School of Health Sciences Publications   College of Health Professions

2020

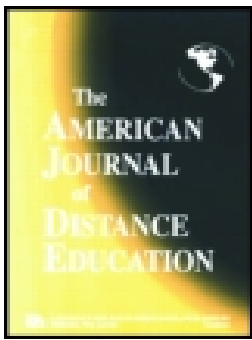# Lived Experiences of Asian and Latinx Online Doctoral Students

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Recommended Citation

Jimenez, Richard, "Lived Experiences of Asian and Latinx Online Doctoral Students" (2020). *School of Health Sciences Publications*. 203.
https://scholarworks.waldenu.edu/shs_pubs/203

Lived Experiences of Asian and Latinx Online Doctoral Students

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ABSTRACT

Over the past two decades, Asian and Hispanic immigrants who have been living in the United States for ≥ 10 years has increased substantially. Yet, Asian and Latinx students are behind Caucasians in doctoral degree completion rates. Enhancing enrollment, time-to-completion rates, and decreasing attrition, are of national concern among promoters of higher educational for these groups. We conducted a phenomenological study to explore the lived experiences of seven Asian and 10 Latinx online doctoral students (N = 17). Participants were recruited using nonrandom purposive convenience sampling and snowball techniques. Data were collected by one of three members of the research team. The other two research team members independently coded and conducted the thematic analysis of the de-identified transcribed interviews and reached consensus for inter-rater reliability. The major findings were that both Asian and Latinx students experienced a sense of duty and rely on family to earn a doctoral degree. Asian students were typically not the first in their families to pursue a doctorate whereas Latinx students usually were. Asian students feel pressure to succeed in the "respectable professions" by their families. Latinx students rely on "cultural capital" to succeed. Language barriers were more of a challenge for Latinx students than for Asian students. Asian and Latinx students desire shorter timeframes for feedback. The research implications include that integrating a limited amount of synchronous teaching could improve their feeling of cohesiveness which coincides with collectivism. Also, shortening timeframes for feedback during the dissertation phase could impact time to completion and decrease attrition rates.

Introduction

Asian and Latinx enrollment in online doctoral education programs has increased over the past years and will grow in the coming years; yet little is known about the experiences of Asians and Latinx students for enrolling in online doctoral programs. Even less is known about Asian and Latinx doctoral students' attrition rates and time to degree completion in online programs and associated factors. According to Snyder, de Brey, and Dillow (2016), degree granting institutions in the United States, have reported an increase number of Hispanic, Asian/Pacific Islander, Black, and American Indian/Alaska native students and a decrease in Caucasian students. However, the rate of completion for racial and ethnic minorities, including Asians and Latinx, is much lower than their Caucasian counterparts (U. S. Department of Education, 2019). Asian doctoral students fair better than their Latinx

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counterparts but both groups still lag behind Caucasians in doctoral degrees awarded in the U.S. In 2016/17, doctoral degrees were awarded to Caucasian, Asian/Pacific Islanders and to Latinx students were 107,445, 20,344 and 12,493 respectively (U. S. Department of Education, 2019).

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to examine the lived experiences of Asian and Latinx online doctoral students. Understanding their lived experiences addresses the gap in the literature and provides information for improving future recruitment and retention strategies among these populations.

Understanding the experiences of Latinx and Asian online doctoral students may have positive social change impact by assisting in the development of more effective and meaningful recruitment strategies and programs to reduce barriers, attrition and improve time to degree completion rates. Findings may also be relevant to already established traditional brick and mortar Asian and Latinx serving non-online doctoral programs and to traditional higher learning institutions seeking to establish online programs.

Relevant literature

Over the past 10 years, there has been an exponential growth in institutions offering distance education degrees (Allen & Seaman, 2017). In 2016, the percentage of students exclusively taking distance courses in public, private nonprofit and private for-profit institutions were 35%, 65%, and 85% respectively (Seaman, Allen, & Seaman, 2018). Snyder et al. (2016) noted there was a 46% rise in conferred doctoral degrees from 2002–2016 and projected a seven percent increase from 2016–2028. In the U. S., approximately 14% of students have taken at a minimum of one hybrid course and 14% attended exclusively on-line colleges or universities (Snyder et al., 2016).

Many universities go through great strides to recruit qualified ethnically and racially diverse doctoral students that are representative of societies demographic changes. Contributing factors to the intergenerational upward mobility threat include, but are not limited to, access, university culture and financial constraints for underrepresented minority (URM) students (Espinosa, Nelson, & Perkins, 2019). Institutions are applying for federal Minority serving institutions (MSIs) status whose outcomes reveal higher completion rates and campus environments that are supportive to URM students (Espinosa, Kelchen, & Taylor, 2018). Unfortunately, there continue to be large variations in how URM students pay for college (Espinosa et al., 2019). Overall, approximately 50% of doctoral degree recipients graduate with loans that average 81,100 USD (Espinosa et al., 2019). Whereas, in 2015–2016, accrued debt for professional or doctoral degree Asian, Black, Hispanic and Whites were 100,680, USD 187,614, USD 113,007, USD and 111,468 USD respectively (Radwin et al., 2018). The percentage of Latinx who borrowed money to pay for the degrees was 85.2% as compared to 65.6% of Asians (Radwin et al., 2018).

Students enrolled in online doctoral degree programs like the flexibility, asynchronous courses, lack of geographical boundaries, and the ability to spend time reflecting (Ames, Berman, & Casteel, 2018). However, the literature also overall reflects doctoral students encounter challenges which contribute to stress as well as high rates of attrition (Desphande, 2016; Erichsen, Bolliger, & Halupa, 2014; Litalien & Guay, 2015). In their doctoral completion project, Sowell, Allum, and Okahana (2015)

focused on Black and Hispanic URM students, across 21 institutions, enrolled in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) doctoral programs. Their findings indicated that students who were doctoral candidates expressed higher rates of isolation than pre-candidates, and Hispanic/Latinx students had shorter time-to-degree and median time-to attrition than Black/African American students. Sowell et al. (2015) also noted that the URM doctoral student median-time-to attrition occurred primarily within 24 months. However, Sowell et al. (2015) did not specify whether participating institutions offered traditional or online doctoral programs and focused primarily on Hispanic/Latinx and Black/African American URM students enrolled in STEM doctoral programs.

Ethnically and culturally diverse student populations are vital to higher education. They bring distinct perspectives and a cultural exchange enhancing the worldviews and cultural sensitivity for students and faculty members (Wu, Garza, & Guzman, 2015). Yet, these student populations may encounter their own unique challenges (Acevedo-Polakovich, Quirk, Cousineau, Saxena, & Gerhart, 2014; Wu et al., 2015). Their cultural norms and expectations may inherently influence their individual experiences, behaviors, self-perceptions, academic attitudes, goals, and self-belief in their ability to attain their goals (Acevedo-Polakovich et al., 2014; Wu et al., 2015). Wu et al. (2015) conducted their qualitative research study in a U. S. Southern institution serving primarily Hispanic students. Their findings among the international Asian student participants were that they encountered multiple barriers academically, prejudices, isolation, struggled with language barriers, and pressure from parental expectations to excel. The participants utilized school resources such as the writing center, library, student organizations, and counseling services as sources of support which aided in relieving their stress (Wu et al., 2015).

The literature on Latinx doctoral students is sparse. According to Ramirez (2014) they encounter race and gender inequalities, are underrepresented and have high rates of attrition within their first year as doctoral students. Cultural challenges in the academic environment include individualism, direct communication and emotional detachment which conflict with their own values of collectivism, humility, cooperation, and emotional expressiveness (Ramirez, 2014). Ramirez's (2014) qualitative study findings indicated some of the challenge's Latinx encounter mirror those of Asians including isolation, alienation, and racism.

The concept of social support using coaching models, has recently come to the forefront for URM PhD students (Williams, Thakore, & McGee, 2017). In their qualitative study, Williams et al. (2017) individual and group coaching sessions provided students with opportunities to learn from each other and openly discuss their experiences with coaches and peers. The perceptions of the students were that the coaching sessions provided them with a source of emotional, informational and appraisal support that URM students may not necessarily access at the universities they are attending. While many faculty members engage in mentoring relationships with some of their students, lack of knowledge and experience with URM students could create functional mentoring relationship barriers (DeAngelo, 2016). According to DeAngelo, Mason, and Winters (2016) an institutional infrastructure and organizational culture that supports faculty engagement in mentoring is of great importance to the success of URM students with PhD aspirations.

Materials and methods

Moustakas (1994) transcendental qualitative phenomenological research design was the selected approach for the research study based on the research problem, literature review and questions: *What are the lived experiences online doctoral students?* and *What are the similarities and differences between Asian and Latino online doctoral students with respect to their experiences?* Moustakas's (1994) transcendental phenomenological approach is descriptive, rooted in psychology and integrates epoche as well as eidetic reduction (Creswell, 2013; van Maten, 2011). It is considered a philosophy as well as a method because it focuses on understanding the meaning, as described and experienced by the participants, to a phenomenon (Creswell, 2013; Rudestam & Newton, 2015). The relevance of phenomenology was that it can be used to focus on the subjective lived experiences of Asian and Latinx doctoral online students (Creswell, 2013; Patton, 2015). Examining the "what" and "how" of the Asian and Latinx online doctoral experiences, using primarily interviews, provided opportunities to holistically combine the data into themes using horizonalization to develop clusters of meaning (Creswell, 2013; Moustakas, 1994). All the study participants experienced the phenomenon of being an Asian or Hispanic online doctoral student which is necessary for transcendental phenomenology (Creswell, 2013; Moustakas, 1994; Patton, 2015). The study contains both textural as well as structural descriptions which were combined into an essential, invariant structure which descriptively depicted the essence of the participants lived experiences (Creswell, 2013; Moustakas, 1994). Materials utilized included a SurveyMonkey software program for a demographic survey, a screening tool to assure the participants met the inclusion criteria, an IRB approved informed consent, e-mail, telephone conferencing and/or Skype, a semi-structured data collection tool, an audio recording device, a professional transcription service, journaling among the research team members, and an electronic Starbucks 10.00 USD gift card for the participant in appreciation for the participant's time and effort. Additionally, NVivo 11 Pro software was used to help organize, code data and identify emerging themes.

Sampling procedures

Nonrandom purposive convenience sampling and snowball techniques were utilized to screen and recruit online Asian and Latinx doctoral students from a large, institution specific, American-based, online university population Research Participant Pool (RPP) and randomly selected U. S. and non-U. S. based online institutions. The criteria for inclusion consisted of self-identifying as being Asian, Latinx or Hispanic, current enrollment in an online doctorate or professional doctorate program, agreement to participate in a confidential audiotaped 90-minute interview to share their experiences as online doctoral students, to complete a confidential demographic survey, and provide permission for the transcription of de-identified audio recordings.

Participant selection

Once approval was obtained from the university Institutional Review Board (IRB) (#01-26-18-5463639), the RPP recruitment process was initiated. However, due to low RPP recruitment, randomly selected online U. S. and non-U. S. based institutions were sent e-mails as

another recruitment strategy, with IRB approval. Interested participants contacted and were screened by one researcher who verified they met the following inclusion criteria:

(1) Self-identification as Asian, Latinx, or Hispanic.
(2) Currently enrolled in U.S. or non-U. S. based online University doctorate programs.
(3) Willing to participate in a 90-minute interview regarding their experiences as an online doctoral student
(4) Willingness to complete a short confidential demographic survey
(5) Willingness to be audio recorded during the interview
(6) Willingness to grant permission to have audio recordings transcribed for analysis with a guarantee all data will be de-identified.

The researcher coordinated a convenient meeting time and date for the interview. A total of seven Asian/Pacific Islanders and 10 Latinx online doctoral student participants were screened, met the inclusion criteria and agreed to participate in the audiotaped interviews which would be transcribed by a professional service. All, except one of the participants, were female and their overall mean age was 38 years. Most of the participants (n = 15) resided in the U. S., one Asian student resided in Canada and a Hispanic student resided in Puerto Rico. Their birth countries included the U.S. (n = 11), Asia (n = 4), and Latin America (n = 1), there was missing data for one participant. The majority (n = 8) were single, widow, separated or divorced, married (n = 5) or cohabitating with a partner (n = 3), data was missing for a participant. Three had children ≤ 18 years of age living at home. Most (n = 14) were employed full-time. Participant major areas of study were behavioral science (30%), business and management (30%), education (30%), and health sciences (10%).

Data collection

One week prior to the interview, the researcher emailed the participant with the call-in number and a reminder of the interview date and time. Personal identifiers collected during the screening process were kept by one researcher in password protected computer files which only the researcher conducting the interviews could access. At the beginning of the interview, the researcher emailed each participant received an electronic 10.00 USD Starbucks gift card in appreciation for their time and effort regardless of whether the participant elected to participate or not or decided to terminate the interview after the start. Once verbal confirmation was obtained to proceed with the interview, the researcher emailed the informed consent form to the participant for review. Once signed, the participant emailed the researcher the signed consent form. The link to the short SurveyMonkey demographic survey was then emailed to the participant. The interviews began with general questions about the participant experiences per transcendental phenomenological study guidelines (Moustakas, 1994). An interview guide was used for follow-up questions and prompts. The use of broad, open-ended interview questions helped ensure that the "what" and "how" were captured during data collection by gathering rich-thick descriptions of the participants experiences (Creswell, 2013; Moustakas, 1994). All questions were asked in the same order which enabled data analysis across cases; however, participants had the latitude to bring up issues during the interview which allowed for a natural and free form of dialogue. Any interesting and naturally or spontaneously occurring comments and potential themes

were followed up with prompts by the interviewer. Most of the interviews were conducted by telephone; two interviews were completed using Skype. During the interview process, establishing rapport, trust, and credibility with the participants and remaining open to discovery enabled a holistic approach to inductive reasoning while bracketing and maintaining objectivity (Creswell, 2013; Moustakas, 1994; Patton, 2015). The average length of the interviews was 45 minutes. All interviews were conducted in English and were audio recorded.

Data analysis

Data analysis followed the procedures used in transcendental phenomenology (Moustakas, 1994) and was based on the research question. Data analysis techniques integrated constant comparison, during the data collection phase (Creswell, 2013; Patton, 2015). A professional transcription service was utilized to transcribe the audio-recorded interviews which were emailed to the sole researcher who conducted them. The de-identified interviews were emailed in verbatim word format to two research team members; one is a Pacific Islander and the other is a Latina of Puerto Rican descent.

The de-identified transcribed interview data was read, reformatted and uploaded into NVivo 11 Plus to organize, code and conduct the thematic analysis. Two researchers, excluding the researcher who conducted the interviews, independently coded and analyzed the data. The interview data was organized into broad, meaningful clusters of how the participants were experiencing the phenomenon for open coding (Creswell, 2013; Moustakas, 1994; Saldaña, 2016). Reflective notes and memos were added; the data was reduced and coded (Rudestam & Newton, 2015). Coding was descriptive, category based and analytical which allowed for the creation of new categories (Rudestam & Newton, 2015). The coded clusters were further evaluated, reduced to a series of significant statements, then grouped into meaning units and themes (Creswell, 2013; Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014; Moustakas, 1994). In this way, distinctive textural and structural themes were derived to capture the essence of the experiences of the participants (Moustakas, 1994). These strategies were consistent with transcendental phenomenological approaches, the research questions, the data collected, and emphasized what was conceptualized about the study (Creswell, 2013; Miles et al., 2014). Thus, both content and thematic analysis procedures were used throughout the data analysis phase (Patton, 2015). Discrepant cases were further analyzed and disclosed (Miles et al., 2014; Patton, 2015).

The two researchers had several telephonic meetings to discuss data analysis, identified themes and attain consensus. Once concordance was established, inter-rater reliability queries using NVivo derived a Percentage score of 99% agreement and Kappa Coefficient of 0.9. Ten themes were identified on the Asian and Latinx online doctoral experiences with some noted similarities and differences. The Asian and Latinx themes included sense of duty, family assistance, not being known by others, flexibility and convenience, coursework, time consuming, professional and personal growth, isolation, cost and self as motivators, and interactions.

Results

Theme 1: sense of duty

When asked about their decision to purse a doctorate, it was found that the Asian and Latinx doctoral students valued collectivism and were very family oriented. Most of the

Asian students had close family members who were educated and "pressured" them into pursuing "honorable" professions. Asian participants felt a sense of duty toward their family. Participant A008 stated,

> My parents always have pushed me so much. And I was never the student that wanted to be a doctor. I was just like, "High school diploma, that's enough." But I think a part of it was my guardians, they were pushing me and wanting to do more just because it was in our culture that "We are all doctors." So, you have to be a doctor as well.

Latinx students also felt a sense of duty to their family and were more likely to be first-generation college students, Participant H019 verbalized:

> I don't really have anyone that I know that has obtained their doctorate. I am a first-time college graduate. I did receive my bachelor's and my master's, and my dad dropped out as a second-grade elementary student, and my mom has an eighth-grade education.

Latinx participants sense of duty included being role models and reducing the social stigma associated with the Hispanic culture. Participant H013 noted:

> Our society has a tendency of saying Latinos, they are either on welfare or they're criminals. Some minority groups are usually doing negative things rather than making some social change or something positive with their life. if I'm going to be a statistic for society, I would rather be on the positive spectrum versus the negative spectrum.

Theme 2: family assistance

When asked about social supports both Asian and Latinx students felt socially and on occasion financially supported by their families. Participant A002 noted, *"Family members being there to guide you through it, to allow you to quit your job and move in with them so you can concentrate on school."* Participant H011 stated, *"I have the support of my husband that's willing to help out with the kids so that I have time to do the writing and research."* Latinx participants were less likely to feel supported by some of their colleagues or friends. Participant H014 stated *"My colleagues in the university where I work, they didn't understand why I was trying to get a PhD when I had a CPA."* And, participant H013 noted that *"Friends, they're not involved in my education. And I don't share with them this information."*

Theme 3: not being known by others

When asked about differences in experiences from a cultural perspective, both Asian and Latinx participants were less likely to perceive culture had an impact on their experiences as online doctoral students. Participant A003 noted *"When I'm online, none of that matters. Nobody knows who's behind that face or who's writing behind there, and you get graded with your work and what you have to provide in that discussion board or that assignment."* Participant H017 stated, *"I am used to seeing a person and saying, "Hey. Yes." But if I don't see the person, I feel weird. Then I'm interacting with people that I don't know that I don't see.*

Theme 4: flexibility and convenience

When questioned about their choice of an online doctoral program both Asian and Latinx participants noted their cultural norms placed a greater value on Brick and Mortar schools than on-line programs. The participants chose online doctoral programs for multiple reasons including their desired major, the mission of the university, flexibility, convenience, and ease of access. Among all the reason's provided, most of the participants discussed how the flexibility and convenience of an online program allowed them to work, manage their family-life and pursue their education. Participant A001 stated, "*Well, definitely the flexibility is amazing. I didn't have to take time off from work.*" Participant H015 noted, "*I like it because I can create my own schedule.*"

Theme 5: coursework

The participants were asked to discuss their initial program expectations. Initial program expectations had mixed reactions. Most of the Asian and Hispanic participants perceived their initial program expectations were either unclear or realistic since they had expected the coursework to be challenging. Participant H019 noted, "*I didn't know what to expect. I just thought it was something that I wasn't going to be able to do initially.*" Participant A002 stated, "*I expected it was going to be hard and to be forced out of my comfort zone.*" One outlier, participant A001, noted that:

> The first few courses, I remember they were foundational courses like Qualitative Research and Quantitative Research. Not the advanced courses. I just remember feeling kind of confused, in a way, because they were courses that I took when I was going to my undergraduate degree. So, I thought, what am I paying this for if I'm taking undergraduate courses?

Theme 6: time consuming

When asked if their expectations had changed, some expressed as they got further into the coursework, it became more time consuming and the classroom interactions were greater than they had initially expected. Participant H017 stated, "*I thought that I had to read, of course, and then submit, and it would be less interactive. But it's more.*" Participant H012 noted, "*it's very time consuming especially since I'm working full-time. So basically, I have to work around my own personal life and my work schedule to make sure that I do what is required of the program.*" Participant H011 noted, "*Time management is definitely something you have to be strong in, in pursuing a doctorate degree*" and participant A002 stated:

> But while you're doing all that, you're also having to manage going to your regular job and managing a household and managing a relationship, whether that's a marriage or a committed relationship. You're stilling having to juggle all those things.

Theme 7: professional and personal growth

When asked about the benefits of being an online doctoral student, the benefits they experienced included personal growth, advancement in their scholarly voice, enhanced writing skills, improved English, enhanced credibility at work, and several were already

applying what they had learned in their work environments. Latinx participants, who were primarily Spanish speaking noted improvements in the English language. Participant H014 stated, *"I have improved my English up to 100%."* Participant H012 stated *"I have seen myself grow in writing a lot. So that is actually helpful for my own personal and professional work."* And, participant A002 noted:

> It really was about personal growth because I know that I mentioned earlier that the isolation was a negative thing, but I think that because you grow so much throughout the program, the isolation was also a positive thing because you learn so much about who you are and what you're capable of and how best to manage your time so that you're able to complete everything that you're supposed to.

Theme 8: isolation

When asked about any challenges they may have experienced being a doctoral student. Challenges voiced by most of the participants included isolation which for some was perceived as a positive Participant A002 noted that *"Because you are so isolated in an online program, there's a level of intimidation that I think comes along with reaching out to your professors."* Participant A002 stated:

> The isolation was a negative thing, but I think that because you grow so much throughout the program, the isolation was also a positive thing because you learn so much about who you are and what you're capable of and how best to manage your time so that you're able to complete everything that you're supposed to complete.

Participant H015 stated, with regards to self-doubt, *"I mean, there's a few times I did want to quit, and I thought maybe I should have never started."*

Theme 9: cost and self as motivators

Participant H015 noted *"I guess the financial aid part of it, the student loans I am pulling out. I mean, there's a few times I did want to quit, and I thought maybe I should have never started."* Participant A004 stated, *"I've invested so much financially into it and so much of my time and dedication and I'm kind of towards the end of it now. So, there's no way that I would not complete it."*

Despite the challenges voiced, most of the participants were at the dissertation phase of the online doctoral program, were highly committed and expressed a high degree of ability and confidence they would complete the program. Participant A003 stated, *"I feel confident that I will finish the doctorate with a nine out of 10."* Several of the participants also expressed how their own self-motivation played a role in the doctoral journey. Participant A002 stated *"I was motivated. I was excited, and I've never quit anything in my life, so I knew that it was possible"* and participant A008 noted *"I just put in a lot of work and it's my motivation to complete it because this is something that I want to do for myself."* Most of them also noted they had a positive experience and would recommend online doctoral programs to others.

Theme 10: interactions

The participants were asked about the resources they found most and least useful as online doctoral students. Both Asian and Latinx online doctoral students expressed they primarily utilized the faculty, their peers, library, technical support, career, advisors, financial, and writing resources including templates and some webinars. They rarely utilized social media resources such as Facebook, Skype or blogs and expressed a desire to have more phone or face-to-face interactions with the faculty and shorter turnaround timeframes for instructor feedback. Participant A001 stated, *"So I think university should look into having more phone interaction with the staff."* The student expectations of the University included continued dissertation support and mentoring their peers. Participant H020 stated,

> I try to be very positive but also very realistic in terms of encouraging the other person. I didn't necessarily have that when I first started. You need a person to help validate, support you and encourage you along the way.

Participant A008 stated,

> So, I would consider my classmates as my resource and a tool because I, at least, try to reach out to one classmate per class just so that I can have someone to connect with, and if I have questions, I can reach out to them.

Discussion

Asian and Latinx online doctoral students encounter similar challenges as face-to-face doctoral students with regards to their experiences. Asian online doctoral students are more likely to feel pressured to pursue advanced degrees due to their family and cultural expectations in face-to-face and online schools. On the other hand, both the Asian and Latinx online doctoral student values of collectivism play a role in their decision to pursue terminal degrees. Latinx participants were more likely to be first generation college graduates and had a sense of commitment to being role models to their children and addressing social stigmas. Whereas most of the Asian participants were from well-educated families and their academic success was a commitment to their family. These findings are consistent with the existing literature (Hsin & Xie, 2014; Ramirez, 2014; Wu et al., 2015).

In contrast, while some of the Asian and Latinx study participants described feeling isolated, both had strong connections to the faculty and their peers which is a new finding. This may be due to the lack of geographical barriers in online environments (Ames et al., 2018). Students who expressed feeling isolated may benefit from faculty who are available to provide either individual or group coaching, or mentoring sessions (DeAngelo, 2016; DeAngelo et al., 2016). Additionally, the Asian and Latinx participants expressed a low degree of self-doubt and a high-degree of confidence in their ability to complete the online doctoral program which contradicts the findings from Acevedo-Polakovich et al. (2014) and Wu et al. (2015).

Asian and Latinx online doctoral students were also more likely to utilize University resources as sources of support which has been supported in the literature (Wu et al., 2015). The library and the writing center were the most important resources for the participants, and they rarely participated in webinars and other media venues hosted by the University. However, they appeared to attribute the use of resources to advance their skills as opposed

to utilizing them to relieve stress (Wu et al., 2015). Another new finding is online doctoral students want more face-to-face interactions with the faculty though all of them had expressed the asynchronous flexibility was one of the most important reasons for seeking an online degree.

Both the Asian and Latinx students expressed having some financial challenges paying for their education. However, the loans and costs of their education acted as a motivator for obtaining their degrees. Future URM doctoral students may benefit from some of the program's universities are instituting to increase access, provide support and apply for MSIs status which will enhance funding opportunities (U. S. Department of the Interior, n.d.).

Limitations

The small sample size of Asian and Latinx participants influences the generalizability of the findings. Accordingly, some demographic data was missing on several of the participants. However, the findings serve as a start for additional studies which could be used to meet the needs of the populations studied and enhance recruitment and retention. Another limitation related to the interviews having been conducted by a faculty member. Nonetheless, the faculty member did not participate in the process of coding or thematic analysis to reduce bias and nor were any of his current or former students eligible to participate in the study. Other important limitations are the gender imbalance (mostly females) and the fact all students were in the dissertation writing phase. More studies with gender balance and students at earlier phases in their academic program are needed.

Recommendations

Several new findings remit the need for recommendations and further research. The lack of geographical barriers in an online doctoral degree program provide opportunities for student forums where Asian students can interact with like students. Also, the Asian and Latinx participants expressed the need for more face-to-face or telephonic interactions with faculty members. Students appreciate the asynchronous coursework and the flexibility it provides but would likely benefit from some synchronous teaching and interactions. A combination of these modalities could provide useful opportunities to meet the needs of online Asian and Latinx doctoral students and enhance their sense of community.

This research included Asian and Latinx participants who were already enrolled in doctoral programs and most were at the point of their dissertation. Further research is needed at earlier stages in their doctoral studies, especially with first-generation Hispanic students to assess their concerns, needs and expectations. Additionally, research is needed on strategies that may act as motivators for Asian and Latinx online doctoral students which may enhance time to completion rates with larger sample sizes.

Acknowledgments

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