion survey results, pay equity analyses, rates of internal promotion by demographic group, among others (Pinkett, 2023). Data metrics provide objective evaluation, help to identify areas of improvement, inform decision making and hold administrators and faculty accountability to equity goals (Pinkett, 2023). Historically underrepresented students need courageous leaders who will set "Big Hairy Audacious Goals" (BHAG), that lead change through data driven metrics and accountability (Collins, 2001). Although this study's findings contribute valuable implications for practice insights to the understanding the impact of recognition by a teacher on the persistence rates of historically underrepresented students, it remains important to acknowledge and address the limitations of the research.

Limitations

All research has limitations that may impact the interpretation and outcomes of a study (Babbie, 2015; Creswell & Poth, 2017). According to Creswell and Poth (2017), "Even the most carefully designed and executed study has limitations that can affect the

interpretation and generalization of its results" (p. 118). To provide transparency and context for the reader, the limitations are discussed in this section (Ross & Zaidi, 2019). Four limitations of this study were sample size, population, personal bias, and data collection (Creswell & Poth, 2017).

Traditional quantitative research relies on a larger sample size for the purpose of validity and reliability (Creswell & Poth, 2017). A large sample size generally allows for accurate data analysis and findings that can be applied to the general public (Creswell & Poth, 2017). The sample size and population of this qualitative approach also limited this study's ability to understand the direct impact on persistent rates. Additionally, no longitudinal data were collected, and students were asked to speak about recognition broadly, not within specific windows of time. Likewise, findings of this study may be less reliable and more subjective as compared to a study with a larger sample size. Nevertheless, the goal of this research was to understand the lived experiences of a sample of historically underrepresented students in Washington state. Therefore, the researcher of this study deliberately chose a small sample size of 15 students to align with a qualitative hermeneutic phenomenological design of this study.

This study focused on a specific population of historically underrepresented students: Black people, Hispanic individuals, and Native Americans/Alaska Natives. Although all participants met the studies' demographic criteria, this study did not represent equal numbers of participants by race: two participants identified as Black, four participants identified as Native American, and nine participants identified as Hispanic or Latino. Furthermore, participants were not given the opportunity to specify their country of origin.

Hence, this study, due to its limitation in terms of racial diversity, may not answer fully questions about the relationship between race and the lived experiences of historically underrepresented students in higher education. Likewise, this study did not account for the important ethnic or cultural differences of each race represented in this study, and the population of this study did not include all historically underrepresented students, such as Pacific Islanders or Asian Americans. Moreover, this study did not interview students outside of those who have participated in a wraparound program, which may limit the information gained. This study also was limited geographically by focusing only on Washington State 4-year colleges and universities.

Further, the researcher's experience as a low-income female student with a dis/ability may have generated personal bias. Creswell and Poth (2017) reasoned "the analysis of qualitative data is often subjective and can be influenced by the researcher's own biases and assumptions" (p. 220). Due to this study's hermeneutic phenomenological design, the researcher interpreted assumptions through the hermeneutic circle, which allowed the researcher to revise or confirm previous assumptions or biases (Peoples, 2020).

In this study, the researcher's assumptions were both revised and confirmed—revised by learning of diverse and similar experiences of the historically underrepresented students in this study and confirmed in that recognition has an influence on motivation and persistence. Despite these limitations, the researcher chose the study design after exploring various research methodologies and deeming the most appropriate method for the research question. By acknowledging and addressing these limitations, the

researcher enhanced the credibility and trustworthiness of the study (Creswell & Poth, 2017).

Last, the data collection timeframe did not allow for a longitudinal study, and the research protocol did not identify any correlations between retention and persistence. Due to these limitations, further research on these topics, particularly in the context of historically underrepresented students is needed.

Recommendations for Future Research

This section recommends several areas for future research based on findings of this study that employed a qualitative hermeneutic phenomenological approach. The themes that emerged from this study illuminated the complex nature of recognition by a teacher and its influence on the persistence of historically underrepresented students in higher education. The recommendations for future qualitative research are intended to advance an understanding of the role of recognition in promoting academic success and equity in higher education. The researcher has four recommendations for future research.

This study looked at the impact of recognition by a teacher on historically underrepresented students who are currently enrolled and persisting in higher education at a higher education institution in Washington State. First, this researcher recommends future studies focus on students who have withdrawn from college and the possible connection between recognition or misrecognition by a teacher on persistence. Second, the study interviews found no distinguishable difference between races in this study; consequently, this researcher recommends future studies examine the impact of recognition on specific races to understand the interplay of race and teacher recognition.

Third, students in this research named soft skills like communication, active listening, empathy, and flexibility that led to deeper student–teacher connectedness and persistence.

Soft skills, also called people skills, "known as non-cognitive skills, are a mixture of emotions, attitudes, behavior and thoughts that are recognized by society and developed throughout individuals' attempts to determine values" (Tabieh et al., 2021, p. 219). It is recommended that future research explores the connection between leadership soft skills. Last, two students who experienced misrecognition described being motivated to "prove that teacher wrong." Hence, this researcher recommends an exploration of the concept of spite motivation to identify differences in motivation between historically underrepresented students and more dominant groups like White and middle class or White and upper class. Through these recommendations, this study aspires to deepen the dialogue around the role recognition could play in the classroom that aims for a more inclusive and equitable academic environment.

Conclusion

The persistence and retention of historically underrepresented groups in higher education continues to be among the most pressing justice issues in our society. Despite progress in access to higher education, historically underrepresented groups, including Blacks people, Hispanics individuals, and Native Americans/Alaska Natives, still encounter numerous barriers preventing them from obtaining a college degree. Moreover, historically underrepresented students continue to face a lack of recognition of their worth and right to education as well as other injustices (Bastedo et al., 2016; Jack, 2019; The New School, 2019).

This study, which relied on Heidegger's hermeneutic phenomenological philosophy, Honneth's recognition theory, and CRT, along with an examination of leadership theory and practice, explored these issues through the perspectives of 15 historically underrepresented students in Washington State. Through in-depth interviews, the study revealed significant insights into how recognition and misrecognition by teachers can influence on the motivation and persistence of historically underrepresented students. This study's findings suggest the need for continued research on how to address the challenges facing historically underrepresented students in higher education and promote greater recognition and inclusion for all.

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APPENDIX A

RESEARCH STUDY GATEKEEPER INVITATION LETTER

Dear [Gatekeeper Name]

My name is Angela Craig, and I am a PhD candidate in the Northwest University's Doctor of Philosophy in Organizational Leadership program. I am emailing you because you lead [name of wraparound program and name of college/university], and I hope to gain your approval to invite students from your program to participate in my dissertation study. The study aims to serve historically underrepresented students who have participated or currently participate in a college/university wraparound program. This qualitative study explores the impact of recognition by a teacher on the persistence rate of historically underrepresented students in higher education in Washington State. For this study, recognition is defined as, validating the worth (dignity), experiences, talents, and potential of every individual, regardless of race, ethnicity, or gender through words and actions (Altmeyer, 2018; Giles, 2020; Hicks, 2019; Honneth, 2020). The Northwest University Institutional Review Board (IRB) approved this study on [date of approval].

Participants in this study must meet the following demographic criterion: (a) the student is an adult age 18 or older, (b) the student is a historically underrepresented student (Black, Hispanic, American Indian or Alaska Native), (c) the student has persisted in a 4-year university or college in Washington State, and (d) the student is past or current participant in a higher education wraparound program. Participants will be asked to participate in a one-on-one interview using the online meeting platform, Zoom. This interview will take no longer than 60 minutes and can be conducted at a convenient time and date to be arranged between the researcher and participant(s). All participant personal information and interview transcripts from the research will be kept strictly confidential. Results will be reported in a dissertation available to all participants on completion. Although no major benefits exist personally for participation, the information from this study will inform researchers, policymakers, and educators on equity practices necessary for the academic success of all students.

If you would consider allowing me access to your students for this research study, please e-mail me at xxxxx@northwestu.edu or call (XXX) XXX–XXXX to confirm. On receipt of your return email, I will provide you with a participant packet that includes (a) letter of invitation, (b) an informed consent form, (c) interview protocol, and, (d) a selection criteria checklist. If you have any questions about this study or the rights of study participant, you may contact me or the faculty advisor for this study, Dr. Ben Thomas, at ben.thomas@northwestu.edu or 425-889-7821. I appreciate your time and consideration of this important research.

Very Respectfully,

Angela Craig, PhD (cand.)
Northwest University

5520 108th Ave NE, Kirkland, WA 98083
(XXX) XXX–XXXX | xxxxxx@northwestu.edu

APPENDIX B

RESEARCH STUDY INVITATION LETTER

Date

Dear [Name of Prospective Study Participant]:

You are invited to participate in a research study conducted at [enter college name here]. This research looks at the impact of recognition by a teacher on the persistence rate of historically underrepresented students. For this study, recognition is defined as, validating the worth (dignity), experiences, talents, and potential of every individual, regardless of race, ethnicity, or gender through words and actions (Altmeyer, 2018; Giles, 2020; Hicks, 2019; Honneth, 2020). The main investigator of this study is Angela Craig, doctoral candidate in Northwest University's Doctor of Philosophy in Organizational Leadership program. The Northwest University Institutional Review Board has approved the study.

You were chosen to participate in this study because you are a historically underrepresented student who has persisted in higher education. If you agree to participate in this study, I will ask you to complete a short questionnaire regarding the following demographic criterion: (a) you are an adult age 18 or older, (b) you are a historically underrepresented student (Black, Hispanic, American Indian, or Alaska Native), (c) you have persisted in a 4-year university or college in Washington State, and (d) you are a past or current participant in a higher education wraparound program. Additionally, you will also be asked to sign a volunteer informed consent form. The investigator involved with the study will keep your personal information collected for the study strictly confidential. Any information obtained in connection with this study that can be identified with you will remain confidential—disclosed only with your permission or as required by law. Your identity will be kept strictly confidential using pseudonyms (fake ID keys like A, B, C etc.). All data and transcripts with pseudonyms are kept in a password protected, encrypted folder on the principal investigator's One-Drive Personal Vault on a Northwest University institutionally secure and managed laptop with limited access. This laptop will be locked in a secure office on the Northwest University campus. Other than the principal investigator, the only parties that may have access to the research data the faculty advisor for this study, Dr. Ben Thomas, at ben.thomas@northwestu.edu. All data forms and information will be destroyed three years from the date of signature.

Approximately 15 students will enroll in this study. Participation should require no more than 60 minutes of your time, is entirely voluntary, and will remain strictly anonymous. You may withdraw from the study at any time without consequences. Your responses will be treated confidentially and will not be linked to any identifying information about you.

PURPOSE: The purpose of this study is to understand the impact of recognition by a teacher on the persistence rate of historically underrepresented students in higher education. Persistence refer to "a student's ability to continue on to the next term"

(Spears, 2020). This study explores the lived experiences of participants and captures the essence of that experience to better understand how to increase educational attainment among historically underrepresented students who may not otherwise persist or graduate from college. Results from the study will be summarized in a doctoral dissertation.

PROCEDURES: If you decide to participate in the study, I will invite you to participate in a one-on-one interview, the goal of which involves hearing your experience as a historically underrepresented student who has successfully persisted at your 4-year university. The one-on-one interview will consist of 12 open-ended questions. I will hold the one-on-one interview using the video conferencing software, Zoom and audio record it, using the application,
Otter, for transcription and accuracy.

RISKS, INCONVENIENCES, AND DISCOMFORTS: No deception is involved, and participation in this study poses minimal risk to participants. There is no inconvenience outside of the time you commit to the one-on-one interview. Some interview questions may cause mild emotional discomfort as you share your life experience as a historically underrepresented student.

POTENTIAL BENEFITS: Although there are no major benefits to you personally for participation, your voice matters. The information from this study is intended to inform researchers, policymakers, and educators on equity practices that are necessary for academic success of all students.

CONFIDENTIALITY: Records of information that you provide for the research study and any personal information you provide will not be linked in any way. It will not be possible to identify you as the person who provided any specific information for the study. I encourage you to ask any questions at any time that will help you understand how I will perform this study and/or how it will affect you. You may contact me, Angela Craig, as the principal researcher (by phone at (XXX) XXX-XXXX or email xxxxx@northwestu.edu). If you have any further questions or concerns about this study or your rights as a study participant, you may contact the faculty advisor for this study, Dr. Ben Thomas at ben.thomas@northwestu.edu or 425-889-7821, or the Chair of the Northwest University Institutional Review Board, Professor Cheri Goit, at cheri.goit@northwestu.edu or 436-889-5762.

Very Respectfully,

Angela Craig, PhD (cand.)
Northwest University
5520 108th Ave NE, Kirkland, WA 98083
(XXX) XXX-XXXX | xxxxx@northwestu.edu

APPENDIX C

INFORMED CONSENT FORM - INTERVIEW

5520 108th Ave. NE
Kirkland, WA 98033

Research Topic Title: A Qualitative Study Exploring the Impact of Recognition by a Teacher on the Persistence Rate of Historically Underrepresented Students in Higher Education in Washington State

Angela Craig, PhD (cand.)

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Voluntary Status: You are being invited to participate in a research study conducted by the researcher identified above. You are being asked to volunteer since you meet the requirements for participation in this study. Your participation is voluntary, which means you can choose whether you want to participate. You may withdraw any time without penalty. If you decline to continue, any data gathered to that point may be used in data analysis. Before you can make your decision, you will need to know what the study is about, the possible risks and benefits of being in this study, and what you will have to do in this study. The researcher will talk to you about the study and give you this consent form to read. If you decide to participate, the researcher will ask you to sign this form.

Purpose: The purpose of this study is to understand the impact of recognition by a teacher on the persistence rate of historically underrepresented students in higher education. Persistence refers to "a student's ability to continue on to the next term" (Spears, 2020). This study explores the lived experiences of participants and captures the essence of that experience to better understand how to increase educational attainment among historically underrepresented students who may not otherwise persist or graduate from college. Results from the study will be summarized in a doctoral dissertation.

Procedure: To voluntarily participate in this study, the researcher will ask you to participate in an interview regarding the impact of recognition by a teacher on your persistence in higher education. The goal of the one-on-one interview is to hear your experience as a historically underrepresented student who has successfully persisted at your 4-year university. The one-on-one interview will consist of 12 open-ended questions. The researcher will conduct the one-on-one interview using the video conferencing software, Zoom, and she will only record the audio using the application, Otter, for the purpose of transcription and accuracy. The privacy policies of Zoom and Otter may be accessed at the following link: https://explore.zoom.us/en/privacy/ and https://otter.ai/privacy-policy respectively.

The information obtained during the interview may be published in a doctoral dissertation and in a journal or presented at meetings/presentations. To protect your identity, the researcher will use pseudonyms (fake ID keys like A, B, C etc.). The

researcher will not use audio recordings for any purpose other than those listed above and will destroy these recordings three years from the date of recording.

Commitment and Compensation: Your total participation in the study will take approximately 60 minutes. You will not receive financial compensation for participation in the study.

Risks, Inconveniences, and Discomforts: No deception is involved, and participation in this study poses minimal risk to participants. There is no inconvenience outside of the time you commit to the one-on-one interview. Some interview questions may cause mild emotional discomfort as you share your life experience as a historically underrepresented student.

However, there is always the chance that there are some unexpected risks. If you feel uncomfortable or distressed, please tell the researcher and she will ask you if you want to continue. If any questions or content bring up personal questions, confusion, or anxiety, you may seek help by contacting the Crisis Text Hotline by texting 741741. In addition, Psychology Today at www.psychologytoday.com is a resource to find a referral for a counselor in your area. Immediate help may also be found by contacting the Wellness Center/Academic services Center at your college/university.

Potential Benefits: Although there are no major benefits to you personally for participation, your voice matters. The information from this study is intended to inform researchers, policymakers, and educators on equity practices necessary for academic success of all students.

Confidentiality and Consent: The investigator involved with the study will keep your personal information collected for the study strictly confidential. Any information obtained in connection with this study and that can be identified with you will remain confidential — disclosed only with your permission or as required by law. The researcher will keep your identity strictly confidential using pseudonyms (fake ID keys like A, B, C etc.). All data and transcripts with pseudonyms are kept in a password protected, encrypted folder on the principal investigator's One-Drive Personal Vault on a Northwest University institutionally secure and managed laptop with limited access. This laptop will be locked in a secure office on the Northwest University campus. Other than the principal investigator, the only parties that may have access to the research data is the faculty advisor for this study, Dr. Ben Thomas, accessible at ben.thomas@northwestu.edu.

This document explains your rights as a research subject. If you have further questions about this study or your rights, or if you wish to lodge a complaint or concern, you may contact the principal investigator, Angela Craig at xxxxx@northwestu.edu or (XXX) XXX-XXXX and/or the faculty supervisor, Dr. Ben Thomas at ben.thomas@northwestu.edu or 425-889-7821, or the Chair of the Northwest University Institutional Review Board, Professor Cheri Goit, at cheri.goit@northwestu.edu or 436-889-5762.

New Information: During this study, the principal investigator may discover information that could be important to you, including information that, once learned, might cause you to change your mind about being in the study. The principal investigator will notify you as soon as possible if such information becomes available.

Conflict of Interest: The principal investigator has complied with the Northwest University Potential Conflict of Interest in Research policy.

Audio Recording: As stated above, this study involves an audio recording of your interview with the researcher. Neither your name nor any other identifying information (voice or picture) will be associated with the audio recording or the transcript. Audio recordings are used for the purpose of transcription and accuracy. A copy of the transcript will be sent to you within 48 hours of your interview for your review and approval. These transcripts will be destroyed 3 years to the date of signature.

☐ I agree to be audio recorded.

Consent: I understand that my participation in this study is entirely voluntary and that I may refuse to participate or may withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. I understand the procedures described above, and I understand fully the rights of a potential subject in a research study involving people as subjects. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I agree to participate in this study. I have received a copy of this consent form.

_____ _____

Participant Name Printed Participant Name Signed Date

I have explained the research to the subject or his or her legal representative and answered all his or her questions. I believe he or she understands the information described in this document and freely consents to participate.

_____ _____

Signature of Principal Investigator Date Time

Angela Craig, PhD (cand.)
Northwest University
5520 108th Ave NE, Kirkland, WA 98083
(XXX) XXX–XXXX | angela.craig@northwestu.edu

APPENDIX D

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

1. Can you describe how you first became aware of the opportunity to attend college?
2. What influence, if any, did a teacher have on your decision to attend college?
3. What motivates you as a student in higher education?
4. What people or experiences have helped you persist in college?
5. Can you describe any attitudes, beliefs or biases that made you question your ability to attend or stay in college? Who did you hear these attitudes, beliefs, or biases from?
6. In what ways have you felt affirmed by a teacher as a college student? [Ask for specific examples.]
7. What words or phrases have impacted your decision to stay in college? [Positive or negative.] Who did those words come from?
8. Can you describe a time you felt recognized by a teacher? [For the purpose of this study, recognition is defined as, validating the worth (dignity), experiences, talents, and potential of every individual, regardless of race, ethnicity, or gender through words and actions (Altmeyer, 2018; Giles, 2020; Hicks, 2019; Honneth, 2020).]
9. Thinking of a teacher who you received recognition from, which of the following statements describes his/her teaching style:
    a. Expressed genuine interest.
    b. Motivated students to reach their goals.
    c. Promoted inclusion in the classroom.
    d. Stood against discrimination.
    e. Promoted social change in/out of the classroom.
    f. Focused on building students' strengths vs. fixing students' weaknesses.
10. How have the words or actions of a teacher helped you to persist in college?
11. Looking into the future, what opportunities do you see for yourself as a graduate of [name of school]?
12. Based on these questions, is there anything else I should have asked?

APPENDIX E

SELECTION CRITERIA CHECKLIST

RESEARCH STUDY TITLE: A Qualitative Study Exploring the Impact of Recognition by a Teacher on the Persistence Rate of Historically Underrepresented Students in Higher Education in Washington State

Angela Craig, PhD (cand.)

INSTRUCTIONS: As you begin to identify participants for the above research study, please consider the following selection criteria.

SELECTION CRITERIA CHECKLIST:

- ☐ Participant currently attends a 4-year college or university in Washington State.
- ☐ Participant is over the age 18.
- ☐ Participant has participated or is currently participating in a college or university wraparound program. **Wraparound Services:** "Wraparound services in higher education refers to holistic support to ensure a student's full range of needs are addressed. This can include academic, health, socioemotional, familial, financial, and logistical support" (The Hunt Institute, 2020, p. 4). Wraparound programs create equitable educational opportunities and remove systematic barriers among underrepresented groups. Wraparound programs meet these goals through scholarships, mentoring, leadership training, and student/career development services (The Hunt Institute, 2020). Relevant wraparound programs used in this research include the following: TRIO, Act Six, Posse Foundation, GEAR UP, or similar program offered through student support services at your college/university.
- ☐ Student identifies as a historically underrepresented student/individual that is part of the population of this study. **Historically Underrepresented Groups:** Historically Underrepresented Groups are "persons who are members of racial, ethnic, or gender groups that have been disproportionately underrepresented for a period of more than ten years" (Goforth, 2022, para. 3).
    - ☐ Black
    - ☐ Hispanic
    - ☐ Native American or Alaskan Native
- ☐ Participant is willing to voluntarily participate in the research study.

APPENDIX F

TEN ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS OF DIGNITY

Ten Essential Elements of Dignity

The 10 essential elements of dignity "create a culture that brings out the best in people" (Hicks, 2019, p. 19) are:

Acceptance of Identity

Approach people as neither inferior nor superior to you; give others the freedom to express their authentic selves without fear of being negatively judged; interact without prejudice or bias, accepting how race, religion, gender, class, sexual orientation, age, disability, etc. are at the core of their identities. Assume they have integrity.

Recognition

Validate others for their talents, hard work, thoughtfulness, and help; be generous with praise; give credit to others for their contributions, ideas, and experience.

Acknowledgment

Give people your full attention by listening, hearing, validating, and responding to their concerns and what they have been through.

Inclusion

Make others feel that they belong at all levels of relationship (family, community, organization, nation).

Safety

Put people at ease at two levels: physically, where they feel free of bodily harm; and psychologically, where they feel free of concern about being shamed or humiliated, where they feel free to speak without fear of retribution.

Fairness

Treat people justly, with equality, and in an evenhanded way, according to agreed-upon laws and rules.

Independence

Empower people to act on their own behalf so that they feel in control of their lives and experience a sense of hope and possibility.

Understanding

Believe that what others think matters; give them the chance to explain their perspectives, express their points of view; actively listen in order to understand them.

The Benefit of the Doubt

Treat people as trustworthy; start with the premise that others have good motives and are acting with integrity.

APPENDIX G

TEN TEMPTATIONS TO VIOLATE DIGNITY

Hicks's (2019) research showed *The Ten Temptations to Violate Dignity* are not restricted to an attacker or enemy. Each of us has the capability to violate our own dignity by falling prey to the *ten temptations*. It is a human condition. The Ten Temptations are:

Taking the Bait. Don't take the bait. Don't let the bad behavior of others determine your own. Restraint is the better part of dignity. Don't justify getting even. Do not do unto others as they do unto you if it will cause harm.

Saving Face. Don't succumb to the temptation to save face. Don't lie, cover-up, or deceive yourself. Tell the truth about what you have done.

Shirking Responsibility. Don't shirk responsibility when you have violated the dignity of others. Admit it when you make a mistake, and apologize if you hurt someone.

Seeking False Dignity. Beware of the desire for external recognition in the form of approval and praise. If we depend on others alone for the validation of our worth, we are seeking false dignity. Authentic dignity resides within us. Don't be lured by false dignity.

Seeking False Security. Don't let your need for connection and relationship compromise your own dignity. If we remain in a relationship in which our dignity is routinely violated, our desire for connection has outweighed our need to maintain our own dignity. Resist the temptation to settle for false security.

Avoiding Conflict. Stand up for yourself. Don't avoid confrontation when your dignity is violated. Take action. A violation is a signal that something in a relationship needs to change.

Being the Victim. Don't assume that you are the innocent victim in a troubled relationship. Open yourself to the idea that you might be contributing to the problem. We need to look at ourselves as others see us.

Resisting Feedback. Don't resist feedback from others. We often don't know what we don't know. We all have blind spots; we all unconsciously behave in undignified ways. We need to overcome our protective instincts and accept constructive criticism. Feedback gives us an opportunity to grow.

Blaming and Shaming Others to Deflect Your Own Guilt. Don't blame and shame others to deflect your own guilt. Control the urge to defend yourself by making others look bad.

Engaging in False Intimacy and Demeaning Gossip. Beware of the tendency to connect by gossiping about others in a demeaning way. Being critical and judgmental of others when they are not present is harmful and undignified. If you want to create

intimacy with another, speak the truth about yourself, about what is happening in your inner world, and invite the person to do the same. (Hicks, 2019, pp. 31–32)

APPENDIX H

LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT TRAINING NOTES

Leadership Development Training: The Recognition of Historically Underrepresented Groups in Higher Education: A Path to Persistence, Retention, and Graduation

Introduction and Overview

- Welcome and Introduction to the Training: Explaining the objectives and goals of the program.
- Understanding the unique challenges and opportunities of higher education in 2023. President's address (state of the university, vision, and mission).
- Data-driven problem solving and teacher leadership. A lecture on current academic research on the pressing issues of persistence and retention in higher education.
- Group discussion about the unique challenges and opportunities of leadership within an academic context.

Axel Honneth's Theory of Recognition

- An Introduction to Axel Honneth and His Theory of Recognition: An in-depth exploration of Honneth's concept of recognition, the struggles for recognition, and how these concepts apply in the classroom.
- Student Spotlight: Understanding the lived experiences of historically underrepresented groups. An interview with a student on the impact of recognition and misrecognition by a teacher.
- Workshop: "Recognizing Recognition": Small group exercises to explore how recognition (or lack thereof) appears in participants' experiences, and how to foster a culture of recognition in the classroom.

Donna Hicks's Dignity Model

- Unpacking the dignity model: An exploration of Donna Hicks's 10 elements of dignity, understanding how to avoid dignity violations, and fostering a culture of respect and dignity in the classroom.
- Workshop: "Dignity in Practice": Role-playing scenarios to understand the application of the dignity model in leadership and in the classroom.

Leadership Practice and Teacher–Student Connectedness

- Research on the impact of leadership styles and student outcomes.
- Leadership styles and teacher–student connectedness: Why it may be more important than a teacher's knowledge in their field of study.
- Workshop: What is your leadership style? Discuss style and tangible ways each teacher engages students through the lens of that style.

Gloria Ladson-Billings' Culturally Relevant Pedagogy

- VIDEO: Exploring critical race theorist, Gloria Ladson-Billings's culturally relevant pedagogy: An analysis of Gloria Ladson-Billings's work, focusing on how educators can develop a more culturally responsive approach to teaching.

- Workshop: “Cultivating Cultural Responsiveness”: Participants will brainstorm strategies for implementing culturally relevant pedagogy in their departments or classrooms, and how to lead others in doing the same.

Data-Driven DEI

- How do you measure recognition and dignity? Why is it important?
- 5 steps to data driven DEI – Pinkett (2023)
- Workshop: Why does this matter to our institution or department? Goal setting and accountable?

Integrating Theories and Final Reflections

- Pulling It All Together: A synthesis of the previous sessions, examining how recognition, dignity, cultural relevance, and leadership styles work together in the classroom.
- Workshop: “Leadership Action Plans”: Participants will develop a concrete plan for how they will apply the lessons from this training in their roles.
- Reflection and Closing: Final reflections on the training, Q&A, and discussion of ongoing support and resources.