

1-17-2025

Perceptions of Encouragement for Native American Women to Persist in Doctoral Programs

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Walden University

College of Education and Human Sciences

This is to certify that the doctoral study by

Venicia S. Mayo Burton

has been found to be complete and satisfactory in all respects,
and that any and all revisions required by
the review committee have been made.

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Walden University
2024

Abstract

Perceptions of Encouragement for Native American Women to Persist in Doctoral
Programs

by

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MA, University of California, Santa Barbara, 2010

MA, Purdue University-Global Campus, 2008

BA, Saint Leo University, 1998

Project Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree of
Doctor of Education

Walden University

December 2024

Abstract

The problem addressed in this study is the underrepresentation of Native American women in doctoral programs in the United States. The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to explore how encouragement in terms of support, confidence, hope, and advice received from family and tribe, friends and social circles, and faculty and college administrators influence the persistence of Native American women in their doctoral journeys. The conceptual framework for this study is the psychosociocultural theory (PSC) to help examine the psychological, social, and cultural influences on the educational experiences of minority students in an educational setting. Data from eight interviews were collected and analyzed using coding, categories, and themes. The three themes are that Native American women confront the disdain of academic intimidation with humility, Native American women navigate the intersectionality of cultural obligations with ancestral wisdom, and Native American women confront the legacy of generational trauma with a sense of solidarity. Three recommendations for institutions were created from the themes: adopt a holistic approach for the encouragement to persist in the recruitment and retention of Native American women, communicate with Indigenous community members to ensure encouragement for Native American women to persist, and collaborate with Indigenous community members to enable encouragement for Native American women to persist. This study has the potential to foster positive social change by encouraging institutions to apply these findings to improve the representation of Native American women in doctoral programs in the United States.

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Dedication

This work is dedicated to all of those who have inspired me, my mother, my grandmother, my godmother, my piano and voice teacher, my fifth-grade teacher, and my youth choir director. My family and community nurtured, cared for, and believed in me. My ancestors and intercessors paved the way for me. Ultimately, I want to inspire my children and mentees to have faith, to hold fast to believe that any and all things are possible when you trust in the Higher Power. Lastly, I want to thank all the young girls, *nenas mamcitas*, *mujeras hermosas*, and “seasoned” ladies who dream beyond their circumstances. This is for you.

Prayer to the Creator

“Now we turn our thoughts to the creator, or Great Spirit, and send greetings and thanks for all the gifts of Creation. Everything we need to live a good life is here on this Mother Earth. For all the love that is still around us, we gather our minds together as one and send our choicest words of greetings and thanks to the Creator. Now our minds are one.”

Acknowledgments

I acknowledge and thank God, the Heavenly father, the creator for spiritual, emotional and physical strength not only through this doctoral process but for mercy and grace every day. I acknowledge and am thankful to my ancestors; stripped of their culture, but not of their dignity, tenacity and strength for it is their blood that runs through my veins and for that, I stand proud. I remain inspired when I think of the struggles faced by Francis C. Sumner, the first Black woman awarded a PhD in Psychology in the U.S.; Martha E. Bernal, the first Latina to earn a doctorate in Psychology in the U.S.; and Marigold Linton, who in 1964, became the first Native American to earn a doctorate in Psychology in the U.S.

I acknowledge and thank my committee members, for their insight and help throughout my dissertation process. Special thanks to my content specialists; Dr. Molly Cinnamon, Dr. Dorothy Grunes, and Dr. Kimberly Ellis, for believing in me and keeping me motivated offering that push to “write that little paper.” Thankful for my Dissertation Chair, Dr. Katherine Garlough, who encouraged me to push through my frustration and offered insight and guidance to persevere through the process. I hope to one day inspire and motivate others as you all have taught me. Lastly, I give thanks to the Native American women who took the time to share their stories with me. Without them, this research would not have been possible, and their voices would not have been heard.

Ahéhee’

“It always seems impossible until it’s done”

Nelson Mandela

Table of Contents

List of Tables	iv
List of Figures	v
Section 1: The Problem.....	1
The Local Problem.....	1
Rationale	4
Definition of Terms.....	6
Significance of the Study	7
Research Questions	9
Review of the Literature	9
Conceptual Framework	9
Review of the Broader Problem.....	11
Search Protocols.....	12
Encouragement from Family and Tribe	12
Encouragement from Friends and Social Circles.....	17
Encouragement from Faculty Mentors and College Administrators	24
Native American Persistence in Higher Education	30
Implications.....	32
Summary	33
Section 2: The Methodology.....	36
Participants.....	39
Data Collection	43
Data Analysis	47

Limitations	49
Data Analysis Results	50
Codes.....	51
Categories	54
Themes	57
Narration of Themes	59
Discrepant Cases	64
Evidence of Quality	65
Discussion of the Research Questions	66
Discussion of the Literature	71
Discussion of the Conceptual Framework	76
Project Deliverable.....	78
Summary	79
Section 3: The Project.....	82
Rationale	83
Review of the Literature	86
White Papers	87
Encouragement to Persist in Recruitment and Retention	89
Project Description.....	96
Project Evaluation Plan.....	98
Project Implications	98
Section 4: Reflections and Conclusions.....	100
Project Strengths and Limitations	100

Recommendations for Alternative Approaches	100
Scholarship, Project Development and Evaluation, and Leadership and Change	104
Reflection on Importance of the Work	104
Implications, Applications, and Directions for Future Research	106
Conclusion	107
References	109
Appendix A: The Project	160
Appendix B: Interview Questions	181

List of Tables

Table 1. Raw Data and Codes	53
Table 2. Categories and Codes.....	56
Table 3. Themes, Categories, and Codes	58
Table 4. Timeline for Policy Implementation	97

List of Figures

Figure 1. Doctorates Earned by Underrepresented Minority U.S. Citizens and Permanent Residents 2010-2020.....	6
Figure 2. Psychosocial Model of Educational Persistence	10
Figure 3. Faculty Encouragement Scale	25
Figure 4. Raw Data and Codes	53
Figure A1. Doctorates Earned by Minority Women.....	163
Figure A2. PSC Theory.....	165

Section 1: The Problem

The Local Problem

With 574 federally recognized tribes, Native Americans are among the most diverse ethnic groups in the United States, but this diversity is not well represented in academia at the doctoral level (Ramiah et al., 2022). Native American students have become more underrepresented at selective and prestigious colleges and universities (Sasso et al., 2023), and are nearly socially invisible at postsecondary levels of education. This social invisibility is a modern form of racism and has led to an academic crisis among Native American students in postsecondary levels of education (Martinez-Cola, 2020; May & McDermott, 2021). The problem addressed in this study is that the underrepresentation of Native American women in doctoral programs has caused a lack of diversity in graduate education, contributing to racial disparity in American society (Patton et al., 2019; Varma, 2018).

According to administrators at the Native American Center at Northern Arizona University in Flagstaff, Arizona, Native American women (NAW) are enrolling in and completing graduate programs at the master's level, but that does not seem to be the case for NAW at the doctoral level. Furthermore, representatives from the Native American Institute at Northeastern State University in Tahlequah, Oklahoma, have stated that while numbers for NAW in undergraduate and graduate programs seem to be on the rise at the university, they have little data showing an increase in enrollments for NAW in doctoral programs. Additionally, enrollment counselors at Western Governors University in Millcreek, Utah, and Grand Canyon University in Phoenix, Arizona, advised that

enrollment numbers for students identifying as Native American are lower but compatible with other minority groups at the undergraduate level for males and females. However, counselors offered that they did not have conclusive numbers for NAW only completing doctoral programs. That said, the council members from the Office of Native American Student Affairs at the University of Arizona advised that between 2016 and 2020, the University of Arizona awarded 13 doctoral degrees to NAW. The number of degrees awarded to NAW is far behind the number of doctorates granted to other minority groups. According to council members, given that geographically Arizona is home to more than 55 indigenous tribes, numbers for Native students ought to be higher in all areas. The Western part of the United States is home to the largest population of Native Americans and Alaskan Natives (Rezal, 2021; Schroedel & Irwin, 2020), but graduation rates have shown that many public colleges and universities are falling short in their efforts to put more degrees in the hands of Native Americans (Bonilla-Silva & Peoples, 2022; Guzman-Lopez, 2019a).

The Native American population is one of the most diverse in the country. Each federally recognized tribe represents a different culture and has its language, history, and traditional practices (Espinosa & Mitchell, 2020). Postsecondary education does not reflect the beauty of this diversity, leaving Native American students nearly socially invisible (May & McDermott, 2021). As a result of invisibility, Native American students are experiencing an academic crisis. The crises are institutional barriers, lack of college access, and lack of college completion, contributing to the disproportionate number of Native American students in postsecondary education (Banks & Dohy, 2019; Spica &

Biddix, 2021). Lack of representation to the point of near invisibility is one explanation for the low numbers of Native Americans in higher education (Guzman-Lopez, 2019b). Fewer than 1% of the graduates in the United States are Native American, and their numbers are often excluded from postsecondary research and data reporting (Guzman-Lopez, 2019a). Being excluded from research data means being excluded from educational research and policy. Many overlook or erase Native American students and communities, viewing them as statistically insignificant and leaving their educational needs unmet (Angelino et al., 2023; Guzman-Lopez, 2019b).

Enrichment for tribal communities is directly tied to higher education because tribes need their citizens to be educated with specialized skill sets to govern their nation better (Tsosie, 2021). Significant issues impacting the Native American community are mental and social health inequities, lack of financial resources leading to poverty and unemployment, and violence against women and girls (Empey et al., 2021). Education leads to better jobs, increased earnings potential, optimal health resources, increased productivity, and economic growth (Raghupathi & Raghupathi, 2020).

But the lack of diversity in higher education also impacts diversity in the U.S. government, where the government is still “White, male, and Yale” (Kralev, 2016, p. 18). The importance of American students of color entering and completing postgraduate education still exists. The problem addressed in this study is the underrepresentation of Native American women in doctoral programs. Native Americans comprise less than 1% of the graduate population (see Feir & Jones, 2021), which means educators conduct research, teach students, and pass laws without considering an entire population of

American citizens.

Rationale

According to the Postsecondary National Policy Institute (PNPI, 2021), postbaccalaureate enrollments for Native Americans decreased slightly, from 13,700 in 2016 to 13,600 in 2018. Additionally, the PNPI noted that the number of Native American doctoral recipients has remained near its lowest point since 2000. The University of Arizona in Tucson, Arizona, awarded the most doctorates to Native American students between 2016 and 2020 (Aljohani, 2016; National Science Foundation [NSF], 2020). Although the University of Arizona awarded 28 doctoral degrees between 2016 and 2020 to Native Americans, this population of students remains underrepresented in U.S. graduate programs (Hagler, 2024; Heavy Runner-Rioux et al., 2018; Martinez-Strengel et al., 2022).

The number of doctoral degrees earned by Native American students within the larger population rose between 103 in 2014 to 231 in 2015 (National Center for Science and Engineering Statistics, 2020); however, the number of doctorates earned by Native Americans declined by 2020 to 97 (Jordan et al., 2022; National Center for Science and Engineering Statistics, 2020). Native American students are overrepresented at 2-year colleges but are often underrepresented at the more selective and prestigious 4-year colleges and universities (Sasso et al., 2023; Matinez-Strengel et al., 2022).

Less than 2% of the world's population has a doctoral degree (Nerad, 2020). Of individuals holding a doctoral degree, 7% are women (Fay et al., 2021). Data from the 2019 National Center for Educational Statistics showed that for the U.S. population 25

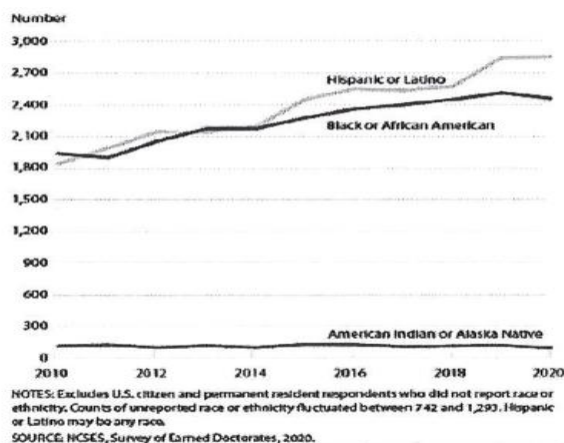
and older, Asian women received 13.1% of the doctoral degrees awarded, White women received 63.6%, Black women received 10.9%, of the doctoral degrees awarded and Hispanic women received 8.8% (Martinez-Strengel et al., 2022). However, NAW received only 0.4% of the total number of doctoral degrees earned in 2020 (PNPI, 2021).

Although Asian American and White women make up a small percentage of the U.S. population (Alba & Maggio, 2022), they are not considered underrepresented minorities; this term refers explicitly to three racial and ethnic groups: Black, Hispanic, and Native American populations (Rabbani, 2023). Asian and White women are overrepresented in higher education (Jordan et al., 2022; Rabbani, 2023). Nearly half of all Asian women and White women who enroll in postsecondary education complete a terminal degree, compared with fewer than one in five Hispanic women and one in five black women (Harris, 2019a). That number is even less when compared to doctoral degree completion for NAW. Thus, a gap exists in doctoral degree completion between Black women, Hispanic women, and NAW.

A more critical review of the broader problem associated with the local problem affirms that Native Americans have the lowest representation among all groups in graduate education. Figure 1 represents doctorates earned by underrepresented minority students between 2010 and 2020. The line at the bottom of the figure indicates the number of earned doctorates by Native American students between 2010 and 2020.

Figure 1

Doctorates Earned by Underrepresented Minority U.S. Citizens and Permanent Residents 2010-2020



Low numbers are partly due to financial barriers, financial constraints, lack of funding, and lack of resources (Mello, 2022; Smith et al., 2014). Fear, anxiety, and questions of belonging are barriers keeping Native Americans from pursuing higher education. Lack of familial support and being away from community and tribe are also barriers preventing Native Americans from pursuing higher education (Lopez, 2018). This study was needed to understand how NAW are encouraged to enroll in and complete doctoral programs. The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to explore how encouragement in terms of support, confidence, hope, and advice received from family and tribe, friends and social circles, and faculty and college administrators influence the persistence of NAW in their doctoral programs.

Definition of Terms

Definitions and key concepts used in this study include the terms *American*

Indian, Native American, Native American women, Alaskan Native, and encouragement.

American Indian and Alaskan Native are combined into one group on the U.S. Census as AI/AN (U.S. Census Bureau, 2020). Both American Indian and Alaskan Natives are referred to as Native American in this study. The following terms were also used as important search terms for this study.

American Indian: A person with blood lineage in a federally recognized tribe or village based on blood quantum, a term created by the U.S. government to determine tribal citizenship based on the percentage of Indian blood using documentation of ancestry and tribal citizenship (Rodriguez-Lonebear, 2021).

Encouragement: Encouragement is “the process of facilitating the development of a person’s inner resources and courage toward positive movement” (Dinkmeyer, 1996, p. 222). Encouragement is giving support, confidence, hope, and advice to someone.

Indigenous: Describes any group of people native to a specific region. People who lived there before colonists or settlers arrived (Stewart, 2018).

Native American: A descendant or member of a federally recognized Indian tribe, used interchangeably with the term *American Indian* (U.S. Census Bureau, 2020).

Significance of the Study

This study is significant because it is an original contribution to understanding NAW who persist in doctoral programs. Developing a better understanding of the needs of NAW could lead to intervention programs that target these students’ unique educational needs. New programs may be especially beneficial in areas where Native Americans comprise a large part of the demographic, leading to more representation in

doctoral programs and a more diverse population of doctoral candidates.

These Native American scholars can create solutions for critical issues facing Native people, such as homelessness and overcrowded conditions in native territories, violations of voting rights on reservations, and the exploitation of natural resources on native lands (Andrews et al., 2024). Ultimately, doctoral education of NAW can have lasting positive effects on tribal living. More Native Americans with doctoral degrees can significantly impact native communities (Locke et al., 2023; Makki et al., 2022) and benefit communities nationwide. Through persistence in doctoral programs, Native Americans can attain higher education and increase their financial capability throughout the Native community (Brouwer et al., 2022).

Further implications for positive social change include that more NAW doctoral graduates serve as role models and mentors to future generations of Native American girls. The next generation of Native American girls can develop their perceptions regarding encouragement to persist in higher education. Their perceptions can shape the future of education for NAW in the United States.

Moreover, education for women leads to better jobs and more money for the household, which benefits the economy (Brouwer et al., 2022; Jayachandran, 2021). Income and better employment provide health equity and insurance and promote healthier living. Likewise, education for women leads to empowerment, allowing more women to leave violent, abusive situations (Heron et al., 2022). In addition, a well-educated woman provides the skills, knowledge, and self-assurance necessary to be a better citizen (Tsosie, 2021).

Research Questions

In this study, I explored persistence for NAW in doctoral programs through perceptions of encouragement from family and tribe, friends and social circles, and faculty and college administrators. The elements of encouragement are support, confidence, hope, and advice given to keep an individual doing something or acting in a certain way. The research questions were used to ascertain how NAW perceive encouragement to continue their doctoral coursework and graduate with a doctoral degree. Addressing these questions can help broaden existing research in persistence in doctoral education.

RQ 1: How do NAW in doctoral programs in the United States perceive encouragement to persist in doctoral programs in terms of support, confidence, hope, and advice received from family and tribe?

RQ 2: How do NAW in doctoral programs in the United States perceive encouragement to persist in doctoral programs in terms of support, confidence, hope, and advice received from friends and social circles?

RQ 3: How do NAW in doctoral programs in the United States perceive encouragement to persist in doctoral programs in terms of support, confidence, hope, and advice received from faculty and college administrators?

Review of the Literature

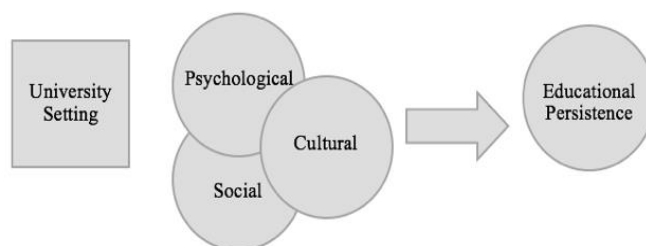
Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for this study is the psychosociocultural (PSC) theory (see Castellanos & Gloria, 2007; Gloria & Rodriguez, 2000). The PSC theoretical

framework, as illustrated in Figure 2, considers the psychological, social, and cultural factors that influence the educational experiences of college students (Castellanos & Gloria, 2007; Rojas et al., 2022). This framework provides a comprehensive approach to understanding how these interconnected factors shape students' academic journeys. Researchers originally formulated the theory for Latinas but have since extended its application to other minority groups, recognizing the broader relevance of its constructs in various educational contexts.

Figure 2

Psychosocial Model of Educational Persistence



Note. Adapted from “Research Considerations and Theoretical Applications for Best Practices in Higher Education: Latinas/os Achieving Success,” by J. Castellanos & A. M. Gloria, 2007, *Journal of Higher Education*, 6(4), 378–396.

<https://doi.org/10.1177/1538192707305347>

The framework offers a culturally contextualized lens to view educational experiences that shape minority students' academic outcomes. The framework has three elements: psychological, social, and cultural (Beasley & McClain, 2020; Castellanos et al., 2022). The psychological element is academic identity, self-efficacy, and academic motivation. The social element is the perceived social support from faculty, peers, or

family. The cultural element is the perceptions of cultural congruity and racial or ethnic identity (Beasley & McClain, 2020). The PSC framework recognizes that minority students have experiences that are psychologically, socially, and culturally unique from other groups (Beasley & McClain, 2020; Castellanos et al., 2022).

Previous studies have used PSC to investigate cultural and psychological factors such as belonging (Ray et al., 2019) and well-being (Herrera et al., 2019). Previous studies have also used PSC to investigate academic self-concept for minority students and women of color on college campuses (Beasley & McClain, 2020; DeVitre et al., 2021). Other studies have used PSC to investigate racial composition and academic attitudes among Black college students (Cokely et al., 2023). Delgado-Guerrero and Gloria (2013) similarly used the PSC theory to examine the influences of Latina-based sororities on academic persistence. The current study used the PSC to explore how NAW perceive encouragement to persist in doctoral programs. The PSC framework helped frame the interview questions and analyze the data. The PSC theory provides a theoretical lens to address issues in education for NAW.

Review of the Broader Problem

The literature review highlights how different elements of encouragement are necessary to persist in doctoral study. By examining support, confidence, hope, and advice, it can be better understood how NAW perceive encouragement received from family and tribe, friends and social circles, and faculty mentors and college administrators, while persisting in doctoral programs. The literature was sparse regarding elements of hope and advice in terms of encouragement for NAW, so the topic was

expanded to include feelings, desires, wants, and beliefs in the area of hope. The topic of advice was also expanded to include recommendations, opinions, and counsel. The topic was expanded further to include persistence in higher education for Native Americans to explore how Native Americans perceive encouragement to persist in doctoral programs.

Search Protocols

I conducted a literature review on NAW students using online academic databases, including EBSCO, JSTOR, and ERIC. Other database searches included Google Scholar, ProQuest, and Education Full Text. I conducted the review using keywords like *Native American women*, *Indigenous women*, *women in doctoral programs*, *women of color in doctoral programs*, and *minority women in doctoral programs*. I also examined educational reports, journal articles, conference papers, dissertations, and books, which were searched and reviewed for relevant work. I found most current research in journals for higher education and Native American populations, including the *Journal of American Indian Education*, The Native American Research Guide, The Native American Studies Online Sources Guide, and the *Journal of Higher Education*.

Encouragement from Family and Tribe

Encouragement from people connected by family and tribe is a predictor of persistence for Native American college students. Parental encouragement of a student's educational goals affects their academic performance (Kahu et al., 2022; Mclean, 2022; Strayhorn, 2019; Waterman, 2019). Connections to family and home are one of the most important factors supporting Native American student success (Tachine & Cabrera,

2017). Home and community provide motivation and encouragement (Covarrubias et al., 2019; George-Levi et al., 2022; Yi & Ramos, 2022). Native students often emphasize that family support and participation within their tribal community and other familial and social supports were critical to their persistence in college (EagleWoman et al., 2022; Tachine et al., 2017). Family significantly influences students' persistence and is a central concept of support. Family is often the most frequently mentioned factor affecting college persistence for NAW (Smith, 2019; Warren & Locklear, 2021).

For Native Americans, the family does not necessarily fit within the contextual nuclear definition of mother, father, and siblings; instead, the family often includes extended relatives, community members, and elders who play significant roles in daily life and cultural practices (Youngbull & Minthorn, 2018). Moreover, it is common for nuclear and extended families to live under the same roof. It is important to note that family for Native Americans often extends to the tribe, tribal band, or clan, which provides an additional cultural component where the student becomes part of the larger community. Native American graduates often speak of their community and elders, which can be examples of sovereignty and self-determination (Busey et al., 2023; Griffiths et al., 2022). Extended family members who did not pursue doctoral degrees became a significant source of support for native doctoral students (Jordan et al., 2022; McCoy & Winkle-Wagner, 2022). Extended family and community are the most frequently mentioned factors affecting persistence in education for Native Americans (White Eyes, 2018). For instance, family is the cornerstone of strength and support for Native women (Burnette, 2018; Roh et al., 2020).

Students can use their connections to and support from immediate and extended families to persevere and overcome challenging circumstances. Native American students, especially those in closer proximity to Indian reservations, report high rates of poverty, unemployment, and drug and alcohol abuse, as well as substandard public primary schooling (White Eyes, 2018). These conditions have a profound effect on Native American students who go on to enroll in college. Despite tribal conditions, the tribal community gives emotional and spiritual support to Native American students to pursue their education (Berry, 2017; White Eyes, 2018). Native American students who receive constant support and reinforcement from their home reservations are driven and determined not to let their families down by failing to graduate (White Eyes, 2018). Trusting and supportive relationships are developed and maintained within the tribal community (Suwinyattichaiorn & Johnson, 2022). The kinship and the connection to the reservation and family leads to increased persistence and greater matriculation rates for Native American college students (Fay et al., 2021; Levy et al., 2019).

Strong identification with family, tribe, and ethnic identity creates an emotional anchor that results in self-worth, a sense of purpose, and confidence to succeed in college (Huffman, 1986). Cultural and ethnic connection with family, tribe, and tradition increases confidence and provides a sense of security for Native American students in higher education (Huffman et al., 1986; Rindone, 1988). Confidence is the feeling of self-assurance or conviction in self-ability (Kurniawati & Noviani, 2022). The more confident students are in their abilities, the more they feel their efforts will result in successful academic outcomes (Cavilla, 2017). Traditional cultural identification and continued

cultural ties are positive factors of persistence in higher education for Native Americans (Benjamin et al., 1993). Students have noted that family, tribal connection, and traditional cultural identity provided personal strength, self-worth, purpose, and confidence to pursue education (Rogers et al., 2022). However, students who identify as culturally traditional and resist what they perceive as cultural assimilation in university settings report extreme emotional, social, and cultural isolation in college (Windchief et al., 2018). In contrast, the transcultural students claim strong ties within their culture but use their cultural identity with family, tribe, and tradition in connection with university life, not necessarily to assimilate but rather to ground themselves emotionally, which gives them strength, security, and confidence to pursue in their programs (Kaur, 2022; Windcheif & Acrouca, 2018). Native American graduate students have a better chance of college achievement when self-assured and socialized in the Native American tradition (Belgarde & Lore, 2019; Johnson & King, 2017). Traditional cultural identification and continued cultural ties are factors for persistence in graduate programs for Native Americans and that family, tribe, and cultural identity gives students strength, confidence, and a sense of security (Benjamin et al., 1993; Chakraverty, 2022).

Further, for doctoral students, hope is nurtured within their relationships with others. Hope is one's perceived ability to execute envisioned paths to future goals (Dixson et al., 2018). Relationships with others nurture hope for doctoral students, leading them to set clear academic goals, create effective pathways to achieve them, and stay motivated. Existing studies on hope reveal a link between hopeful thinking and positive outcomes in academic achievement (Dorfman & Kalugin, 2022; Murphy, 2023).

The literature further suggests that hope influences academic goals and serves as an essential ingredient for sustaining students, enabling them to persist even without tangible reinforcements (Dixson et al., 2018). Hope, or the belief that something is possible and probable, is a basic tenet of optimism and achievement (Bashant, 2016). Hope is not only rooted in individual and internal sources but also influenced by external relationships with significant others (Berndardo, 2010); as such, family, friends, and peers all play a role in fostering hope. Hope is an integral and necessary part of the educational process (Green et al., 2020). Hope offers Native American students the belief that they can find pathways to their educational goals (Gray et al., 2019). Native students also understand that they are the hope to make life better for their families and communities (McCleary, 2019, p. 7; Smith, 2019; Wright & Balutski, 2016).

Finally, teachers, advisors, and mentors can offer advice, but the family has essential information about the student (Gravett et al., 2021). When a family shares its perspectives, it enriches a doctoral student's experience. Family advice, such as encouragement, reminders, and warnings, provides valuable support for doctoral students. Native American students receive advice as relational action, which includes Indigenous laws, personal responsibilities, orality, blessings, support, movement, personal experience, and collective story (Kovach, 2018). Advice in the Native community is in storytelling. Stories are a powerful, robust, respectful, and supportive approach to sharing advice (Hallett et al., 2017). Giving advice or knowledge sharing for Native Americans follows a particular set of protocols and is treated with the utmost respect. An example of advice through storytelling in words spoken by Chief Plenty

Coups, as cited by Norman Wiltsey in the book *Brave Warriors*, “Baaishtashíile ammaaéhche iiwaa awássahcheewailuuk Ammaaéhche éwahkuulak baaawássahcheewiolak baleetáak” translated to mean “With what the white man knows he oppresses us, if we learn what he knows, he will never oppress us again.” Native American reporter Glendolin Wagner retranslated the sentiment to mean, “Education is your most powerful weapon. With education, you are the white man’s equal. Without education, you are his victim and so shall remain all of your life. Study, learn, and help one another always” (Hill, 2020). This kind of advice resonates within Native American communities and speaks to the importance of higher education. A common notion and sentiment is to become well-educated and return home to put knowledge to work in the community (Duder et al., 2022).

Encouragement from Friends and Social Circles

Connections to specific groups and individual relationships influence graduate school aspirations for women. Original work regarding undergraduates reveals how social support and involvement are encouraged because of the positive outcomes demonstrated for undergraduates with support systems (Jairam & Kahl, 2012; Tinto, 2012). Despite differing academic challenges, doctoral students need the same formal social support systems for success.

Social support refers to how interaction meets a person’s fundamental social needs. It involves active listening, empathy, and showing concern. It includes active listening, empathy, and showing concern. Developing numerous support systems to promote doctoral student success may benefit doctoral program students (Putra et al.,

2021; Young et al., 2019). Social circles and networking relationships are vital for strength and support in completing doctoral degrees (Hall et al., 2018).

Existing research suggests that social support is a significant resource for doctoral students (Brouwer et al., 2022). Social support is powerful and enriching (Banks-Weston & Kolski, 2022; Powazny et al., 2022; Ryan et al., 2020), and social groups receive many benefits (Carlson & Frazer, 2020). Social support includes but is not limited to academic circles, online chat groups, and cultural memberships (Mishra, 2020). These social networks are vital in offering support that influences academic persistence. The collaborative and engaging platforms offer love, empathy, acceptance, and respect. In personal communication with a current doctoral student, “remaining involved in sorority life at the graduate level allows me to merge my limited social life with my academic life.” (V. Hinton, personal communication July 4, 2022). She explained that though her doctoral program is rigorous and does not leave much time to engage socially, her sorority sisters show love and provide support via phone calls and check-ins to keep her updated on local and national events and community projects. They often provide meals and even financial help when needed. She reported that probably the group’s most beneficial area of support is the mentorship received from other doctors in her sorority, who “understand my struggle, help me keep me grounded, and support me every step of the way.”

For doctoral students, social networks and organizations help to navigate the transitional stages of doctoral life. Social influences like other enrolled students and respected professionals in the same field of study are more aware of the backing needed

to reach the finish line and are appealing to the scholarly environment, providing comfort, support, and encouragement to doctoral students (Jairam & Kahl, 2012; Lynman et al., 2022; Renbarger et al., 2021). Support of this nature offers encouragement and provides a collective and engaging environment that cultivates ideas, reinforces personal accountability, and aids in persistence toward study completion.

Quality social support is critical in persistence toward doctoral degree completion (Dávid, 2023; Trent et al., 2021). Studies show that involvement with social groups, cohorts, related clubs, and philanthropic organizations is beneficial and offers additional support to students (Basyouni & Parkinson, 2022; Mishra, 2020; Shelton et al., 2019; Timonen et al., 2021). Social groups for Native students create an atmosphere of inclusiveness and belonging (Fong et al., 2019). An atmosphere fostered by interactions between students and members of Native American culture on campus who are viewed as family (Tachine et al., 2017). Doctoral students recognize involvement with such groups as contributing to their mental and physical well-being and is critical to their successes, which include their academic pursuits (Charles et al., 2022; Gardner & Barnes, 2014).

For NAW, culturally based, holistic social groups like the Society for Advancement of Chicanos/Hispanics and Native Americans, the American Indian Higher Education Consortium, and the American Indian Graduate Center provide monetary support and facilitate educational success. The noted organizations represent a handful of others that foster academic support in the social context. These organizations are easily accessible as groups via Instagram, Facebook, YouTube, and LinkedIn. They are supportive, solid networks recognizing that challenges exist for all doctoral students, but

encouragement from like-minded others reduces thoughts of giving up.

Seminal works further suggest that social support helps to reduce stress and feelings of isolation for doctoral students (Ali & Kohun, 2006; Lewis et al., 2004). Social support guards against perceived stress and its damaging effects on psychological health (Johnson-Esparza et al., 2021; Xu et al., 2023). Students with more social support report fewer health-related issues and emotional problems, which leads to better academic success. Through interactions with other academics, students found outlets for pleasure and fun, which helped them deal with the demands and rigor of a doctoral program (Kalam et al., 2023). Students' overall anxiety levels decrease in direct proportion to their perception of social support (Mai et al., 2021). Social support is a crucial factor in enhancing college students' performance.

Social support and identity development breed overall confidence in learners, and there is no denying that the relationship between a student's confidence and educational success is intertwined (Akbari & Sahibzada, 2020). Confident students are better able to perform under pressure. Friends and social circles offer validation and increase school engagement, proving that being connected by a cultural thread or common bond of familiarity provides confidence and strength to students to continue their educational pursuits (Heavy Runner-Rioux, 2018).

Confidence levels in students are essential factors in educational success, and social groups and organizations provide support and guidance, often reinforcing values and cultural norms and increasing confidence levels. These groups also help with school fit and comfort within academic environments, thus adding to learners' confidence,

which is essential to student success. Students' confidence controls their desire to learn, and this confidence strongly influences their educational performance.

Research suggests that social networks offer a sense of acceptance, belonging, and self-validation (Bateman, 2021). Doctoral students require additional support, and social networks provide a shared practice from a community with a defined set of goals (Wenger, McDermott & Snyder, 2002). A social network is a collection of relevant people or groups linked by one or more relations (Chua & Wellman, 2015; Kanagavel, 2019). Social networks place the student at the center of personal connections (Kanagavel, 2019). Actively interacting within social networks positively impacts students' well-being (Raaper et al., 2022). Social networks help shape identities for doctoral students as they shift from student to scholarly practitioner to educational researcher (Bourner, et al., 2001).

Hope is the belief that something is possible and probable (Mills-Scofield, 2012). Hope allows individuals to recover from hardship and move forward positively and adaptively. According to Charles Snyder's study on hope theory, hope consists of three components: goals, pathways, and agency thinking (Bashant, 2016). Goals must be attainable and almost always contain some degree of uncertainty. Pathways refer to one's belief that they will be able to find a solution to a problem or meet a desired goal; agency thinking is the importance of developing perseverance and grit to reach a goal (Einav & Margalit, 2022; Ong et al., 2022; Rose, 2022).

Hope bonding and hope reminding are expansions of hope theory proclaiming that supportive relationships act as persuaders to attain goals and dreams as these

relationships create a feedback loop allowing one to self-monitor and regulate their hope by listening to and reviewing personal stories and bonding with other people to reinforce hope (Sheehan & Rall, 2011). Caring social relationships and supportive social networks contribute to psychological well-being and foster hope for students (Bashant, 2016; Keene, 2018). Social support from peers, social circles, and social organizations matters the most in areas of hope for students. Peers, friends, social circles, and social groups are potent tools offering support, validation, connection, and hope (Desselle et al., 2023; Esparza-Reig et al., 2022).

Native students look to their peers and the community for support during college. Association with peer and friend groups is vital for NAW in higher education because Indigenous students often feel isolated as there may be very few others who share their unique identity and culture. Supportive native and non-native peers promote validation and acceptance, fostering a supportive network (Gallop, 2016). Friends are a crucial source of encouragement and hope as they inspire and support students (Sulimani-Aidan & Melkman, 2022).

Overall, social support is critical for doctoral students. Results from EN Goplerud's Graduate Social Support Scale Survey showed that one's social support network was vital to completing the doctorate (Goplerud, 1980; Hadjioannou et al., 2007) conducted one of few studies examining graduate students' specific social support behaviors. The study successfully identified types of peer support that helped complete graduate degrees. Findings highlighted several types of support, including emotional support and advice. The research shows that positive social support includes friends,

peers, and social network advice. Additionally, participants in the study shared that with support from trusted peers, they could share feelings and receive feedback and sound advice, which helped solve challenges faced during their programs.

Social media generates support from others (Heidari et al., 2023). For Native Americans, social media has become a tool that has allowed individuals to share information openly (Heidari et al., 2023). Social media provides a platform for people to voice their opinions and share experiences (Heidari et al., 2023). The sentiment is echoed in research conducted by Adrienne Keene, Amanda Tachine, and Christine Nelson (2018), where Native scholars describe support and advice received via social media while navigating through the doctoral dissertation writing process.

The research explains how Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter are impactful in areas of support and advice for NAW (Keene et al., 2018). The research suggests that social media platforms inspire hope and advice to Native scholars (Keene et al., 2018). Participants in the study shared that posting their thoughts and struggles in an arena that honored their cultural values, community, and Native epistemologies was cathartic and inspirational. They used social media in sharing circles, motivated by responses and advice from other NAW scholars. Sharing circles are open conversations of trust and vulnerability that allow women to share personal, in-depth stories (Tachine et al., 2017). Incorporating sharing circles, the women were open to discussion, they challenged each other, they were able to reflect and debrief, and they were able to process information, offer feedback, and give and receive advice (Tachine et al., 2017). The women realized

the role of social media and social groups had a tremendous impact on the writing stage of their dissertations, encouraging them to persist through their doctorate.

Encouragement from Faculty Mentors and College Administrators

In addition to benefiting from support from family, tribe friends, and social circles, Native American students persist academically when supported and encouraged by faculty mentors and college administrators (George-Levi et al., 2022; Mclean, 2022). Most students enrolled in doctoral programs also work full-time and do not experience the same level of support as other graduate students or undergraduates enrolled in school full-time. Therefore, educational institutions must offer active academic support to doctoral students (Mantai, 2019).

Academic support systems, faculty mentor guidance, socialization, and mentorship influence persistence in graduate education and are essential to doctoral program completion. Availability and quality support within a program and access to resources and support outside of a program play a critical part in persistence toward doctoral degree completion (Trent et al., 2021). Successful doctoral experiences largely depend on effective mentoring (Byrnes et al., 2019). Faculty mentor support has academic, psychosocial, and sociocultural dimensions (Posselt, 2018). Academic support includes the development of academic skills such as writing and research techniques. The psychosocial and sociocultural dimensions affecting the doctoral learning experience also include the support and guidance from teachers, administrators, and faculty mentors.

Seminal works suggest that one of the most critical factors in completing a doctorate is a supportive, positive, and non-hierarchical relationship between the

dissertation chair and the doctoral candidate (Stallone, 2011; Storms et al., 2011). Other studies point to the importance of student/advisor relationships, citing the quality of the relationship between student and chair or advisor as being directly aligned with the successful completion of a doctorate (Ruud et al., 2018; Salinas-Perez et al., 2019). Findings confirm that support from faculty mentors and college administrators influences students' persistence and perceptions about networking within their graduate department, positively contributing to their success. As illustrated in Figure 3, the data highlights the critical role that these support systems play in shaping students' experiences and outcomes in their academic journeys.

Figure 3

Faculty Encouragement Scale

- FE_C1. Encouraged me to believe in myself when I doubted my academic abilities.
- FE_C2. Instilled hope in me when I felt like giving up on an academic task.
- FE_C3. Reminded me of my strengths when I was discouraged about a challenging academic task.
- FE_C4. Assured me that I was competent in dealing with my academic difficulties.
- FE_C5. Expressed confidence in me and told me to keep trying in school even though it was hard.
- FE_P1. Pointed out my strengths when she/he suggested I pursue a new academic opportunity.
- FE_P2. Noticed I was doing well in school and encouraged me to dream bigger and aim higher.
- FE_P3. Insisted that should strive for higher academic standards because I was capable.
- FE_P4. Explained why I had the skills to succeed in school at an advanced level.
- FE_P5. Said something positive to motivate me to consider a new academic goal.

Note. From “Exploring the relationship between student-perceived faculty encouragement, self-efficacy, and intent to persist in engineering programs,” by H. Y. Hsu, Y. Li, S. Dugger, & J. Jones, 2021, *European Journal of Engineering Education*, 46(5), 718–734. FE_C=Challenge-focused faculty encouragement. FE_P=Potential-focused faculty encouragement.

Other studies also identify the crucial role that faculty mentors play in doctoral persistence. Faculty mentors and advisers are essential to the doctoral process and act as teachers and role models. Faculty support enables doctoral students to persist independently (Lee et al., 2020). Faculty mentors are knowledgeable, expert sources of information about departmental and university policies. They advocate for students and significantly influence their experience, productivity, and progress (Ferree, 2018). Support from faculty mentors grows from relationships built on rapport, trust, and realistic expectations, where the advisor becomes a mentor and shares personal experience and expertise to guide the mentee toward their goals (Billion, 2019; Ferree, 2018; van Rooij et al., 2019). This type of support is the most critical factor affecting progress at the doctoral level.

In an influential study conducted by Maher et al., (2004), students shared that the positive and consistent interactions with their chair or faculty mentor showed a genuine concern for them as being most beneficial. The study confirmed that when students felt supported, they credited faculty mentors and the administration with encouraging them to persist.

Native American students need more support and engagement with faculty mentors and administrators to pursue college education (Becenti, 2020). A supportive faculty and school administration proved critical for success in doctoral programs for Natives (Swaminathan & Mulvihill, 2023). Aspen Rendon and Ahmed Al-Asfour (2019) reviewed pathways to persistence for educational success at the graduate level for seven Lakota women. The Lakota women identified formal and informal support as critical to

graduate persistence. Formal support included financial support, female influence, and culture. Informal support included school services and social integration with teachers and faculty (Rockinson-Szapkiw et al., 2016). The interview consensus was that learners are more likely to show persistence in learning environments that support them and offer a conducive learning environment Rendon & Ahmed-Asfour (2019). Thus, faculty mentors and college administrators positively support student persistence at the doctoral level (Bottomley et al., 2020).

Students are more likely to be successful as doctoral candidates and as imaginative researchers when they possess a sense of confidence (Ulibarri et al., 2014). Formative works show that doctoral students build confidence when they perceive college administrators and faculty mentors as approachable, respectful, available, and supportive. Academically confident students complete learning tasks and achieve their educational objectives (Pulford et al., 2018). When students know that they have the freedom and tools to solve problems creatively and view failure as a source of new skills while maintaining their efficacious attitude, logic follows that they are more likely to succeed in solving problems and in producing more innovative ideas (Corlett, 2022; Martin, 2022; Ulibarri et al., 2014). Thus, doctoral students are more likely to persist when they are confident.

Psychosocial support, provided by faculty mentors and college administrators, is a critical factor in helping doctoral students build confidence and persist in their programs. This support includes external validation and growth-oriented feedback (both negative and positive), which aids students in identifying themselves and their skills as

researchers. Students credit this kind of support as essential for boosting their confidence and enabling them to navigate the challenges of the doctoral process (Lamar & Helm, 2017). Crosby, Gliner, and Tenenbaum (2001) demonstrated that faculty mentors offering psychosocial support increased students' program satisfaction and contributed to program completion. Their study highlighted how such support encouraged students to articulate their research interests confidently, paving the way for future scholarly pursuits.

Confidence enables doctoral learners to handle setbacks, learn from mistakes, and take chances (Williams & Wilson, 2022). A confident doctoral student learns to tolerate and even embrace uncertainty, view failure as a learning opportunity, and remain hopeful that a seemingly disorderly process of a doctoral program will eventually yield results.

According to research, hope is an abstract form of encouragement critical to academic achievement (Zakrzewski, 2012). Hope motivates behavior in the face of obstacles (Chan et al., 2019) and is an aggressive expectation that something good will happen. Like confidence, researchers have found that students who possess hope have tremendous academic success, have lower levels of depression and anxiety, and are less likely to drop out of school (Zakrzewski, 2012).

Hope for doctoral learners is more than wishful thinking. For doctoral students, hope is setting clear and attainable goals, developing strategies to reach those goals, and remaining motivated to attain those goals when faced with challenges, setbacks, and uncertainty. Influential studies by (Pink, 2011; Sheehan and Rall 2011 and Mills-Schofield, 2012) suggest that faculty mentors and college administrators provide hope for students when they help students create goals that are both specific and take a positive

solutions-based approach when they know that there is an attainable result.

Encouragement from teachers and faculty is necessary for fostering hope for educational persistence (Burt et al., 2018). Faculty mentors and college administrators impart hope by reminding students to focus on the process and not take things personally, offering the students hope to not derail on their doctoral journey. A reminder to students that the faculty mentor has their back throughout the process offers hope for the arduous process of obtaining a doctorate. McKee (2008) and Mills-Scofield (2012) advise that faculty mentors and college administrators offer hope in fact and support realistic optimism (McKee, 2008; Mills-Scofield, 2012). Faculty mentors do more to “invite feelings” and listen to their students. To validate that the doctoral process is complex and to offer examples of how they found hope while pursuing their degrees (Pentón Herrera et al., 2022).

Faculty, advisors, and academic mentors are vital to encouraging students to participate actively in their education. Studies in this area show that providing students with one-on-one informal counseling, assistance, or advice significantly increases college enrollment and college persistence (Canaan et al., 2019). Programs that offer personalized and proactive coaching or advising and faculty mentors with open office hours to meet and chat with students have substantially increased academic performance (Kot, 2014; Oreopoulos & Petronijevic, 2019) and college persistence (Barr & Castleman, 2018; Bettinger & Baker, 2014). In Schmidtke’s 2017 study, students mentioned that working with college administrators and other school support personnel was “motivating and invigorating,” crediting the administration with encouraging them to

persist (Schmidtke, 2017, pp. 117-145).

Faculty mentors provide professional support by offering feedback, advising, and helping learners solve specific academic problems. For doctoral students' their adviser's expertise and knowledge were instrumental in their successful completion, especially in the writing of the dissertation (Jairam & Kahl, 2012), and the feedback received is critical. Informal conversation and feedback offer advice, with feedback providing information on the quality of a person's performance. It could be positive, negative, or both (Tsang, 2019).

Native American Persistence in Higher Education

Persistence in higher education for underrepresented and marginalized groups has long been a topic for research (Aljohani, 2016). The constructs of support, confidence, hope, and advice in areas of persistence in higher education are highlighted in research by Belgarde and Lore, who identify that personal and institutional factors impact. Persistence shapes retention and affects graduation at the University level (Belgarde & Lore, 2019). Support emerges as an essential factor in the academic success of minority students, consistent within this study's scope.

Thiem and Dasgupta approached the problem that too few NAW persist in doctoral programs by looking at barriers to academic success. Their research suggested that underrepresentation in higher education is driven by various interconnected social, economic, educational, and structural factors that prevent students from thriving and persisting in college, putting their degree completion at risk (Thiem & Dasgupta, 2022).

One study's weakness is that the researchers only looked at the barriers to persistence in education. One strength inherent in the researchers' approach is that they note that barriers to academic persistence are not distinct. Instead, the obstacles and barriers are interrelated and impact students on many levels (Thiem & Dasgupta, 2022). As the PSC theory suggests, some interconnected variables shape academic outcomes and impact college persistence (Beasley & McClain, 2020).

Additional studies related to the research question of how NAW perceive encouragement indicate that encouragement is perceived using multiple constructs. These constructs encompass familial support, cultural identity reinforcement, community connections, and mentorship within academic settings. The basic qualitative methodology used in this study and previous research is significant because it aids in the researcher's comprehension of the perspectives of NAW in graduate programs. Focusing on individual narratives and lived experiences provides a deeper understanding of contextualizing and internalizing encouragement. Furthermore, it highlights how NAW interpret and value encouragement in formal and informal contexts, offering insight into the critical support systems that enhance their resilience and persistence in higher education.

The direction of more current qualitative research suggests different support mechanisms help to remove barriers to college persistence. Scholarships, tribal resources, and economic and financial support all aid in affordability, removing financial barriers to attending college (Berry, 2017; Genge & Day, 2021; Hearn & Kenna, 2021; Lopez, 2018; Tachine et al., 2017). Feeling welcomed, being understood, support from family, and

giving back increases motivation for Native American students, which enables them to persist in academia (Adelman et al., 2013; Duder et al., 2022; Lopez & Tachine, 2021; Smith et al., 2014). A more critical analysis of the body of literature shows the current direction of literature, which focuses on supplemental constructs of encouragement and support that Native American students rely on to complete graduate programs.

Implications

Support systems like family, community, cultural identity, spirituality, strategies, and social activities contribute to academic persistence for Native American college students (Bashant, 2016; Busey et al., 2023; Kornbluh et al., 2021). Moreover, support vital to Native American student persistence comes from the student's family and tribal community (Jordan et al., 2022; Reyes, 2019). Support from family and tribal community encourages students to pursue higher education to better themselves, learn how to navigate the dominant culture, give back, and combat the disadvantageous conditions of tribal communities. Furthermore, peer support and support from social networks give American Indian students a sanctuary to learn, transfer tribal information, participate in rituals, and share history, which provides an outlet preventing feelings of isolation in an atmosphere where native students may be the minority (Jensen & Minke, 2017). Additionally, culturally congruent mentorship, development, and support from faculty chairs, teachers, and other administrators is needed for successful graduate degree completion for Native Americans (Chee et al., 2019; Windchief et al., 2018). All students benefit from encouragement, but family, community, social networks, faculty, and institutional networks are essential for Native American graduate students (Jensen &

Minke, 2017). The results of this study may also drive leaders in higher education to review their diversity policies and examine strategies currently used to encourage persistence for a more diverse student population.

Summary

The literature review covers encouragement, hope to uplift, confidence to inspire, and guidance that serves as feedback (Mason & Merga, 2022; McCoy & Winkle-Wagner, 2022; Williams & Thompson, 2021). Wong et al. (2019) evaluated potential-focused encouragement within the academic environment and found that self-efficacy created by assurance, confidence, and hope influences student outcomes (Glowrey et al., 2023; Field et al., 2020; Ghoston et al., 2020; Puckett & Lewis, 2022; Wong et al., 2019). These findings underscored the sense of value that comes from the different elements of encouragement. Encouragement is derived from support and can increase intrinsic motivation (Sverdlik & Hall, 2020; Tokan & Imakulata, 2019). Providing resources to stay positive during difficulties, hardships, barriers, and adversity encourages doctoral students (Yi & Ramos, 2022). Students receiving support as encouragement reported decreased stress, anxiety, health, and emotional issues, which resulted in leading to higher satisfaction, success, and completion rates in graduate school (Mason & Merga, 2022).

Encouragement reinforces confidence (Seibert, 2021; Yi & Ramos, 2022). Confidence is assurance in oneself and one's ability to do well (Field et al., 2020; Ghostone et al., 2020; Ju et al., 2020; Mason & Merga, 2022). Adult students build confidence and boost their social capital while embracing a personal identity as learners

through their collegiate experience. Doctoral students gain confidence when they meet academic expectations and understand academic writing conventions (Yi & Ramos, 2022). Meeting academic expectations and mastering academic writing conventions build confidence in doctoral students, increase productivity, and help them complete their programs (Lee & Boud, 2003; Badenhorst et al., 2014).

To complete a doctoral degree, an atmosphere of hope is vital in providing the necessary stamina to supply the needed effort (Duckworth, 2016). The doctoral process is arduous, and students constantly question their academic abilities (Cornwall et al., 2018). With the vulnerability inherent at this level of scholarship, hope is the element of encouragement doctoral students hold on to (van Rooij et al., 2021). Hope is a feeling or desire for something to happen. Hope is a sentiment of eagerness and anticipation for a specific event (Pleeging et al., 2022). Hope is not optimism, but both play an essential role in the successful functioning of graduate students (Freire et al., 2020). By maintaining successful functioning, students can attain graduate degrees and deal with the stressors and anxiety inherent in the graduate school environment (Allen et al., 2021). Higher levels of hope link to greater self-efficacy in academic tasks, contributing to program completion and graduation. Hope and optimistic thinking are critical and have a significant positive relationship with academic performance (Gallagher et al., 2013; Marrun & Arnoldo, 2022).

Another type of support that impacts graduate students is advice. Doctoral study is intense; it is a tremendous personal sacrifice with challenges. Advice is a suggestion, a recommendation, and guidance (Hill et al., 2023). Advice inspires a doctoral student to

prepare to pursue a program. Inspiration is drawn from input, advice, or feedback from significant people in a doctoral student's life.

Section 2 of this essential qualitative project study includes the research methodology and design. The section also includes participant selection, data collection, data analysis, and any limitations found in the research. Section 3 describes the project, reviews the literature, and includes data findings. Section 4 concludes with my reflection as a learner and researcher. I address the strengths and weaknesses of the project as well as give directions and implications for future research.

Section 2: The Methodology

The methodology for the study is qualitative to support the problem and research questions. The problem addressed in this study is the underrepresentation of NAW in doctoral programs. The underrepresentation has caused a lack of diversity in graduate education, contributing to racial disparity in American society. The research questions are

- Do NAW enrolled in U.S. doctoral programs perceive encouragement in terms of support received from family and tribe, friends and social circles, and faculty mentors and college administrators?
- How do NAW enrolled in U.S. doctoral programs perceive encouragement regarding confidence received from family and tribe, friends and social circles, and faculty mentors and college administrators?
- How do NAW in U.S. doctoral programs perceive encouragement regarding hope received from family and tribe, friends and social circles, and faculty mentors and college administrators?
- How do NAW enrolled in U.S. doctoral programs perceive encouragement regarding advice from family and tribe, friends and social circles, and faculty and college administrators?

Qualitative research questions do not seek to answer specific, measurable questions or test hypotheses; researchers pursue them using descriptive data (Bradshaw et al., 2017).

Qualitative research is used to examine how phenomena unfold in real-world settings, naturally and organically (Cristancho et al., 2018). Qualitative researchers usually view human thought and behavior in a social context, covering a range of phenomena to

answer how and why instead of how many or how much (Chowdry & Shill, 2021).

The research design in this study is basic qualitative. A basic qualitative research design is suited for this study as it enables the researcher to function as a filter and active analyst in the research process (Yoon & Uliassi, 2022). Basic qualitative research helps highlight participants' experiences and interpretations, allowing comprehensive descriptions of complicated phenomena (Prosek & Gibson, 2021). Basic qualitative research methodologies are instrumental when concentrating on participants' thoughts, feelings, reasons, motivations, and values to understand why they act in the manner they do (Aspers & Corte, 2021; Dames, 2019; Tomaszewski, 2020).

Additionally, a basic qualitative research design is a technique where the researcher is concerned with locating or exposing significant themes (Mihas, 2019). This approach is often used in research when a study intends to describe the participants' experiences and explore an issue (Nicholas, 2015). The encouragement NAW experienced from their family, tribe, friends, social circles, faculty mentors, and college administrators while matriculating through doctoral programs can be described using a simple basic qualitative design. For this study, a basic qualitative approach is the best method for understanding study participants' experiences and making meaning of them.

Other qualitative research designs are not appropriate to answer the research question of how NAW perceive encouragement from family and tribe, friends and social circles, and faculty mentors and college administrators to persist in doctoral programs. Ethnography, phenomenology, and case studies are all qualitative research models offering an analytical framework that classifies human experiences based on the

viewpoints of the participants (Sharma et al., 2023). Ethnography design allows researchers to collect significant data and participant quotes to draw theory through inductive interpretation of patterns and inductive reasoning (Creswell & Poth, 2016). A primary tenet of ethnography is observation from being amongst study participants. Ethnography is an effective qualitative methodology that provides a detailed study of a specific place, organization, or event and focuses on gaining a holistic understanding of said event (Kelly, 2022). However, ethnography does not fully incorporate the individual human experience and, therefore, would be less effective for this study.

Another qualitative design that is not appropriate for this study is phenomenology. Phenomenology is research into what is experienceable (Williams, 2021). Phenomenological research uses interviews to ascertain the questions “What is it like?” as opposed to “How and why” of basic qualitative research (Williams, 2021, p. 373). Phenomenology can also serve a dual role in research, as both a theoretical perspective and a research methodology, as both are concerned with understanding an individual’s lived experiences (Williams, 2021). Phenomenology aims to provide an integrated and comprehensive explanation of meaningful interactions between a living subject and its surroundings (Summa, 2023); however, this approach is more concerned with the feelings and behavior of participants rather than their perceptions (Willis, 2022).

Case study is another qualitative design that is not appropriate for this study. Case studies integrate the various study components consistently and logically, ensuring researchers adequately address the research questions. A case study is empirical research that explores a recent occurrence in its actual setting (Kekeya, 2021). The case study

methodology is suitable for obtaining solutions to questions utilizing particularistic, descriptive, and heuristic criteria. Particularistic refers to specific circumstances, programs, events, and phenomena of a person's routine behavior. Descriptive refers to the research outcome, and heuristic refers to the case study that illuminates the reader's understanding of the phenomena (Merriam, 1998). A case study provides in-depth data and a whole or complete picture of real-life actions of human beings in a social activity in a particular natural setting (Punch, 2009).

Participants

The criterion for selecting participants is that participants self-identify as female Native Americans with experience as doctoral students. Self-identification for Native American will be irrespective of having a Certificate of Degree of Indian Blood (CDIB). Female, Native American, and doctoral student experience are criteria necessary for this study because eliciting specific individuals' experiences, information, ideas, perceptions, and opinions creates data to answer the research questions (Creswell, 2007; Johnson & Christensen, 2012).

The number of participants included eight female Native American women with experience as a doctoral student. The sample size is suitable and can make a difference in empirical research if the sample addresses and elucidates something crucial to the theory (Hennink & Kaiser, 2021). Qualitative research aims to provide a sample size that will give readers a detailed and in-depth understanding of the topic (Hennink & Kaiser, 2021). A purposeful sample size with participants having characteristics that are specific to the study holds what is called information power (Malterud et al., 2015). Information

power drives adequate sample size in qualitative studies; fewer participants are needed because the sample contains more information pertinent to the study (Malterud et al., 2015).

Potential participants were recruited via social media, using public social networking sites, public Slack channels, and public listservs to connect with them. Listservs are often readily available with an already established list of people from a particular population. I was able to manipulate the lists to find people who may already be interested in my research project. Slack channels allow researchers to post a question for recruitment and wait for responses from interested parties (Lee et al., 2022). The questions posed using Slack channels were specific to the research study and include participant criteria to ensure those interested meet the study requirements.

Finally, I used my personal network, using word of mouth to communicate with my family, friends, and acquaintances to spread the word about my research. Once responses are received, I used snowballing to recruit additional participants through their recommendations. This technique is beneficial for studying individuals who belong to hard-to-identify groups. Snowball sampling depends on individual participants to find other participants likely to satisfy a specific sample's inclusion criteria and to disseminate study information to these potential participants (Zikar et al., 2023). With the help of research participants, researchers can uncover additional potential subjects using the snowball sampling technique.

The first eight volunteer participants who self-identify as female Native Americans with doctoral student experience were selected. An invitation to each potential

participant was sent via email. The email listed the virtual interview's date, time, and length. I provided participants with an informed consent form, giving them specific and sufficient information to help them decide whether they want to participate in the research study. I asked them to return the form to me before the interview.

First, I personalized my communication, letting each participant realize I am interested in and care about their lives, families, outside interests, dreams, and aspirations. Second, I made sure that all study participants feel valued by constantly reminding them that I appreciate their stories and respect their time and efforts, for without their shared stories, there is no research study. Third, I reminded all study participants that their participation is valuable, beneficial to society, and instrumental to future research. Finally, I maintained respect for each participant. Respecting participants involves protecting their privacy, honoring their decision to remain in the study, and sharing findings responsibly. I maintained respect for participants throughout the research and after their participation ends.

Methods to establish a researcher-participant relationship began with building rapport with the participants. The process to protect participants included participants' rights to confidentiality, informed consent, and protection from harm. To protect privacy and confidentiality, aliases and pseudonyms were used to keep participants confidential. To protect study participants from harm, I removed their names from files and use synonyms when applicable. I also preserved privacy and confidentiality during telephone calls, interview sessions, data analysis, and in reporting research findings. I privately conducted each phone call and audio conference interview in my home office or another

secluded area. I password-protected each audio conference to secure the meeting and protect participant confidentiality to prevent unintended guests from joining. Each audio conference was password protected to ensure the meeting, preventing unintended guests from joining and keeping participant confidentiality. For data analysis and research findings, I deleted any identifiable information related to participants to prioritize their protection during and after the project (see Arifin, 2018).

Research participants for this study were educated regarding informed consent before beginning the interview process. Informed consent is the disclosure of relevant and pertinent information and the ability to give consent as a free choice (Crowley et al., 2017; O'Sullivan & Feeney, 2021). The informed consent thoroughly explains the interview process, how long they will last, and why the data is necessary and pertinent to the study (Appiah, 2021). In order to ensure that interviewees are aware of their right to withdraw at any time, informed consent was also discussed during the interview process. Participants must receive comprehensive information about the study to make an informed, sound, voluntary, and rational decision to participate (Crowley et al., 2017). A pre-approved IRB informed consent form was issued to each participant outlining the purpose of the study, expected duration, voluntary participation rights, research benefits, incentives or compensation to participate, and whom to contact should questions arise. In addition, participants had the option to review their transcripts from the interview.

To protect participants from harm, participants were reminded of their decision to withdraw from the study at any time if they feel threatened or coerced by the interview questions. Additionally, if at any time participants feel that their physical, emotional, or

mental health is in jeopardy throughout the project study, I would immediately stop the interview, remove the participant from the project without prejudice, and continue the study in good faith. Researchers working with human subjects must adhere to specific ethical guidelines to protect participants (Appiah, 2021; Bazzano et al., 2021). A small electronic gift card of \$20 was given to potential participants as a “thank you” to participate. The study issued the electronic gift through a link to potential participants’ email. The email will explain that participation is voluntary and that participants can withdraw at any time without reason. The explanation also included the fact that all information obtained is confidential.

Data Collection

Data collection approaches for qualitative research often involve direct interaction with individuals on a one-to-one basis (Sim & Waterfield, 2019). I plan to use interviews to garner responses from participants in my study; thus, a basic qualitative methodology will provide the structure and flexibility to elicit verbal interpretations and accounts of personal experiences from each participant (Utibe Monday, 2020). Qualitative research utilizes tools to capture the data from the interactions. These tools are the instruments used for data collection. Common sources for data collection in qualitative research are tests, questionnaires, observation, focus groups, and interviews (Utibe Monday, 2020). However, the most direct way to obtain rich, in-depth information about a particular occurrence is through interviews (Barrett & Twycross, 2018; Devonshire & Vaughn, 2018). Qualitative researchers often design one-on-one semi-structured interviews to address the study questions, participant characteristics, and the researcher’s preferred

methodology (Barrett & Twycross, 2018). The data includes accounts of reconstructed facts and the social meanings associated with recalled experiences (Bearman, 2019).

The interview protocol for this study is the interview questions I designed to gain data for analysis. The protocol is sufficient for data collection and will provide data to answer the research questions. Because my research questions center around how NAW perceive encouragement, a researcher-designed protocol offers the best method for data collection (Adeoye-Olatunde & Olenik, 2021). The protocol will consist of questions that support the research questions. The interview will focus on perceived encouragement from family and tribe, friends and social circles, and faculty and college administrators. The interviewer will ask participants to describe the encouragement they received to persist in their doctoral programs, focusing on support, confidence, hope, and advice. Equally as important as participants describing encouragement received, participants will describe who expressed the most substantial encouragement and who expressed the weakest encouragement in terms of support, confidence, hope, and advice. Participants will also describe how they expressed these attributes. The interview questions are justified and guided by the PSC theory as is necessary for solid research and for eliciting rich, focused, and meaningful data from the point of view and experiences of the participants. In addition, participants will share their reasons for pursuing a doctorate, collegial achievement, academic persistence, and educational support.

The processes for how and when the data will be generated, gathered, and recorded are as follows. This interview protocol will be applied to allow consistency across interviews. The protocol helps to organize the questions for the interview, finds

probing questions throughout the interview, and suggests follow-up questions. Interviews will last approximately one hour. The questions will be pre-determined and asked in the same order. An organic dialogue will develop with each participant regarding how encouragement is received while persisting in their doctoral programs. Follow-up questions frequently change as qualitative research develops, forcing researchers to revisit the data corpus and transcription (Knott et al., 2022). The conversation will flow naturally, and I will remain positive throughout and make sure to allow grace to the interviewees to share their experiences. I will use audio conferencing and record the conversation during the interview process. The simplicity and reduced geographic restrictions provided by audio conferencing are practical methods for qualitative data collection (Archibald et al., 2019). Further, most audio-conferencing platforms have enabled features that prompt participants to consent to recording (Archibald et al., 2019). The audio conference setting will also generate an audio transcript of the recording. In the event of a failed audio conference, a second method of recording will be a smartphone application where recordings are saved and can easily be uploaded securely for audio transcription.

I will arrange and manage the data in a spreadsheet to keep track of it. I will keep participant information and recorded interviews in separate files on a secured hard drive. I will also store the information on a flash drive for added measure. Any written notes, reflective journals, or other communication will be kept in physical folders in my office until it is time to engage the data.

My role as researcher includes interpreting the data retrieved from the interviews.

I will remind each participant about the interviews' goals and the project study's premise. As researcher, I will be an active participant in the study seeking to explore and understand perceptions of encouragement from NAW in the study. Another role of the researcher is to learn and grow as a scholar. This research study project will help me become more effective as an educator in achieving educational outcomes, educational standards, and educational reform. An additional role of the researcher is to negate bias. Bias typically occurs in responses to surveys, questionnaires or interviews concentrating on individual behavior or attitudes (Lloyd & Hugenberg, 2021). Response bias could result in dishonesty in the data and affect the validity of the research.

I will present a positionality statement and integrate researcher reflexivity to reduce bias. Positionality describes the researcher's place in relation to the context of the study on a personal level (Hampton et al., 2020). My positionality statement is that I have no current professional role engaging with Native American students at the doctoral level. I have no current or past personal relationships with the NAW being interviewed for this research study. While my subject of study is NAW, I identify as mixed race of African American and Puerto Rican descent. My interest in the topic of NAW comes from my experience as a doctoral learner, a college instructor, and a college administrator, where I noticed a lack of representation of female Native Americans with doctoral degrees.

Reflexivity refers to transparency about the relationship between the researcher and study participants (Davis, 2020). Reflexivity is a continuous self-critique for the researcher to evaluate their subjectivity and how it influences the research process

(Olmos-Vega et al., 2022). Reflexivity is also related to the researcher's capacity for ethical decision-making and communication (Olmos-Vega et al., 2022). Reflexivity is another method researchers use to self-evaluate to see how they influence the project (Ravitch & Carl, 2016; Saldaña, 2016). The researcher conducts this check to remain objective throughout the study and avoid countertransference in the research results (Borraz et al., 2020). This task is essential because if the researcher inserts themselves into the research too much, it could alter the results (Borraz et al., 2020). I will keep detailed journal records for reflection after each interview to maintain reflexivity.

Data Analysis

The data will be analyzed as each interview is completed. Organizing, managing, sorting, and engaging with the data in a fully immersive manner is necessary for conducting data analysis. To organize and manage the data designated folders will be created on google one drive, one note or a flash drive to hold interview responses. The folders will be sorted according to each individual participant's interview. To engage with the data, an analytical process of reviewing will begin in order to generate findings that transform raw data into new knowledge. Engaging in the data involves reviewing the information multiple times, iterative coding, categorization, theme generation, and a close examination and analysis of the results (Ravitch & Carl, 2016; Saldaña, 2021). A third-party transcription provider will be used to prepare for analysis and transcription. I will revisit each recorded interview and compare the contents with any written notes taken. I plan to assign codes to each participant that coincide with the transcripts; that way, I can compare information and provide further analysis using descriptive coding.

Researchers use descriptive coding as an initial form of coding, examining data line by line (Juliatt & Corbin, 2015) to identify patterns, similarities, differences, frequency, sequences, correlation, and causation in the research (Saldaña, 2021). In qualitative research, a code is typically a brief term or phrase that captures the essence of the information contained in an interview (Saldaña, 2021). A code symbolizes or translates into data (Vogt et al., 2014). Descriptive coding is beneficial in identifying a topic and garnering perceptive responses to open-ended questions from rich descriptive detail (Saldaña, 2014). Descriptive coding is beneficial in identifying a topic and garnering perceptive responses to open-ended questions from rich descriptive detail (Saldaña, 2014). I plan to use descriptive coding based on 1 or 2 keywords to place the information received from the interviews into descriptive codes. I will code the semi-structured interviews for this study based on the information gathered using the participants' own words and then apply my descriptive labels.

I will create categories after coding by grouping the descriptive codes into collections of similarities. I will cluster the collections as I formulate an understanding of the meaning of the cluster. I will assign labels to the collections generated from the codes. I will systematically organize each collection and continue to look for similarities, revisiting the data and identifying which collections look alike until patterns are found (Langu, 2022).

I will develop themes from the categories and codes found within the data (Saldaña, 2021). Because qualitative inquiry requires close attention to detail, language, and reflection (Langu, 2022), I will highlight key words and phrases looking for

embedded information on emergent patterns and meanings of the human experience. The themes will be sentences forming overarching ideas that will be unique to the data collected in this study.

To assure quality, accuracy and credibility in the study findings member checking will be applied. Member checking is a way to ensure accuracy in qualitative research (Kosleck, 2013). Member checking offers a way for participants to review and verify that what they have shared during the interview process is accurate and consistent with their experiences. By reviewing the transcripts, research participants can provide feedback to see if what they have expressed in their interviews is projected correctly (Ravitch & Carl, 2016; Saldaña, 2016). To validate transcription summaries, member checking will be utilized.

Procedures for dealing with discrepant cases will include reporting all findings represented in the data. Though I will be looking for similarities and themes within the research, I will include any dissimilarities and report issues from different perspectives. Contradictions in the data may lead to surprising conclusions that may eventually support my theory. It is crucial to report study findings for dissemination and synthesis (Wainwright et al., 2018). Collaborating and allowing a knowledgeable, unbiased, impartial colleague evaluate my summary, transcripts and conclusion opens the research for scrutiny and debate which enhances the validity of the research (Joyce, Cantillon, & Georghegan, 2022)

Limitations

Presenting the limitations of the study means acknowledging flaws in the study

that might affect the results of the study. This study is performed in the western region of the United States limiting generalizability to other samples of NAW in other regions.

Interviews with NAW from regions may yield different results. Study participants reside in different states in the western region of the United States. As such a level of adaptability will be applied. Interviews will not be conducted face to face, and access to participants may be reduced causing a reduction in the number of available participants.

Data Analysis Results

Qualitative researchers must organize data for analysis and condense it through coding, categorization, and theme identification. Then, they choose the most effective format to represent the data using tables, figures, graphics, and discussion (Reyes et al., 2024). The aim is to gather, analyze, and interpret the data, using the findings to answer the research questions. The data analysis for this study encompassed a series of steps: a thorough reading of the transcripts multiple times, a careful review of the recorded audio to verify the accuracy of the transcripts, supplementary note-taking on the transcripts, contemplation of each recorded response, initial formulation of descriptive codes, organization of the codes into an Excel spreadsheet, and subsequent analysis of the data to discern pertinent patterns and themes, and as they align with the research questions. In this section, I elaborate on the execution of these procedures within the scope of this study.

I conducted interviews with 8 NAW who had experiences in doctoral programs. I gathered the data for this study through semi-structured Zoom interviews, each lasting about an hour. I stored the data in a designated folder on my computer. Each folder

housed the audio recordings of the semi-structured interviews in M4A format, accompanied by the interview transcripts, and saved as closed caption text documents. Although the participants' cameras were turned off per IRB requirements, I retained the video footage in a separate secured folder. All participant folders were also backed onto a secure flash drive for safekeeping.

The subsequent task involved reviewing the interview transcripts meticulously to identify errors and check validity. To ensure validity, I used member checking to present data transcripts to all participants for their feedback (McKim, 2023). I sent each participant an email containing a summary of their interview to assess accuracy and relevance to their personal experiences. The participants were made aware prior to the interview that member checks would be conducted to ensure validity and that if errors or misinterpretations were found, they would be corrected immediately.

From this point, I present the data and delve into the themes that emerged from the data alongside the theory. I analyze the key patterns and insights, drawing connections between the empirical evidence and theoretical perspectives to provide a deeper understanding of the subject. I show evidence of quality and revisit the research questions. Finally, the outcomes are methodically summarized concerning the identified problem, research question(s), and their congruence with the broader literature on the subject, integrating insights derived from the conceptual framework.

Codes

A comprehensive coding process was employed to systematically analyze the rich insights gained from the interviews with study participants. This approach provided

structure to the data and helped to identify recurring motifs and emergent themes, thereby paving the way for deeper interpretation and analysis (Reyes, Bogumil, and Welch, 2024). In this section, I used coding based on 1 or 2 keywords to place the information received from the interviews into descriptive codes. I explained how the raw data were grouped to create the codes. The rationale for coding stems from the need to organize, dissect, and extract meaningful patterns and themes from participant quotes within the collected data (Ravitch & Carl, 2016; Saldaña, 2021).

I present the raw data using figures and tables to highlight patterns and relationships within the data visually. I created Figure 1 with a program called Vizzlo, using frequencies of the coded data with a specific application or program. Figure four is a word cloud consisting of 44 words. The word cloud provides a visual representation showing the frequency and significance of 44 codes derived from the raw data (see Figure 4). The data forms a single image composed of multiple words associated with a particular text, with the size of each word indicating its importance or frequency in the data. This visualization helps quickly identify the most prominent themes and patterns from the interviews (Limna, 2023). The larger the word appears in the cloud, the more frequently participants mentioned it. Participants used the codes “heritage” and “tradition” to express their motivation to succeed academically more often than they used “difficult” or “ignorance” to express barriers to academic success. Similarly, participants used the code “accountability” more often than the code “reinforcement” and “aspiration” to describe their commitment to meeting expectations and achieving their doctoral goals.

Figure 4*Raw Data and Codes*

For a more structured analysis, I used a table to understand the collected data better (see Table 1). The table summarizes the essential findings and patterns captured in the raw data. Tables effectively demonstrate the trustworthiness of qualitative analysis (Cheung & Tai, 2023). The table below presents the codes derived from the raw data obtained through participant interviews. Each code emerged from the analysis of the interview transcripts. The codes serve as organizing principles, which allowed me to categorize and analyze the data systematically according to recurring themes and patterns. Through this process, I gained more profound insights into the experiences, perspectives, and opinions expressed by the participants.

Table 1*Raw Data and Codes*

Raw Data	Codes
P1. I have to keep going.	Tenacity
P2. But just being a mama through it was hard and it was trying.	Difficult
P3. It's nice to have family and close people to be supportive. Mom, the most emotionally supportive and the biggest cheerleader.	Solace
P4. Ultimately giving back to the community, if not, you know, presently, but in the future through studies, making a larger impact. Services in the community. Doing more in tribal communities	Obligation

The code tenacity was applied when participants expressed their unwavering perseverance and determination while enrolled in their doctoral programs. For example, Participant 1, said “I have to keep going.” Participant 2 shared how she needed to see things through regarding her doctoral program. Participant 3, affirmed that dedication to her doctoral program was worth it while Participant 4, explained she had to push herself harder to not give up. Participant 5 explained how she needed to suffer to get through whatever was necessary to complete her doctoral program. Participant 6, declared “once I’m committed to something, I’m committed to finishing it.” Participant 7, exclaimed “I’m just very lucky to have inherited their strength and that certainly their spirit lives in me and that certainly helped me persevere through hard times in my doctoral program.” Participant 8 exclaimed “there’s nothing like fear and failure, fear of failure and rejection to motivate you.” The code tenacity is appropriately applied to all 8 study participants in this research. After codes like these were created and grouped, categories were established based on their similarities.

Categories

Categories are created from the data and are not predetermined (Bingham, 2023). A thorough review of the categories derived from the data analysis and the rationale for their inclusion are presented based on the codes assigned and the raw data collected. The categories presented encapsulate key thematic clusters discerned through rigorous analysis of the collected data. Each category represents a distinct aspect of the participants’ experiences and perceptions. The rationale for these categories is rooted in

the systematic coding process applied to the raw data. Significant quotes and responses were identified as the foundation for creating descriptive codes. The codes were then grouped into meaningful categories, reflecting commonalities and patterns observed across the dataset.

The categories presented in the following table (see Table 2) provide a structured framework for analysis and illuminate the research topic's multifaceted nature. The richness and depth of the raw data guided the inclusion of specific categories. The categories captured the core elements of participants' experiences and perspectives from their interviews. As a result, the identified categories are comprehensive and representative, reflecting the true essence of the data collected and providing a solid foundation for further interpretation and discussion.

Table 2*Categories and Codes*

Categories	Codes
Drive	Tenacity Humility Sacrifice Confidence Accountability
Generational Trauma	Crisis Heritage Tradition Neophyte Ignorance
Wellbeing	Solace Obliging Balance Understanding Supportiveness
Intimidation	Insecurity Doubt Guilt Worry Incertitude Financials Fear
Inspiration	Validation Trust Competence Reinforcement Accountability Exemplars Aspiration
Obligation	Altruism Activism Belonging Inclusion Solidarity Unity Heritage Tradition Respect Transcendence
Magnanimity	Disdain Superiority Arrogance Relatability

Themes

Themes are fundamental building blocks in qualitative research, offering a structured framework through which collected data can be organized, interpreted, and understood (Naeem, Ozuem, Howell, & Ranfagni, 2023). In this section, an exploration of the emergent themes derived from the data analysis is presented, providing valuable insights into the intricacies of the research topic. Each theme represents a distinct aspect of the participants' narratives, shedding light on their diverse perspectives, challenges, and lived experiences. The themes have been carefully identified, categorized, and synthesized, offering a holistic understanding of the research findings.

The rationale for employing themes stems from several key considerations. First, themes facilitate the condensation of voluminous data into manageable categories, enhancing clarity and coherence in analysis. Second, themes enable researchers to interpret and understand the underlying meanings embedded within the data. Third, themes serve as a means of representing and communicating research findings to diverse audiences and offer a structured framework for presenting the outcomes of the study (Naeem, et al., 2023). The next table (see Table 3.) explores the richness and depth of the qualitative data, uncovering valuable insights that contribute to a deeper understanding of the research phenomenon and its broader implications.

Table 3*Themes, Categories, and Codes*

Themes	Categories	Codes
NAW confront the distain of academic intimidation with humility.	Drive Tenacity	Humility Sacrifice Confidence Accountability
	Intimidation	Incertitude Financials Fear Validation Trust Disdain Reinforcement Inspiration Accountability Exemplars Aspirations
NAW navigate the intersectionality of cultural obligations with ancestral wisdom.	Obligation	Altruism Activism Belonging Inclusion Unity Heritage Tradition Respect
	Wellbeing	Competence Obliging Balance
	Solace	Transcendence Understanding Supportiveness
NAW confront the legacy of generational trauma with a sense of solidary.	Generational Trauma	Insecurity Doubt Guilt Worry Crisis
		Heritage Tradition Difficult Neophyte
	Magnanimity	Ignorance Superiority Arrogance Relatability Solidarity

Narration of Themes

Themes represent recurring patterns of meaning from the data and offer profound insights and a deeper understanding of the research questions (Battle, L., and Ottley, A., 2023). The process of identifying the themes began with the categorization of the data. This initial step was fundamental as it laid the groundwork for the analysis. I meticulously examined the raw data, breaking it down into manageable segments. Each piece of data was carefully coded to capture its essential meaning and context. After categorizing the data, I grouped concepts that encapsulated the meanings of the codes and categories. Themes developed from the concepts found in the raw data.

I connected the themes to enhance the study's rigor and depth of insight (Naeem et al., 2023) as they correlated with the research questions. This process involved carefully examining how each theme related to the central inquiries of the study. By mapping the themes directly to the research questions, I ensured that the analysis remained focused and relevant. This connection validated the themes, enriched the overall understanding of the data, and allowed for a more nuanced interpretation, revealing deeper insights that might have otherwise been overlooked. By aligning the themes with the research questions, the study achieved higher analytical precision and comprehensiveness (Goff et al., 2023). This methodological approach reinforced the study's foundation, providing a robust framework for interpreting the findings and drawing meaningful conclusions (Frazer, Orr, & Thielking, 2023). With this solid foundation in place, the next critical step involved the identification of key themes that emerged from the data.

Three themes were identified as the most significant patterns that summarized the core findings of the research: (a) NAW confront the disdain of academic intimidation with humility, (b) NAW navigate the intersectionality of cultural obligations with ancestral wisdom, and (c) NAW confront the legacy of generational trauma with a sense of solidarity. Each theme was examined through the lens of the conceptual framework, ensuring a thorough and structured analysis. The themes correspond directly to the research questions, providing a cohesive alignment that strengthens the overall study and substantiates the core findings of the research. Any discrepancies in the cases are clarified through this detailed examination, allowing for a more refined understanding and interpretation of the data. In the following sections, I explain how the themes address the problem of underrepresentation of NAW in doctoral programs, which has led to a lack of diversity in graduate education and contributes to racial disparity in American society, prompting this study.

Theme 1: NAW Confront the Distain of Academic Intimidation with Humility

NAW frequently encounter significant challenges in academic settings, where they face overt and covert forms of intimidation. Participants shared their experiences, with one stating, “I didn’t know any of my classmates,” while another remarked, “I felt like school was competition... students are not nice... it was hard to talk to other students... many put up a facade of success/fake.” The pressure is intense when writing a dissertation, as one participant described how “It’s not unusual for them to rip it apart and say basically the entire past year was a waste.” The strain of navigating these environments was further highlighted by a participant who feared their dissertation might

not be approved, stating, “I was afraid that I wasn’t going to be able to have my dissertation signed off by him in the end because I had to set boundaries.” Another shared a particularly disheartening experience: “I was told by one of the people on my committee, actually my co-chair at the time, that if I was struggling so much with the perspectives, maybe I just couldn’t hack it in academia. Maybe a PhD wasn’t meant for me. Maybe I just wasn’t cut out for this life.”

Despite these challenges, NAW often respond with humility, a deeply rooted cultural value that helps them navigate the harsh realities of academia. This humility does not signify passivity or a surrender to intimidation. Instead, it embodies a profound strength from a cultural tradition emphasizing respect, community, and resilience. Rather than engaging in confrontational or defensive actions, NAW face academic intimidation with quiet confidence and a steadfast commitment to their scholarly goals. As one participant shared, “I had to humble myself,” another reflected, “I needed to suffer to get through,” and acknowledged, “You still have to come to terms with the humbling experience... you’ve got to put your head down and do what they say.” This approach empowers NAW to navigate hostile environments without sacrificing their identity or yielding to external pressures.

Humility intertwines with a sense of purpose, as NAW view their academic journeys as a mission to uplift their communities and preserve their cultural heritage. This broader perspective helps them maintain focus and perseverance, even in the face of discouragement or discrimination. By confronting academic intimidation with humility, NAW challenge the prevailing norms of competitive and individualistic academic

cultures, offering an alternative model of leadership and scholarship that is inclusive and community-oriented.

Theme 2: NAW Navigate the Intersectionality of Cultural Obligations with Ancestral Wisdom

For NAW, there is always a balance between dual pressures, that of cultural and that of academic expectations. Often, the demands for higher education run counter to the deeply ingrained cultural responsibilities and obligations that lie inside the communities and their traditions. These require NAW to draw strength from ancestral wisdom to guide and support them. One participant expressed, “I knew I had to confront this battle inside, against myself and against the world.” Another participant said, “When you’re connected with a constellation of people who believe in you and uplift you, so much becomes possible. It’s my grandmothers’ spirit, my parents’, my ancestors’ within me.”

While NAW navigate through their doctoral environments, they rely on the knowledge of their ancestors, which helps to ground them in their cultural commitments as well. Ancestral wisdom guides NAW through academic life, especially during stressful periods when the pressures of academic success intensify and threaten to pull them away from their commitments to Native culture. By staying grounded in their Native heritage, study participants indicate they can negotiate and overcome such challenges to pursue a coherent and harmonious path to academic success. NAW is not simply trying to ‘balance’ their academic life with the demands of their Native culture; instead, they genuinely integrate their academic life into the experiences of their Native culture. They

are simultaneously and quite purposefully students and culture bearers of Native scholarship. Through their journey, NAW demonstrate that it is possible to excel in doctoral programs while remaining firmly rooted in the cultural traditions that have shaped their lives.

Theme 3: NAW Confront the Legacy of Generational Trauma with a Sense of Solidarity

NAW confront the legacy of generational trauma with a profound sense of solidarity, finding strength in their connections with others who share similar experiences. This solidarity often begins within academic environments, where the challenges of pursuing a doctoral degree are made more bearable through the support of peers. As one participant expressed, having a “fellow doctoral student or someone that’s going through it with me that understands” provided a crucial sense of camaraderie, further enhanced by “some peers and other friends in doctoral studies” who could empathize with the unique struggles faced by NAW.

The bonds of solidarity with close friends are immensely significant. NAW shared how “teaming together” with friends allowed them to “bounce ideas off each other.” This connection became especially meaningful when participants found others who were “actually going through what I was going through,” particularly those from similar backgrounds. One participant highlighted the importance of “finding women, you know, Native and Indigenous women that I could connect to,” noting that “there’s so much I connected with personally.” Another participant described how the presence of other NAW who “supported me through thick and thin and helped me make sense of myself

and my trajectory” was invaluable. She described how a mentor, who had faced her own struggles, became a beacon of resilience and solidarity, guiding the participant through her doctoral journey. Through shared experiences and mutual support, NAW transform their collective pain into resilience, forging a path deeply rooted in solidarity and cultural strength.

Discrepant Cases

The final stage of the data analysis process involves recognizing any discrepant cases (Cole, 2023). Participants may provide contradictory accounts of their experiences or perspectives, and discrepant information may arise when analyzing interview transcripts, field notes, or other qualitative data sources (Matos & Kasztelnik, 2023). This may be due to the fallibility of human memory, or it may be due to specific observations that diverged from the overall patterns identified in the data (Hammersley, 2023).

To address discrepant information, I revisited all data collection methods, critically examined the sources of discrepancy, and explored possible explanations such as methodological limitations, sampling biases, or contextual factors. Reporting and discussing discrepant information in research publications is crucial for maintaining rigor and transparency (Brotzeller & Gollwitzer, 2024) as it allows readers to evaluate the robustness of the study’s conclusions and implications.

There were a few inconsistencies identified during data collection and analysis. When asked “Was there another time when someone encouraged you to believe in yourself to persist when you had doubts? A participant replied “There was never, I never had any doubts that I would not finish.” When asked if she could describe a time when

someone expressed confidence in her and told her to keep trying, even though school was hard she stated, “no” and expressed that she “had no additional support.” And when asked was there a time in her doctoral journey when someone pointed out her strengths and skills to be successful in her program, the same participant explained that no one pointed out her strengths or skills to succeed. Since this participant was the only one to answer this way, the researcher asked her to provide further explanations. There was no other data that showed irregularities requiring further investigation by the researcher. The remaining collected data appeared consistent with the emerging patterns and themes.

Evidence of Quality

A fundamental aspect of ensuring quality in research is providing a comprehensive narrative that delves deeply into and elucidates the participants’ experiences (Parks, 2023). In qualitative research, “evidence of quality” refers to various indicators that demonstrate the trustworthiness of the research. These indicators help to ensure that the findings are consistent and reliable. Validity and reliability were assessed meticulously throughout the entire research process, encompassing every stage from the beginning phases of the study to the intricacies of data collection and the critical stages of analysis. This section details the strategies utilized in the study to uphold validity and reliability in the research.

To ensure validity, I integrated researcher reflexivity for transparency in the relationship between myself and the study participants. By continually reflecting on my role and potential biases throughout the research process, I aimed to provide a transparent and honest account of how my interactions and perspectives might influence the findings

(Davis, 2020). I had to be self-critical and follow the steps articulated in the proposal to maintain integrity. Member checking was employed to verify the accuracy of participants' experiences as reflected in the study. This process involved sharing the findings with the participants to ensure their perspectives were accurately captured and represented (McKim, 2023). By engaging participants in this manner, the research gains an additional layer of validity and trustworthiness, confirming that the interpretations align with the participants' experiences and viewpoints (McKim, 2023). Additionally, I employed rigorous data-gathering techniques such as triangulation, which involves using multiple methods, data sources, and theories to cross-check and confirm findings to enhance the credibility and validity of the study (Yan et al., 2023).

Reliability was maintained through consistent data collection procedures and detailed documentation of the processes, ensuring that the results are dependable and can be replicated in future studies (Ahmed, 2023). I reviewed participant interviews three times or more to identify codes. I subsequently used direct quotes from participant responses, which were then categorized and used to develop themes. I used standardized protocols for data entry and analysis, conducted frequent cross-checks to identify and rectify any inconsistencies found in the data, and utilized advanced software tools to enhance data integrity. I took every measure to monitor reflexivity and address challenges objectively as the overall trustworthiness of the study is bolstered by its validity and reliability (Riazi, Rezvani, & Ghanbar, 2023).

Discussion of the Research Questions

This section presents the key findings of this study and reflects on participant's

interaction with the research questions. Data analysis identified three overarching themes from the interviews corresponding to each research question: NAW confront academic intimidation with humility, NAW navigate cultural obligations with ancestral wisdom, and NAW confront generational trauma while embracing solidarity. The analysis explores the themes in depth and illustrates how they relate to and illuminate the answers to the research questions.

RQ 1: How Do NAW in Doctoral Programs in the United States Perceive Encouragement to Persist in Doctoral Programs in Terms of Support, Confidence, Hope, and Advice Received from Family and Tribe?

NAW develop a profound resilience rooted in their cultural heritage sustained with humility, empowering them to transcend the disdain and skepticism they encounter in academic settings. NAW view the support of family and tribe as a wellspring from which they draw strength birthed in humility. Not just support as in ‘cheering on’ for success but a quiet support, to stay humble, and bounce back from academic challenges. The nuclear and extended family, along with the tribal community, instill and encourage humility in NAW, reminding them that education is not just about personal achievements but about bringing their people along with them on their academic journey. It is this kind of collective obligation that encourages a confidence threaded so seamlessly through humility that allows NAW to persist in doctoral programs.

Wisdom is not just affirmations to provide emotional support. Instead, wisdom with a pattern of advice passed down from generation to generation through their ancestors stresses the value and necessity of education to protect and restore themselves.

Knowing this, NAWs step through cultural responsibilities while pursuing their doctorates. Their cultural identity, maintained by the ancestral wisdom and teachings from their families or tribes, enables them to find strength in who they are. They draw confidence from their cultural identity, which is reinforced by the ancestral wisdom and teachings they receive.

NAW carry the legacy of generational trauma, stories for centuries passed down through generations in terms of injustices their communities experienced and continue to endure. Having family and tribe show up to hold space for them and provide solace for generational wounds is crucial. Support, grounded in a shared understanding of past struggles, provides a buffer against the emotional toll of trauma, enabling NAW to persist in their academic endeavors.

Embracing humility allows NAW to persist in their studies with a sense of purpose and connection to their cultural identity, reinforcing their resilience in the face of academic challenges. Wisdom and teachings from their families, tribes, and ancestors empower them to find strength in their identity. The encouragement received from family and tribe, infused with a deep understanding of generational trauma, helps NAW confront challenges while embracing the solidarity of their community. This collective support provides the emotional and psychological resources necessary for NAW to persist in their doctoral programs.

RQ 2: How do NAW in Doctoral Programs in the United States Perceive

Encouragement to Persist in Doctoral Programs in Terms of Support, Confidence, Hope, and Advice Received from Friends and Social Circles?

Friends and social circles play a crucial role in affirming abilities and achievements (Killen et al., 2022), helping NAW combat feelings of inadequacy and intimidation that often arise in competitive academic environments. NAW build confidence through the acknowledgment of their communal and relational strengths. This study found that encouragement from friends and social circles was most impactful when it aligned with NAW's cultural beliefs and obligations and did not go against the wisdom instilled in them from their ancestors.

Ancestral wisdom is the foundation of encouragement and support that NAW receives from friends and social circles. This wisdom teaches resilience, emphasizes the importance of community, and values education to uplift their people (Ekman & Simon-Thomas, 2021). When encouragement from friends and social circles echoes the sentiments of the ancestors, they provide encouragement that strengthens NAW's resolve to persist in their doctoral programs. NAW view the advice and support from these groups as extensions of the cultural teachings they have internalized, offering both practical and emotional reinforcement. NAW often find themselves torn between academic responsibilities and cultural obligations, making it essential to find a balance. The wisdom passed down from their ancestors, combined with support from friends and social circles who understand this duality, is critical in helping them maintain that balance, which is vital to their persistence.

RQ 3: How do NAW in Doctoral Programs in the United States Perceive Encouragement to Persist in Doctoral Programs in Terms of Support, Confidence, Hope, and Advice Received from Faculty and College Administrators?

When faculty and administrators acknowledge the generational trauma experienced by NAW, they offer more empathetic and personalized support, creating an environment where NAW women feel seen, understood, and valued. This recognition fosters solidarity between NAW and the academic institution, strengthening their confidence and hope. Encouragement that aligns with their cultural identity and acknowledges their collective struggles not only supports their academic persistence but contributes to healing the wounds of generational trauma through solidarity and shared understanding.

Support from faculty and college administrators who understand the generational trauma experienced by NAW helps create a more empathetic and supportive academic environment (Steinman & Kovats Sánchez, 2023), fostering a sense of belonging and resilience that encourages NAW to persist in their doctoral programs. When faculty and college administrators acknowledge and validate the challenges NAW face, they reinforce their commitment to NAW's academic goals and recognize their potential contributions to society (Banwo, Khalifa, & Seashore Louis, 2022). Beyond acknowledgment, the advice NAW receive from faculty and administrators becomes significantly more impactful when it is culturally informed and considers the legacy of generational trauma. Culturally respectful and integrated guidance complements the support NAW receive and enhances it, making it more meaningful and effective.

By acknowledging the historical and ongoing effects of generational trauma, faculty, and college administrators offer advice that is more empathetic and effective. The guidance and advice offered are more practical and offer strategies that resonate with NAW's personal experiences and aspirations, making the advice not just a set of academic tips but supportive instruction that acknowledges the unique circumstances of NAWs in doctoral programs. Further, culturally informed advice fosters a deeper connection between NAW and their academic mentors, reinforcing a sense of belonging and validation within the academic environment. Recognizing and valuing their heritage and struggles, enhances the relevance and effectiveness of the guidance provided, enabling NAW to overcome obstacles and achieve their academic goals.

Discussion of the Literature

The findings of this study aligned with those in the literature review. The findings show that too few Native American women persist in doctoral programs and that the number of NAW in doctoral programs lags far behind the numbers of other minority women. Findings from the literature also show nuances to the experiences of NAW enrolled in doctoral programs that affect their academic persistence. Those nuances are cultural, social, and institutional barriers that create additional challenges hindering their academic progress. Addressing these subtleties requires a multifaceted approach, including tailored support systems and policies that acknowledge and mitigate NAW's unique challenges.

Participants in this study were acutely aware that the number of NAW completing doctoral programs is significantly lower than other minority women. Chow-Garcia et al.

(2022), Miles et al. (2022), and Oxendine et al. (2020) suggest that there is an underrepresentation of NAW in doctoral programs due to systemic challenges that are both historical and contemporary. One study participant cited, “We don’t have a whole lot of that type of degree,” reflecting the scarcity of doctoral degree holders within Native American communities. The participant emphasized that seeing few people from her community reach such academic heights was discouraging. Another participant explained how “going past your associate’s degree” was uncommon but extraordinary in her family, highlighting the profound sense of achievement and rarity associated with higher education.

Markle et al. (2022). Miles et al. (2022) and Oxendine et al. (2020) posited that factors contribute to lower enrollment and completion rates in doctoral programs for NAW. The researchers further elucidate the intersectional nature of barriers, pointing out that NAW often lack access to culturally responsive mentorship and support networks, which are critical for their academic success. Thiem and Dasgupta (2022) stated that underrepresentation in higher education for Native American women is driven by various interconnected social, economic, educational, and structural factors that hinder students’ ability to thrive and persist in college, ultimately jeopardizing degree completion. Belgarde and Lore (2019) identified that personal and institutional factors significantly impact persistence, shape retention, and affect graduation rates at the university level for women of color. These findings emphasize the multifaceted nature of the challenges faced by NAW in doctoral programs.

Clark & Wylie (2021). Chow-Garcia et al. (2022) and Timonen et al. (2021)

identified generational trauma and cultural disconnection as some of the unique challenges faced by NAW in doctoral programs. One of the study's participants shared a poignant experience, stating, "I was explicitly told very negative narratives throughout my entire life... a lot of the negative stereotypes and statistics that we hear about our Native communities. The weight of those hurtful messages carries generations of pain." This participant's testimony accentuates the enduring impact of negative narratives on the academic journeys of NAW. Because of these deeply ingrained issues, there is a pressing need for a tailored support system to help NAW navigate and succeed in academia. Addressing these challenges is essential to fostering a more inclusive and supportive educational environment that acknowledges and mitigates the effects of generational trauma and cultural disconnection.

Lindstrom, G. (2020), McCoy & Winkle-Wagner (2022), and Williams & Thompson's (2021) research highlighted the importance of more supportive and understanding environments to foster academic success for NAW. Their research indicates that various support mechanisms are more effective in helping NAW overcome barriers to college persistence when elements of encouragement are incorporated. Mason & Merga (2022) proclaim those supportive elements include hope to uplift, confidence to inspire, and guidance with positive feedback as critical support mechanisms that effectively overcome barriers to persistence for NAW.

Additionally, Busey et al., (2023) and Kornbluh (2021) cite support systems like family, community, cultural identity, and spirituality contribute to academic persistence for Native American college students. All 8 study participants spoke of their parents,

siblings, spouses or partners, tribal communities, and co-workers offering extra support. One participant credited her mom as her “biggest cheerleader,” while another expressed, “My mom because she’s always told me you know you can do anything that you put your mind to.” Another participant said her mom “sort of kept me grounded. She would say you can do it, you know, you’re really smart, all the encouraging things that a parent does say.” Jordan (2022), Reyes (2019), and Rendon and Al-Asfour (2019) add that additional support is vital to Native American student persistence and comes from the student’s family and tribal community. One participant, shared that even though she felt alienated from family while pursuing her doctorate, she still felt supported spiritually by the connection to her ancestors and encouraged by “the sustained hope from an indigenous collective, that connection across, you know, our sense of time, generations, those values is what sustained my hope... I continue to get my strengths highlighted to me really explicitly from our community.” Another participant said the strength of her ancestors “is by far an amazing example of what I have inherited...the Grandmothers...those strengths and that long line of ancestors that I come from...when you know that you’re connected to a constellation of people who are believing in you and uplifting you, then so much can be possible.” Another participant said “I’m just very lucky to have inherited their strength and that certainly their spirit lives in me and that certainly helped me persevere through hard times in my doctoral program.”

Aligning with previous literature is the notion that NAW persist in doctoral programs when their support systems are specialized to meet their needs and unique experiences. George-Levi et al. (2022) and Levin (2022) share in their research that

systemic barriers such as institutional biases contribute to difficulties for NAW, which leave them feeling isolated and unsupported in predominantly non-Native academic environments. Therefore, NAW need more specialized supports and different pathways to succeed in order to persist in their studies. Hsu, Li, Acosta (2021) and Lindahl et al. (2022), and Soto-Santiago et al. (2023) emphasize the importance of these specialized supports being inclusive educational spaces complete with faculty and school administrators that recognize and value the cultural backgrounds and unique experiences of Native American students.

The researchers agree that such an environment not only fosters a sense of belonging but enhances academic success by addressing specific needs and challenges. One study participant explained how an admissions director for graduate students went above and beyond to assist her while pursuing her doctorate, providing personalized guidance and support throughout the application process. The director not only helped her navigate the complex admission requirements but also connected her with valuable resources, mentorship opportunities, and funding options. The director helped her navigate the complex admission requirements and connected her with valuable resources, mentorship opportunities, and funding options. The same study participant expressed gratitude, noting, “the archival librarians were amazing,” as they understood that her study was somewhat unorthodox and assisted her in finding the necessary information to complete her dissertation despite her challenges. Cokely et al. (2023) and Genge & Day (2021) found student support and services critical to academic success. One of the study participants shared that she had many professors who had seen promise in her, but an

academic mentor who shared some of her struggles with her made her feel supported.

The participant said, “She helped me make sense of myself and my trajectory.” Another participant mentioned how “wildly supportive” her chair was of her completing her doctorate. Dedicated support significantly impacted her academic journey, helping her overcome obstacles and stay motivated to achieve her doctoral degree.

Discussion of the Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for this study is the psychosociocultural (PSC) theory, which integrates psychological, social, and cultural factors that influence the educational experiences of college students (Castellanos & Gloria, 2007; Rojas et al., 2022).

According to the PSC theory, interconnected variables shape academic outcomes and influence college persistence (Beasley & McClain, 2020). The framework states that psychological factors like self-efficacy and resilience, social factors including peer support and mentorship, and cultural factors like identity and community play critical roles in academic persistence (DeVitre et al., 2021; Herrera et al., 2022). PSC theory’s emphasis on culturally responsive practices resonates with participants of this study, demonstrating that when interventions are aligned with cultural values and historical contexts, NAW feels more understood and supported (Herrera, Gloria, & Castellanos, 2019).

Study participants who received support that was distinctive to their cultural heritage, social dynamics, and psychological needs reported higher academic resilience and personal growth. This adapted support acknowledges and respects each individual’s unique background and experiences. Support systems based on the PSC theory create an

environment where NAW are more likely to thrive academically and personally. The participants noted that this approach helped them overcome challenges more effectively, providing them with strategies and resources that resonated with their cultural values and life experiences. Additionally, they felt a greater sense of belonging within the academic community, further motivating them to pursue their educational goals. The holistic nature of this support fostered academic success and contributed to their overall well-being and self-confidence.

The psychological aspect of the theory signifies the need for kinship and mentorship from individuals attuned to the specific stressors and traumas that NAW face. The social component of the PSC theory reflects participants' first-hand accounts of the importance of community and peer networks (Guan, Gloria, & Castellanos, 2020), and the cultural component emphasizes the critical role that cultural identity and heritage play in shaping their educational experiences and outcomes. The cultural aspect of the theory also emphasizes the necessity of recognizing and integrating Native American traditions, values, and perspectives within the academic environment. The three components of PSC theory provide emotional and educational support, which is crucial for NAW's persistence in facing challenges. Participants reported feeling a stronger sense of belonging and motivation when their cultural identity was acknowledged and respected. This cultural validation helped to bridge the gap between their academic and personal lives, making their educational journey more meaningful and aligned with their identity.

Overall, the PSC theory aligned with my study findings, validating the significance of addressing the psychological, social, and cultural elements of support for

NAW. The PSC theory highlights the importance of customized support that addresses their distinct psychological, social, and cultural contexts, enhancing their persistence and success in higher education. Participants in this study demonstrate greater academic resilience when support systems are adapted to their specific needs and backgrounds. By aligning resources and interventions with their unique experiences, these women were better equipped to navigate the challenges of doctoral programs (Chee et al., 2019), leading to improved retention rates and overall achievement in their academic pursuits. The PSC theory provided a comprehensive framework that demonstrated how psychological support, social connections, and cultural recognition collectively contribute to the success and persistence of NAW in doctoral programs.

Project Deliverable

The problem addressed in this study is that the underrepresentation of NAW in doctoral programs has caused a lack of diversity in graduate education, contributing to racial disparity in American society (Patton et al., 2019; Varma, 2018). To address the underrepresentation of NAW in doctoral programs, I recommend implementing the PSC theory as a guiding principle in recruitment practices for college and university admissions. Implementing the PSC theory in recruitment means developing targeted outreach programs, creating partnerships with organizations serving Native American communities, and incorporating culturally sensitive criteria to attract and support qualified NAW candidates. Implementing the PSC theory will ensure that culturally relevant support systems are in place to foster an inclusive and empowering educational environment.

At minimum, this white paper will produce new knowledge and theory surrounding doctoral persistence for minority women. Knowledge that raises awareness of the importance of psychological, cultural, and social support in graduating new doctors. This white paper will address racial disparities and inequalities in the educational system which will thereby contribute to greater diversity in graduate education, and American society. The paper will also serve as a valuable resource for policymakers, education analysts, and educators at all levels of postsecondary instruction who are committed to supporting minority women in achieving terminal degrees.

Summary

The study focuses on the underrepresentation of NAW in doctoral programs. NAW are grossly underrepresented in doctoral programs, part of a more significant dilemma regarding the lack of diversity in US graduate education and symptomatic with broader imbalances within America. This study highlights the need to shape a learning environment that is inclusive of NAW in doctoral studies.

Through data analysis of participant interviews, I identified several codes, which I subsequently categorized into themes. A narration of the themes showed how recurrent patterns found in the data provided a deeper understanding of the research questions. The themes addressed the problem regarding the underrepresentation of NAW in doctoral programs and strengthened the study. I found discrepancies in 1 interview. Therefore, I revisited data collection methods and explored possible explanations, such as methodological limitations, sampling biases, and contextual factors. This was the only discrepant case found; therefore, the remaining data appears consistent with emergent

patterns and themes.

A discussion of the research questions provided a basis for reviewing and explaining the themes that emerged from the study. The discussion deepened each of the themes through systematic analysis and exploration that illuminated the subtleties, complexities, nuances in the study's findings. The discussion also provided more detail regarding each theme and how they connected with each research question. A discussion of the conceptual framework followed and revealed that the interconnected variables of the PSC theory have a significant influence on the educational experiences and academic outcomes for NAW in doctoral programs.

The study results were comprehensively deconstructed in a literature review, clearly delineating the concrete barriers NAW face when entering doctoral programs. Central to the review was that too few NAW made it through doctoral programs. The discussion revealed the complexities that NAW experiences in doctoral programs, which impact their academic persistence. The literature brought to light a complex picture of the challenges faced by NAW in negotiating institutional barriers, managing conflicting cultures and experiences among their peers either being nudged towards whiteness or similarly seen as not belonging. Together, these elements impede academic persistence and lead to underrepresentation in doctoral programs for NAW. The literature review also emphasized the importance of recognizing NAW as having different experiences that might allow for planning to assist them in being more successful and remaining in doctoral programs over time.

The paper will use the PSC theory to analyze widespread recruitment strategies in

doctorate-granting programs. A white paper is a comprehensive, authoritative document that addresses critical issues and presents solutions based on facts supported by data. The white paper will serve as a powerful resource for educating and convincing education policymakers, college administrators, and educational leaders to adopt the PSC theory to change recruitment policies. By integrating the PSC theory in academia, a more inclusive environment may increase support for NAW success as doctoral students. This white paper aims to generate new understanding, inform the research literature, and raise awareness on how psychological, cultural, and social support can improve diversity in graduate education while reducing racial gaps.

Section 3: The Project

The project presents a white paper offering policy recommendations for education decision-makers, college administrators, and educational leaders to incorporate the PSC theory into recruitment strategies. The goal is to help institutions attract and support a broader range of students by recognizing the unique psychological, social, and cultural factors influencing their decision-making processes. College administrators and education leaders widely use conventional recruitment strategies highlighting test scores, extracurricular activities, and academic accomplishments to predict a prospective student's potential. Recruitment strategies frequently focus on metrics like GPA, SAT, and ACT scores to recruit high-achieving students because policymakers believe these measurements are reliable indicators of academic success.

While traditional recruitment methods have merit, they often overlook the unique strengths that other student populations, such as first-generation students, students from underrepresented racial and ethnic groups, and those from diverse cultural backgrounds, can bring to higher education. These students often possess qualities like resilience, adaptability, and a solid commitment to their communities, which are not always captured by conventional metrics. By recognizing and valuing these unique strengths, institutions can create more inclusive recruitment practices that enrich the academic environment and foster a more diverse and dynamic student body. I intend to bring awareness to three recommendations that education decision-makers, college administrators, and educational leaders can implement based on the information acquired from this study and previous research, emphasizing a more inclusive approach to student

recruitment.

Based on this study's results, institutions can adopt a holistic approach to encourage persistence in the recruitment and retention of NAW. Recruitment strategies considering NAW's psychological, social, and cultural backgrounds are essential. By adopting a holistic recruitment approach, institutions can attract more NAW and create an environment where NAW feel valued, supported, and empowered to succeed academically. Policymakers need to communicate with Indigenous community members to ensure encouragement to persist for NAW and establish genuine relationships with prospective students, community leaders, and Indigenous tribal members, having respectful and reverent conversations about Indigenous customs and cultures. Further, institutions should collaborate with Indigenous community members to enable encouragement to persist of NAW to create projects, programs, and initiatives to address the unique challenges Indigenous students face. By establishing robust collaborations and cultivating a culturally equitable atmosphere, educational institutions embrace NAW students and empower them to thrive academically.

Rationale

The problem addressed in this study is that the underrepresentation of NAW in doctoral programs has caused a lack of diversity in graduate education, contributing to racial disparity in American society (Patton et al., 2019; Varma, 2018). Assessment of the data revealed that NAW in doctoral programs confront the distain of academic intimidation with humility, navigate the intersectionality of cultural obligations with ancestral wisdom, and confront the legacy of generational trauma with a sense of

solidarity. Based on the findings from the data, I concluded that a white paper would be the most suitable format for presenting recommendations to address a change in policy regarding recruitment practices and strategies.

A white paper addressed the study's problem by supporting three policy recommendations. These recommendations propose integrating the PSC theory into recruitment practices, specifically within doctoral education programs. These policy recommendations include integrating the PSC theory into recruitment practices, specifically within doctoral education programs. By incorporating this theory, institutions can develop more inclusive recruitment strategies that account for the psychosociocultural support needs of underrepresented students. These policies would enhance the diversity of doctoral cohorts and ensure that students from historically marginalized communities are better equipped with the academic, emotional, and institutional support systems necessary to thrive throughout their doctoral journeys. The policy recommendations are (a) Adopt a holistic approach for the encouragement to persist in the recruitment and retention of NAW, (b) communicate with Indigenous community members to ensure encouragement to persist of NAW, and (c) collaborate with Indigenous community members to enable encouragement to persist of NAW.

Recommendation 1 urges institutions to adopt a holistic approach to recruitment and retaining NAW in doctoral programs. Based on Theme 1, which highlights how NAW face academic intimidation with humility, this recommendation aims to reduce these challenges. It promotes a comprehensive recruitment strategy that celebrates and acknowledges NAW's diverse experiences and backgrounds, helping to minimize

intimidation and foster a more welcoming and supportive environment.

Recommendation 2 urges institutions to communicate with Indigenous Community members to ensure encouragement of NAW. This recommendation builds on Theme 2, which states that NAW navigate the intersection of cultural obligations and ancestral wisdom. The recommendation addresses the theme by ensuring the recruitment process respects and incorporates Indigenous communities' cultural and ancestral values. The recommendation aligns with the theme's focus on navigating the intersection of cultural obligations and ancestral wisdom by recognizing the complexities Indigenous students face as they balance academic aspirations with their cultural duties.

Recommendation 3 urges institutions to collaborate with Indigenous community members to enable encouragement to persist of NAW. This recommendation aligns with Theme 3, which emphasizes how NAW confront the legacy of generational trauma with a strong sense of solidarity. By fostering Indigenous-led solutions, institutions can encourage community collaboration, which in turn helps address the deep-rooted challenges of generational trauma. Programs developed in partnership with Indigenous communities are more likely to be culturally responsive and sensitive to the historical traumas experienced by NAW, ensuring that the initiatives effectively support healing and resilience.

Ultimately, the recommendations serve as a directive for educational institutions and policymakers to prioritize Indigenous perspectives and knowledge in their recruitment strategies, ensuring that these practices are inclusive and equitable. Several studies have released recommendations supporting policy changes for college

recruitment of Indigenous communities. The following section will present literature that links this white paper project's main ideas and research findings. In addition to providing background for the suggestions, this review of the literature will draw attention to the current scholarly discussion about Indigenous recruitment and retention in higher education.

Review of the Literature

In this section, I present a scholarly review of the literature related to the white paper. This literature evaluation aimed to demonstrate the suitability of a white paper with policy suggestions to address the study's findings. I describe the white paper, its themes, and the recommendations supported by other studies published within the last five years related to recruitment policies for marginalized groups. The following terms were applied to search current literature from Google Scholar and the Walden University Library databases: *doctoral student recruitment strategies, graduate student recruitment policy, white papers in higher education, diversity recruitment in doctoral programs, inclusive recruitment practices for doctoral students, and recruitment of underrepresented groups in doctoral education*. The search terms were selected to ensure a comprehensive exploration of existing literature enabling the identification of relevant studies and policies that directly inform the development of effective and inclusive recruitment strategies for doctoral programs. The studies reviewed underscore the importance of inclusive recruitment strategies that prioritize long-term support for underrepresented populations in doctoral programs.

I synthesized the data to provide a strong foundation for supporting my study's

findings and ensuring the conclusions were robust and well-substantiated. The data gathered validated the significance of my findings and provided critical insights into the ongoing systemic issues that hinder progress for marginalized groups in higher education. The review helped to strengthen the argument for the need for policy reforms in doctoral recruitment for NAW. The data served as a foundation for actionable recommendations to recruitment policy aimed at creating more equitable pathways for underrepresented doctoral students. The review is divided into two sections to provide a clear and structured analysis: the first section focuses on the literature found in white papers with existing research on recruitment practices, while the second section evaluates recent policy recommendations and their practical applications in fostering diversity and inclusivity in doctoral programs.

White Papers

White papers are well-written documents with data-driven solutions to issues intended to persuade a particular audience (Kearny & Rutherford, 2019; Smith, 2021). The audience may include industry professionals, policymakers, academic researchers, or community leaders. By tailoring content to these specific groups, white papers ensure that the information is relevant, practical, and directly applicable (Pickert, 2020) to their readers' unique concerns and decision-making processes. This targeted approach enhances engagement and credibility, making it more likely that the proposed solutions will resonate with the audience and inspire action (Harris et al., 2022; Hwang & Chen, 2023).

White papers give a solid foundation for suggestions by drawing on in-depth

analysis, case studies, and expert opinion. This ensures that recommendations for solutions are trustworthy, well-informed, and appealing to the target audience. White papers are a way to address issues from the perspectives of academic research and educational objectives, as they allow for the synthesis of complex data and theories into practical, actionable insights (Cheng & Hwang, 2023; Harris et al., 2022; Pickert, 2020). Additionally, the researchers suggest white papers offer a thorough analysis of the challenges within educational systems while presenting well-researched, viable solutions. By addressing both the root causes and the broader context of these issues, they provide valuable insights that can guide informed decision-making. This comprehensive perspective allows policy makers to better understand the complexities involved and implement more effective, sustainable solutions. White papers offer a structured approach for translating research into real-world applications, making them valuable tools for guiding institutional change.

White papers also create a sense of urgency by detailing the issue and often emphasizing the potential repercussions if it remains unresolved (Davis et al., 2023). (Davis et al., 2023). For this reason, white papers effectively convey complicated information, allowing decision-makers to act quickly and make informed decisions based on well-examined data (Baker, 2020; Meyer, 2021). White papers accomplish two things: they present a thorough, convincing justification for a specific solution and identify difficulties their target audience faces, proving that white papers are valuable tools for educators, policymakers, and researchers to convey innovative solutions and drive swift and informed decision-making in educational contexts (Hwang & Chen, 2023).

Encouragement to Persist in Recruitment and Retention

Education decision-makers, college administrators, and educational leaders can adopt strategies to address the challenges of underrepresentation in doctoral education, particularly regarding the recruitment of NAW. Methods for achieving equitable recruitment begin with a holistic approach and “active” recruitment focused on the whole person. Argrawal et al., 2020; Bautista et al., 2024; Davis et al., 2023; and Nehemiah et al. (2021), explored holistic approaches to recruitment in their white papers and concluded that despite the availability of resources and recommendations aimed at promoting and recruiting women and minorities, their persistent underrepresentation in postgraduate education highlights the need for significant reforms in recruitment practices.

The researchers agreed that holistic recruitment approaches be considered to embrace and recruit whole candidate, that is, their personal experiences, leadership qualities, cultural background, and the unique challenges or obstacles they have faced and overcome. This approach requires assessing more than just academic performance by placing equal importance on factors like emotional intelligence, resilience, and the applicant’s ability to navigate adversity. Nehemiah et al. 2021; and Washington et al., 2020, recommend looking at the personal qualities of candidates, their character, curiosity, commitment, and potential. The authors state these qualities, more often than not, provide far better indications of how students will relate both to academic challenges and to the life of the campus community. A focus on qualities like persistence and intellectual curiosity enables each school leadership to identify students who might make

valuable contributions to the institutions culture in addition to succeeding academically Nehemiah et al. (2021) Additionally, the assessment of commitment and potential allows recruiters to pick only those candidates who are most likely to go through the hard times and seek for themselves all the opportunities for personal and academic growth.

The researchers reiterate a holistic approach to recruitment, emphasizing the integration of various factors and perspectives to enhance the effectiveness of the recruitment process. By considering a mixture of academic achievements, personal stories, lived experiences, leadership potential, and community involvement, an institution will do much better to identify and recruit more candidates with an array of experiences and perspectives to enhance their academic programs. Agrawal et al. (2020) advocate for incorporating diversity in the recruitment process by ensuring faculty, staff, and current students from varied backgrounds participate in recruitment events. This inclusive representation fosters a welcoming environment, encouraging prospective students to envision themselves as part of the institution. Such approaches aim to create a more inclusive recruitment process that reflects diverse perspectives and experiences, essential for fostering innovation and creativity within academic institutions.

Education leaders could also build off these findings by using this as a chance to reshape recruitment strategies so that there is continued engagement with potential candidates throughout their school experience. Rather than formally recruiting students at specific recruitment events, institutions could adopt policies of continued outreach through mentorship programs, early college awareness workshops, and opportunities for community service. The constant involvement allows recruiters to be friendly with the

students and understand their growth and potential as a person. By opening up avenues of recruitment beyond the application phase, institutions are sure to attract a diverse pool of students and ensure that they admit candidates who are a cultural and academic fit for the programs. The proactive approach, utilizing long-term methods in their effect-even today, would make recruitment both transactional and transformational in providing a sense of belonging and long-term success.

Researchers have stressed the importance of addressing the disparities in traditional recruiting methods to increase the representation of people of color in educational programs and institutions (Cheng, 2020; Ramiah et al., 2022; Robinson & Candal, 2023). Conventional recruitment methods often fail to account for the systemic barriers that underrepresented groups face. The authors suggest revamping recruitment strategies to be more inclusive and equitable, allowing institutions to bridge the gaps and creating pathways for success for students from diverse backgrounds. Their white paper offered a thorough “back to basics” holistic approach to recruitment, which goes beyond only hitting enrollment goals. Instead, it places more emphasis on inclusive and proactive strategies that consider the multitude of variables affecting student selection as well as the educational process overall.

The colleagues clarify that a “back to basics” approach is a new, creative, modern, and comprehensive recruiting strategy rather than an old-fashioned method, focusing on core values and principles that prioritize the whole candidate experience. This approach encourages institutions to engage with potential students on a deeper level, emphasizing authentic connections and a thorough understanding of their unique backgrounds and

aspirations. By integrating these fundamental elements into recruitment efforts, institutions can foster a more inclusive and supportive environment that resonates with diverse prospective students. Bethea et al., 2024 and Gallegos et al. (2022) agree that modern recruitment strategies ought to focus on fundamental principles of inclusivity, accessibility, and equity. They suggest that these strategies can be enhanced by utilizing contemporary resources such as digital outreach platforms, data analytics, and community engagement initiatives. The modern strategy aims to break down conventional barriers and proactively expand the pool of candidates to ensure that recruitment efforts are inclusive and representative of the diverse population they intend to serve.

To achieve this inclusivity, educational institutions must prioritize establishing genuine relationships with Indigenous community leaders. Establishing relationships with Indigenous community leaders well before any official student recruitment process starts is a highly effective recruitment strategy in education, as it builds trust and fosters a sense of inclusion from the outset. By engaging early with community leaders, educational institutions demonstrate a genuine commitment to understanding and addressing Indigenous students' specific cultural, social, and academic needs. Scholars Brint and Frey (2023) emphasize the importance of prioritizing authentic relationships with students and leaders in their communities, as these relationships foster trust and mutual understanding. The authors state that forming genuine relationships with community leaders and prospective students allows institutions to understand better the psychological, social, cultural, and even economic factors that influence students'

academic choices and shape their academic experiences.

Forming genuine relationships with community leaders helps institutions develop recruitment, encouragement, and retention strategies responsive to underrepresented communities' specific needs and challenges rather than relying on generic methods that may overlook critical aspects of a student's background. Furthermore, fostering these connections signals to prospective students that the institution respects and values their heritage, creating a more inclusive environment where they feel seen, heard, and supported. In the long term, such relationships build a foundation for lasting collaboration between educational institutions and Indigenous communities, ensuring that students receive the guidance and resources necessary to succeed academically while staying connected to their roots. This requires meaningful dialogues with Indigenous leaders to understand their distinct traditions and cultural practices. Such conversations ought to prioritize active listening and mutual respect, to gain valuable insights into the unique values and experiences that shape Indigenous identities. By proactively engaging with Indigenous community leaders, institutions can gain valuable insights into the unique needs, concerns, and aspirations of the Indigenous community, enabling them to tailor their recruitment and support efforts more effectively.

Moreover, early engagement with Indigenous leaders provides an opportunity for institutions to co-create recruitment initiatives that are culturally relevant and responsive to the values and priorities of the community. By laying this groundwork, institutions not only attract prospective students but also signal that they are committed to creating an academic environment where Indigenous students can thrive. In addition, forming long-

term genuine relationships with community leaders helps ensure that recruitment efforts are sustainable and reflective of the evolving needs of the Indigenous community, creating a recruitment pipeline that consistently brings in Indigenous students.

By actively engaging with Indigenous community leaders, educational institutions demonstrate a commitment to culturally responsive practices that honor and integrate Indigenous knowledge systems into the academic landscape. As a result, Indigenous students are more likely to feel a sense of belonging and support knowing that their collective voices are not only heard but are valued paving the way for their academic success and long-term retention within an institution. This cultural relevance helps to create a welcoming environment that resonates with NAW and encourages them to pursue advanced degrees. Ultimately, this partnership lays a foundation for sustained engagement and mutual growth, benefiting both the communities involved and the educational institutions striving for diversity and equity.

Building on the foundation to establish genuine relationships with Indigenous community leaders is collaboration with Indigenous communities to offer programs, provide incentives and create initiatives to meet the unique needs and struggles of Indigenous students. This partnership includes the perspectives of Indigenous students and institutional leadership to work toward a more culturally responsive and inclusive academic environment. White papers by Menifield et al. (2024) and Millward (2023) highlight that building sincere connections with Indigenous communities is essential for attracting Indigenous students and creating pathways that honor their cultural heritage. The authors acknowledge this community informed collaboration as being vital for

different ethnic, racial, and underrepresented groups. The goal of collaborative recruitment with Indigenous communities is to customize recruitment efforts to the unique needs, values, and cultural identity of the community.

Researchers Berliner (2021), Harvey et al. (2021), and Pessach et al. (2020) emphasize that this engagement enables educational leaders to develop targeted initiatives aligned with the specific cultural and academic priorities of the community, ensuring that recruitment strategies are not only inclusive but also practical. Targeted initiatives like information sessions, workshops, mentorship programs, culturally relevant curriculum development, and community-led recruitment events ensure that recruitment strategies are inclusive and effective in supporting Indigenous students. Institutions can provide appropriate resources and support that align with the population's needs by hosting information sessions, workshops, and culturally relevant events specifically tailored to community interests. This targeted approach enhances the visibility of available educational opportunities and fosters a sense of belonging among prospective students, ultimately increasing the likelihood of their enrollment. Thus, including collaborative recruitment aligns the institution's interests with those of the community and results in a representative and more diversified enrollment.

Cunningham-Erves et al. (2023) echo the sentiments of Menifield and Millward emphasizing that collaborating with groups connected by shared interests can significantly enhance recruitment efforts. However, the scholars stress that outreach to these communities ought to be made actively rather than passively waiting for these groups to come to them. A proactive approach involves institutions reaching out directly

to community members through targeted engagement efforts, information sessions, and partnership initiatives. This engagement not only builds trust but also allows institutions to effectively communicate the value of higher education while addressing any concerns or misconceptions about the recruitment process.

Collaborating with Indigenous communities demonstrates a commitment to inclusivity and representation in recruitment practices by actively acknowledging and valuing these communities' unique cultural identities and histories. This partnership goes beyond mere outreach; it involves engaging in meaningful dialogue with Indigenous leaders, elders, and community members to understand their educational perspectives and aspirations. This relationship also dismantles historical barriers and misconceptions surrounding education, as institutions work collaboratively with Indigenous communities to create pathways that facilitate access to resources and support systems designed explicitly for Indigenous students. By prioritizing recruiting Indigenous students through collaborative practices, educational institutions can help create a more equitable academic environment that benefits all students, fostering a rich tapestry of cultural perspectives and a deeper understanding of the complexities of Indigenous students.

Project Description

White papers are tools for policy recommendations and can impact the decision-making processes, as they provide a structured and evidence-based framework for addressing complex issues Smith (2020) and Johnson (2023). By offering clear recommendations grounded in research and supported by data, white papers help policymakers make informed decisions that align with institutional goals and societal

needs (Ingram et al., 2023; Riaz et al., 2022). Benjamins, Rubio Viñuela, and Alonso (2023) agree that white papers facilitate stakeholder collaboration by presenting actionable solutions that can guide long-term strategies, thereby influencing change at both organizational and systemic levels.

The policy recommendations call for a holistic approach to encouragement in the recruitment and retention of NAW, communicating with Indigenous community members, and collaboration with Indigenous community members to ensure culturally relevant, supportive, and accessible pathways for NAW in doctoral programs. The timeline for implementation is as follows (see Table 4)

Table 4

Timeline for Policy Implementation

Month	Goal	Tasks
Months 1-3:	Needs Assessment	Convene a committee of institutional leaders, school administrators, compliance officers, and policymakers to assess the current landscape of NAW in the institution.
Months 4-6:	Policy Research and Relationship Building	Convene think-tanks to conduct a comprehensive analysis of encouragement of NAW to persist and develop a holistic policy that aligns with institutional effectiveness. Cultivate connections with Indigenous communities for Indigenous epistemologies.
Months 7-12:	Drafting the Policy	Prepare a clearly articulated policy draft for encouragement of NAW to persist. Incorporating purpose, scope, guidelines, procedures, responsibilities, directives for compliance and relevant law.

This time frame ensures that policies and partnerships are carefully developed and that recruitment efforts are sustainable and effective in increasing the representation of NAW in doctoral programs.

Project Evaluation Plan

I suggest analyzing the suggested policy changes annually to determine how well they work to increase the number of NAW enrolled in doctoral programs, ensuring that the strategies used have a long-term, lasting effect. This review ought to include input from all associated stakeholders and community members to improve and align the plan with the diversity and inclusion objectives. Continuous monitoring will ensure that these efforts increase enrollment and enhance the overall academic success of NAW doctoral students (see Table 5).

Table 5

Continuous Monitoring Plan

Month	Goal	Tasks
Months 13-18:	Approvals and Adjustment.	Submit the revised policy to trustees, directors, and stakeholders for approval. Conduct thorough feedback analyses and policy revisions to ensure the final policy document aligns with institutional goals, addresses stakeholder concerns, and reflects best practices encouraging NAW.
Months 19-24:	Implementation of Policy	Once approved roll out the policy across relevant departments. Communicate the policy through training sessions, informational meetings, and by distributing the policy document.
Months 25-30	Monitor and Review	Assess and analyze policy effectiveness. Strengthen partnerships with Indigenous communities and refine support systems for long-term success for the encouragement of NAW.

Project Implications

Positive social change, particularly when it leads to constructive societal shifts, can open doors for developing other programs that address the needs of underrepresented populations. My objective is to publish the research project findings and make them accessible to the public, students, educators, and educational leaders to promote greater

awareness and foster conversations around the persistence of NAW in doctoral programs.

By sharing this knowledge, I firmly believe that policymakers and education leaders will utilize the results of this study to formulate, refine, and carry out the three suggestions presented in the white paper. I hope to contribute to broader efforts to increase diversity and inclusion in higher education.

Section 4: Reflections and Conclusions

Project Strengths and Limitations

The project was a white paper providing recommendations to change recruitment strategy policies. The project highlighted the need for long-term support structures that extend beyond traditional academic resources. The white paper aims to generate new understanding, inform the research literature, and raise awareness on how psychological, cultural, and social support can improve diversity in graduate education while reducing racial gaps. Three recommendations inform the project: (a) a holistic approach to recruitment, (b) establishing genuine relationships with individuals within the community and (c) partnerships with Indigenous community members and stakeholders. The recommendations pointed to the necessity of continuous evaluation and adaptation of policies supporting NAW. The project reinforced that data-driven decisions can lead to more effective and responsive policies promoting NAW persistence in doctoral programs.

The recommendations presented in the white paper highlight the responsibility of administrators, policymakers, and academic leaders to prioritize diversity and inclusion in their strategic planning. The project calls for leaders to foster an inclusive educational environment proactively. This involves revising existing policies and implementing innovative programs that address the unique challenges faced by NAW.

Recommendations for Alternative Approaches

In developing strategies to improve the encouragement, recruitment, and retention of NAW in doctoral programs, exploring alternative methods prioritizing community-based support systems is essential. One approach leverages personal connections and

culturally relevant networks to create a more supportive academic environment (Douglas, 2020). Peer-to-peer networking and mentorship initiatives take advantage of the connections that already exist between current students, alumni, and community professionals with comparable experiences, to facilitate more individualized and encouraging recruitment and retention efforts (Bethea et al., 2024; Douglas, 2020; Harris et al., 2023). Peer-to-peer mentorships and networking supports the development of a feeling of community and mentors who have successfully overcome similar obstacles, provide advice on how to get over obstacles in the classroom and beyond.

By leveraging existing networks of doctoral students, alumni, and professionals from similar backgrounds, these individuals can serve as ambassadors and mentors, actively identifying potential students and guiding them through the recruitment process (Secules et al., 2024). This strategy allows recruitment efforts to tap into established relationships and trusted networks, making it more personal and targeted. The peer-to-peer model creates a sense of belonging and support early on, which is particularly valuable for NAW entering doctoral programs, ensuring that they feel connected to both their academic pursuits and a broader community of scholars who understand their unique cultural experiences.

Another approach might be to design culturally sensitive mentorship programs in which mentors who are thoroughly knowledgeable about the cultural experiences of doctorate students from underrepresented groups, especially NAW, are partnered with students from underrepresented groups. By providing specialized intellectual, psychological, and emotional support, these mentors can foster community in

environments where students might otherwise feel alone (Krause & Moore, 2022). A mentorship program may create a robust, multi-layered support system for NAW doctoral candidates by combining peer-support networks, community gatherings, and conventional information exchange.

Redesigning doctoral programs with Indigenous knowledge systems, cultural views, and research methodologies incorporated into the curriculum would be a transformational strategy that could be an alternative approach. A transformational approach is an option that makes doctoral programs more desirable and relevant to NAW and focuses on developing an academic climate that acknowledges and incorporates Indigenous ways of knowing rather than just changing actual recruitment techniques (Shahjahan et al., 2022). Empowering Indigenous scholars and giving them a sense of empowerment and ownership over their academic path would also entail building transdisciplinary spaces where they lead the development of courses and research initiatives (Shahjahan et al., 2022).

Another alternative approach would be formal partnerships between tribal colleges and universities and traditional research institutions. Providing NAW with a clear path from undergraduate to doctoral studies, this cooperation might involve collaborative research projects, funding opportunities, and joint programs (Youngbull, 2022). Tribal colleges and universities may ensure that students are well-prepared and supported throughout their academic careers by serving as a vital link between doctoral programs and community-centered education through this relationship.

Implementing longitudinal studies that follow NAW's academic path from

recruitment to graduation and into their professional lives would be an alternate strategy to depending solely on short-term evaluations of policy improvements. Continuous feedback loops that incorporate the voices of NAW students, alumni, and community leaders would allow for iterative improvements to programs and policies, ensuring their ongoing relevance and effectiveness (Baker et al., 2022). Longitudinal research would provide invaluable data on the long-term consequences of implemented policies. It would allow educational institutions to determine whether the support structures and recruitment initiatives in place are having a lasting positive impact beyond graduation. This would offer an extensive comprehension of their persistence and the long-term consequences of the implemented policies and support structures. Additionally, continuous feedback loops that incorporate the voices of NAW students, alumni, and community leaders would allow for iterative improvements to programs and policies, ensuring their ongoing relevance and effectiveness (Baker et al., 2022).

The recommendations for alternative approaches emphasize the importance of cultural relevance, community involvement, and long-term, sustainable support structures to improve recruitment and retention and encourage and foster a more inclusive and equitable educational environment for NAW. These ideas for alternative approaches strongly emphasize the value of cultural relevance, community involvement, and long-term, sustainable support systems. Institutions may foster greater diversity and equity in higher education by incorporating these tactics and empowering NAW to excel academically while respecting and maintaining their cultural identities.

Scholarship, Project Development and Evaluation, and Leadership and Change

As I reflect on the importance of this work, I focus on the experiences of the NAW interviewed for this study and advocate for changes in recruitment strategies on their behalf. Their experiences must be translated into practical suggestions that promote inclusivity. Their perspectives and stories shed light on the difficulties they encounter in the academic setting. By bringing their voices to the forefront, I hope to make sure that academic institutions understand the value of culturally appropriate encouragement, recruitment, and retention strategies, which will eventually lead to creating a more varied and equitable learning environment. I aim to dismantle institutional barriers and foster a more equitable and representative environment in doctoral education.

The significance of this work extends beyond academia; it speaks to the need for social justice and equity in society at large. By empowering NAW and advocating for their academic success, the project contributes to the broader movement for racial and gender equity, reinforcing the idea that diverse voices and experiences are vital to the health and progress of our country. For me, this work is not just an academic endeavor; it is a vital contribution to the ongoing struggle for inclusivity and representation in higher education. By focusing on the experiences of eight NAW, I highlight the need for systemic change and recommendations that serve as a blueprint for fostering an equitable education where all students can thrive.

Reflection on Importance of the Work

This research is important because it contributes to fostering the persistence of NAW in doctoral programs. By highlighting factors that support their continued success,

the study provides insights that can shape policies and initiatives specifically designed to meet the unique needs of NAW in doctoral programs. The findings can influence institutional practices, ensuring that recruitment, support systems, and educational structures are more inclusive and culturally responsive. The research contributes to broader efforts to increase diversity in higher education by offering practical recommendations that directly address the underrepresentation of NAW in doctoral programs. The study's focus was to explore factors that encourage NAW to persist in doctoral programs. Identifying ways to address the challenges they face is a critical step toward fostering a more equitable and inclusive academic environment. These efforts will not only enrich the academic experiences of NAW but also help benefit all students by fostering diverse perspectives and experiences within academic communities.

The study has shed light on critical areas for reform in higher education recruitment practices. NAW face unique psychological, social, and cultural barriers that must be acknowledged to support their journey through doctoral programs. My project, a white paper, outlines three pivotal recommendations to address these challenges. The first recommendation calls for institutions to adopt a holistic approach to recruitment, emphasizing the importance of understanding the psychological, social, and cultural backgrounds of prospective graduate students. This inclusive strategy ensures that recruitment practices align with the diverse needs of NAW and fosters an environment of support from the start of their academic journey. The second recommendation advocates for recruiters to establish genuine relationships with Indigenous community leaders and tribal members. By having respectful conversations about Indigenous customs and

cultures, recruiters can build trust and demonstrate their commitment to understanding and addressing the specific needs of Indigenous students. This relational approach not only strengthens ties with communities but also sets a foundation for long-term engagement and collaboration. Finally, the third recommendation suggests that institutions work closely with Indigenous communities to create programs and initiatives tailored to the challenges Indigenous students face. These programs need to address issues such as generational trauma, cultural preservation, and academic preparedness, all of which are essential for NAW's success in doctoral programs.

Implications, Applications, and Directions for Future Research

The implications for social change related to NAW will become increasingly significant as minority populations in the United States are projected to grow substantially in the coming decades (McConnell & Carreon, 2024), meaning the need for greater representation of NAW in higher education, particularly in doctoral programs, becomes more pressing. Their increased presence in academia can contribute to a more inclusive and diverse learning environment, which not only benefits NAW but enriches the academic community. Moreover, as institutions respond to the growing diversity of the student body, there will be more opportunities to address the unique challenges faced by underrepresented groups, thus creating pathways for success that could have a far-reaching impact on future generations of Indigenous scholars and professionals (Vass & Hogarth, 2024). This social change will be key in shaping equitable policies and practices across educational systems, ultimately influencing broader societal progress.

Considering directions for future research, it is crucial to explore the effectiveness

of the recommendations provided in the project study as they offer a framework for addressing the challenges faced by NAW in doctoral programs. Specifically, future studies could examine how adopting a holistic approach to recruitment, as recommended, impacts the enrollment and retention of NAW in graduate programs. Researchers might also explore the long-term benefits of building genuine relationships with Indigenous community leaders and members, assessing whether this strategy not only improves recruitment efforts but also enhances the academic and personal support systems available to NAW throughout their educational journeys.

Conclusion

My goal for this study was to explore the perceptions of encouragement that support NAW in persisting through doctoral programs. To achieve this, I examined their support systems, cultural connections, and the academic environments that influence their persistence in academia. I hoped to shed light on the key elements that encourage these women to achieve success in doctoral programs. By identifying the factors that foster persistence, I was able to provide recommendations for changes in policy and recruitment strategies that emphasize inclusivity, cultural sensitivity, and holistic support. These recommendations include adopting a recruitment approach that considers the unique backgrounds of NAW, communicating to foster genuine relationships with Indigenous communities, and collaborating with Indigenous communities to create programs that address the distinct challenges Indigenous students face.

Collectively, these recommendations emphasize the importance of inclusivity, collaboration, and cultural responsiveness in recruitment and support systems for NAW

in doctoral programs. As a woman of color, this research is significant for two reasons: visibility and representation. I know that representation matters, and this study amplifies the voices of those often overlooked in academia. Bringing the narratives of NAW in doctoral programs to the forefront not only validates their experiences but also challenges the prevailing narratives in higher education. By illuminating their journeys, we can foster greater awareness of the unique challenges they face and advocate for systemic changes that promote equity and inclusion. Ultimately, this research aims to inspire a more diverse academic environment where all voices are heard and valued. This research holds the potential to not only inform recruitment reform but also to foster positive social change, providing NAW with the encouragement and support needed to thrive in doctoral programs.

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Appendix A: The Project

Encouragement to Persist:

Recommendations for the Recruitment and Retention of Native American Women in

Doctoral Programs

by

Venícia S. Mayo Burton



Executive Summary

The project sought to generate policy recommendations from a study that explored the perceptions of encouragement to persist in doctoral programs. The study examined elements of encouragement for these women to continue their doctoral studies despite numerous challenges and barriers. By exploring their perceptions, the research shed light on the various forms of support, both formal and informal, that helped foster the participant's persistence in doctoral programs.

The study addressed the problem of the underrepresentation of NAW in doctoral programs that contributes to a lack of diversity in graduate education. Analysis of the study's results revealed three themes (a) NAW confront the disdain of academic intimidation with humility, (b) NAW navigate the intersectionality of cultural obligations with ancestral wisdom, and (c) NAW confront the legacy of generational trauma with a sense of solidarity. The findings, along with the theoretical concepts and strategies outlined in the literature review, have informed the development of the following recommendations for a change in policy.

Thus, institutions can implement these recommendations to create a more inclusive and supportive environment for NAW pursuing doctoral degrees. Three recommendations inform the project: (a) adopt a holistic approach to recruitment, (b) communicate with Indigenous Community members and (c) collaborate with Indigenous Community members and stakeholders. The recommendations pointed to the necessity of continuous evaluation and adaptation of policies supporting NAW.

This white paper provides evidence-based recommendations aimed at improving

encouragement, recruitment, and retention strategies for NAW in higher education. These recommendations are designed to foster greater inclusivity by addressing the cultural, social, and academic needs of NAW and creating environments that respect and uphold their cultural heritage while promoting academic success. By paying attention to and framing recruitment strategies around NAW's specific challenges, institutions can create a more supportive, culturally responsive educational experience that attracts Indigenous students and supports their wholeness during their academic journeys

The Study

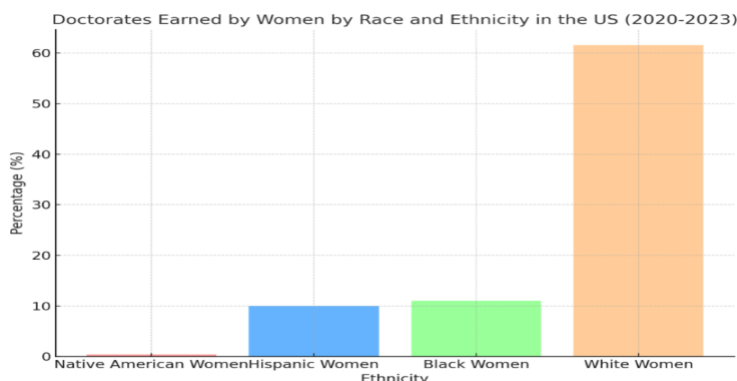
With 574 federally recognized tribes, Native Americans represent one of the most diverse ethnic groups in the United States. However, this diversity remains underrepresented in academia, particularly at the doctoral level (Ramiah et al., 2022; Bureau of Indian Affairs, 2019). Native American students have become increasingly underrepresented at selective and prestigious colleges and universities, particularly at the doctoral level (Sasso et al., 2023), and NAW remain nearly socially invisible within doctoral degree completion as shown in Figure A1. This lack of representation not only limits the perspectives and experiences shared within academic discourse but also hinders the development of programs and policies that address the unique challenges faced by Native American communities. Therefore, increasing the presence of Native Americans in doctoral programs is essential for fostering a more inclusive and equitable educational environment. The study addressed the problem of the underrepresentation of NAW in doctoral programs, contributing to a lack of diversity in graduate education.

The underrepresentation for NAW extends into higher education and specifically

doctoral programs. Native Americans and Alaskan Natives are the largest population in the Western region of the United States. According to Rezal, 2021; Schroedel & Irwin, 2020, yet NAW still face many challenges in higher education, especially in doctoral programs. With such strong community and cultural resiliencies at the core of their experiences, it has certainly become clear that public colleges and universities have failed in their policies of support to increase the numbers of NAW earning advanced degrees.

Figure A1

Doctorates Earned by Minority Women



¹ Includes Ph.D., Ed.D., and comparable degrees at the doctoral level, as well as such degrees as M.D., D.D.S., and law degrees that were classified as first-professional degrees prior to 2010–11.

NOTE: Data in this table represent the 50 states and the District of Columbia. Data are for postsecondary institutions participating in Title IV federal financial aid programs and U.S. service academies. Race categories exclude persons of Hispanic ethnicity. Reported racial/ethnic distributions of students by level of degree, field of study, and sex were used to estimate race/ethnicity for students whose race/ethnicity was not reported. Detail may not sum to totals because of rounding.

This underrepresentation affects academia and exacerbates the broader racial disparity in American society (Patton et al., 2019). The research questions were also shaped by this theoretical framework, aiming to explore how these interconnected factors specifically affect the persistence of NAW in doctoral programs. This qualitative study examines perceptions of persistence for NAW in doctoral programs in the US. This research is informed by knowledge obtained from interviews with 8 NAW, as it provides

deeper insight into their experiences in doctoral programs.

Through in-depth analysis of semi-structured interviews, I was able to identify key themes related to the perceived encouragement of 8 NAW as they navigated their doctoral journeys. These themes encompassed a variety of support mechanisms, including mentorship, community engagement, and institutional resources, all of which play a pivotal role in shaping their educational experiences. By emphasizing these critical factors, the study contributes to the growing body of scholarship focused on the intersectionality of identity, culture, and academic achievement within higher education, highlighting the need for targeted interventions that foster an inclusive and supportive environment for NAW in doctoral programs. This aspect of the study underscored the need for institutions to not only recognize the barriers faced by NAW but also actively work to dismantle them through inclusive practices. My intention was to impart positive social change encouraging educational institutions to implement more inclusive policies that foster diversity and equity doctoral education.

The study was guided by the psychosociocultural (PSC) theory, which integrates psychological, social, and cultural factors that influence the educational experiences of college students (Castellanos, 2018; Rojas et al., 2022). The PSC theory stresses the need to recognize psychological challenges, social relationships, and cultural contexts that form the realities of these women in academia (see Figure A2).

Figure A2*PSC Theory***Results of the Study**

I analyzed interviews using descriptive coding, a foundational approach in which data is analyzed line by line (Juliatt & Corbin, 2015). This method is used to identify patterns, similarities, differences, frequency, sequences, correlations, and causation within the research data (Saldaña, 2021). The data analysis uncovered 3 themes: a) NAW confront the disdain of academic intimidation with humility, b) NAW navigate the intersectionality of culture obligations with ancestral wisdom, and c) NAW confront the legacy of generational trauma with a sense of solidarity. The themes, refer to the research questions regarding how NAW in doctoral programs in the US perceive encouragement to persist in doctoral programs in terms of support, confidence, hope and advice received from family and tribe, friends and social circles, and faculty and college administrators.

NAW Confront the Disdain of Academic Intimidation with Humility

The first theme states that NAW develop a profound resilience rooted in their cultural heritage sustained with humility. Humility allows NAW to approach challenges

with an open heart and mind, recognizing that true strength often lies in listening to others and valuing their experiences. This humility is not a sign of passivity or yielding to intimidation. Rather, it displays a cultural strength based on mutual respect, a sense of community and resiliency.

NAW face scholastic challenges with quiet confidence and a steadfast commitment to their educational goals instead of reacting with hostility or defensiveness. One participant in the study stated while she was completing her doctorate she had to “stay humble.” Another participant shared “you still have to come to terms with the humbling experience” and another participant in the study explained “you’ve got to put your head down and do what they say.” Such collective responsibility engenders confidence intertwined with humility that allows NAW to persist in doctoral programs. Participants in the study shared that both their nuclear and extended family, along with the broader tribal community, instill a deep sense of humility encouraging them to view education not merely as a personal accomplishment, but as a means of contributing to the greater good of their entire community.

NAW Navigate the Intersectionality of Culture Obligations with Ancestral Wisdom

The second theme explains how Native American women juggle academic goals against community responsibilities along the complex intersectionality of cultural commitments and ancient wisdom. The commitment to maintaining customs, being part of rituals, and helping with family and tribal needs of the culture often runs in conflict with the demands of higher education. However, NAW actively incorporate their academic endeavors into the fabric of their cultural experiences rather than attempting to

“balance” their academic life with the demands of their Native culture.

NAW draw on the wisdom of their ancestors to anchor themselves in their cultural commitments as they navigate their doctoral surroundings. One NAW muses, “when you are connected to a constellation of people who believe in you and uplift you, so much is possible. It’s my grandmothers’ spirit, my parents’, my ancestors within me”. This ancestral wisdom imparts a foundation of adaptability and resilience, informed by spiritual teachings, community values, and a cross-generational appreciation of persistence. Because of this NAW can successfully navigate academic systems despite obstacles by finding strength in their ancestry to persevere. NAW’s experiences demonstrate that it is feasible to succeed in doctoral programs and maintain strong ties to the cultural traditions that have greatly influenced their identities.

NAW Confront the Legacy of Generational Trauma with a Sense of Solidarity

The third theme underscores how NAW confront the trauma left by previous generations by finding strength in their unity with those who have gone through similar circumstances. The ties of solidarity that one has with close friends are significant. According to NAW, “teaming together” with others allowed them to “bounce ideas off each other.” This connection became even more meaningful when participants discovered people who were “actually going through what I was going through,” especially those from similar backgrounds. “Finding women, you know, Native and Indigenous women that I could connect to,” was emphasized by one attendee, who added, “there’s so much I connected with personally.” As one participant put it, having fellow NAW “supported me through thick and thin and helped me make sense of myself and my trajectory” was

helpful.

The collective resilience component builds a sense of community and belonging through the process of empowerment of NAW by shared experiences, validation of emotions, and in mutual efforts to overcome obstacles created by generational trauma. Empowerment brings about the development of a shared purpose that mobilizes students to support one another and advocate for systemic changes within educational institutions that further embolden their distinctive identities. Together, they use their skills and benefit from each other's knowledge and experience as they navigate their respective doctoral journeys. In the end, their shared trauma becomes a source of strength because of their interrelatedness in providing enabling space where they can be vulnerable and confront challenges. It is through their shared experiences that they put forward an inspiring account of the importance of cultural heritage, community and solidarity.

Policy Recommendations

1. Adopt a holistic approach for the encouragement to persist in the recruitment and retention of NAW.
2. Communicate with Indigenous Community members to ensure encouragement to persist of NAW.
3. Collaborate with Indigenous Community members to enable encouragement to persist of NAW.

This white paper's recommendations were focused on addressing the underrepresentation of Native American women in doctoral programs. The targeted recommendations aim to improve recruitment practices that will enhance support systems

and create more inclusive academic environments that recognize and address the unique challenges faced by NAW in higher education. By implementing these recommendations, institutions can work toward fostering greater diversity and equity at the doctoral level, ultimately contributing to more inclusive educational experiences for Native American students.

Based on the study's findings, this white paper proposes a policy change that emphasizes integrating the psychological, social, and cultural (PSC) theory into recruitment strategies. The recommendations aim to create a more holistic approach to recruitment, recognizing the diverse backgrounds and unique challenges faced by prospective Indigenous students. By incorporating the PSC theory, institutions can better understand the psychological barriers, social dynamics, and cultural contexts that influence students' experiences and decisions to pursue doctoral programs.

The recommendations include an implementation plan to enhance recruitment strategies, aiming to increase the enrollment and retention rates of Indigenous students in higher education programs. This plan will focus on establishing stronger connections with Indigenous communities, incorporating culturally relevant practices, and providing ongoing support throughout the educational journey. The goal is to ensure Indigenous students particularly NAW not only enroll in higher education but also persist and succeed in completing doctoral degrees.

These recommendations toward policy advocate the need for a holistic approach in recruitment efforts that goes beyond conventional recruitment. A Holistic approach includes developing rapport with the prospective students and establishing long-term,

meaningful relationships. This involves actively engaging with prospective students and demonstrating a commitment to their academic success while embracing their cultural identities. Such relationships are built on mutual respect, cultural sensitivity, and an understanding of the unique obstacles Native American women face in higher education.

Recommendations also include establishing genuine relationships with tribal leaders within the community. Tribal leaders are highly valued advisors who may be able to provide guidance on culturally relevant pathways to doctorate programs. They will also be able to assist in building trust between the academic recruiters and potential students, so the recruitment is not only respectful but sensitive to the experiences and challenges of Native American women. It is this relational approach that forms the basis of long-term collaboration which will establish an educational pipeline supporting Indigenous students in their recruitment and through to completion of their doctoral programs.

The recommendations further extend to include the collaboration and partnerships with Indigenous communities. Educational leaders would have to provide cultural relevance, support, and access to create pathways to doctoral studies. Cultural relevance is particularly important in these partnerships, as it ensures that the content, structure, and delivery of educational programs align with Indigenous worldviews and traditions. Institutions can work alongside tribal communities to incorporate culturally informed curricula, mentoring opportunities, and support services that respect Indigenous knowledge systems and values.

Building on the themes that were developed from the findings of the research

study and an extensive literature review on the subject at hand to formulate three major recommendations for revising recruitment policies. The recommendations will target gaps in outreach, support mechanisms, and culturally responsive practices that could be used to improve the encouragement, recruitment, and retention of underrepresented groups into doctoral programs, particularly NAW. The project reinforced the idea that data-driven decisions can lead to more effective and responsive policies that promote NAW persistence in doctoral programs.

Recommendation 1: Adopt a Holistic Approach for the Encouragement to Persist in the Recruitment and Retention of NAW

Recommendation 1 is for institutions to adopt a holistic approach to recruitment that considers the psychological, social, and cultural backgrounds of prospective graduate students (Nabhan et al., 2023). This approach takes into account a prospective student's "holistic self," which encompasses their experiences, accomplishments, obstacles, and personal history, in order to provide a more comprehensive picture of a prospective student's chances of success. A comprehensive picture of an applicant's character, resolve, and capacity to contribute to the academic environment is provided by this holistic approach, which look at things like resilience, leadership, life experiences, and community involvement (Gallegos et al., 2022). This approach enables organizations to identify distinctive capabilities and perspectives for excluded communities, that may not be discernible from traditional quantitative metrics. The holistic approach considers social duties, cultural values, and non-academic achievements, which are crucial for students who might encounter obstacles or structural injustices while trying to obtain

conventional measures of academic success, therefore, it provides a more equitable and inclusive way to assess potential, ensuring that diverse experiences and backgrounds are valued in the admissions and recruitment processes.



Recruitment strategies ought to focus on creating an environment where students feel supported, represented, and valued (Davey et al., 2023), including targeted and holistic outreach to Indigenous and other minority groups, showcasing mentorship programs, and highlighting institutional commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion for Indigenous groups (Curtis-Boles et al., 2023). Incorporating holistic recruitment process imposes a broader assessment of the individual and can play a crucial role in increasing the representation of women and underrepresented minorities students in doctoral programs. Based on the findings from the research, this suggested recruitment practice shall try to address the unique needs and challenges arising among the underrepresented populations pursuing studies at the doctoral level.

Recommendation 2: Communicate with Indigenous Community Members to Ensure the Encouragement to Persist of NAW

Recommendation 2 calls for recruiters to prioritize establishing genuine relationships with Indigenous community leaders and tribal members by having

respectful and reverent conversations about Indigenous customs and cultures (Sherwood and Anthony, 2020).



This approach emphasizes the importance of understanding the historical context and contemporary issues faced by Indigenous communities, which can inform more effective recruitment strategies. This relational approach goes beyond the standard transactional nature of recruitment, establishing meaningful connections that acknowledge the deep-rooted values and traditions of Indigenous communities. By actively listening to the insights and experiences of tribal members, recruiters can build trust and demonstrate a commitment to honoring Indigenous identities. Fostering these relationships can lead to collaborative efforts that integrate Indigenous perspectives into academic programs, creating a more inclusive environment for prospective students.

Recruiters could engage in ongoing dialogue, seek guidance on culturally appropriate practices, and participate in community events to deepen their understanding of Indigenous values and priorities. This commitment to respectful engagement not only enhances recruitment efforts but also promotes a more equitable and supportive academic environment that recognizes the contributions of Indigenous students and their

communities. Fostering these relationships can lead to collaborative efforts that integrate Indigenous perspectives into academic programs, creating a more inclusive environment for prospective students. Ultimately, such relationships can help bridge gaps between colleges and universities and Indigenous populations, ensuring that recruitment strategies are relevant, culturally informed, and aligned with the aspirations of these communities.

Recommendation 3: Collaborate with Indigenous Community Members to Enable Encouragement to Persist of NAW

Recommendation 3 calls for collaboration with Indigenous communities to address specific challenges Indigenous students face. In this respect, collaboration with the broader community will allow institutions to construct support systems imbued with the values and practices of Indigenous culture ensuring that these systems are not only relevant but also deeply rooted in the traditions and experiences of Indigenous peoples. By actively engaging with Indigenous communities, institutions can develop programs that reflect the importance of communal support, respect for elders, and the preservation of language and cultural practices.



Collaboration could lead to mentorship programs and culturally appropriate resources that more effectively allow Indigenous students to thrive academically without losing

their identity.

Other initiatives could involve mentorship programs where Indigenous students are matched with faculty members or professionals of similar cultural backgrounds who can provide role models (Viscogliosi et al., 2020). Mentors can help students to balance academic demands with cultural commitments while providing insights into overcoming structural barriers (Belone et al., 2020). Mentorship fosters not only academic growth but also personal development, helping Indigenous students build networks that extend beyond their academic pursuits (Lucero et al., 2020). Mentors can help students to balance academic demands with cultural commitments while providing insights into overcoming structural barriers.

Ultimately, these collaborative programs play a crucial role in creating an environment that fosters persistence and success for Indigenous students. These collaborative initiatives would help to establish an inclusive and culturally supportive academic environment that values the identities and experiences of Indigenous students. This approach promotes academic success and strengthens the connection between Indigenous students and their communities, ensuring they remain connected to their cultural heritage while pursuing higher education (Sobierajski et al., 2022). Such collaboration paves the way for greater representation and inclusion of Indigenous students.

Concluding Thoughts

Findings that come out of this research identify how important it is to create supportive academic pathways for underrepresented populations. The findings further

facilitate access to higher education but also ensure that students receive the resources and guidance necessary to navigate their academic journeys successfully. This research demonstrates that with the right tools, NAW not only persist in but excel within their doctoral programs while balancing cultural expectations and fighting through generational trauma. The emphasis on family, tribal support, and peer solidarity is raised highly throughout their academic journey. The stories of these women are those of resiliency and strength as each woman accesses ancestral wisdom and community values to balance scholarly pursuits with their cultural commitments. Findings that emanate from this research highlight supportive academic environments for underrepresented populations but also add to a better understanding of how culture and education can come together in harmony.

From that point of view, this paper, therefore, demonstrates how support systems, family, tribal communities, and institutional resources are an essential foundation for building encourage persistence among NAW in doctoral programs. The findings ought to make policymakers and educational institutions aware that culturally responsive recruitment strategies for NAW, with their particular needs in mind, are imperative for the call to promote greater inclusivity and equity in higher education.

Implementing the recommendations in this paper may help with persistence by providing NAW in doctoral programs with the necessary support systems to navigate academic challenges while staying connected to their cultural roots. The recommendations point to the need to improve recruitment strategies encompassing the PSC that recognize psychological factors, such as self-efficacy and confidence, social

factors like community and peer support, and cultural factors involving identity and values, all play critical roles in determining student success, particularly for underrepresented groups like NAW in doctoral programs. By addressing psychological, social, and cultural factors impacting persistence, institutions can better retain underrepresented students and enhance their ability to complete their doctoral studies. Without addressing the barriers NAW face in accessing and succeeding in higher education, efforts toward achieving racial equity and inclusivity in academia and beyond will remain incomplete.

These issues challenge their academic success and bring urgent calls for institutions to adopt more inclusive strategies relevant to culture that support NAW throughout their educational journeys. Inclusive strategies must be addressed if NAW are to be assured not only of entering doctoral programs, but also of persisting and succeeding in their quest to complete a doctoral degree.

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Appendix B: Interview Questions

1. Describe a time when someone encouraged you to believe in yourself to persist in your doctoral program when you had doubts.
 - a. Was there another time?
 - b. Which time was the most important to you?
2. Describe a time when someone instilled in you with hope when you felt like giving up on your doctoral studies.
 - a. Was there another time?
 - b. Which time was the most important to you?
3. Describe a time when someone reminded you of your strengths when you were discouraged about a challenging time in your doctoral program.
 - a. Was there another time?
 - b. Which time was the most important to you?
4. Describe a time when someone assured you that you were competent in dealing with doctoral studies.
 - a. Was there another time?
 - b. Which time was the most important to you?
5. Describe a time when someone expressed confidence in you and told you to keep trying in school even though it was hard.
 - a. Was there another time?
 - b. Which time was the most important to you?
6. Describe a time when someone pointed out your strengths when she/he gave advice about your doctoral studies.
 - a. Was there another time?
 - b. Which time was the most important to you?
7. Describe a time when someone noticed you were doing well in school and encouraged you to dream bigger and aim higher.
 - a. Was there another time?
 - b. Which time was the most important to you?
8. Describe a time when someone insisted that you should strive for higher academic standards because you were capable.
 - a. Was there another time?
 - b. Which time was the most important to you?
9. Describe a time when someone explained why you had the skills to succeed in graduate school at the doctoral level.
 - a. Was there another time?
 - b. Which time was the most important to you?
10. Describe a time when someone supported you to complete your doctoral degree goal.
 - a. Was there another time?
 - b. Which time was the most important to you?