

## Independent Study: How Three Doctoral Students Tackled Issues Recruiting Participants and Collecting Data with Historically Underrepresented Populations

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### Abstract

Studying historically underrepresented populations can be challenging, especially for doctoral students or early career scholars, who have often been taught more "traditional" research methods. In this article, we outline challenges that we faced when conducting qualitative research on three different historically underrepresented populations, i.e., Asian/American gay, lesbian, bisexual students, doctoral students of color, and Black students at HBCUs, and how we addressed those challenges in order to complete our respective research studies. Some of these issues include recruitment of participants, maintaining confidentiality, and gaining participant trust. We conclude by discussing implications and suggest strategies for future researchers who wish to conduct similar studies.

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## Introduction

In all higher education doctoral programs, students are required to take research courses (Schuh, Jones, Harper, & Associates, 2011; Young & Janosik, 2007). These classes provide foundational knowledge about research, which ultimately propels most into the beginning stages of life in academia. While students learn “how” to conduct both qualitative and quantitative research (Creswell, 2012; Glesne, 2011; Holstein & Gubrium, 1995; Luse, Mennecke, & Townsend, 2012; M. Patton, 2002), the reality is that the experience can be quite different than what was taught in the classroom, particularly when qualitatively studying historically underrepresented student populations. Previous literature has shown that underrepresented populations within higher education have special needs, such as fear of discrimination and retaliation that require attention (Chung & Katayama, 1998; L. Patton, 2009; L. Patton & Harper, 2003; Pontius & Harper, 2006; Smith, Allen, & Danley, 2007). Currently, most qualitative research books use standard institutional review board guidelines to discuss protections for research participants (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Forrester, 2010; Savin-Baden & Howell Major, 2013), but few books state how ethics would apply to working with underrepresented populations (Glesne, 2011).

The purpose of this article is to challenge the status quo in recruiting qualitative research participants. Namely, the authors describe how their positionality as researchers of color does not automatically render them as insiders when working with underrepresented populations. Consequently, it is important for researchers to consider their ethical practices in working with participants from underrepresented and marginalized populations. In addition, professional organizations emphasize these ethical standards (e.g., see American Anthropological Association, 1998; American Educational Research Association, 2011; American Psychological Association, 2010; American Sociological Association, 2008). The needs of underrepresented students can warrant making modifications to elements of the research process outside of what students learn in the classroom. These issues will be further discussed throughout the paper.

Qualitative methodologies have been developed to understand specific populations and issues, such as diverse institutional cultures and underrepresented students in higher education (Green, 2007; Museus, 2007; Museus & Truong, 2009). While more traditional research designs may be helpful in understanding specific issues, few (if any) discuss issues that arise for the researcher in conducting research with the above mentioned populations, particularly for those conducting educational research (Glesne, 2011). In this paper, the authors discuss their experiences conducting doctoral dissertation research on three different underrepresented populations, 1) Asian American gay, lesbian, and bisexual (GLB) students, 2) doctoral students of color, and 3) Black students at Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs). Furthermore, we explore issues that we faced, including recruitment of participants, issues regarding trustworthiness and confidentiality, and the need for participant support. We conclude by making recommendations for doctoral students and early scholars wishing to conduct similar work.

### **Literature Review**

Much of the previous literature exploring the methodological challenges when studying underrepresented groups has come from the healthcare and psychology fields. Dickson-Swift, James, Kippen, and Liamputtong (2007) interviewed thirty qualitative healthcare researchers. They found that these researchers faced several challenges in conducting their studies. These issues included 1) building rapport with their participants, 2) self-disclosure by the researcher, 3) feelings of guilt or vulnerability, 4) researcher exhaustion, 5) leaving the researcher relationship, and 6) listening to participants' untold stories. Amanda Clarke (2006) further expanded upon the importance of the researcher relationship within nursing, particularly when conducting studies on vulnerable populations. Clarke stressed the importance of reflexivity along with the need to build rapport and demonstrate empathy. These qualities were particularly important considering participants were being asked to recount uncomfortable or upsetting health situations. Clarke

concluded that since participants in healthcare studies were often asked to recount personal situations, the relationship between the researcher and participants and the trust that must develop between the two was vital to any study's success. However, building this relationship can create ethical challenges that qualitative researchers must address (Hegney & Chan, 2010).

Several health researchers have further explored some differences between the participant and researcher that can impact their relationship (Suh, Kagan, & Strumpf, 2009; Underwood, Satterthwait, & Bartlett, 2010). Suh et al. (2009) emphasized the importance of researchers developing cultural competence regarding the groups they were studying, and using that cultural competence to adjust their studies accordingly. These adjustments needed to be made at all points of the study, from its design, data collection, and analysis. Additional issues can arise when studying populations whose primary language is not English.

Researchers need to take care when transcribing qualitative data with these groups (Wong & Poon, 2010). Underwood et al. (2010) argued that researchers must reflect on the assumptions they make when studying different age related cohorts. Glesne (2011) outlined several ethical considerations the researcher must make, including the nature of the relationship with the participants in a study, privacy, reciprocity, representation, and cultural considerations.

Researchers can take on the role of being an exploiter, intervener, advocate, or friend. In discussing reciprocity, researchers should listen to participants. Glesne (2011) described the relationship between the participants and researcher in the following way, "the closer the relationship between the researcher and the research participants, the more special obligations and expectations emerge" (p. 179). Glesne emphasized respect, sharing, and listening rather than telling or flaunting knowledge in working with people from different cultures.

Beyond the healthcare field, researchers in both higher education and ethnic studies have stressed the importance of creating equity in research methods (Pasque, et al., 2012, Guido, Chávez, & Lincoln, 2010). In particular, numerous researchers maintain that traditional

qualitative methodologies are inherently geared toward studying the White population (Sandoval, 2000; Tuhiwai Smith, 1999) and that methodological perspectives need to go beyond this White supremacist point of view in order to fully capture the experiences of historically marginalized groups. Scholars, such as Tuhiwai Smith (1999) and Sandoval (2000) bring to light the distrust that many of the historically underrepresented groups have against researchers, and in particular White researchers. Much of this is rooted in history; for example, the U.S. Public Health Service Syphilis Study (The Syphilis Study) at Tuskegee, which involved a clinical study of untreated syphilis in African American men who thought they were receiving free health care from the U.S. government (Gamble, 1997; Washington, 2007). This history of distrust makes the participant/researcher relationship crucial to the methodological process. In addition, Critical Race theorists have challenged scholars to reflect on what is considered legitimate knowledge in the academy, who can produce it, and whose knowledge is valued (Delgado Bernal, 2009; Solórzano, 1998; Solórzano and Yosso, 2002, Yosso, 2005). Guido, Chávez, and Lincoln (2010) argue that scholar-practitioners should reflect on their own identities, knowledge, and assumptions in their everyday activities to understand the populations they support. Many scholars align their paradigms with their research and practice. For instance, someone who comes from a critical and cultural paradigm and conducts research on communities of color would probably not use research methods that are grounded in positivist or post-positivist paradigms.

At its core, it is essential to having a meaningful and productive researcher and participant relationship in order to ensure that the researcher becomes an insider and not an outsider during the research process (Hawkins, 2010; Minkler, 2004; Suh, et al., 2009). They must also work to establish trust with the participants, regardless of any racial or ethnic differences (Rhodes, 1994). Hawkins, in his study of low income women in New Orleans post-Katrina, stressed the importance of avoiding personal agendas in research and explained how

his identity as a Black man impacted the interviews that he conducted in his study. Minkler (2004) explained the role that different forms of racism, including institutionalized, personally mediated, and internalized racism, can have on the process and particularly on the researcher/participant relationship.

A review of the previous literature demonstrates how sociocultural factors including but not limited to race, class, and gender can influence the research process. In this paper, the authors will bring to light the issues around their own studies of three different historically underrepresented groups of students. In doing so, we hope to further the discussion on how to accurately represent and tell these students' stories.

### **Theoretical Framework**

To help guide the discussion of our studies, the authors chose to use a critical race methodological framework. Established by Solórzano and Yosso (2002), critical race methodology is an extension of critical race theory (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995), an often used theory to challenge the dominant ideologies around race. While the five tenets of critical race theory (i.e., the centrality of race and racism in society, challenge to dominant ideology, commitment to social justice, the centrality of experiential knowledge, and a transdisciplinary perspective) still apply, critical race methodology grounds these tenets within the research process itself, thus providing the authors a useful framework for this study.

Solórzano and Yosso (2002) argued that racism is embedded in the “shared” norms and “neutral” scientific practices and that this racism perpetuates a master narrative that is prevalent in research studies. They discussed the need to find methodological approaches that go beyond creating these master narratives in order to truly explain the experiences of those from underrepresented groups. The reality is that when researchers choose methodological tools, they need to consider underrepresented populations and the inequities that they face (Pascale, 2008). As argued by Parker (1998), CRT and critical race methodology can bring out the

“historical vestiges of past discrimination and present day racial manifestations of that discrimination” (p. 46).

Within critical race methodology, race and racism are in the foreground but also challenges traditional research methods previously used to explain the experiences of students of color. Because of the transdisciplinary perspective, Solórzano and Yosso (2002) assert that critical race methodology can be used to explain the experiences of students not only centered around race, but also gender, class, and other social categories. While the three groups studied in this paper may appear very different on the surface, by integrating our research experiences, the authors wish to shed light on how the changes to the methodology can enhance how we as researchers accurately represent the experiences of these historically underrepresented populations.

Using our respective studies, we will discuss how each researcher captured the unique voices within the context of their personal experiences; in particular, methods that avoid creating the “master” narrative. We will explain our choice of methods, including design, data collection, and data analysis. In doing so, we hope to facilitate further discussion about issues that may arise when conducting qualitative research on historically underrepresented populations and to encourage researchers to think beyond “typical” qualitative research, when working with underrepresented groups.

### **Study 1**

Narui (2011) explored the college experiences of nine Asian/American<sup>1</sup> gay, lesbian, and bisexual students, and specifically, the impact of concealing or revealing their sexual orientation on their educational experiences. By utilizing a Foucauldian, poststructural theoretical perspective, Narui studied the decision making process that leads Asian/American GLB students to disclose their sexual orientation, and how the experience of disclosing their sexual

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<sup>1</sup> "Asian/American" is the term used in the original study to describe the Asian and Asian American students in the original study. The solidus was used to allow equal voice to both populations (Narui, 2011).



identity affects their sense of self (i.e., construction of identity). Narui found that the students navigated multiple discourses, and their decisions about revealing their sexual orientation were based on relationships formed within those discourses. These decisions, in turn, helped many of the students grasp their emerging agency within the dominant discourse.

### **Data Collection**

One consideration with regards to data collection was recruiting an appropriate sample while maintaining the integrity of participants' voices. For the Asian American gay, lesbian, and bisexual students, their status as a hidden population made it difficult for Narui (2011) to recruit them into her study. Heckathorn (1997) defines the hidden population as having several attributes, including 1) not having a solid sample frame or population set and 2) privacy concerns "because membership involves stigmatized or illegal behavior, leading individuals to refuse to cooperate, or give unreliable answers to protect their privacy" (p. 174). The Asian/American GLB college students in Narui's study met both criteria, with privacy concerns existing because these students' sexual orientations were central to this study.

Initially, in an attempt to identify participants, Narui (2011) used both a general call for participants and a modified form of traditional snowball sampling. For the general call for participants, she used an Institutional Review Board (IRB) approved flyer and distributed it both electronically and posted hard copies in several areas around campus. When distributing the hard copies, Narui focused on colleges and offices with higher concentrations of Asian/American students. The hope was that the faculty and teaching assistants would know of potential individuals who could participate in the study and would pass along the information from the flyer.

Narui (2011) also attempted a chain referral sampling method and met with several university faculty and staff members who she thought would have close interactions with Asian/American GLB students. Since little was known about the location of the Asian/American

GLB social network within the university, she believed that these informants would act as the gatekeepers within the community and could be used to help gain access to potential participants (Singer, 1999). While theoretically, this type of sampling should have helped her to identify participants; in reality, she did not find a single participant using this method.

Ultimately, to find participants, Narui (2011) reached out to both Asian/American and GLBT student organization leaders. For each group, she offered to lead a discussion on either the experiences of GLB or Asian/American GLB students of color. In all, she contacted 26 Asian/American student organizations and nine GLBT student organizations and presented to three GLBT student organizations and two Asian/American student organizations. She also attended two socials put on by a GLBT student organization for graduate students. From attending the socials and presenting to these groups, she obtained all but two of her participants.

Because of the invisibility of the population, Narui (2011) found it difficult to use more common methods of recruiting participants to her study. More traditional methods of recruitment, such as snowball sampling and IRB approved flyers, assume that participants are seeking to be studied and do not take into account that the participants need to trust the researcher because of issues regarding confidentiality. The difficulty finding participants with these traditional methods illustrates how these methods exhibit a heteronormative and White bias that is implicit within these traditional methods. By reaching out to the students within student organization meetings, where they were presumably comfortable with at least one aspect of their identity, she was able to minimize this bias and foster trust because the students' initial contact with the researcher was in an environment where they felt comfortable with themselves and others.

### **Crisis of Representation**

For Narui (2011), the researcher's personal identity had to be considered when

collecting data, as she was asked about her own sexual orientation. The researcher believed that she was questioned about her own sexual identity because these students assumed that because she also identified as gay, lesbian, or bisexual. When faced with this situation, the researcher was unsure on how best to respond and feared that the participants would not be truthful with her during the initial interview if they knew about her heterosexuality. She needed their trust in order to conduct a meaningful study but feared that by being in a position of privilege as heterosexual, she would not gain that trust. At the same time, she had a personal obligation to herself to not claim a sexual identity that she did not personally identify with and live. The situation reflected a personal “crisis of representation.” The crisis of representation is based on the idea that researchers and their training are inherently embedded into the research that they conduct (Flaherty, Denzin, Manning, & Snow, 2002; Segall, 2001). In this case, the researcher’s own sexual orientation as heterosexual and ethnicity as Japanese American embedded her in this project, as the participants wanted to know about her sexual orientation. Their participation in the study allowed the researchers to be a part of their lives and a part of the discourse that helped to create them as Foucauldian subjects.

In the end, Narui (2011) was faced with the challenge of staying true to her own self-identity while entering into these students’ lives without significantly disrupting or changing their world. Throughout this study, the researcher was also challenged to authentically represent these students’ voices and communicate their experiences in a meaningful way. As Segall (2001) explains, the challenge is to balance the Self and Other, the Self being her as the researcher and all of her personal qualities, including her education and identity, and the Other as the participants, their voices and experiences. Both the Self and Other are needed within any research study, and authentically representing both, to the best of her ability, while also minimizing any power dynamics was the researcher’s concern. When asked by participants about her sexual orientation, the researcher never denied her heterosexuality, but she also

made sure to explain her belief that sexuality was a fluid concept, and that while she might be “heterosexual at the moment,” one’s sexuality is always changing. She also made sure to explain her belief and passion to have the voices of Asian/American GLB students heard, and that this study was a way for that to occur. This explanation seemed to please the participants and allowed her to address this crisis of representation in the most meaningful way possible.

### **Data Analysis**

When considering the analysis of data, researchers studying underrepresented populations have several important considerations, including the method of analysis. Narui (2011) used situational analysis, as developed by Adele Clarke (2005) as her method of analysis. Clarke (2005) developed situational analysis by seeking to “push grounded theory more fully around the postmodern turn through a new approach to analysis within the grounded theory framework” (p. xxi). Founded in positivism and humanistic approaches to scientific methodology, the goal of grounded theory is to create and generate new theory based on the data and the data collection process (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Situational analysis operates under the Foucauldian assumption that multiple truths are possible. These multiple truths help to avoid the creation of the “master” narrative, and allows for the incorporation of multiple voices within a research study. This type of analysis was particularly useful for Narui’s (2011) study as it allowed her to fully incorporate the complexity of the students’ multiple identities and their interactions, thus minimizing assumptions of the master narrative.

### **Study 2**

Truong (2010) conducted a qualitative study about the lived experiences of doctoral students of color with racism and racial trauma. Her study was guided by CRT, theoretical perspectives on Yosso’s concept of Navigational Capital, and Mellor’s (2004) Taxonomy of Racism Coping Styles. Semi-structured, individual interviews were conducted with 26 participants, and eleven themes emerged from the data analysis. From these experiences,

students developed a set of strategies to ensure their well-being while responding to their racist encounters in politically savvy ways and fighting for racial justice (Truong, 2012).

### **Data Collection**

Truong (2010) used criterion sampling to select participants for the study. The first criterion was that the students must have been enrolled in doctoral programs, and completed at least one year of coursework in their respective programs. Truong wanted participants who understood the political context of their programs and who had experience navigating doctoral study, so Truong recruited participants who were in their second year or beyond. Fearing that she would be unable to recruit enough participants for the study, she also opened up participation to recent graduates within the past three years. Second, participants must have self-identified as belonging to a racial or ethnic minority group and be American citizens or permanent residents. Finally, the participants must have experienced racism and racial trauma.

Truong had to negotiate with her dissertation committee about the target sample for her study. The committee wished that only 10 participants be interviewed for the study. However, Truong was concerned about the committee's instance on the small sample. She felt that the participants' identities might be exposed in the presentation of the data as their racialized experiences may be distinct and identifiable. Participants may be subject to retaliation by their programs if their identities were revealed. Therefore, Truong negotiated with her committee to recruit more participants. She endeavored to recruit over 20 participants for her study. She hoped to have a diverse sample by race and ethnicity, gender, and discipline.

Truong encountered no major issues with recruiting participants. In a little over a month's time, 360 prospective participants completed the online questionnaire. One of the strengths of the recruitment strategy was that the message reached a large number of prospective participants through the use of social media. The recruitment message was distributed through Facebook, email, listservs, and Twitter. While the researcher was not a member of Twitter,

several colleagues informed her they saw the message posted by other friends on Twitter. The researcher created a closed Facebook event and invited her friends to participate in filling out the initial recruitment questionnaire. In addition, she emailed those who filled out the form (whether or not they qualified to participate in the study) to pass along the recruitment message to others they knew who might qualify for the study. This way, the recruitment message reached a larger population and the researcher was able to evaluate the responses to the questionnaire for those who met the criteria for participation in the study.

The researcher was able to recruit those in education more effectively than other disciplines. Through outreach to listservs, she was able to recruit participants from other disciplines, such as public health and social work. The sample included 17 women and nine men. Eleven participants identified as Black or African American; five as multiracial; four as Mexican American; two as Chicana; three as Asian American; and one as Native American. The 26 participants from the study were from the following fields: Anthropology (1), Biomedical Science (1), Biostatistics (1), Business (1), Communications (1), Education (7), History (1), Psychology (2), Public Health (4), Race and Ethnic Studies (2), Sociology (1), Social Work and Social Welfare (3), and Women's Studies (1).

### **Participant Support**

Establishing trust with participants was of the utmost importance in the Truong (2010) study. The researcher was well aware that trust was a critical factor throughout the entire research process, during the recruitment process, data collection, data analysis, and presentation of the findings. Some prospective participants were willing to complete the questionnaire without question, while others posed questions about trust in completing the questionnaire. In these instances, the researcher contacted the prospective participants and had a conversation that often led to her disclosing her own experiences with racism and racial trauma in doctoral study. Truong also assured prospective participants of how she would try to

ensure the anonymity of the participants as well as measures she took above and beyond those required by IRB or other entities.

While some prospective participants were hesitant at first, others freely completed the questionnaire and were willing to participate in the study. While trust seemed established through their willingness to participate, the researcher had a conversation with each participant about the research process at the beginning of the interview. She discussed why she wanted to conduct the study, how the data was going to be used, implications for the findings, and how the findings would be presented. One of the concessions that Truong (2010) made early on was to present pseudonyms for participants, but never matched the pseudonym with the participant's academic discipline. In addition, she created pseudonyms for people that the participants discussed during their interviews. Finally, she made these statements while the interviews were being recorded so these participants would have the transcripts in writing, which showed her willingness to work with these participants on their own terms. Many of these participants had been targeted and oppressed by their departments, and many of them ended up having to file complaints to show proof of their racialized experiences. They knew very well how to keep written records of their incidents. For their protection, it was important to have a written record of how their data was to be presented.

Truong (2010) also discussed how she came about making some of these decisions in ensuring the participants' anonymity. She had participated in two research studies as a doctoral student in which the researchers were unethical, and she certainly would not put participants of her study in similar situations. In one study, she was never given a consent form and was incorrectly told the goals of the study. The researcher then presented the findings of the study in a way that clearly identified her. Truong subsequently withdrew her participation from the study. In another study, the researchers never member checked with her, and misrepresented her interview data in the presentation of their findings. As someone who had negative experiences

as a research participant and also someone who experienced racism and racial trauma in doctoral study, Truong was adamant about protecting research participants and representing them based on their own perceptions and lived experiences. Throughout the process, she held herself accountable to the participants themselves. She maintained communications with participants throughout the research process, including but not limited to follow-up email correspondences, follow-up interviews, a minimum of two member checks, and including a participant on the peer debriefing team.

From this interview process, several of the participants expressed how much they appreciated the care Truong (2010) took in working with them on this research project. One participant stated how much she appreciated being included in the research process, and how collaborative the experience felt. Several of the participants also discussed how they had never had the opportunity to formally reflect on these experiences. Some of them expressed how having the opportunity to reflect and make sense of their experiences helped them heal. A Chicana participant discussed her experience participating in the study:

It's definitely been interesting because it's made me reflect on certain things, liberating in some others. I definitely think that the work you're doing is very positive and if I could contribute to it I think that's wonderful. Having to sit and think about that experience and then how it impacts you and how you think that you were affected by it I think that it's important to do that and I don't think we do that often enough. I think there has been a deeper analysis beyond what happened and so that has helped.

### **Participant Driven Interview Process**

Because of the importance of trust and confidentiality, the researchers wanted the participants to drive the interview process. In structuring the process, Truong (2010) was cognizant of the challenges participants may experience in discussing racism and racial trauma. During the interview, bringing up situations in which they were marginalized also brought back



emotions, such as anger and resentment toward the perpetrators. One participant mentioned experiencing symptoms of posttraumatic stress disorder and dissociation during the process. The interview was stopped and while the participant was willing to complete the interview at a later time, Truong did not want the participant to experience this pain in recounting her doctoral experiences.

Being well aware of the fact that these instances could occur with any of the participants during the study, Truong (2010) made a concerted effort to make the interview process comfortable for the participants. Each interview started with Truong thanking the participant for her or his valuable time and insights. She gave a brief summary of the study and discussed the format of the interview. She reiterated confidentiality and the use of pseudonyms. Sometimes during the interviews when participants expressed concern about confidentiality, Truong made sure to discuss how her presentation of the findings would not indicate the participant's pseudonym with the institution or the discipline. She stated these considerations on record so that the participants would have a written copy of the conversation in the interview transcript. Finally, she asked participants if they had any questions before the interview started.

Truong (2010) was flexible in allotting time to the interviews. They were scheduled in a way that allowed participants to take additional time if needed. Participants were encouraged to take pauses or breaks between questions and within questions so that they could process some of their thoughts. Several of the participants made use of the flexibility to gather their thoughts during interviews, which led to detailed and rich descriptions of their experiences. Instead of leading the discussion, Truong listened intently and quietly. The interviews were semi-structured in format, which left room for follow up and probing questions. Truong (2010) was also flexible in terms of interview format based on participants' preferences. For example, she originally scheduled two interviews with participants, with a split in the interview protocol. However, some participants expressed how important it was for them to get through all of the raw emotions in

one sitting. Therefore, the researcher catered to each participant's needs, conducting one longer interview or two or more shorter interviews if needed.

Reciprocity was extremely important within this study. Truong (2010) did not offer any prospective participants incentives for taking part in the study. However, she provided each participant with a small gift after the interviews were conducted. Gifts consisted of a meal, a \$10 gift card, or a \$10 USB jump drive. These individuals devoted a significant amount of their time corresponding with her. This time included participating in interviews, member checks, data analysis, and findings presentation. In some cases, the communications with participants have continued. The relationships that the researcher fostered with some of the participants have lasted until the present day. Several of them have become close friends and colleagues to the researcher. They have provided each other with social support and encouragement through and beyond doctoral study.

Participants were more actively involved in the research process by driving the interviews. They were well versed in research as doctoral students, and knew about the history of research exploitation of marginalized populations. Therefore, having additional control and ownership to drive the interview process at their own pace allowed the participants an opportunity to reflect on their personal experiences at their own pace. It also solidified the trust that developed between Truong and the participants.

In reflecting on her experiences with interviewing participants using this flexible process, Truong learned several things that may be helpful for future researchers. Having a flexible interview process benefited both the participants and researcher. The participants felt more at ease in sharing their stories, sometimes very traumatic narratives. The researcher established rapport with the participants more quickly, and participants were willing to share more in depth information with the researcher after pausing to think and reflect on their doctoral experiences. Future researchers should be flexible, spontaneous, and comfortable in handling last minute

scheduling modifications. For instance, future researchers should try to schedule as few interviews on the same day as possible so that they could possibly spend more time with a participant whose interview is longer than the estimated two hours. In addition, researchers should be prepared to postpone interviews if participants need to take a break from recalling traumatic experiences. Essentially, flexibility not only refers to the interviewing process, but to the researchers conducting the study. As Nutov and Hazzan (2011) suggest, along with flexibility, researchers should also recognize the emotions that participants exhibit during the interviews so that they can act in ethical ways by postponing interviews if participants are experiencing further trauma from recounting their experiences.

### **Data Analysis**

Truong (2010, 2012) did not encounter any major issues with data analysis. Truong (2010) utilized the qualitative approach of empirical transcendental phenomenology for this study. Phenomenology has philosophical and scientific underpinnings that date back to Edmund Husserl (Moustakas, 1994). This approach is focused on studying the lived experiences of individuals as it relates to their consciousness and perceptions surrounding a particular phenomenon. From these lived experiences, interpretations will be made about the essences. Empirical transcendental phenomenology, which was developed by Moustakas, relies less on interpretations of the researcher and more on participants' insights than hermeneutic phenomenology. It also has a prescribed set of procedures. For instance, the researcher brackets by acknowledging her or his own personal experiences and biases. This post-positivist methodological approach seemingly contradicts the author's critical, cultural, and constructivist research paradigm. More particularly, this researcher embraced her subjectivity (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992; Neumann & Peterson, 1997), and disagrees with the notion that objectivity exists as it is a part of dominant ideology that is espoused to maintain White supremacy (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). The researcher intentionally chose this method for its

bracketing procedure, not to reduce bias, but to better ground the participants' voices as she saw them as experts in interpreting their own lived experiences. This approach worked well for analyzing the racialized experiences of doctoral students of color because they were knowledgeable about how they navigated through their primary, secondary, undergraduate, and graduate doctoral experiences (Moustakas, 2004). In addition, several of them studied Critical Race Theory, so they reflected on their experiences using this framework and adopting it in their personal lives. Therefore, transcendental phenomenology was an appropriate method, because these doctoral students and recent graduates were able to articulate, interpret, and make sense of their own lived experiences. Like situational analysis, transcendental phenomenology allowed Truong to more fully present the participants' voices and lived experiences as they made sense of it. In addition to grounding the voices of participants, the researcher engaged the participants in trustworthiness activities.

### **Trustworthiness**

Truong (2010) devoted a lot of time and effort to trustworthiness and quality assurance in this study, combining it with establishing trust with the participants in the study as well as data analysis. She member checked with each participant at least twice. Each participant was provided with an interview transcript to confirm the interview data were accurate. Each participant was also provided with two additional documents: a final draft of the study abstract and sections of the text from the findings section of her dissertation that mentioned their pseudonyms and racialized experiences. Participants were asked about the accuracy of the analysis and presentation. Interestingly, only one participant requested a minor word change in the presentation of her quote. Several of the participants expressed interest in reading the dissertation, and satisfaction from having contributed to the study. One participant stated the following to the researcher. "Your abstract looks fabulous. I would read your dissertation cover to cover! I am glad that I could participate in research of such importance." Three of the study

participants attended Truong's dissertation defense and one participant came to support her during her doctoral commencement.

Truong (2010) was careful to invite members of the peer debriefing team who studied Critical Race Theory, had experiential knowledge about race and racism, and those who employed qualitative research methods. In convening this team, the researcher was intentional and invited one participant to be a member and provide additional feedback on analysis. Besides the official peer debriefing, several nonofficial peer debriefing sessions have occurred with participants. Since this study was completed, the researcher has worked on several manuscripts and conference presentations in which participants have provided valuable feedback and support. For example, some participants have attended conference sessions, looked at the materials before presentations, and commented after the presentations. Because of the close relationships that the researcher has been able to foster with many of the participants, she has been able to rely on the expertise of participants by member checking and peer debriefing.

### **Study 3**

McMickens (2012) explored how HBCUs socialize and prepare Black students to respond to racial realities and encounters with racism they may experience in predominantly White workplace settings and graduate programs. With a grounded theory research design, McMickens also examined the racial realities and preparedness that Black graduating seniors at HBCUs anticipate as they enter predominantly White environments. Furthermore, McMickens interviewed HBCU alumni to assess how they respond to racism in predominantly White post-undergraduate settings. The first phase of the study involved 24 individual, semi-structured interviews with HBCU alumni. The second phase involved 11 focus groups with 58 graduating seniors at six HBCUs (three public and three private). A total of 82 participants were interviewed. The findings from this study led to the development of a theoretical model. The

participants ascribed their racism readiness to pre-college socialization and four institutional factors: safe space, personal empowerment, learning cross context while learning etiquette, and socializing exceptionalism.

### **Data Collection**

For the Black senior focus group participants at HBCUs, McMickens (2012) found it challenging to gain access to some of the research sites due to the sensitive and perceived controversial nature of the research topic—racism readiness. Upon contacting the senior student affairs officers (SSAOs) and/or student leaders at several HBCUs, the researcher was often redirected to the Institutional Review Boards for additional approval of the research study, which is a standard research practice. However, occasionally, the host IRB office mandated additional conditions. For example, one of the public HBCUs required McMickens to gain IRB approval beyond the primary documentation from his home institution. After completing the other IRB process, certain parameters had to be in place in order to recruit and interview students.

Specifically, a student affairs educator had to be on site at the times in which the researcher conducted the interviews with students. In addition, the IRB guidelines indicated that the supervising student affairs educator was solely responsible for the recruitment of students; therefore, the researcher was not allowed to recruit his own participants. These parameters, coupled with the reality that most of the students at the university commuted, created a structure that made it more challenging for the researcher to recruit students during regular business hours, but during times that were agreeable with the participants commuting schedule. When access to the site was granted, it was imperative for McMickens (2012) to establish rapport with the supervising student affairs officer, introduce himself to other institutional decision makers, and inform the community about the ways in which the research may have implications for HBCUs.

## **Participant Support**

In the data collection phase of the racism readiness study, McMickens (2012) developed a working relationship with study participants by taking some important steps. First, he established rapport by welcoming and greeting each participant to the focus group sessions and informing the participants that he is a Black alumnus of an HBCU, has experienced racism, and would like to engage them in a research discussion about their readiness for, and anticipation of, post collegiate environments. Second, he explained that the conditions of the informed consent process emphasizing that the study is voluntary, maintained that he will ensure confidentiality and anonymity, and may have implications for HBCUs. Third, throughout the focus group sessions, he encouraged participants to be honest, frank, and forthright about their preparatory and anticipatory experiences about race and racism.

There is an affinity among the lived collegiate experiences of persons who attend HBCUs (Allen, 1992; Fleming, 1984). Relationship building occurred prior, during, and after the focus group sessions. The researcher encouraged the participants to inform him about their post college whereabouts as another way of building relationships with participants. Many contacted him via email and social media to tell the researcher about their progress in workplace settings and in graduate school. McMickens (2012) was intentional about disseminating his contact information to each focus group participant. Since several indicated an interest in graduate school, they were encouraged by his passion for research and he has kept a relationship with many of the participants.

Unlike the presentation for individual interviews, other ethical considerations should be considered when presenting focus group data. McMickens (2012) maintained a threaded conversation of several focus group participants to ensure anonymity of participants' sense-making of ideas. Threaded conversations enable the reader to be less inclined to identify a participant, and more likely to see the similarities and differences of several persons who have

shared properties. In this study, those shared properties were graduating seniors who were either entering graduate school or predominately White workplace environments.

### **Data Analysis**

McMickens did not experience significant issues with data analysis. Constructivist grounded theory (Charmaz, 2006), traditional grounded theory, and open, axial and selective coding techniques were employed (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Constructivist grounded theory allows the researcher to be reflexive and transparent about biases brought to the research process. This method is a contrast from Corbin and Strauss who call for strict objectivity. The researcher utilized memoing and coding throughout the data collection phases to generate a theory that explains a process, which is the main purpose of grounded theory research. Memoing involved transcribing the researcher's ideas, thoughts, and assumptions about the developing theory (Creswell, 2012). Charmaz (2006) described memo writing in greater detail, "Memo writing constitutes a crucial method in grounded theory because it prompts you to analyze your data and codes early in the research process" (p. 72). This type of blended data analysis was useful for McMickens's (2012) study as it allowed him to fully understand the experiences of the research participants, and his own assumptions and biases about the research.

### **Trustworthiness**

For McMickens (2012), the historical legacy associated with his research impacted his data analysis. Much has been written and re-told about the ways African Americans have been treated unethically in social science and healthcare research (Gamble, 1997; Jones, 1993; Reverby, 2009; Washington, 2007). Gamble (1997) described this distrust in the following way, "Black Americans' fears about exploitation by the medical profession date back to the antebellum period and the use of slaves and free Black people as subjects for dissection and medical experimentation" (p. 1773-1774). Moreover, arguably one of the most infamous studies



was the U.S. Public Health Service Syphilis Study (The Syphilis Study) at Tuskegee which involved a clinical study of untreated syphilis in African American men who thought they were receiving free health care from the U.S. government. When penicillin, a cure for syphilis, became available, it was still intentionally withheld from the Black men. This lack of disclosure resulted in death for the men, and subsequent infections for their wives and children. Although another forty years has passed since this study, issues of trust and validity are paramount when involving African Americans in medical and social science research (Washington, 2007). The lack of trustworthiness and quality assurance in the aforementioned past studies informed the strategies employed by McMickens in the racism readiness study.

Upon the completion of the focus group and individual interviews, McMickens (2012) gave the participants copies of the transcripts. Although no one modified the transcribed words, this step was crucial in facilitating trust among the researcher and participants. Additionally, the researcher juxtaposed the focus group data (graduating seniors transitioning into predominantly White post-undergraduate settings) with the individual interview data (alumni currently navigating predominantly White post-undergraduate settings) to check for confirmatory and contradictory suppositions related to the main theme—preparation. Finally, McMickens vetted the culminating racism readiness theoretical model with the study participants. The study participants affirmed that the researcher captured their process. Concurrently, McMickens was intentional about giving voice to his participants, which countered the master narrative often told about African American students. McMickens gave participants ample opportunities to respond to the transcript data, incorporated verbatim quotes from the participants, and relayed how his own experiences relate to his role as the researcher.

### **Summary of Research Studies**

In recruiting members of underrepresented groups into a research study, researchers need to remember that participants have multiple factors to consider, including fear of retribution

or being “outed” to the majority population. It is important to remember that this fear of being outed extends beyond knowledge of one’s sexual orientation, and includes the potential of not being hired and/or recruited for positions post-graduation. These factors can lead to administrative challenges when recruiting participants and can cause researchers to reconsider their recruitment methods or else work to carefully establish rapport with the appropriate consistencies.

For both Truong (2010) and McMickens (2012), being extremely transparent about the interview process and upfront about the possible consequences were vital to the success of their studies. Because study participants faced potentially harmful consequences by participating in the study, they needed to be assured that confidentiality was being maintained. In addition, all three researchers not only developed trust with participants, they also developed friendships. Glesne (2011) states that formed friendships are not detrimental to the research process as long as the researcher maintains all ethical considerations. She also poses the question. "should you use such data from individuals who disclose information to you as a friend rather than as a research participant?" (p. 171) Truong and McMickens respond quite simply that they asked their participants if they could use the information they provided. In working with participants in the study, the authors offer suggestions to share with future researchers who plan to work with and study underrepresented populations. First, researchers should show sincerity in working with participants in their studies as they are the experts. Second, researchers should be transparent throughout the research process, particularly as these participants come from marginalized populations. The informed consent form can help guide the researcher during the pre-interview process as well as throughout data collection and data analysis. Finally, the researcher should be patient when working with participants. For instance, some of the questions in the interview protocol may be new to the participant and therefore, they may need additional time to reflect and make sense of them.

Overall, as a way to further the trust among participants, Truong (2010, 2012) and McMickens (2012) established several trustworthiness methods within their analysis using methods such as member checking, peer debriefing, and establishing an audit trail. In doing so, McMickens was able to address the historical legacy and distrust established with research on African Americans. Establishing trust is important because it allows African Americans an opportunity to have their voices included. Truong was able to further her relationships with several participants, and has continued to work towards giving her participants a voice in the research process. It gives these participants power in the research process whereas they have often felt powerless in their doctoral experiences.

### **Implications**

Historically underrepresented populations have traditionally been silenced by the research literature. When they have been studied, their experiences have often been distorted, as evidenced by The Syphilis Study (Reverby, 2009). This lack of voice could be due to the fact that methodologies have traditionally focused on studying the populations as separate entities rather than collaborating directly with these groups. By outlining the challenges faced when working with these populations, we wanted to help doctoral student researchers and early scholars interested in working with these groups gain an additional appreciation for their lived experiences. Researchers wanting to study underrepresented groups should have specific tools or knowledge that fully considers the needs of these groups. While the textbooks that we read provide some guidelines, these books are not a "one size fits all." All researchers should have special considerations for the populations they work with. As Knight and Cross (2012) point out, researchers need to have a contextual approach to their methodology. For underrepresented populations, these issues could include potential breach of confidentiality, violation of trust, and issues of respect.

As the demographics of the American college student changes and more graduate students choose to study underrepresented and emerging populations, we believe that this information should be incorporated into their education. While a full course that addresses these issues may not be realistic, having this information incorporated within any qualitative course (with methods such as sample case studies) would assist doctoral students as they work towards becoming emerging scholars within the field. Because work on underrepresented populations is becoming more prevalent within the field, textbook writers should consider developing sections on how best to work with these populations and also include ethical implications for the work. Faculty could also incorporate books on indigenous research so that students have the tools they need to fully study these groups (Chilisa, 2012; Tuhiwai Smith, 1999).

In capturing participants' voices within the research, we wanted to reach beyond the "master" narrative associated with more traditional qualitative research. In doing so, we sought to elevate our research beyond the more traditional forms into the realm of critical race methodology (e.g., Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). While we still utilized techniques associated with more traditional qualitative research (such as member checks, peer debriefers, etc.), we challenge future researchers to continue to elevate their methodological choices beyond the "master" narrative and further explore alternative research methods, including participatory research and decolonizing methodologies (Chilisa, 2012; Tuhiwai Smith, 1999). Doing so will only further our understanding of these experiences of these groups and help us to better serve them within the educational field.

### **Conclusion**

Tuhiwai Smith (1999) argued that maintaining ethical boundaries within the context of research with historically underrepresented populations is of utmost importance, particularly as research "has traditionally benefited the researcher and the knowledge base of the dominant

group in society” (p. 176). The incorporation of ethical considerations is imperative to every aspect of the research process. Many participants who are members of these groups have been violated within the research process or have been marginalized by society (Delucchi & Do, 1996; Gay, 2004; Gildersleeve, Croom, & Vasquez, 2011; Jones, 1993; Lee, 2006; Ng, Lee, & Pak, 2007; Reverby, 2009; Solórzano, 1998; Washington, 2007). As researchers, we have a moral and ethical obligation to our participants before, during, and after the research process (American Anthropological Association, 1998; American Educational Research Association, 2011; American Psychological Association, 2010; American Sociological Association, 2008; Glesne, 2011). As more researchers study issues facing historically underrepresented populations, we hope that this information will be helpful in continuing to bring to light the lived experiences of these groups.

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