

**GRADUATE ASSISTANTSHIPS – WHO GETS THEM, HOW AND WHY:
IMPLICATIONS FOR GRADUATE EDUCATION**

by

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**A thesis submitted in conformity with the requirements
for the degree of Master of Arts
Department of Sociology and Equity Studies in Education
Ontario Institute for Studies in Education of the
University of Toronto**

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ABSTRACT

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M.A. Thesis

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This thesis is an exploratory study on graduate student funding with specific focus on minority graduate students and how they access funding in an Ontario University. Of the nine participants, four had attained graduate assistantships while the other five had not. The Data were collected through in-depth interviews with minority graduate students regarding their funding experiences, the role of graduate assistantships (GAships) and institutional policies and practices. The findings indicated that these minority participants felt they were severely under-represented as graduate assistants, a situation attributed to institutional policies and practices which had affected their ability to secure graduate assistantships. They also felt that although graduate assistantships played an important financial role, it was the emotional and academic roles which were most beneficial in integrating into graduate studies. The study offers insights into the ways in which graduate assistantships may assist in connecting them to peers, faculty members and departments in general.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT	ii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	iii
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION	1
Relevance of Research	1
Research Objectives and Key Research Questions	6
Background	7
Funding Process	12
Policy Implications	15
CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW	19
Representation	20
Socialization	24
Institutional Policies and Practices	25
Federal and Provincial Policies	27
CHAPTER 3: DISCURSIVE FRAMEWORK	31
CHAPTER 4: METHODOLOGY	42
Selecting a Topic	43
Qualitative Research	44
Data Collection	46
Designing the Research Questions	46
Interview Process	47
My Role as a Researcher	49

Listening and Probing	52
Keeping a Journal	53
Ethics	54
Coding	56
Limitations	57
CHAPTER 5: FINDINGS	60
Under-representation	60
Institutional Policies and Practices	69
The Role of Graduate Assistantships	77
CHAPTER 6: DISCUSSION	95
Under-representation	95
Institutional Policies and Practices	100
The Role of Graduate Assistantships	106
CHAPTER 7: CONCLUSION	112
Future Directions	114
Implications for Pedagogy and Graduate Education	116
Recommendations for Reconceptualizing Graduate Student Funding	117
Toward a More Critically Reflective Funding Approach	119
BIBLIOGRAPHY	120
SCHEDULES	127

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this research is to examine the funding challenges visible minority students encounter as they proceed through graduate school. In accordance with the Ontario Equal Opportunity Plan, and for purposes of this research, the term visible minority refers to “persons who identify themselves to be a visible minority because of their race or colour” (Harvey, 1996, p.18). Throughout this thesis, I will be using the terms “visible minority” and “minority” interchangeably to refer to persons belonging to this group. In this thesis, the data are collected through in-depth interviews with minority graduate students about their funding experiences, the role of graduate assistantships (GAships) and institutional policies and practices. Furthermore, GAships are defined as paid academic research assistant positions, regulated under collective bargaining arrangements which apply only to full-time graduate students. Participants’ experiences are discussed within the interconnected context of education funding in Ontario and with particular emphasis on graduate studies.

In this chapter, I discuss the relevance of this study, present the research questions and clarify the research objectives. I will then provide a synopsis of the relevant literature, an outline of the discursive framework and the methodology which informed this study.

Relevance of Research

My reasons for conducting this research project are both personal and academic. In the case of the latter, it is derived from the need to address the lack of research on minority graduate student funding in Canada. Graduate student funding such as assistantships, are important for

training future academics and professionals as they provide an avenue for practical experience and networking opportunities. The value of these positions cannot be underestimated in that they give students the opportunity to position themselves favourably in the labour market (Thomas, 2000). Historically, minorities have encountered discrimination in the Canadian labour market by being segregated into low paying, low status jobs even when they are overly qualified for higher paying positions (Henry, et. al., 1985). Sociologists such as Porter (1965) have long suggested that the labour market in Canada is stratified along ethnic and class lines which is reproduced over time. Porter's work has particular relevance for minority students in graduate school in that they share similar issues with the working class in his analysis. Likewise, recent studies (Simmons and Plaza, 1998; Williams, 1997) highlight the ways in which this stratification continues in the education system through streaming, to produce minoritized students into low status jobs. Minority student funding is therefore important in addressing how different bodies are assessed within graduate faculties and its consequences for their future careers.

The study is also important in addressing an oversight in the academic literature on minority graduate students working as graduate assistants (such as teaching, graduate and research assistantships) which has not been fully explored, and although there has been some research on graduate students, these studies tend to view the experiences of this student population as homogenous, that is, middle class and predominantly white. Recently, there has been a small body of developing studies attempting to address the barriers encountered by minorities in graduate schools; however, these studies tend to focus on socialization processes of graduate departments. Essentially, the role of GAships in students' experience has been largely ignored. One study that deviated from that route was undertaken by Simpson and Smith (1998) who examined the

transition from teaching assistantships to being a faculty member, but the sample consisted of no minority students. Since there was so little documentation of minority graduate students' experiences, I wanted to see if my personal experience regarding funding particularly the attainment of GAships, was anomalous. In undertaking this research, I discovered that I was not alone in that many minority graduate students shared my concerns.

I am aware that the issue of GAships concern every graduate student regardless of racial background; however, funding policies seem to have had a more acute effect on minority graduate students. What was surprising was that every participant in this study expressed great enthusiasm for this research topic. One participant noted, "This is such important work, everyone is talking about it, but no one is doing anything..." about changing the situation.

The participants' responses reinforced my contention that this research endeavour is needed in order to counter the dearth of research on this segment of the graduate student population. Their reaction speaks clearly about the lack of attention granted to minority graduate students within higher education funding. By giving voice to minority graduate students in this project, I hope to alleviate their feelings of being "invisible" in the academic literature and to draw attention to the issue of funding for the graduate student population.

The key research objectives and research questions in this study are relevant to administrators, researchers and policy makers who are concerned about the overwhelming shortage of minority faculty members. Many institutions of higher education have attempted to address this issue by implementing equity policies in their drive to recruit qualified minority faculty members. However, this seems to be a slow process, as policy does not readily translate into reality since there have been no major shifts in the composition of minority faculty across Canada. It is the

contention of this thesis that concerns regarding under representation of minority faculty may have begun with their graduate experiences which then created a more difficult transition from graduate student to faculty member. In that vein, studies on graduate student funding contribute in an important way to our understanding of how graduate education is structured and experienced. Understanding the barriers to graduate education that exist for visible minority students will inform us about minority graduate education and graduate education in general.

On a personal level, this research is meaningful to me as a minority graduate student of Caribbean descent. My decision to attend graduate school was derived from my desire to pursue a career in academia. Although I have thoroughly enjoyed and have been successful throughout my academic studies, my inability to obtain a GAship has marred my experience and created anxiety, as I have doubted my academic ability and questioned my presence within academia. On several occasions, I came close to ending my graduate studies at the Masters level, but my professors and family members encouraged me to continue. Like other students from minority backgrounds who have since spoken to me about their experiences, I began to think of the academic reward process and its impact on my psyche. Inevitably, I began to wonder about “how my research reflects the questions of my own” life (Peterson 1997, p. 210). Was I to blame for my inability to attain a graduate assistantship? Consequently, this thesis is therefore my attempt to reject self-blame and seek out the social processes have negated my full participation in graduate education.

Researchers such as Giroux (1983) stress the need to elaborate resistance theories by looking beyond the standard forms of resistance such as “overt acts of rebellious student behaviour” (Giroux, 1983, p.287). Giroux suggests that some students may “resist” the dominant

ideology of schooling covertly, which allows them to be successful in the system while at the same time having “the power to reject the system on a level that will not make them powerless to protect it in the future” (Giroux, 1983, p.288). Likewise, Margolis and Romero (1999), in studying graduate women of colour in Sociology, found that students adopted various “resistance strategies” whereby,

They challenged sociological research in their own communities. They pointed out contradictions in sociological theory and practice. They adopted paradigms, theories and concepts...to criticize the discipline and to analyze their own situations as women of colour graduate students. They fought within the department for equity in the allocation of resources and within individual seminars for more inclusive literature (p.115).

I would argue that my selection of this research topic is my personal strategy of “resistance” in an attempt to manage graduate school in the face of funding constraints.

Throughout my research project, I have not only been concerned about the way in which this topic would be regarded, but also have questioned the politics of undertaking this research. In academia, certain topics are viewed as more legitimate and more privileged than others as evidenced by what topics are selected for academic study, which studies receive funding and which studies gain scholarly attention (Mazzuca, 2000, p. 4). As stated previously, the studies on minority graduate students funding are not the topics receiving scholarly attention. The obvious question is why not? According to Mazzuca (2000), most minority graduate students are either first generation Canadians, recent immigrants or international students. They have little power in the education system and for most part, have made few inroads into academia. Likewise, most minority graduate students are preoccupied with solving society’s “larger questions,” so they may not feel an urgent need to turn the gaze on themselves.

On the whole, in academia, what is valued or selected as worthwhile topics of study are intricately tied to power and privilege. According to Giroux (1983), “the bodies of knowledge given top priority...not only legitimate the interests and values of the dominant classes, they have the effect of marginalizing other kinds of knowledge, particularly knowledge important to feminists, the working class, and minority groups”(p.268). Although it is my intention to shed light on the funding experiences of minority graduate students, I do not intend to portray them as victims. In fact, their very pursuit of graduate studies under these severe financial constraints indicate otherwise. This study is a legitimate examination of a specific group of students which can make important contributions to the topic of graduate student funding issues, not only for the financial ramifications, but also to illuminate the impediments to the future aspirations of the graduate student population.

Research Objectives and Key Research Questions

The study sets out to investigate the following key research questions and objectives. It accomplishes this in an exploratory manner which will both provide answers as well as allowing for new areas of discovery.

- To explore the prevalent perceptions of graduate assistant representation among minority graduate students.
- To explore issues of access and equity in obtaining graduate assistantships from students' understandings and perceptions.
- To critically examine the institutional processes affecting graduate assistantship application.

My questions are in the following general order: What role does funding play in the

organization of graduate students' academic life? How do they feel about policies/procedures in regard to funding allocation to graduate students? What are the relations of ruling from graduate students' perspectives? What is lost and/or gained in the process of securing funding? How do graduate students gain access to funding resources? How can these findings be used to inform funding allocation in graduate education?

The study proposes the thesis that an urgent, ongoing project for identifying and managing the challenges of funding minority graduate students is necessary. Moreover, examining specific academic relationships can provide a useful forum for exposing the influences of institutional funding policies on this student population.

Background

In situating these research questions, it is necessary to provide the socio-economic and political context which gives rise to this study. The research topic is fundamentally about the nature of graduate student funding at the local and national levels and has arisen specifically out of the graduate assistant strike at the University of Toronto in January 2000. The University was embroiled in bitter negotiations with the Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE) Local 3907 about increases in pay and better working conditions for graduate assistants. During that time, the University was one of several in the province of Ontario experiencing the possibility of class disruption by its graduate and teaching assistants who were threatening strike action. The negotiations were lengthy and culminated in strike action which lasted approximately one month.

In the ensuing weeks, discussions with graduate students revealed that all were concerned about the impact of funding on their studies. For minority students however, the strike took on

added meaning. Many felt that although funding was inextricably tied to their training as future academics and professionals, access to these positions was their primary concern, an issue that is still left unaddressed.

The deregulation of tuition fees was another concern for graduate students during the strike. With deregulation, university administration has the power to charge whatever they deem appropriate for graduate studies. As a result, post secondary institutions have been steadily increasing tuition. However, not all universities have taken this route. For example, the University of British Columbia has chosen to freeze tuition. During the graduate assistant strike, although the CUPE Local 3907 and 3902 attempted to address tuition increases with a call for proactive measures such as freezing fees and tuition rollbacks, they had no success in these areas. This is in contrast to the graduate assistant strike at York University, 2001, where members were successful in securing tuition rollbacks as a result of a bitter struggle with management.

With increased tuition and lack of funding in the form of graduate and teaching assistantships, many visible minority (and majority) students are forced either to drop out of graduate school, or to prolong the completion date for their studies. Since 1996, the funding level for graduate assistants has remained at 181, despite the fact that over six hundred graduate students have applied each year for these positions. The result is the gross underemployment of minority graduate and teaching assistants at the University. One of the reasons forwarded by the University for this underemployment is its inability to afford increases in the level of funding levels for graduate assistants despite the fact that it is one of the richest universities in North America. This raises the inevitable question: What is the value placed on graduate student training by the University of Toronto? I wish to stress to the reader that it is not my intention to examine the

mechanics of the strike in this thesis, rather, my intention is to tease out only how these issues were viewed or taken up by visible minority graduate students.

The issue of graduate student funding is not new to either Canadian universities or visible minorities studying within these institutions, but in the past four to five years, it has become a hotly debated topic at most universities in Southern Ontario. Historically, graduate assistantships (GAships) have been utilized by universities and students as a means of financial resource and as an avenue for apprenticeship in becoming a teacher and researcher. Typically, a student works under the supervision of a faculty member in order to be tracked toward an academic or professional career. At the University of Toronto, the use of GAship as a means of apprenticeship has a history as long as the university itself. These positions were largely informal until they were unionized in the early 1970s.

The Canadian Union of Education Workers (CUEW Local 7) began in 1973 as the Graduate Assistants Association at Victoria College, University of Toronto. In 1994, it merged with the Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE) Local 3907 through a secret ballot of the members, and the CUEW Local 7 was subsequently certified as the CUPE Local 3907. The Canadian Union of Public Employees retained many of the CUEW practices and procedures which evolved as the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (OISE) graduate assistants. The employees who organized the merger felt that their position was being eroded by inflation and budget cuts and felt that a more democratic way was needed to ensure that graduate assistants were not arbitrarily exploited or disposed of. It was one method whereby graduate assistants could take an active role in defining their working lives (CUPE Local 3907 Members Manual, 1999-2000).

What is especially noticeable about the unionization of graduate assistants is that the

process was initiated during an era of government fiscal restraints. The unionization of professors and other academic workers in Canadian universities emerged as a national pattern in the early 1970s. By early 1980s, over 50 per cent of the Canadian professorate belonged to certified bargaining units. It is apparent that the unionization of academic workers was a response to economic contraction, whereby unions were needed to confront administrations which were implementors of government policies (Newson and Buchbinder, 1988).

On the national level, with increasing cutbacks in federal and provincial government spending, universities have had to prioritize their allocation of funds. According to Fleras (2001), "Government grants to colleges and universities dropped 14.1 percent between 1993 and 1997, with the result that government revenues now make up only 57.7 percent of total revenues, down from 66.2 percent in 1993. Such declines not only erode the effectiveness of higher education in Canada, but also undermine the competitive advantages of Canada in a global and research-based world. Provincial variations are evident: Ontario ranked in the bottom third of provinces according to Statistics Canada, ... with spending of \$275 per capita (a drop from \$350 in 1992/93), compared to Quebec's \$440 per capita " (p.245).

Typically, the faculties and departments that are heavily funded are those which are driven by market forces. According to Dei and Karumanchery (1999), the marketization of education in Ontario has had harmful consequences for issues of equity and access to education. "Through the rhetoric of cost-effectiveness and bureaucratic efficiency, the "official" agenda for educational change shifts focus away from equity considerations in schooling to those of capital, market forces, and big business" (Dei and Karumanchery, 1999, p.111). Behind this rhetoric there is a noticeable silence surrounding the harmful effects of such policies on both Blacks and the white working

class. As a result, many minority students are finding it difficult to pursue graduate school with such high costs and so little funding

The market model assumes, conveniently, that we are all starting out on a level playing field. In this model everyone is presumed to be equal, with equal access to opportunities for job training. However, this is not the case for those in social science and humanities programs where many graduate students do not necessarily receive “practical” training as graduate or teaching assistants. Moreover, this also varies with race, class and gender differences. As Apple (1991), notes that the racialized patterns of income inequality of employment and unemployment ... in nations like the U.S.A..., make a mockery of any claim to a level playing field and one should not be surprised that in times of fiscal and ideological crises, multiple forms of triage can be found in many” (p.11) institutions.

According to Nelsen (1997), “today, the demands for education cuts as well as placing emphasis on training students for the current job market are being made by government, industry and the managerial elites” (p.45). Although Nelsen was speaking in the Canadian context, this policy heralds a trend in global education policy which links education to private industry. The United States, Britain and Australia among others have adopted market policies whereby “students foot the bill for re-vamped post secondary system that links funding to job-related programs” (Fleras, 2001, p. 246). Despite this emphasis on training, visible minority graduate students are experiencing what they call a “crisis in funding” and are worried about their ability to gain adequate practical experience. Their concerns are reflected in how they view the selection process in securing graduate assistantships.

The Funding Process

The selection of graduate students is a long process in that it necessitates the completion of a series of steps. Although the formality differs by institution, for this discussion, I have selected the process utilized at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (OISE). First, an application form must be submitted before a specific deadline. Although the filling out of the application form appears to be quite simple there is a series of criteria that the applicant must fulfill such as, publication, experience, qualification and extra curricular activities. A selection committee is actively involved in sorting out the most qualified candidate who can provide the required functions for the department. In order to make the process democratic, the committee consists of faculty, staff and union representatives. The applicants are selected through a weighted system whereby points are allotted to each criterion on the application form.

In order to select the best of the applicants, each candidate is ranked according to the following criteria:

- 50 per cent for ability to assist in research and, or field development which is allotted a maximum of 50 points.
- 25 per cent for departmental recruitment needs are weighted at 25 percent which is allotted 25 points.
- 25 per cent for seniority in the bargaining unit which is allotted a maximum of 25 points.

Together, these criteria total 100 points. The candidates with the highest scores are selected as graduate assistants.

Even though this process seems not only equitable but comprehensive, according to one former committee member, the way in which points are allotted can make a significant difference

in terms of outcomes. He remarked that there were enormous differences among committee members in this process and in the final decision-making stage, the selection process can become quite “archaic.” For instance, OISE administration prefers to utilize the qualification criteria for ranking applicants while the union representative prefers seniority. The need for qualification reflects the new debate on merit in education funding as it is seen as neutral, objective and transparent. The final selection is a compromise between seniority and qualification (Personal Communication, January 2000).

This account is telling in that the juggling between committee members is not visible to applicants, as the process appears to be rational and objective. However, the ranking criteria appears to favour seniority and departmental needs. So, even when applicants have excellent experience and research skills (which are only allotted 15 points), they may not be sufficient for the departmental agenda. For instance, since ability to conduct research is allotted 20 points, students’ potential rather than their experience is deemed as more important, or a student with a high grade point average is given more credence than one with average scores. In this scenario, merit is one of the built in criteria for determining students’ potential. What is most apparent is that the process favours Ph.D. candidates, as they have seniority and are also more likely to have greater publishing experience which is highly valued in academia. The downside to this process is that Masters students may choose to study elsewhere in order to take advantage of better funding opportunities. Another problem is the low ratio of jobs to applicants and seniority of union members. Since union membership dictates automatic security for GAships in ensuing years, it means that there is little movement between jobs, given the limited number of positions available. The end result is greater financial hardship for minority graduate students.

The institutional process of graduate funding is determined at the federal level, whereby each year the federal government allocates money to the provinces in the form of transfer payments to administer education budgets. The Province then allocates funds to each university, whose administrators in turn decide how these resources will be distributed among faculties. What is interesting is the disparity in the levels of funding to each department or faculty. For instance, in comparing funding levels within the University of Toronto, it is apparent that the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (OISE) receives the lowest level of funding in the province (Report on the Task Force on Graduate Student Financial Support, 2000). This has had tremendous impact on graduate students, especially minorities since the OISE faculty has the highest number of minority students in its population (Report of the Task Force of on Graduate Student Financial Support, 2000).

Another problem with the government formula is that universities are allocated money per student in each department, and as a result some departments, such as OISE, might be driven to recruit as many students as possible in order to secure optimal funds from the provincial government. The downside to this is that there will subsequently be a larger proportion of students who have no GAships; as mentioned earlier, only 181 of these positions are available. The gap between supply and demand is creating a funding crisis for many minority graduate students who believe that a graduate assistantship is instrumental to their career paths because it incorporates theory with practice, thereby enhancing their ability to compete in the academic labour market. How institutions will deal with these funding problems, or respond to ongoing student concerns, remain to be seen.

Policy Implications

There is no disputing that funding is instrumental in training graduate students although debates may persist in regard to the most effective and efficient forms it should take. Likewise, at every level in the education system, this issue has been downplayed, as government blames the bad economy for insufficient funding for higher education, while universities, in turn, blame the government for under-funding its faculties. Hence, students are left to incur more personal debt toward their education. There is therefore conflict in the rhetoric between encouraging advanced learning in order to compete in the global economy, and the fact that students are given minimal institutional support to do so. Canadian graduate students receive much less funding when compared to their United States counterparts (Report of the Task Force on Graduate Student Financial Support, 2000). This funding varies even within Canada, because some universities such as Alberta and York, provide assistantships upon acceptance into graduate programs. Minority students make up an even smaller proportion of these funding allocations.

It can be said that higher education institutions follow patterns of the larger society, that is to say, they reflect its patterns of inequality. For example, the segregation of visible minorities in low paying jobs remained consistent overtime, and minorities continue to earn considerably less income in comparison to whites of comparable education (Simmons and Plaza, 1998). Minority funding is therefore instrumental in highlighting the ways in which the university, through its funding protocol perpetuates this inequality by “fostering a system of winners and losers” (Haley, 1987). We live in a society that is stratified along race, class, ethnic and gender lines, and as such, groups are rewarded according to their differences. Hence, concerns over graduate student funding are directly linked to minority students’ employability in the national and international labour

market.

The results of this study suggest that policy makers and administrators should make provisions for improving funding allocation to minority student populations (from Chapter 7). While many universities have emergency bursaries, etc. to help alleviate financial burdens, minority students see this as asking for “handouts.” Minority graduate students are fully aware that the only way in which they can distinguish themselves from majority students in the highly competitive academic labour market, is through the attainment of assistantships for the reasons already alluded to. It would be more fruitful to establish opportunities through training (practicum), mentoring, and volunteer programs whereby minority graduate students would be given either credit or recognition for their participation. This would not only enhance connection to their departments but would also increase students’ general sense of well being and accomplishment. Certainly students learn best when they have institutional support, but institutions are highly selective in allocating this support. If the goal of the academy is to create diverse student and faculty representation, then training minority students for tomorrow’s professoriates becomes even more crucial in order to prevent the academic pipeline for minority professionals from drying up.

This chapter has provided an introduction to the study, comprising the political context, debates and positions to be taken when looking more closely at this issue. The following chapters will seek to amplify this discussion for graduate education.

Chapter Two is a survey of the relevant literature on funding and subsequently draws particular focus on Canada. The focus here is upon the academic discourse of research, the institutional locations of minority graduate students, and how they are impacted by their unique

status as minorities.

Chapter Three provides the conceptual approach through a discursive framework by elaborating on the underlying philosophy, aims and perspectives of this thesis. The purpose of this chapter therefore is to ground this study's theoretical underpinnings through anti-racist, feminist standpoint and critical theories. These theories share commonalities in that they strive to make links between students' experiences and the interlocking structures of race, ethnicity, class and gender.

Chapter Four shifts the focus to methodology that informs this study and lays the groundwork for further analysis. The methodology employed was in depth interviews with minority graduate students. The sample was further divided between graduate and non-graduate assistants for comparative purposes. The chapter outlines the research process of selecting the topic, designing the research questions and a discussion on ethics. An important part of this chapter is a reflective analysis of the research process.

Chapter Five discusses the research findings by focussing on three main themes emerging from the data, i.e., under-representation, institutional policy and practices and the purpose of graduate assistantship. It is here that students seriously discuss their career aspirations, expectations from graduate school and how they are negotiating graduate school in keeping with their aspirations, as well as how funding or a lack of it affects their ability to make transitions into the academic world.

Chapter Six links the research results with the relevant literature. It reviews the key research questions and asks how they are articulated within the system. It highlights connections and gaps in the research on graduate student funding.

Finally, chapter Seven attempts to offer alternative views from minority students on how they can address the issues around funding. The chapter also offers future directions, implications of the study and recommendations for change.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

In reviewing the literature, I have tried to find research material that would critically analyze or discuss minority graduate students' representation as graduate assistants and on graduate student funding in general. I discovered that there is a dearth of literature on the topic. The small body of literature focus almost exclusively on student loans (Finnie and Schwartz, 1997; Cronnin and Simmons, 1987) and student aid (McPherson and Schapiro, 1998). It was even more problematic to discover the distinct lack of analysis on race, class and gender identity in the literature on higher education funding (Apple, 1999; Ball, 1993). This sentiment is echoed by Mazzuca (2000) in her studies on Italian graduate students in Canada, Singh (1990) in the British context and Friedman (1987) in the American context. These authors note that there are an increasing number of studies on minorities in the elementary and secondary school system, however, when it comes to post-secondary education, they are almost nonexistent.

The existing literature tends to focus on socialization of graduate students (Turner and Thompson, 1998), minority graduate faculty (Blackwell, 1988 and 1989; Brazziel, 1988) and access programs (Dei and Calliste, 2000) for minorities in under-graduate education. There is a small body (Kelley and Slaughter, 1991; Skutnabb-Kangas and Cummins, 1988) of work in the international comparative field but these are in the minority. However, all is not lost, as Baird (1990) notes that in the last decade, researchers are including more minority groups in their studies of graduate students. I have used these works to inform my work and to build on the existing literature. The discussion in this section will address areas in the literature which focus on issues of gender, race, ethnicity and social class that pertain to graduate students. The discussion is

restricted to three main themes which are most suitable to understand the research question. They are representation, socialization and institutional policies and practices.

Representation

The literature implied that the attainment of graduate assistantship or lack thereof, among visible minority students, is influenced by various factors such as the criteria for selecting recipients (Departmental Guidelines, 2001), the streaming of students according to departments (Haley, 1989), and social networks (DeFour and Hirsch, 1990). These factors were highly influential in the socialization of graduate students. Doctoral programs typically involve a lengthy period of adult socialization in cognitive skills, appropriate attitudes toward research and scholarship, and field specific values (Turner and Thompson, 1993, p.357). Historically, the socialization of graduate students has been controlled by the prevailing culture which until recently, has been overwhelmingly white and almost exclusively male. A successful socialization process is critical in embarking on a graduate career. Typically, it means that those who have been most successfully acculturated fit the status quo most comfortably (Turner and Thompson, 1993, p.357). Since visible minorities come to academia with traditions very different from the majority culture, they tend to experience more difficulties fitting into that culture.

In fact, their values may actually conflict with those of white academic culture (hooks, 1989; Collins, 1991). The implication for visible minority graduate students is that they are less likely to hold such positions given their research interests. However, in taking this line of reasoning, are we assuming that there is something wrong with minority culture which must be fixed or remedied? If the idea of a liberal education is to give everyone equal opportunity for self

expression, then educational institutions should be able to accommodate graduates from a wide variety of socio-cultural backgrounds.

In Canada, visible minority students are increasingly taking up the challenge to attend graduate school. According to a Statscan (1998) report,

In Canada, visible minorities have a fair representation in universities. Indeed, visible minorities form 10 percent of the student population at the undergrad level, 13 per cent at the masters level and approximately 10 per cent at the doctorate level. This is compared to their approximately 11 per cent representation in the general population.

The fact that these bodies are not represented in the attainment of graduate assistantships speaks to the degree to which minority students are being under-represented. One of the difficulties of making statistical estimates is that most graduate faculties in Canada do not collect data on ethnicity and race so it becomes difficult to make accurate representation in and across departments. However, based on a union survey of graduate assistants, minority students make up about 23 percent of the graduate assistantship population in that faculty.

The notion of identity is central to the way in which one is socialized as a graduate student. Although claiming one's identity is a form of power, minorities are penalized for doing so (Dei, 1996b). According to hooks (1989), "many of us have found that to succeed at the very education we have been encouraged to seek, would be most easily accomplished if we separated ourselves from the experience of black folk, the underprivileged experience of the black underclass that was grounding our reality. This ambivalent stance toward education has had a tremendous impact on my psyche" (p.99). hooks' description tells of the "bifurcated consciousness" experienced of minority students as they navigate their way between two vastly different worlds. This ultimately has psychic consequences for minority students as they seek to affirm their racial and other

identities while at the same time attempting to fit into the academic culture. However, many students in this study have actively sought to maintain their ethnic identity as well as seeking to acquire an academic identity through social networks. Most participants actively pursued research that focused on minority issues in an attempt to understand their situation. Others have actively sought out professors, minority and majority, who support their research interests in other departments. It is their own means of resisting the totalizing aspect of graduate studies.

In academia, it seems that the only way to gain credibility is to acquire the language and methods of the dominant. This is reflected in the fact that students whose research concentrates on minority issues are generally less valued. Interestingly, many believed that it is not necessarily the subject matter that is less valued, more importantly, it is the body which delivers the subject matter under examination. For example, participants gave instances of research studies which focused on minority or Southern issues but a minority or Southern scholar (from developing world) is not employed on these projects. As one participant relates, "Just look at who gets to work as a teaching assistant or graduate assistant in either department (X) or department (Y) and you can tell who are the beneficiaries" (Interview 1 page 2). This source of these chilly relations is important in how resources are distributed across departments and in defining who are appointed as academics. Turner and Thompson (1993) suggest a subtle but critical source of this marginalization is a professional environment that fails to support women and minority students. They note that minority students were least likely to work collaboratively with a professor or to present their work at conferences (p.356).

Additionally, while minority and majority women reported gender discrimination, minority women were most likely to report the feeling of isolation. What is surprising is that few minorities

report racial discrimination. It is possible that the kind of racism these students encounter is much more subtle, given the very fact that they are denied access to information networks (Turner and Thompson, 1993, p.356). According to Moyer et al (1999), a notable barrier for minority graduate students is symbolic racism whereby overt forms of prejudice are condemned while access to sources of support, information, and other resources are informally denied. Similarly, female graduate students have experienced subtle forms of sexism such as stereotyping and environments unfriendly to women. Does racial discrimination add significantly to the gender barrier that minorities are already experiencing? To answer this question, using a single axis approach (such as gender) does not go deep enough to allow for a complex interrogation of how systems of oppression are interlocked. To understand interlocking systems of oppression requires one to address how race, class, gender and sexual orientation are interdependent factors which are dependent upon historical and contextual relationships (Dei, 1999, pp. 608-609).

The increasing concern about the severe under-representation of minority scholars in academia (Kulis et al., 2000; Mickelson and Oliver, 1996; Turner et al., 1999) has as much to do with socialization in the discipline as it has to do with the funnel effect, whereby with each step in an academic career, from high school graduation to the promotion to a full professor, there are progressive decreases in the representation of minority scholars. Several reasons have been forwarded for this deficit, such as the public schools' failure to address the needs of minority children, inhospitable college campuses and a retreat from recruiting minority students for graduate programs (Blackwell, 1988; Brazziel, 1988; Comer and Haynes, 1991). These concerns are echoed in Canada, to a lesser extent, than in the United States where the recent abandonment of affirmative action in graduate admission and reduction in financial aid as the costs of graduate

education escalates may have influenced the low numbers of minority students pursuing doctorate studies.

Socialization

For many social researchers, socialization practices are inherently tied into apprenticeship and mentoring. In a university setting, the relationship typically consists of an accomplished faculty member and a graduate student. Winkler (1983) concludes that apprenticeship experiences help to pave the way to acceptance as faculty members. Clark and Corcoran (1986) provide evidence that successful, tenured women faculty had the opportunity for socialization experiences with advisors and colleagues. Whitt (1991) found that administrators expected new faculty to bring with them much of what they needed to know about being faculty members. They were expected to have prior socialization in research and teaching; appropriate values, expectations, and work habits; a research orientation; and a program of research already in progress (p.91). Despite the well-documented success of many socialization experiences, minority graduate students continue to experience isolation, a lack of faculty mentoring experiences, and a lack of collegiality with other doctoral students despite the fact that they may excel in their course work.

It is most interesting that visible minority students who had mentors initiated the process themselves. Turner and Thompson (1993) found that majority women had more opportunities than women of colour for such apprenticeship opportunities as research and teaching assistantships, coauthoring papers with a faculty member, making presentations at professional conferences, and being introduced by faculty to a network of influential academics who could provide support for students seeking entry level jobs (p.366). It appears that race, gender and class are important

factors which cannot be easily denied. James Blackwell (1989) succinctly underscores this point when he comments:

Those who teach are often guilty of subconscious (though sometimes conscious and deliberate) efforts to reproduce themselves through students they come to respect, admire, and hope to mentor. As a result, mentors tend to select as proteges persons who are the same gender and who share with themselves a number of social and cultural attributes or background characteristics such as race, ethnicity, and social class. Because minorities are presently under represented in faculty positions, such practices inevitably result in the under selection of minorities as protegees (p.11).

While I agree with the author, I do not believe that only minority faculty can mentor minority graduates. I believe that while a minority faculty member might be better able to identify with this student in important ways, mentoring should be every faculty member's responsibility irrespective of minority background.

Institutional Policies and Practices

Successful socialization and the provision of mentorship cannot exist without active institutional policies that foster the development of minority students. Institutional structures are necessary for meaningful graduate experience and transition. Hill (1991) notes that marginalization is perpetuated if new voices are added while the priorities and core of the organization remain unchanged (p.44). In their studies on the career development of tutorial assistants (TAs), Smith and Simpson (1998) conclude that the success of graduate students in securing graduate assistantships is dependent on disciplinary forces combined with institutional policies that provide graduate students with teaching opportunities. This entails creating opportunities for workshops, faculty mentorship and individual consultation with senior faculty (p.91).

According to Smith and Simpson (1998), institutions of higher education have an enormous role to play in how their graduates make their transition from students to faculty members. Smith and Simpson (1998) conclude that institutional policy such as the provision of mentorships and teaching assistantships have positive influences on the attainment of faculty positions once students have graduated. Since scholarship in higher education emphasizes research as well as the pedagogy of the discipline, graduate programs which provide training and experience in discipline-based pedagogy increase students chances for successful recruitment into faculty positions (p.91). It stands to reason that if minority graduate students are not receiving adequate training then they would be streamed out of prestigious jobs in academia. The consequence is that these students may be forced to pursue careers outside of academia, thus decreasing the pipeline for minority faculties. However, there is little in the literature to document the impact that these policies and programs have on the career paths of graduate assistants who are visible minorities.

The role of institutional policies is especially important in order to increase access and diversity of faculty on campuses. Blackwell (1989) believes that because black faculty play a crucial role in the recruitment and retention of black students, their severe under representation among faculties has widespread implications at most post secondary institutions. However, concerns about diversity are only bland talk if no concrete policies are implemented to reflect a diverse population. The implication for minority graduate students is that they will continue to experience high personal financial responsibility for their education because it fits well with the university's corporate style of ruling and with the government's policy of educational deregulation.

Federal and Provincial Policies

One missing element in this issue is the role that government policies play in financing post-secondary education. In Canada, there has been a shift in the way education is being financed from a grant to a loan-based system, whereby students bear the personal financial responsibility for their education (Hardy 1996; Newson and Balbinder, 1988; Slaughter and Leslie, 1996). This policy is fallout from the late 1970s when rising inflation and declining productivity signaled the beginning of an economic crisis in Canada (Newson and Buchbinder, 1991, p.14). The proportion of government expenditure for education fell from 22.2 percent in 1970 to 16.7 percent in 1975 while the university's share of the education budget declined from 24.7 percent in 1967-68 to 19.5 percent in 1977-78. In the 1980s, universities were forced to juggle increases in student enrolments with decreases in government support. Accordingly, the federal government began to implement restrictions on transfer payments (Hardy, 1996, p.22).

At the provincial level, even when grants were increased, they did not keep pace with inflation or enrolment increases. All provinces except Prince Edward Island saw a reduction in the grant per student between 1976-77 and 1986-87, ranging between 14 and 28 percent (Hardy, p.22). These pressures are a continuation of funding policies from the 1980s. Recently, the deregulation of tuition fees has further exacerbated the problem, as the various levels of government seek to reduce funds to universities. At present, most provinces in Canada have either frozen tuition increases or have fees rolled back fees in an attempt to address the financial stresses among post secondary students.

This pattern of funding is not unique to Canada. According to Slaughter and Lesley (1997), the United Kingdom, Australia and the United States have also implemented policies that mean

less government support to university students. Indeed, the United States has been the forerunner in this area. United States funding trends are directly linked to changes brought about in the early 1970s by federal agencies and national policy groups, including the committee for Economic Development and the Carnegie Foundation for the advancement of Teaching. The OMEGA Documents, developed by the Nixon administration, shifted government support for higher education from institutions to students (Slaughter and Leslie, 1997, p. 72). It was not incidental that many of the U.S. officials who led the policy change were graduates and benefactors of elite private institutions. Many Western countries such as Britain and Australia have implemented policies that have severely restricted the availability of public funds to higher education (Slaughter and Leslie, 1997, p.72).

Under-funding has enormous consequences for post-secondary institutions. First, contraction of government funding results in an uneven distribution of funds across faculties. Typically, faculties such as business management, law, the physical and natural sciences have not experienced the same level of financial hardship as their counterparts in the arts and sciences and humanities. Second, the vision of the university as an arena for the pursuit of liberal education is no longer seen as efficient. The university is now seen as an effective tool in the creation of national economic prosperity (Slaughter and Leslie, 1997, p.64). Educational programs must now be closely tied to the private sector and professors and staff is required to compete for scarce resources in funding research projects. This policy heralds a new era that can be characterized as marketization whereby faculties compete for monies, external grants or contracts, endowment funds, university partnerships and increased student tuition (Slaughter and Leslie, 1997, p.11). Third, an increase in the unionization of academic workers as professors and staff conflict with

management to control autonomy over work. What is especially notable about the unionization of academic workers is that the process was initiated during an era of government fiscal restraints.

The unionization of professors and other academic workers in Canadian universities emerged as a national pattern in the early 1970s. By early 1980s, more than 50 per cent of the Canadian professorate belonged to certified bargaining units. The experience of university unionization in the United States followed similar patterns. According to Penner (1978-79), a former president of the Canadian Association of University Teachers (CAUT):

Collective bargaining seems to have appeared in Canadian universities for the same reasons as in the United States, namely, the poor academic job market, the erosion of rights and perquisites lacking legal protections, budgetary cutbacks, the increase in size and remoteness of university administrations, and the growth of unionism in the public sector (p.71).

It is apparent that the unionization of academic workers did not stem from any particular ideological standpoint in order to make the university a source of social transformation, rather it was a response to economic contraction. Unions were needed to confront administrations who were agents or implementors of government policies (Newson and Buchbinder, 1988, p.88).

We hear about the effects of government funding on management's ability to make competent decisions in the face of funding cuts. However, we do not hear about the overall effect of these policies from the perspective of students some of whom, on a micro-level the policies will ultimately affect, especially those who differ by race, class, gender and sexuality. The apparent void raises the question that requires an answer: How does government funding policy affect minority graduate students? Since minority graduate students voices are rarely heard in this debate, this thesis is an attempt to understand how the above-mentioned factors influence students' perceptions regarding the representation of minority graduate assistants. These factors are

important in addressing issues of not only access to higher education funding, but also to increasing diversity in academia.

CHAPTER THREE: DISCURSIVE FRAMEWORK

The literature review points to a lack of critical race, gender and class analysis, thereby requiring the need for a counter discursive framework. An integrative anti-racist, standpoint feminist and critical theories are conceptualized to reflect the research objectives, and to illustrate and develop the strongest explanatory model in this discussion on minority student funding. These theories share several common characteristics in that they make connections between marginalized experiences and the interlocking structures of race, ethnicity, class, gender and sexuality. The eclectic discursive framework is activist in that it is geared toward the development of “multi-centred politics” for social change that builds alliances and recaptures the concept of solidarity (Dei and Calliste, 2000, p.104). Finally, these theories are selected because they are not meta-theories and can be used as a basis for social action by their insistence on historical specificity and local context.

Although there are many convergences between these theories, they also have several points of divergence. Some theorists such as Maher (1987), posit that there is a distinction between anti-racist, critical and feminist frameworks with the critical ones emphasizing a more collective analysis of social oppression, and the feminist ones focussing on personal feeling and experiences. While there is some truth to this postulation, I prefer to see these theories as liberatory pedagogies which start from the experiences of marginalized groups and aim at developing a collective, integrative analysis of oppressions. Where integrative anti-racist theorists examine interlocking oppressions, feminist theorists focus on gender analysis while critical theorists analyze power and destabilizing the status quo. One of the reasons for the emergence of

an integrative analysis is to address the intersection of oppressions (race, gender, class, religion and sexuality) which is sometimes lacking in critical and feminist analysis. In this sense, an integrative anti-racist theory incorporates many theoretical perspectives and builds on critical race, class and gender studies to provide an integrative understanding of oppression as well as individual and collective resistance (Dei and Calliste, 2000, p. 144).

An integrative anti-racist framework incorporates critical and standpoint feminist theory to provide an understanding of the interlocking ways in which one's identity (gender, class, race, ethnicity, sexuality, religion and language) is constructed and experienced, and also how various institutional structures respond to these multiple identities in their policies and practices. According to Dei (1996a), an integrative discursive framework explicates how institutions use these multiple identities to grant privileges and impose penalties on different members of society. In my research, I am interested in exploring how issues of race, class, ethnicity and sex may be implicated in minority students' perceptions of representation as graduate assistants. Likewise, a study of the state's policies, academic practices and students' experiences are necessary to arrive at a fuller understanding of this issue (Dei, 1996a, p.63). In utilizing an integrative theory of anti-racism, I will be drawing on the actual experiences of graduate students as a basis of my intellectual inquiry.

Before we can theorize how institutional structures accommodate and respond to issues of diversity in their policies and practices, we must first critically assess the ways in which various forms of knowledge are produced and ultimately become valued in the societal context. One way of doing this is to focus on the various ways in which institutional policies facilitate not only the recruitment of graduate assistants, but also the culture of faculty mentoring. In this way, it can

capture how dominant groups in pluralistic societies succeed in imposing their ways of knowing and social reality on subordinate groups, sometimes resulting in the marginalization or silencing of the latter's knowledge, experiences and practices. The literature implies that faculty members prefer to employ students who reflect their own social background. In that sense, an integrative framework provides an understanding of how social oppression and privilege have been historically constituted through individual actions and institutional policies. It identifies how forms of social marginality and structured dominance intersect and shift with changing conditions of society (Dei, 1996a, p.56). Thus, while policies may encourage graduate assistant employment, covert institutional practices may exclude minorities from gaining access to these positions. This study does not argue whether racism exists in the education system, rather it acts on the recognition that racism is in fact a part of the lives of visible minority students. Likewise, I am not arguing that policies are intentionally racist; however, it is important to realize that intent is not required to produce racist effects.

An integrative approach to understanding social oppression closely examines the politics of identity and difference (Dei, 1996a, p.58). In such an approach, social identities are constructed beyond notions of race, class, gender, language, sexuality and culture to the actual practices engaged in by people in the course of daily interactions. "On the one hand, identity construction is a point of power and, therefore, difference. To claim difference is to have the power to claim one's difference as identity" (Dei, 1996a, p.59). However, claiming one's identity involves much more than asking whom am I? It involves a question of political practice such as asking: what must be done? There is therefore a politics of identity that comes with certain consequences. For instance, the minority graduate students who focus on non-traditional issues such as holistic

medicine may find that they may not be granted a research assistantship because their work may not appear to be important to the department. As one participant in this study remarked, “Even when there are projects focussing on minority issues, it is not these students who are granted GAships.” The use of identity in this study helps in understanding how students’ definition of themselves fit into the departmental culture. In this sense, I hope to uncover how issues of race, culture, gender and class may be implicated in minority students’ ways of knowing through their interaction with dominant academic culture. Identity is then treated as multiple, shifting, contradictory and contextually dependent (Dei, 1996a, p.59).

In using an integrative analysis, I am adopting a monolithic portrayal of social diversity in order to refrain from essentialism. An integrative approach captures the myriad ways in which multiple forms of oppression are constituted in and through each other in people’s lives by treating each oppressive force as if it were a dependent element acting together and simultaneously with other oppressive forces. Therefore, social constructs such race, gender, sex, religion, class and language will not be treated as single variables but as interdependent variables (Dei, 1996a, p.56). The idea is to interrogate the intersecting identities together rather than addressing them separately. For instance, the research objective which entails exploring issues of access and equity in obtaining graduate assistantships will not treat gender, sex, class or language as separate categories since these factors interconnect at the same time and are difficult to determine which is most salient to the matter at hand.

Standpoint feminism, like anti-racism and critical theory, questions the role of the state and societal institutions in producing and reproducing inequalities with specific emphasis on gender. I rely on the work of feminist standpoint theorists such as bell hooks, Dorothy Smith and

Sandra Harding to offer an account of experiences that have been devalued or ignored as the source of objectivity-maximizing questions. Theorists working within standpoint epistemology view this knowledge as socially situated which means, starting from the marginalized lives, and then taking “everyday life as problematic”(Smith, 1987, p.87). In utilizing feminist epistemology, the notion of “standpoint” is of particular relevance in examining minority students’ experiences of seeking and obtaining graduate assistantships since it refutes the singular notion of a minority subject and facilitates an understanding of minorities as having multiple identities and subject positions. It acknowledges that as an employer, the university produces, reproduces and utilizes work relations and roles structured by race, class and gender. Thus, as a microcosm of the wider society, the university plays an important role in producing and reproducing segments of a stratified labour force and the structure of labour based on race, gender and class positions (Dei and Calliste, 2000, p.145).

In starting from the experiences of minority students, standpoint epistemology offers a lens through which their positions can be explored. Therefore, it is one means of truly examining and/or arriving at the social relations of the funding process and how it influences their employment as graduate assistants. Because standpoint theory focuses on what happens when marginalized peoples begin to gain public voice, it is most appropriate to lending itself to the issue at hand. In that sense, the experiences of minority students can provide starting points for research and scholarship (Harding, 1992, p.443). According to Harding, because these experiences and lives have been devalued or ignored as a source of objectivity maximizing questions, it is precisely why it is important to begin at this starting point (Harding, 1992, p.443).

Standpoint epistemology is quite relevant to this thesis as it sets out the relationship between knowledge and politics at the centre of its account in the sense that it tries to provide causal accounts to explain the effects of different kinds of politics on standpoint knowledge (Harding, 1992, p.444). Thus, the standpoint claims that all knowledge is socially situated, and that some of these social locations are better known than others. As starting point of knowledge projects challenge the most fundamental assumptions of the “scientific world view and the Western thought” that take science as its model of how to produce knowledge (Harding, 1992, p.444). The object of this exercise is to set out a rigorous “logic of discovery”, whereby knowledge can be produced not only for marginalized people, but also for the use of dominant groups in the projects of administering and managing the lives of marginalized peoples (p.444).

Standpoint theorists have argued that marginalized lives are better places from which to start asking causal questions about social order. Therefore, where Smith starts from the everyday lives of women, Hill Collins (1990) has argued for starting from the lives of the poor, and in some cases, illiterate African American women to reveal truths about the lives of intellectual African American and European women (Harding, 1992, p.447). It is no accident that these theorists have argued for standpoint approaches since one’s social location enables and sets limits on what one can know. Starting from the dominating lives can be more limiting in their ability to generate the most critical questions about societal beliefs. As Hegel argues, the master/slave relationship could better be understood from the perspective of the slaves’ activities (Harding, 1992, p.447). In their transforming projects, standpoint and anti-racist theorists view the objects of knowledge as multiple, heterogenous and contradictory, not unitary, homogenous and coherent. In that sense, there are multiple sites for producing objective knowledge starting with the lives of the

marginalized.

Since standpoint epistemology is utilized as a theory and as a methodological tool, it links well with the research analysis where the grounded approach by Glazer and Strauss (1969) is utilized. The grounded theory stresses the use of theory arising out of the data. In that sense, the thesis is firmly embedded in the everyday lives of visible minority students from which social meanings emanate. I intend to draw loosely on Dorothy Smith's investigative approach, which she calls Institutional Ethnography. She uses the term broadly to encompass varied and interconnected practices of management, administration, government, law, finance, education, business and the professions (Smith, 1987, p.3). For Smith, an understanding of organizational power in contemporary society requires attention to the ideological practices of administration (McCoy, 1998, p.395).

Smith's method is most instructive for this undertaking as it describes how people's lives are determined beyond the scope of their everyday world, and provides a way of exploring how the world works and how it is put together with a view toward helping them to change it (Smith, 1990, p.629). In starting from the standpoint of the participant and locating them in the relations of ruling, the discourse is giving voice to exclusionary voices. Therefore, standpoint feminism has tremendous possibilities for locating minority women in this discussion of funding. One of the challenges of this thesis is to examine concerns that are specifically related to minority women funding experiences. Likewise, how do they navigate the academic structures to succeed in graduate school. In recognizing the heterogeneity of women's experience, it provides a starting point for locating the knower in their everyday lived experiences. The effect of locating the knower in the everyday world of experience creates connections between what we know at the

micro-sociological level of the everyday world and the macro sociological level (Smith, 1987, p.97).

Like standpoint feminist and anti-racist theories, critical theory use of “border crossing” purports to disrupt the academy to bring about social change by highlighting subjugated knowledge and counter histories that have been traditionally invalidated (Mazzuca, 2000). In that sense, critical theory seeks to enable students to shift from being passive receivers of knowledge to become actively engaged in the learning process where they can transform knowledge and in the process, themselves. Furthermore, the purpose of a critical or liberatory border pedagogy is political and emancipatory. By challenging knowledge and social relations structured in dominance, educational struggles (are connected) with border struggles for the democratization, pluralization and reconstruction of public life (Dei and Calliste, 2000, p.104).

The use of “borders” and “border crossing” is important in examining notions of difference in the experience of graduate education (Giroux, 1983, p.91). According to Anzaldua (1987), a “border is “ a dividing line, a narrow strip along a steep edge” (p.3). Some people may find it difficult to cross this border and feel “safe” even if they are able to do so. Critical theorists suggest that invisible borders are created in a manner which makes some voices inaudible within certain “borderlands.” With critical theory, Tierney (1991) suggests research as a means to bring about change in power relations by exposing the “borders” of this power. These power relations create and maintain the borders which are not necessarily visible for those who hold power, as they do not have to overcome the barriers that surround the borders. This study attempts to use Tierney’s suggestion. To do this, the study begins by exploring in detail how graduate schooling and

funding are structured, in an effort to expose the inherent power relations that exist in graduate education for minority students. If we were to conceptualize the graduate assistantship as a “borderland,” we can see how crossing this “border” might prove difficult for those who do not seem to possess the appropriate cultural signs in making the transition into an academic career. As visible minority students, race will be one of the less formal intersections they encounter, as will be the distinctive life experiences they have to their ethnic background. These life experiences, as we will see, create “borders” for minority students to cross (Mazzuca, 2000, p.14).

Inherent in the discussion of “border” is the notion of “cultural capital.” According to Bourdieu (1984, p.114), capital is a “set of actually usable resources and powers.” In reviewing Bourdieu’s theory of cultural capital, Bellamy (1994, p. 122) states that:

The culture that is transmitted and rewarded by the educational system reflects the culture of the dominant class. Schools reinforce particular types of linguistic competence, authority patterns, and types of curricula. Children from higher social backgrounds acquire these cultural resources (that is, dispositions, behaviour, habits, good taste, savoir faire, and attitudes) at home, and enter the educational system already familiar with the dominant culture.

This notion of “cultural capital” as experience and how it is validated by the educational system is useful in the analysis of the attainment of GAships. I believe that those who hold this capital and how it is defined is based on the current power relations in society. For instance, students who obtain GAships might tend to be those in a field of study that reflects the values and customs of the dominant societal group of the day. By linking power and culture, and by pointing out the political interests underlying the selection and distribution of those bodies of knowledge that are given the highest priority, Bourdieu provides numerous insights into how the hegemonic curriculum works in schooling (Giroux, 1983, p.268).

The application of critical theorists' notion of the "hidden curriculum" is important in this discussion about minority graduate student funding. The concept was developed by Philip Jackson (1968) through observations in K-12 public schools. He noticed that peculiar disciplines and behavioural expectations that did not necessarily further intellectual development were found in classrooms as well as embedded in school practices. For instance, he observed that students were credited for trying and rewarded for neatness, punctuality and courteous conduct (p.33).

In applying the hidden curriculum concept, Margolis and Romero (1998) utilized two forms of the hidden curriculum in their study of female minority graduate students in sociology. The "weak form" consists of connections to civil society that transform children into social beings so that they can work and live together within social institutions through agreed upon meanings. The "strong form" of the hidden curriculum focuses on the ideological perspective of control whereby education and the curriculum in particular is seen as essential to preserving the existing social privilege, interests and knowledge of powerful groups. Most often this took the form of guaranteeing expert and scientific control in society in order to eliminate or socialize unwanted racial or ethnic groups or characteristics to produce an efficient group of citizens.

These concepts provide useful heuristics for analyzing the hidden curriculum in graduate education because it differentiates the socialization process essential to becoming an academic (weak form) from socialization processes that function to reproduce stratified social relations (strong form). Likewise, the hidden curriculum highlights the ways in which the labour market has become segmented by favouring certain bodies while, at the same time, aggregated by concentrating individuals at certain strata of the labour market according to race, class, and gender.

The hidden curriculum in this context ensures the production and reproduction of the professional academic labour market by the various gate-keeping measures embedded in institutional relations.

The preceding discussion outlines the discursive framework which informs this study. By looking at the myriad ways in which the process of graduate assistantship serves as a border with barriers in place for some students, the search begins for answers as to how minority graduate students negotiate their way through graduate school.

CHAPTER FOUR: METHODOLOGY

The focus of this study is an examination of funding experiences of minority graduate students. The study utilized a sample size totaling nine minority graduate students at a large research university in Southern Ontario. The sample consisted of four men and five women who were at various stages in their graduate programs. The participants were selected for their optimal representation of the population under examination as well as their availability. In essence, this was a convenience sample which best reflects the research population and research questions.

In this study, the term minority refers to colour or race and visible minorities who are both immigrants and Canadian born. Although the participants are all visible minorities, there are many differences within the sample in terms of students' status, race, ethnicity and gender. Some students are international students while others are domestic. Several participants were international students before they acquired domestic student status which brought further insights into their experiences. In terms of race and ethnicity, the sample is quite diverse consisting of continental and diasporic Africans, Canadian-Chinese, Japanese and South Asian descent. As already noted, the majority of participants consisted of females, totaling six and three males. Given their varied backgrounds, these participants had different conceptualizations about the impact of student funding on their graduate studies. For instance, international students cannot work as graduate assistants unless they have a work permit.

However, the participants shared many commonalities in terms of institutional discrimination, racism and disempowerment. I asked participants about their graduate funding

experiences, the impact of these experiences on their academic careers and their coping strategies. I asked the participants to describe the application process for graduate assistantship and institutional policies involved as they understood them. Institutional and departmental procedures were a major focus of this study in an effort to understand their impact on criteria for selection. Participants were also asked to consider what strategies can be effective for improving the funding to minority graduate students. Finally, I considered the relationship between graduate and non-graduate assistants in students' perceptions of a successful transition to an academic career.

Selecting a Topic

I have previously discussed the dearth of literature on minority graduate students. There has been very little theorizing about minority graduate and graduate students in general. It is my hope that in pursuing this research, more attention will be drawn to this under-researched area. Although recent years, there has been an emergence of a small number of African Canadian scholars (Dei, 2000; Brathwaite and James, 1996) attempting to theorize the location of visible minority students in secondary education, there still needs to be much more attention to those in graduate education.

One participant in this research summed it up well when she said that one of the things she liked about being a minority graduate student is that she can be a voice for her community in mentoring other students who are intimidated to take that step. Although I agree with this participant, I am much more timid in voicing such aspirations, yet, it is my hope that my research will help others to obtain a deeper understanding of minority graduate students' needs. Many

readers will most likely find similarities to their own experiences regardless of cultural background however, as in most cases, undoubtedly, some will be able to relate more closely than others to the experiences of these students. In effect, this research explores the relationship between minority graduate student funding and graduate students' career aspirations in academia.

Qualitative Research

A qualitative research methodology was employed in this study for various reasons. The exploratory approach is used to discover social processes, meanings and experience which need to be understood and explained in a rounded way rather than by attempting to understand causal patterns between variables. According to Mason (1996), the advantage of a qualitative method lies in its ability to produce depth, complexity and roundedness to social explanations, rather than the kind of broad survey patterns which, for example questionnaires, might provide.

In my explanation about the social meaning of graduate assistantships, I will argue that this approach requires an understanding of depth and complexity in students' accounts and experiences, rather than a surface analysis of comparability between accounts of large numbers of people. Typically, this requires asking what, when, where, how and why questions that are most suited to a qualitative methodology. Similarly, a qualitative method gives participants greater freedom and control in the interview situation than is permitted with structured approaches. It is therefore more likely to generate a fuller representation of the interviewee's perspective. It also allows the researcher to be responsive within the interview situation, such as answering questions the interviewee may ask, giving information, opinion, or support. It will ultimately be more

participatory for the interviewee than the structured/quantitative method.

Secondly, qualitative methodology stems from the discursive framework which utilizes anti-racist, standpoint feminist and critical theory. These theories are critical of the conventional conception of objectivity since all knowledge is socially situated. We can only get to knowledge by starting from the everyday lives of the marginalized. In that sense, they generate explanations about ontological components of the social world through social processes, meanings and social actions. This entails asking why, what, when and how questions which are most suited for qualitative studies. I intend to draw directly from Dorothy Smith's Institutional Ethnography which explores the social relations that individuals bring into being through their actual practices. Institutional Ethnography seeks to locate the dynamics of a local setting in the complex institutional relations organizing the local dynamics.

Finally, in terms of the discursive framework, this study is self-reflexive in which my role in the data generation is analyzed (since knowledge generation is contextual). A qualitative approach makes it possible to reflect on my position as a researcher in this process. Until recently, I resisted attempts to implicate myself into my research projects due to ingrained notions of "objectivity." However, I realized that the motivation for doing this research comes from experiencing the funding process personally and observing that few of my peers are obtaining these positions. Glesne and Peshkin (1992) suggest that qualitative research involves openness which allows the researcher to approach the inherent complexity of social interaction and to do justice to that complexity by respecting it in its own right. I therefore intend to do "justice" to the complexity of the participants' experiences by including my own voice in the discussion.

Despite these advantages, the qualitative method has some drawbacks. The interviewer does not have total control over the situation, given the nature of open-ended questions. However, this is the nature of qualitative study as it encourages the researcher to tease out the relevant information pertaining to the topic at hand by asking how, when, why and what questions.

Data Collection

The data collection was greatly influenced by the discursive framework and the research questions which I have selected for this study. I have adopted the many suggestions from these theories that will lead to ethical and reliable data collection with minority graduate students.

Designing the Questions

The questions used for these interviews were designed to allow for an open-ended discussion with participants regarding their experiences of graduate student funding. Questions were centered mainly on funding because of limited time. However, some areas of general discussion pertaining to their cultural and personal lives came up during the interviews. In the beginning, the questions were of a general order to get to know the participants and to make them comfortable. This approach seemed useful in many cases where students were ready to proceed and answered questions with more information than was necessary.

The decision to select minority only graduate students stemmed from my research questions and objectives. Although it would have been fruitful to interview both majority and minority students, my focus was concerned with the latter because it allowed a more in-depth analysis into

the issues of graduate funding. Moreover, time constraints limit such comparison, nevertheless, this dimension could be studied in the future. As I have discussed previously, the literature on funding tends to treat graduate students as homogenous, therefore, I wanted to focus on groups that were not usually heard in these discussions. The sample was selected to reflect the research questions and participants were selected to address unanswered questions until data saturation occurred. The selection process was relatively uncomplicated since many participants gave referrals. The most challenging part of the data selection was having to select male participants. It seems that males were less easy to locate, or were too busy to participate. Ultimately, the challenge was data management, that is, knowing when I had sufficient information, however, this dilemma was solved as I had the choice to return to ask further questions if the need arise.

It was important to note that much of the rich data collected stemmed from students' desire to tell their stories. The line of questioning was also an important influence. I did not simply ask about their graduate education as if it existed in a vacuum. I also asked about their personal lives as they proceeded through graduate school. I allowed them, through verbal and non verbal cues, to reflect on the broader picture of their educational lives, one which included relationships outside academe.

The Interview Process

The interviews were confirmed through e-mail for a time and location that was most convenient to the participants. The interviews lasted approximately forty-five minutes and were tape-recorded and transcribed verbatim. The participants were accessed through personal contacts

and snowball sampling. All participants were eager to participate in the study and had offered suggestions for future referees. It was relatively easy to establish rapport given our common background as graduate students. Three students had to leave immediately after the interview for work or other appointments. It was interesting to me that most participants were quite rushed, either having to leave for work or returning from work. One interview was conducted at the participant's work place. It was a challenge to maintain the thrust of the discussion due to numerous interruptions because she had to leave on several occasions to attend to the public.

At first, I was somewhat hesitant about conducting the interview at this location but this participant insisted that it posed no problems. Additionally, since this participant commutes from another city, I had little choice in the matter. I pursued the interview because being one of the "few" minority graduate assistants, I felt that her inclusion was necessary. It was a very informative interview but to my dismay, it was not tape-recorded. Luckily, I had made detailed notes after the interview, so I was able to use it for further discussions with the participants at a later date. This participant later sent her responses by e-mail since we were unable to conduct the interview a second time. As my first interview, this was an important lesson for later ones. I would double check my tape-recorder and make every attempt to obtain a secluded, uninterrupted location. I also made notes after the interviews which helped with organizing my thought processes. Although I have used comments from these notes, I have not used direct quotes but I want to make mention that they have been influential in my thought processes. In many cases, the most interesting "bits" of conversation tend to occur either before the tape-recorder has been turned on or after it was turned off. Again, note taking proved useful during these occasions.

In all interviews, the participants placed a high value on this research. They all offered to be interviewed a second time if necessary. They were all interested in seeing the final report of the study which I will provide to them.

My Role as a Researcher

The first question that I must address in my role as a researcher is that of subjectivity given my personal attachment to this research. As previously discussed, I have a personal attachment to this research the issue of subjectivity has been at the forefront of this study. Peshkin (1988) believes that “researchers should be meaningfully attentive to their own subjectivity” and not simply “acknowledge their subjectivity” (p.17). He offers several guidelines in the ways that research can address his or her subjectivity. First, subjectivity should not be conceived as necessarily negative but can be the basis for making a distinctive contribution resulting from the researcher’s “personal qualities joined in the data they have collected” (p.18). Second, we must actively seek out our subjectivity in order to address its “its enabling and disabling potential” while the data is being collected (p.18). Throughout the research process, I have attempted to reflect on my subjectivity by taking field notes and recording my personal thoughts and preliminary data analysis in a personal journal. This has disallowed me to see myself as an “objective” researcher since the research is intricately linked to my life as a graduate student. I have therefore included, where appropriate, aspects of my personal reflection where I believe that it adds value to the study. It was necessary and important to make known my personal location to participants and readers of this thesis.

My concerns about subjectivity also influenced the way in which I had conducted the interviews. I was especially aware of the power relations which can naturally arise when the researcher, as the one who guides the discussion, takes the participants' words, document them, and subsequently leaves the field. Rather, it was my intention to avoid the "take the data and run" approach to research. I have attempted to counter this attitude in various ways.

At the beginning of each interview, I would explain to my participants the reasons for wanting to do this research and its outcome. During the interviews I also shared some of my experiences of graduate student funding with the participants. I have disclosed personal information when I felt that a participant had disclosed extremely personal information and needed to be reassured that their feelings were valid, or when the participants asked a direct question. For instance, participants might begin their answers with "maybe you have experienced this" or, might complete their response by saying "you know what I mean? In these instances, I felt that their questions warranted an honest reply.

Several participants indicated that answering some of the questions were emotionally draining, and in such cases, I would simply listen to their explanations, sometimes only prompting with "really," or "I know what you mean." In my response, I tried to convey to the participants that their reaction is natural and reassured them of my confidentiality. Researchers such as Griffith and Smith (1987) acknowledge that sharing aspects of their experiences as mothers helped in establishing rapport with participants. As mothers, they found their experiences useful and appropriate in drawing out typical experiences. Like these researchers, I found that sharing my common background as a graduate student and my ethnicity proved useful in the interview

process. By including my own experiences in the interviews and by answering questions directly, I feel that I was both ethical and fair in asking participants to respond sincerely to my questions. "It was the manner in which I strove to make the relationship between the participant and myself more equitable" (Mazzuca, 2000, p.92).

In these interviews my presentation of self could be typified as the "friendly stranger" (Cotterill, 1992). To some participants, I was a stranger since we did not have a friendship. Cotterill suggests, that "the friendly stranger," unlike a friend, does not exercise social control over respondents because the relationship exists for the purpose of research and is terminated when the interviews are complete (Cotterill, 1992, p.596). Cotterill further argues that respondents may feel more comfortable talking to a "friendly stranger" because it allows them to exercise some control over the relationship (p.596). The participants may have felt comfortable discussing details with me since I was not part of their everyday reality.

However, the fact that we shared similar backgrounds presented some obstacles. In one interview after having shared some intimate and emotionally taxing details, one participant became very concerned about her revelations and the implications it might have for her job. I responded immediately to reassure her of my code of confidence and anonymity. I talked at length about my experience as a qualitative researcher because I felt that she needed to know that she was dealing with a professional. I also promised to give a copy of the final report so that she may add critical comments. So, although I was a "friendly stranger," my background and status as a student within the institution became an area of concern.

Another interesting outcome of interviewing the participants similar to myself was the transition to friendship. As a result of these interviews, I have become close friends with several of the participants. As the interviews progressed, I established very close friendships. I must stress that establishing friendship was not part of my goal for this study, but I have welcomed the opportunity to continue relationships with the participants who showed an interest in doing so. Unlike Cotterill's (1992) research, I have welcomed the "transition to friendship" and have continued to maintain contact with most of the participants.

Much of the preceding discussion on my role as a researcher points to my position as an insider with this group of participants. Simply put, "Insiders are the members of specified groups and collectives or occupants of special social status (Merton, 1972, p.21). I fit this description as a minority graduate student since I am at a similar stage of my life with most participants in this study. Coming from a similar background, my own experiences on funding has put me in a better position to generate trust, sharing and emotional expression than interviews conducted by outsiders (Mazzuca, 2000, p.96). Although trust was not gain immediately, sharing similar backgrounds was extremely beneficial in establishing rapport.

Listening and Probing

The questions in the interview guide were open-ended which allowed greater flexibility in my role as the researcher. Listening to the participants was quite intense and I found their responses so interesting that at times I would lose track of the question which I had intended to ask. I was able to get back on track by repeating the last phrase or just probing from a comment that

they have made rather than moving onto the next point. I often used this tactic as a transition into the next question and also as a means of allowing the participants to maintain their thought processes, rather than moving on and then returning to the idea a second time. By listening carefully, I was able to see patterns arising from the interview with the second participant, and this buoyed my confidence in my questioning (Mazzuca, 2000, p.97).

Mason's (1996) advice to qualitative researchers is to constantly analyze throughout the interview process. My approach to the interviews was to see myself as a learner. In becoming a "learner," one asks and probes areas which might appear to be more complex than one might suspect (Glesne and Peshkin, 1992). In many of these interviews, I have asked questions to which I already knew the answer. There were several occasions when these questions helped elicit further information which might not have come to light otherwise. My general approach was to refrain from making too many general assumptions. In so doing, I felt that I learned more that I would have with simple statements like "Really?" or "What do you mean?" In the same vein any naivety or pretense was picked up by participants as they would reply, "Who are you kidding?" I have found out that there is a fine line between being a naive researcher and a dishonest one. I have tried to find a balance between asking questions that are instrumental to gather comprehensive data, and alienating the participants. I answered all questions truthfully, honestly whenever participants demanded a direct personal reply.

Keeping a Journal

Journal writing was another method which I used to document ideas and information about the research. The journal was instrumental in helping me to reflect on the research process. On

many occasions, during the data collection, I would find my thoughts wandering while having a quiet moment. During these times a journal became invaluable in helping organize my thoughts. It was during this time when themes or ideas for the data would emerge. Subsequently, I began to see the way in which students become part of a larger set of institutional relations. These participants were not merely actors but were part of a set of processes within the education system. I have also made entries about my personal conversations or attending a meeting. These moments provided a source of rich information related to my research which seemed totally unrelated at the time which the entry was made.

Another manner in which I found the journal useful was that its format, which was completely unstructured and for my own personal expression, allowed me to write freely about aspects of my research which I may have been hesitant to note elsewhere. Areas around my personal feelings about the topic and my participants would not have been documented had I not created this outlet for myself. Journal writing, or “Memo Writing” as Glesne and Peshkin (1992) calls it, was productive to the research process in helping to clarify my thoughts and in making linkages to issues that at first seem entirely unrelated.

Ethics

As I have stated, I was concerned about “take the data and run” attitude. During the interview process I found that the participants regarded the process as very thought provoking, as well as emotional. I was concerned about raising emotional issues and then moving onto another topic without honouring their response. I attempted to rectify this issue by relating to those participant experiences which I had encountered myself. I felt that this was applicable since I had

also shared many characteristics with the participants on the research topic. Hence, to pretend otherwise would have been unethical. I also had concerns regarding confidentiality. One participant was extremely concerned about the personal information that was disclosed during the interview. With that concern in mind, participants' names, as well as any other personal details have been changed in the final report. In order to maintain anonymity of these participants, I considered various ways in which it might be compromised. Since there are only a small number of minority students in graduate school, I wanted to ensure that they were not recognized by the details provided. I speak about their disciplines in general terms, for example social science, and do not mention their particular areas of research.

Although I have pseudonyms in most quotations, in a few cases I refer simply to a 'participant' who had made the comment. In so doing, I have attempted to avoid the possibility that a participant could be recognized by a reader piecing together comments to reveal the identity of the participants. This is only an extra precaution which may not be necessary since I have been careful not to reveal too much personal information but again, given the relatively small number of minority graduate students who fit the characteristics of the sample, I wanted to avoid any breaches of confidentiality.

A series of key questions concerning organizational bodies, funding processes and strategies formed the nucleus of each interview, but considerable digression was given to allow interviewees to identify the issues that concerned them, present their thoughts in their own terms, and allow new information to emerge. In so doing, it was my intention to create a space where by minority graduate students could talk freely about their funding experiences in a value-free atmosphere.

Coding

In coding the data, the objective was to provide answers to the original research questions through the use of an inductive process. An inductive process begins with the particular, then makes generalizations, moving them into wider societal context.

Prior to beginning the analysis phase of my research I had the opportunity to become familiar with the data. I conducted and transcribed my interviews personally. I made written notes immediately following the interviews and during the transcription process. I coded the interviews using the “two different phases” outlined by Emerson, Fretz and Shaw (1995). Although their discussion is based on field notes, I found it relevant to coding the transcripts. During the first phase, or “open coding, ” I read each transcript thoroughly in order to identify and formulate “ideas, themes, or issues they suggest” (Emerson, Fretz and Shaw, 1995, p.166). For example, in the first three interviews, phrases such as “having the GA is necessary to do my research” or, “it will help toward conferences” were mentioned frequently. It became clear that participants were talking about roles, so I created a category called GA roles and as I read the transcripts, I would look for similar accounts. I continued this method, by highlighting sections of data using a code word while I read the transcripts. On a separate sheet of paper, I made note of the word and kept adding to the list as I found new codes. When I came across an idea or issue that looked familiar, I would refer to the list and code it with a word previously used. This helped to ensure easy retrieval of data which were connected.

In the second phase, or “focussed coding” (Emerson, Fretz and Shaw, 1995), I reread the transcripts and began to code. I eventually created a code list which was used to code chunks of data in each interview. After the first few readings, I began to code more specifically and in more

detail, using code words which reflected this deeper analysis. Finally, the themes which began to arise became the basis for writing the analysis. Using the literature and the research notes as my guide, I decided to create three broad themes; under-representation, institutional policies and practices and the role of graduate assistantships. I began to write about these themes using the participants' words as a starting point. By collecting the themes together I was able to write about the participants' experiences in a manner which provided insight into relevant topics such as their experiences filling out application forms, their negotiation of graduate school and the roles of graduate assistantships. The quotes used by participants throughout this thesis are samples which I have used in uncovering specific themes. These quotes capture the essence of participants' beliefs, values and perceptions which illustrate the findings of this research in their own words.

Limitations

It is important to highlight in some detail certain limitations or challenges of this study. They include, representativeness, geography and researching in my own territory (e.g., within one's community). First, the study utilized a convenient sample of visible minority students. The selection of participants was limited to my own contact and networks of minority students who referred friends and colleagues. Therefore, the findings from this study are only limited to this group of minority graduate students. This is not to say that generalizations cannot be made, but they must be limited to this sample.

Geography was another limitation. All interviews were conducted in mainly one faculty. Therefore, my findings and conclusions are only pertinent to what exists in Ontario given the exploratory nature of this study. Although graduate students experience funding difficulties across

Canada, it cannot be assumed that my findings prevail in all geographical areas of the country. For example, in British Columbia and Quebec, students are given tuition freezes and tuition cuts whereas in Ontario, tuition is rising. Likewise, in these universities and in some faculties at the university in this study, GAships and TAsships are conditional upon acceptance into graduate school. In that vein, the graduate funding experience is likely to be different.

A final challenge to my study is that I did the research in familiar territory. As the researcher, I collected data, particularly in the interviews, from my colleagues. I did not know them personally, but we had taken classes together. My experience and background made access easier and allowed me to establish trust with the participants, yet my background had its drawbacks.

As Glesne and Peshkin (1992) discuss, researching in your own geographical area can pose certain problems: "In your research role, you will relate to known persons as your research 'others'. This switch may prove confusing to both parties" (p.22). Glesne and Peshkin suggest that this can lead to a situation whereby participants may not provide careful answers to the researcher's questions. I found this shortcoming to be true. At one interview the respondent replied, "You know what I mean" or, "You must have experienced this as well?" As a result, some participants neglected to explain in detail what they started out to discuss, assuming I knew the answer. Unfortunately, because I was the novice researcher, I failed to probe for more clarification. Since I was researching in my own territory, I occasionally let the interview become too conversational. This tendency frequently resulted in the participant asking me a question. Again, caught off guard, I would respond to the question with my thoughts and feelings about the problem or issue, which could have influenced the respondent's answer.

This thesis is an exploration of the representation of minority graduate assistants. It seeks to address how the university functions as a social institution in the allocation of resources to graduate students. Many studies have focused on structures of governance (Baldrige, 1971; Clark, 1984; Cohen and March, 1986). They identify the bodies that make decisions, the responsibility of these bodies, and the relations between them. These bodies include the senate which includes faculty council and academic departments and divisions; the administration (which includes the board of governors, the president and the president's appointed officers), and with the advent of collective bargaining, the faculty associations and unions that represent the academic staff.

I agree that these departments are focal points for political activity and that their organizational approach to decision making is different. I will focus instead on the social processes of accessing graduate assistantships. Another issue concerns generalization. One of the criticisms leveled at qualitative studies is the lack of representativeness. While I agree that this student population may not be representative of the general graduate student population, it is not my intention to seek representativeness. I am only interested in answering "how" and "why" questions to which this method is most suited to. However, I believe that it is possible to generalize findings that are grounded in the context of the study itself.

CHAPTER FIVE: RESEARCH FINDINGS

In addressing the research questions from visible minority graduate students' understandings and perceptions, three main themes emerged from the data. They are under representation, institutional policies and practices and the role of graduate assistantships. As I described in the previous sections, these themes were derived through the grounded theory method (Glazer and Strauss, 1969) until data saturation occurred. These themes or theories gave me a better understanding of my research questions regarding the representation of minority graduate assistants.

I will first discuss each theme and illuminate the findings with actual comments from the participants in the study. The participants specifically requested that they remain anonymous, especially those who held assistantships, were especially concerned about possible ramifications for their jobs. In addressing their concerns, I have utilized pseudonyms to protect their identity and have used only general information to comply with their wishes.

Under-representation

The overwhelming majority of participants in this study perceived minority graduate students to be severely under-represented as graduate assistants. They stressed that among their peers, few have obtained graduate assistantships and among those who have acquired graduate assistantships they tended to do so mainly in the third and fourth years of their programs. Shona, a full time Ph.D student who obtained a graduate assistantship in her third year commented:

I can think of ten minority students who are very close friends to me in the same department, and I am aware that I am the only one who has one (Graduate Assistantship). Then again, I'm in my third year, and I have already spent two years here without financial support. So, we are under represented, which is problematic (Interview 7, December 2000, Page 4).

According to Theresa, another graduate assistant:

...there is under-representation. The imbalance is not evident when one looks at (department) X, but X is perhaps one of the only spaces in the institution where the research interests of faculty match the research interests of scholars from the South. You would find for example, in the area of higher education...there is an almost entirely Eurocentric focus...Just look at who gets to work as a TA or GA in these departments and you can tell who are the beneficiaries (Interview 1, December 2000, Page 1).

These students' perceptions corroborate recent findings in a graduate assistant survey. According to the survey results, only 23 percent of respondents identify themselves as belonging to a visible minority group. However, there are problems associated with this data in that some respondents may not have chosen to self-identify as a visible minority. Likewise, since I have no comparable data, I cannot compare this result over time, across departments or between universities. A major contribution to this problem is that some Canadian universities may collect this data but they are not gathered in a form that would allow for such comparisons. Additionally, the data are kept as classified information which prevents us from analysing how universities could be more responsive to the needs of graduate students (Haley, 1989). This draws attention to the need to collect more accurate and ongoing statistical data for future analysis.

One of the union representatives who initiated the survey noted that the underlying problem of under-representation is that only 181 graduate assistant positions are available every year, despite the fact that over six hundred and fifty graduate students apply each year for these positions (CUPE Local 3709). She believed that part of the problem of the administration's unwillingness

to increase GAships is because GAships are not perceived as “real jobs” (Personal conversation, 2000). Likewise, in a study on social support in doctoral programs among minority graduate students, Williams (2000) found that a majority of the students seldom reported working with faculty members on research or serving as research and teaching assistants (p.1008).

Despite this enormous gap between supply and demand, only two new graduate assistant positions will become available in the 2001-2002 academic year. So to a large extent the participants in this study are correct in noting that a large part of their problem is due to institutional factors that make it impossible to obtain GAships.

In articulating their conceptualization about minority graduate student under-representation, I felt that it was necessary to ask about their understandings of the selection process. I find that most participants did not fully understand the underlying criteria for selection as a graduate assistant. They had only fragments of information and ideas gathered mostly from friends and from what they have read on the application form. Several participants did not bother applying for a GAship because they learnt from friends how difficult it was to obtain one. In effect, they felt that they should expend their energy where they were more certain about obtaining a GAship. I was even more surprised to learn that they did not mention any attempt to obtain additional information from advisors or any other faculty member with whom they may have had relationship. Those who were most aware of the process were the ones who held a GAship. Paul, who obtained a graduate assistantship in the second year of his Ph.D. program, commented:

I attended a GA (graduate assistant) information session. They tell you what it entails and how you can get it and what they did tell me was that...they go according to seniority and according to union membership...so if somebody is already a GA, there is no way they will drop that person ...I think that they also have a point system for giving the GA and I think that they give 20 out of 20 in academic and departments' need for you. Then they give, I

think 15 points for experience...I have already forgotten how it all works out (Interview 9, January 2001, Page 2).

This was Theresa's description:

I know that grade point average has something to do with the merit ranking. The next category is the match between the student's experience or research interests, and the research opportunities available in the department. I know that teaching assistants in the initial education program must have teaching experience. I also know that experience in teaching in England, the U.S. or Canada is valued more than teaching experience in the South. I was even at a meeting where it was said that the Ontario College of Teachers' may want all those who teach in the Pre- service Program to have Ontario qualifications. If this suggestion is followed through many minority teaching assistants have had their teacher education in the South (Interview 1, December 2001, Page 2).

Theresa's descriptions were quite detailed due to the fact that as an administrator in the faculty, she had a firmer grasp of the subtleties underlying of the selection process. Her description indicated that merit was one of the most important criteria in selection because it suggested a level playing field. However, these participants expressed deep concerns about the emphasis on merit. They felt that since entry into graduate school is dependent upon the attainment of certain academic merit, it should not be a necessary criteria for selection of graduate assistants.

Another problem with the use of merit pertained to the country where students received their degrees. Like Theresa, some participants noted that if knowledge from the South is less valued, it was only logical that such students will have less chance of being selected for GAships. Theresa believed that one of the contributing factors to this devaluation of the Southern scholar is the accreditation process. For instance, minority scholars who are educated in British colonies are believed to be at a disadvantage because their accreditation from British institutions is not truly reflective of their ability.

Many colonial institutions have unfairly reflected the abilities of many scholars from the South, since they are evaluated by the standards of such examination boards as those of the Universities of Cambridge and Oxford. Since grade point average is also a criterion used to determine who gets what, once again, the external scholar is often misrepresented as academically inferior to the local scholar (Interview 1, December 2000, Page 1).

I can personally speak to this concern having completed my secondary school education in a former British colony. The British colonies in the Caribbean typically sent general and advance certificate examinations (GCE O' and A' levels) to the Universities of Cambridge and Oxford to be graded, although this system has now been revised or abolished in some states. The curriculum is set according to British standards and as such reflect British culture and history. In other words, we were participants in a system which had no cultural or historical relevance to our lived experiences. Therefore, in terms of merit, minority scholars are at a disadvantage since they do not have the same cultural frame of reference as do British students in their frame of references. The brutal final examination determines a student's success or failure, unlike the North American system where term papers and final examinations contribute toward the final grade. In this respect, merit is not judged at the same base level. Very few students obtained A's as a result, which in turn lead one to ask: How are the marks from the Southern scholar reflected in the Canadian meritocratic process?

Another problem concerned the evaluation of experience. As the participant above noted, experience from the South is valued less. All participants expressed concerns about how minority students' experiences are measured especially those who have worked in their home countries prior to residing in Canada. For example, foreign teachers still face obstacles in having their certification and experience validated. As Theresa continued:

Many minority graduate students have external qualifications, especially in regard to things like teacher certification... and these are not considered to be commensurate with Ontario qualifications...especially in regard to research agendas. The positions available reflect the research interests of the dominant group which gives students who share that cultural capital an advantage in terms of matching their interests to the researcher, which is a category used to determine who gets a graduate assistantship (Interview 1, December 2000, Page 2).

The participants viewed this kind of under-representation as symbolic of those whose knowledge is most valued within the academy. In some cases, the institution had allowed those with foreign certification to teach in the Initial Teacher Education Program, but as this graduate assistant noted, it is an uneasy alliance. Theresa recounted that she had attended a staff meeting where there was a vote to make it mandatory for all teaching assistants in that faculty to have an Ontario teaching certificate. She believes that this will further exclude minority graduate students since many have had their qualifications in foreign countries.

Theresa's comments raised several issues which typified the responses from the sample. First, the belief that the under-representation of minority graduate assistants is due to the way in which knowledge is validated within the academy.

When...international discourses are encouraged, they serve two purposes. Firstly, they provide the faculty and department with resources which enable them to get funding for their projects by international agencies. Faculty then spend time in these locations as consultants and "development" experts. Secondly, they increase the prestige or status of the department or centre, because they appear to be fulfilling the demands of a "global" research agenda. Either way, there is little to gain for the students, but much for the academy (Interview 1, December 2000, Page 1).

Minoritized students are thus objects to be studied but are not considered experts. It reinforces the

fact that certain kinds of knowledge are only validated when they are taken up by dominant scholars and students. To a large extent, graduate student funding was seen as distributed along epistemological and ideological lines. So although minority voices may be heard in certain spaces, when they are utilized, they served to procure funding for departments and to enhance the prestige of scholars within these departments. Secondly, the process results in the creation of a marginalized status given to certain departments when they situate themselves within issues of concern to minority students. The fact that these departments have fewer resources only served to reinforce their marginalized status within the academy. Participants believed that the close fit between dominant students' research projects and Eurocentric discourses gave them the advantage when applying for graduate assistantships.

Generally, under-representation was seen to be caused by structural barriers within the institution which tended to undermine the funding process. This will be further expanded upon this further in the discussion of institutional policies. Participants attributed part of this problem to the application process, which was seen as highly exclusionary. Fred explains:

Going back to what I was saying earlier...you are structurally disadvantaged which is why I had to go outside of this department...If you are an undergraduate, just straight out of your B.A., are you going to have much research experience? No. Are you going to have other experience? Well, maybe if you are an adult student, especially if you are a motivated student but that generally doesn't happen and so when you get put in the same pot as all the other students, and also don't forget it as part of the union, and so they base these jobs on seniority as well so you get points for having a job already. So that gets...perpetuated and so you see incoming students get structurally disadvantaged so that was a problem for me. So, in a sense, when you apply and you get rejected and you say, oh, jeeze, am I just not up to the same quality standards as everyone else? At first I thought that. I don't think that any more but I do think it has to do with the way things are and in terms of M.A. students and beginning Ph.D. students you are sort of at the bottom in the first place...What that leaves is very few positions for beginning students. Even more senior M.A. students get disadvantaged as well and even the TAs ...have to be in upper year Ph.D. (Interview 8,

January 2001, Page 9).

For all participants, the funding process favored Ph.D. students who tend to have more work and academic experience. In case of the latter, participants believed that the emphasis placed on academic experience and publishing is unfair for many reasons. They believed that it is unlikely that most Masters students will have publication experience; coming from undergraduate programs does not provide many opportunities for publication that they are aware of. Another important reason was that those who are international students may not come from an academic culture where publication is highlighted. So in terms of a level playing field, again they are at a disadvantage. Likewise, union members are favoured since they are ranked by seniority which carries more weight. The participants were not anti-union but were aware of their relative disadvantage in this process. For instance, union members can work as both graduate and teaching assistants. This may also serve to exclude students very early in their graduate studies as GAships can become unevenly distributed and concentrated in the hands of a few.

As already stated, the application process favours those who have published and whose experiences and interests are matched with that of a faculty member. In other words, how valuable are you to your department? It seems to me that the graduate selection process is embedded in a set of ruling relations which serve to determine who will be the worthy "academic." What might be most important, is that it depends on one's ability to "sell oneself," something which many minority students may not be aware. In this sense, the application process is actively engaged in the production of a certain type of academic professional. In a very real sense, it is engaged in the production and reproduction of inequality within the academy whereby those who have certain

“cultural capital” are valued most. Minority graduate students are thus drawn into complex institutional relations that limit and direct their actions.

What was particularly surprising to me during the interviews was that most participants were uncertain as to how to fill out the application form. They were unaware as to what constitutes “useful information.” For instance, most students who applied in the first year of their programs were unaware that a Masters thesis or presentation at a conference could be counted as publication.

Shona explained the problem:

The application form was not complicated but I did not (know) what to write, what kind of information to include. For example, I did not know that my M.A. thesis could be part of publication. (Interview 7, December 2000, Page 1).

She continued:

Now that I am used to it, I would say that it is o.k ...I found it difficult because I did not know what to do exactly, and what will be the right thing...to write... If you don't know exactly what to do, then it is difficult. I believe that the chances of getting a graduate assistantship now ...depends a lot on this...process of how to apply. It is important to know how to do it (Interview 7, December 2000, Page 1).

Minority graduate assistants stress that at previous universities, obtaining such positions was much easier. At such universities they were automatically granted GAships on admission to the faculty.

Paul, who had obtained a graduate assistantship in the second year of his Ph.D program compared his experiences:

I want to make my point through some comparisons...I have attended at least two other Universities, the University of Alberta and Western. When they give you a GA, they try to give you something...substantial so that you can meet your program requirements. I don't know about now but when I was in those universities, it was really o.k. I have a friend who is doing a Ph.D. at the University of Western Ontario, they gave him \$15,000.

(Interview 9, January 2001, Page 3).

Even when students knew how to fill out the forms, they stressed that the process was highly exclusionary. Participants who completed a graduate degree from an external university were shocked to learn that they were unsuccessful in obtaining a GAship, despite having several years of experience in teaching and research assistantships. However, those who had obtained GAships felt that it was past experiences at previous universities that gave them the advantage.

The process of applying and gaining the position...is very exclusive. It excludes students at a very early stage in their program (Interview 2, January 2001, Page 1).

IN WHAT WAY?

I had experiences at another university doing my Masters. It helped me when I applied for my Ph.D...I had applied to...other departments and found that I didn't get the GA in department X but I got it in another department. So that dramatically influenced my choices because I felt as though I wanted to be funded. I felt that funding through GA and TA came through my other university more readily. There were more positions I suppose at the other university than here. But once I came here, I found that it was a very selective process and so the fact that I got it in department X was a decisive factor for me to decide to go (there). (Interview 2, January 2001, Page 1).

The fact that this student took a graduate assistant position in a "conservative" department because it had more funds at its disposal speaks to the type of knowledge which gets validated and reproduced in the academy through its ideological and institutional values.

Institutional Policies and Practices

The preceding sections discussed participants' perceptions regarding under-representation of minority graduate assistants and some of its underlying causes. Among the reasons discussed was the effect of structural barriers within the institution such as the application criteria. They

believe that the under-representation of minority graduate assistants is due to institutional processes which serve to exclude them early in the selection process and is perpetuated at two levels, departmental and institutional.

Departmental Level

At the departmental level, participants felt that the ranking process needed to be more transparent. Many participants, as I have discussed in the preceding section were uncertain as to how this process worked. As with all bureaucracies, there are certain protocols that must be followed, and the ranking process is one of these.

To obtain an in-depth understanding of the ranking process, I spoke to a senior administrator who had served on the Ranking Committee he explained the process as follows. First, the application form must be handed in before a deadline date. Second, the committee meets to discuss the applications received. The committee must follow a process of ranking applicants' qualifications according to the positions available. They follow a set of criteria such as experience, union membership and publication for which points are awarded, from a total of one hundred. Third, depending on the total points awarded to the applicants he or she is either given a position or rejected. He stressed that although the process was created for the purpose of transparency, equity and objectivity and seems quite straightforward, in reality, there is a lot of back and forth before a final resolution is made. He also stressed that in reality, the final allocation of a GAship is rather archaic and quite subjective. For instance, there can be minute differences in the allotment of points which can have enormous consequences for the applicants in terms of obtaining or losing a GAship. He further explained that students should not feel inadequate if they were rejected

because there are other factors at play such as the amount of GAship being offered. However, this feeling of inadequacy was exactly the result of rejection.

Many participants felt that they were of little value to the institution as their inability to obtain a graduate assistantship created a feeling of low self-esteem. They recalled feelings of inadequacy and being devalued as they began to question their purpose within the academy. Despite these reservations, none of the participants mentioned or suggested in any way their intention of dropping out of graduate studies. In fact, they all seemed to enjoy their graduate studies.

Simon, a visible minority graduate student whose work was being ranked provided some interesting insights into the ranking process. He believed that ultimately, students' ranking depended on the professor whose work was being evaluated as well as the composition of the members on the ranking committee. He related how he was almost passed over for a GAship because his research interests were deemed unimportant by his department. That opinion changed when a professor whom he knew talked to him about the situation. So the ranking criteria which are believed to be neutral and objective in the final decision can be subjective and non-neutral. In the final analysis, it may not necessarily depend on merit or experience, but, rather how one's area of interest can best reflect departmental interests.

Generally, participants believed that departmental practices could be improved to make the distribution of GAships more equitable. Participants noted that some departments had extra positions while others did not have enough to distribute.

I heard that there are 12 positions which are unfilled. A student was talking to me about it. She said that according to the meeting she attended, there are twelve positions that are

unfilled and this is because no one had either applied for them, or it is not matched properly which is silly because many people applied and they didn't get it...What is going on? (Interview 6, December 2000, Page 13).

It appears that the uneven distribution of resources made it difficult for all students to participate and experience their graduate studies equitably. Participants hypothesized about possible contributors to the continued under-representation of graduate assistants in their departments. It was interesting that most participants were adamant that it was not racism, since institutional policies were the primary contributing factor to their problems. On the other hand, they also noted that racism could be part of the problem, but they could not be certain since they had no evidence to suggest otherwise. As Fred noted:

The proportion of those who have any kind of GA position is not great. Those positions are filled overwhelmingly by the dominant group, so you don't want to say that it is about skin colour, but is there systemic discrimination? It's right, though impossible to challenge (Interview 8, January 2001, Page 3).

Fred stressed:

I never saw racism, ethnicity as being part of the major issues in terms of barriers. I cannot say that for certain, but it wouldn't surprise me if that was the case. However, I have no claims to support that (Interview 8, January 2001, Page 4).

So while participants were aware of the inequality that exists, they were either unsure as to whether it could be attributed to race, or something else. Some researchers believe that racism can be particularly difficult in some cases to conceptualize because we tend to view it as intentional and personal. However, it is more subtle, usually found buried deeply in institutional relations.

According to Moyer et al (1999), a notable barrier for minority graduate students is that of symbolic racism, whereby overt forms of prejudice are condemned while access to sources of support, information and other resources are informally denied. Informal networks whereby information is shared and passed among students exclude minority students. As one student noted, “We tend to pick up on these bits of information when the event is already passed so that nothing can be done about it.” The consensus among these students was that their under-representation was due to structural processes that mitigate minority students’ full participation in the University as a whole. They believed that by virtue of the way in which the funding process is structured, departments are pitted against each other for students and scarce resources. The end result is the creation of chilly climates and a lack of collegiality which makes it extremely difficult for minority students to optimize academic training during their graduate careers. The competition for scarce financial resources among departments is due to institutional push factors which I will now examine.

Institutional Level

At the institutional level, the way in which the funding process is organized was seen as unequal and unfair. According to participants, the University’s funding formula favours the natural and physical sciences which are generously funded, in comparison to the social sciences and the humanities, which are allotted considerably less.

What could be true is that the sciences are probably seen as a more legitimate area of study. More funding is directed to that area because it is more quantitative...it is very...empirical whereas a lot of the work done here is...very theoretical and if you look at...feminist research...people have said historically that area is being under-funded ...because it is not

seen as a true science. You see a lot of science students getting funding because they can produce reports and have statistics...but...the research interest here is participative or qualitative research rather than quantitative (Interview 6, December 2000, Page 13).

The funding distribution reflects government policies which increasingly stress collaboration with the private sector. According to Newson and Buchbinder (1988), the marketization of education policies has increasingly become the model for managing higher education. Where there is a close fit between the curricular and the workplace, funds are much more easily attainable. Typically, faculties such as the business management, law and the physical and natural sciences are favoured. Even within the social sciences such as applied sociology and economics, their funding budgets are much higher due to their emphasis on quantitative methodologies (Slaughter and Leslie, 1997).

According to Fred:

(In) economics and applied sociology more funds are allocated there...Institutionally, even coming down from the provincial government which has not been really supportive of, not only education in general, but also in terms of when you break that down, where does the money go? Well, it goes into technology, so you pay for computers which are not necessarily horrible but when that is all that is being done, I think it is a problem. When you go down the line and filter that then you see in situations like this... which doesn't get a lot of money to begin with, you just see the lack of money for doing research . So because of that you suffer even more. So then we apply for money...you write about computers and then you might get funding (Interview 8, January 2001, Page 11).

The state was seen as inextricably tied to the way in which the institution handles its financial affairs. In making the connection between state and education, participants were able to make direct connections to the effect of marketization policies. As a result, minority graduate students are forced to become "entrepreneurs" in their quest for securing funding. They became

entrepreneurs by taking employment in more “conservative” departments while maintaining personal links with more “liberal” departments. Others chose courses with a more “practical” component in order to match their skills to the general labour market. They felt that what became a necessary skill was their ability to match their research to that of the general labour market demands. These students felt that the liberal ideal of higher education for the sake of learning has disappeared, and they in turn, are forced to meet the demands of the labour market by having more general, applicable skills.

Not surprisingly, faculties that follow the market model are seen as not only more useful but they have the added benefit of increasing the University’s prestige externally. Participants reasoned that this resonates with epistemological bias.

The perception of people from his faculty is different from that of the University in general. The reasons are threefold. One, that qualitative research is more accepted and supported here. The rest of the University is very conservative place...which is ideologically prevalent. So anytime you think this person goes there you sort of think well, we don’t really like that type of research. We don’t respect it...The other thing with here is that it is seen as a more radical place where ideas flourish that are not conventional and that doesn’t really go with the status quo... So there is that perception ...especially among older professors at this University in that they don’t really think very highly of people here regardless if it is professors or students (Interview 8, January 2001, Page 3).

This student went on to relate that when he applied for a teaching assistant position in this “conservative department,” the shop steward warned him about the negative ways in which he will be perceived by staff and students in that department. He continued:

It wasn’t my own fear of being seen negatively by professors that I would apply to. It was ...that I have an uphill struggle because of the reasons I have mentioned. That they really won’t see me as any other student. They will see me as a type of student from a different place and for that matter, I might as well be from another school entirely, not part of

this...university (Interview 8, January 2001, Page 4).

The story highlights the ways in which institutional bias becomes embedded in academic relations, whereby departments that are ideologically tied to the status quo are highly rewarded and those that challenge the status quo are penalized. This creates an atmosphere where players seek to legitimize and solidify their interests. The obvious impact is that graduate students are the losers in this war for funding distribution. In the highly competitive field of higher education, certain students are valued more highly and competed for more strongly than others (Ball, Maguire and Macrae, 1998). The interplay between race and space is important in making sense of the organization of funding. According to Ball, Maguire and Macrae (1998), spatial practices are never neutral in social affairs. They always express some kind of class or other social content and are often the focus of intense social struggles over scarce resources. Several participants felt that the university can diffuse the situation by investing more money into creating more graduate assistant positions not only there is a need for it, but also because the University is rich enough to afford to do so. On the other hand, they were skeptical as to whether this idea would be adopted because it might be seen as not cost effective.

Given the difficulties encountered, the obvious question one might ask is: Why do students continue to enrol in faculties or departments that are grossly under-funded? What was their motivation for continuing under such financial and emotional strains? Some participants remained in their programs because it was one of the few departments addressing issues of concern to minority students. They note that even though the danger in so doing was that they might become marginalized and ghettoized, yet by so doing they had gained the strength to attain their goals.

What became apparent in these stories was the connection to mentoring. By staying in departments where minority issues were highly considered, participants may have felt like they were mentored. While this was an indirect connection to mentoring relationships, it was obvious that participants stayed despite the economic and other hardships because they were encouraged to pursue their research interests. This definition of mentoring needs to be more fully examined in looking at faculty and minority students' relationships. In addressing issues of mentorships they had made it clear that they did not want the "traditional" mentor, protegee relationships.

It is possible that minority graduate students may have quite different needs than those of their majority counterparts, which they want to see reflected in their relationships with faculty. For these participants, their presence in certain departments might be viewed as mentoring opportunities of encouragement. As a result, students might have put up with the lack of GAship and high fees because it serves a higher purpose. This also brings up the issue: Why do minority graduate students choose certain spaces within academia? The racialization of space has important implication for graduate minority students. Very little attention is given to this issue in higher education which warrants closer examination. Regardless of their individual frustrations, minority graduate students feel that GAships have an enormous role to play in their graduate training and this has certain implications for their academic career.

The Role of Graduate Assistantships

The results indicated that GAships are important in pursuing an academic career for minority graduate students. They stressed that it was important for universities to provide both practical and theoretical training for graduate students. According to the findings in this study,

three primary roles that GAships provided for these participants have been identified: academic, financial and emotional.

Academic Role

The literature reveals that academically, student assistantships (such as teaching and research assistantships) are instrumental to the professional development of graduate students. In their research on teaching assistantships, Smith and Simpson (1998) concluded that teaching assistantships have positive influences in the attainment of faculty positions once students have graduated. Since scholarship in higher education emphasizes research as well as the pedagogy of the discipline, graduate programs which provide training and experience in discipline-based pedagogy increase students chances for successful recruitment by providing a smooth transitions into faculty positions (p.91).

Like these researchers, participants stressed the fundamental need for GAships because they provided theoretical and practical training in their area of expertise. The following comments illustrated this point:

It will give me the conceptual framework for what I want to do, and that is something I think every graduate student must get...I think that it is a very good transition. You know, a preparatory stage toward the future especially if you want to be in academia. It is very, very important because with either GA or TA, the person is exposed to solid quality academic work whether it is through publishing, through literature review or through teaching assistantship ... you are going into a practice that would form part of your future life (Interview 9, January 2001, Page 5).

Experiences like that you need to eventually obtain positions in academia and to have teaching and research experiences... It can't do anything but to bolster your chances of landing a position in academia somewhere. One of the main reasons why I choose to even apply was not so much for the money. The money is obviously nice but I mean you are not going to pay your school years with it given the tuition increases in the last few years...For

me, it was more a matter of here is the experience for doing so. Eventually, down the line, I can use this...as something to put on my C.V./resume which should go further to bolster my being able to land a position in academia somewhere (Interview 8, January 2001, Page 5).

It was evident that all participants were overly concerned about their ability to be competitive in the academic labour market. With increasing emphasis on practical skills such as teaching, this deficit had not escaped their attention. Those who were at the masters level especially appeared to be concerned about the market value of a Ph.D. and as to whether it was going to make an increased difference in their job status. They were actively weighing the deficit in using more of their time and resources for another five years. For instance, one participant obtained a teaching job while completing her Masters degree. It was a “choice” position and she was torn between taking this position full time as opposed to pursuing a full time Ph.D. In considering her financial and other obligations as a parent, she chose to delay the Ph.D. and become a full time salaried employee.

Another academic role of GAship was mentoring. I want to clarify that these participants did not have a traditional view of the mentor/protégé role. Several participants noted that they “did not want to be led by the hand.” What they felt that would be most beneficial was having a faculty member as a guide in making certain decisions while at the same time allowing for their autonomy. The need for direction came from feeling of being disconnected from their department. This was especially noted by non-graduate assistants who felt alienated from their supervisors and the institution as a whole. For instance, some participants found it difficult to obtain information about decisions to be made about their graduate studies in a timely manner, such as filling out

graduate assistantship forms.

Participants felt that they needed more direction and general help in making career choices and attaining their career goals. I have had numerous encounters where students have called me to help obtain or clarify information. In one instance, I invited a Ph.D. candidate to my thesis support group meeting organized by my supervisor, so that she could overcome her feelings of alienation. On the other hand, participants who were graduate assistants felt the opposite, in that their prolonged exposure to the discipline through hands on experience gave them a feeling of connectedness, such as having a relationship whereby learning and respect can take place mutually.

In my case with Professor B, there is a lot I can learn from his theory and his principles in developing the course...because he has actually read my work. If he hasn't read my work before, I can use that to do my own research and use his principles so then there is an exchange between him and myself. He learns from my studies in criminology and political science and then I take a lot from his...theory ...and that becomes a mutual exchange in the development between the student and the faculty. So, I think it is an extremely important exercise (Interview 3, December 2000, Page 3).

It is an extremely important thing for mentoring. A student is placed with a professor to work with, who can really guide and direct that person who knows where that person can go. That person can go very far. I can ...think of some examples of people who had GAships with certain professors and I see that they are still working with that professor and they present at conferences all over the world so there are some good stories (Interview 9, January 2001, Page 4).

The recognition of the importance of mentoring in graduate school correlates to the literature findings whereby socialization practices are inherently linked to apprenticeship. In a university setting, the relationship typically consists of an accomplished faculty member and a graduate student. Researchers (Winkler, 1983; Whitt, 1991) conclude that apprenticeship experiences help

to pave the way to acceptance as faculty members as well as providing much needed training in research and teaching. Yet, despite these well-documented socialization experiences, minority graduate students continue to experience a lack of faculty mentoring (Turner and Thompson 1993, p. 366).

I was fascinated by the fact that few participants identified a faculty member whom they could call a mentor. Of all the participants, only two females reported having had such a relationship. One participant stated:

I was very fortunate in that regard. I had a lot of experience teaching in different situations and even as a minority teacher in Birmingham, England. My "mentor," a white woman, was ideologically positioned on the left. Her research interests were in social justice and equity issues, and she was one of those rare academics who actually practised what she preached. She gave me some important insights into social justice and equity issues in education in the Toronto area. She also encouraged me to be a voice for those issues in the academy (Interview 1, December 2000, Page 2).

Another female graduate assistant noted that although she had a good mentoring relationship, it was at a previous university with a minority scholar:

I have had (mentoring) relationships like that before, at the other university.... where I was a GA with this Black professor. He was great and we did a lot of work on teacher education and access...I was his G.A for about a year and I was in charge of putting together a research project which I wrote a report and submitted and he used it in the department and for funding different things...I more or less steer that report, well in collaboration with someone else, but she ended up not finishing up the work and I did, so I felt I grew a lot because of that sense of trust and respect and also from a skills-based perspective. One of the things that I find is that it is not a given that you will be able to access certain skills that you will like to be able to in your work. So, with him, there were courses that I took in research, qualitative research techniques which I then used immediately when it came to collecting the data, analyzing the data and writing the report. There were various steps in the process and he was there supporting me throughout, giving me the access to the knowledge in order to produce this work at the end--the final product.

So that was a really wonderful relationship. And it wasn't until it was over that I appreciated it more (Interview 2, January 2001, Page 3).

On the other hand, the males who had attained graduate assistantships or who had only recently entered graduate studies felt confident about their mentoring prospects. They did not appear to share the same anxieties about being left "out of the loop." In fact, they felt quite good about their prospects once they have completed their studies. One male in particular was extremely confident in his ability to obtain an academic position despite not having a GAship while another who had a GAship felt that he had "an advantage" over his colleagues. I would say that in many ways, the males in this study seem to be able to negotiate their way around academic structures more efficiently than their female counterparts.

How do we account for these gender differences? One possible answer is the influence of gendered roles. For example, one-half of the female participants were mothers and primary caregivers. Therefore, they may have been preoccupied with the impact of further studies on their families and increased financial costs. Conversely, it could be argued that women are taught to be modest while men are socialized to be the opposite, and since graduate school encourages competition and rewards individualized learning, (traits that are encouraged in men) they may find its structures easier to navigate. An important point to remember is that most men in this study were single, or had no family of their own so they may have had more time to spend on campus, thereby, developing a wider social network within the university community.

A second related question is, why do male participants feel so positive about their mentoring prospects? It is possible that minority males might reflect majority males in receiving more mentoring than their female counterparts. In some ways, this finding corresponds to the

literature on mentoring whereby females, especially those from minority backgrounds are less likely to have a mentor/protégée relationship. We cannot dismiss factors such as accents, age and social class in mentoring decisions. For instance, some participants who were graduate assistants talked about the ways in which their dress codes and accents were viewed negatively by supervisors. As mentioned above, most female participants with children felt that having a family may not be seen as conducive to academic life which may have deterred mentoring relationships.

It can be viewed that in many ways, the structure of academia might be more accommodating to minority males even when they face similar barriers as their female counterparts. Since few studies focus on male minority graduate students, this would be fertile ground for contrasting experiences. Because gendered roles are replicated in university education, it is also possible that male and female graduate students might experience and negotiate graduate schooling differently. Likewise, race and/or ethnicity is implicated in these stories. Many felt that it was not only their gender but their racial background that played an influential role in the way they interact with faculty. For example, some departments were less friendly toward research focussing on issues such as race and religion which made it difficult for students to do their work.

According to Turner and Thompson (1993), race, class and gender play an important role in who gets mentored in graduate school. Traditionally, the protégé of choice was white, male and middle class. With some minor deviations, not much has changed despite the much touted policies of equity and diversity. These researchers also found that majority women had more opportunities than women of colour for such apprenticeship opportunities as research and teaching assistantships, coauthoring papers with a faculty member, making presentations at professional conferences, and being introduced by faculty to a network of influential academics who could

provide support for students seeking entry level jobs (Turner and Thompson, p.361).

What became apparent in this study was that a mentor was not solely dependent on sex or race. This is apparent in comparing the experiences of two females with opportunities for being mentored by white female professors. Theresa's experience with a white female professor was extremely satisfying. This professor who was ideologically complimentary encouraged Theresa to advocate for her community on issues of social justice. Tina on the other hand had a much different experience. She felt that her white would-be mentor had more to gain professionally by having a minority protegee. She felt like a token, not respected for her intellectual skills. Anna continued by saying,

Not only was I a student but I was the student of this particular person...because she had accepted me into this department. The whole process of feeling as though you are accepted not because of what you are or what you have or your level of capacity...but because maybe this person has her agenda or you know, you have to be able to be shaped by this person and I just didn't want to do that and I just didn't want that...I suppose it's okay if you have a lot in common with this person but I felt as though she was using me for other purposes like her own agenda ...It could be out of her own kindness. I don't know what it was, but I felt as if I was the thing to say this is mine. And not only that, but gaining credibility with her peers through me. I felt too uncomfortable with it. I want somebody who functions in academics in her own right not because of something that I do (Interview 2, January 2001, Page 2).

Tina viewed her relationship with a black male professor to be much more fulfilling whom she felt gave her challenging assignments and "trusted her decisions." She noted that she did not realize how much she had learned from his tutelage until she had left that university. There is therefore a tension around wanting to be mentored but also needing autonomy. The sometimes intense power struggle between student and professor is a result of this tension.

In this study, it appeared that while factors like race, sex, gender, ethnicity and class might be important in mentoring relationships, “mutual respect” was seen as the primary element. Those who were graduate assistants felt that in a real sense, they were not necessarily respected as colleagues. Several participants felt that some faculty members are still uncomfortable with the idea or actuality of having a minority faculty as their colleague. They believed that minority graduate assistants for example were treated differently depending on how they were perceived by their colleagues. For instance, it seemed that where the possibility for assimilation or integration into the department was great, there was a higher probability for mentoring from non-minority faculty.

Anna outlined a scenario where her co-worker, another minority graduate assistant who was concentrating on “traditional” research, was treated much differently. She felt uncomfortable talking about her work because it dealt with issues of gender, race and social class. In order to get support for her work, she felt that she had little choice but to pursue relationships with faculty outside the department. In many ways, minority graduate students do not feel safe talking about their research when it concentrates on issues such as race, ethnicity and class in more “traditional” departments. Anna cautioned that gaining any assistantship position does not guarantee respect or acceptance for the minority scholar.

What was apparent from these narratives was that good mentoring relationship was seen as contingent upon “mutual respect and trust.” Participants felt that mentoring was mutually beneficial when both parties could learn from each other. The mentor’s role was seen as that of a guide while at the same time being able to maintain a respectable distance so that students have the space to explore their own ideas. Essentially, they felt that mentoring would be more beneficial

to students and faculty if it is embedded in the institutional policies so that faculty can be recognized for their efforts. These participants believed that if mentoring was recognized as valuable work through faculty evaluation for tenureship, then it would be an incentive to pursue these relationships.

I think...that's one big mistake they are making in academia. They only highlight their publications, the published work... They don't evaluate (mentoring) but there should...be a serious mentoring evaluation. Ultimately, the goal is to really enhance learning and students must feel that there is somebody that seems like a role model (Interview 9, January 2001, Page 6).

For some, this was important because it removes the feeling of being obligated to the faculty member. It appeared that where mentoring occurred, students believed that there was an expectation that "they should feel grateful since they are taken under someone's wings out of the goodness of their heart." This problem they felt, could be alleviated if there is an official policy to encourage a culture of mentorship within departments at the graduate level.

Emotional Role

In this study, I prefer to view emotional roles as those whereby participants felt graduate assistantships affected their general sense of well-being. On the whole, graduate assistantships were seen as having a positive impact on students' academic career in that they felt a greater sense of connectedness to departments and colleagues.

I find it very useful to work with other students when we have different interests. I mean academic interests in terms of advice. I always seek advice, asking questions even those

related to my thesis...I find it useful to work with a team... In fact, I prefer to work with other students than working by myself, otherwise I will feel kind of isolated (Interview 7, December 2000, Page 3).

Being at the heart of departmental activities may have helped in bolstering their self-confidence and in making connections to the larger academic community, thereby reducing their stress levels.

Generally, being part of a community was important to all participants and those who felt that their departments fostered a community feeling were most satisfied with their programs.

I noticed a remarkable difference in participants' attitude as they talked about the improvement in their lives by having a GAship. They felt that having a graduate assistantship provided a sense of accomplishment.

When I didn't have it I was just floating in the system. I wasn't serious with myself. I strongly believe that there is a strong correlation between having a GA and your academic performance. It is good pre-exposure for what I really want to do...It will give me the conceptual framework for what I want to do and that is something every graduate student must get (Interview 9, January 2001, Page 5).

It was evident that participants who were graduate assistants had a better sense of direction in terms of their career development. The overall high level of morale among those with graduate assistantship speaks to effect in improving individuals' well-being. Generally, they seemed more focussed and more self assured. For this group, they were able to envisage the possibilities of pursuing an academic career with little difficulty. Now that they were becoming acculturated in research and pedagogy of the discipline, they seemed to have a better sense of their potential.

On the other hand, participants tell about the emotional anxiety and low self esteem in feeling devalued for not having a GAship. The following reflection is a typical narration from the

Ph.D participants on this issue.

When I first came here, I really felt a little bit down. I say to myself I was getting the GA even when I was in the Masters program in Western and here I was in the Ph.D program and there wasn't any G.A which really lowered my self esteem. I thought what the heck, is that it? I don't have a GA in my Ph.D. program. So it really made me to think that I wasn't that useful and it was really impacting my studies. I think that it impacted my academic work. In addition, ... you need to have money in order to go to conferences. In order to go to other places, you need to have all these things in place. I don't know how you can do quality research when you are in this position (Interview 9, January 2001, Page 3).

This participant is making the connection between financial and emotional well-being which is interdependent in this study. It would be unwise to separate these two elements as they are both instrumental to academic success. Having a GAship created financial stability which in turn increase students' concentration on academic matters such as attending conferences, or partaking in departmental activities.

The non-graduate assistants on the other hand were uncertain about pursuing an academic career. They were preoccupied with the financial obligations and how increased debt will be repaid in the future.

I have to look at practical things. For me, money is a big issue...I cannot see myself investing four more years in this (Interview 4, December 2000, Page 6).

What will have to change? ... I guess it will have to be ... my financial situation but that is only part of it. I think what would make me change my mind would be if I could find out in advance whether or not I would get a GAship; that would make a difference if I do decide to go full-time. I was thinking, suppose I applied full-time and did not get my GA then I would be on the losing end and so I would probably switch back (to part-time) but then they probably don't allow you to do that (Interview 6, Interview 2000, Page 12).

Like this participant, everyone in this study was actively engaged in the process of negotiating their

funding choices and its consequences for their educational future. As we see with this participant, financial obligation became the predominant factor in deciding whether to proceed to Ph.D. studies. There were very few participants who were unconcerned about finances, what is more important, it also created many anxieties.

A major part of their problem was their sense disconnectedness from colleagues, advisors and the department in general. The psychological distancing within departments was predominant in this study.

I have been trying to get somebody to answer questions about what I need for my MRP and I cannot get anybody to answer. I am thinking that I am going to call on Monday and say direct me to a website or something where I can get to but nobody is answering me. I later got Professor J, but when I spoke with him, he said "I am not sure" (and) that he wouldn't want to give me details that are wrong so I should contact the department which is the correct thing to do. I tried but the mailbox was full. Another time I left a message ...but nobody me back. Up till now, I am exactly at the spot I was a week ago (Interview 4, December 2000, Page 7).

It is this sense of frustration that had a negative impact on their academic experience. Some considered delaying an academic career, or it had taken them longer to complete their Ph.D. It is not because they were failing at their courses, on the contrary they were doing quite well, but their increased financial responsibilities were always at the forefront when weighing career possibilities. What was interesting in this study was that none of the participants mentioned wanting to dropout. These students were unlike the participants in Duncan (1976) and DeFour and Hirsch (1990) in their studies on social support among black graduate students. These researchers found that there were either a large number of dropouts or there were a large number of students who had thought of dropping out.

The difference in results could be partly attributed to the belief among most participants

in this study who felt that their work was most supported in this faculty. DeFour and Hirsch (1990) in their studies on social support among black graduate students noted that they were less likely to drop out of their school if they had more external contact with black faculty. In many ways, it was apparent that students' sense of connection within the institution had a great impact on how they perceived themselves as would-be academics.

Financial Role

Financially, graduate assistantships were viewed as an important source of income for all participants. They reasoned that "on average, a graduate assistantship paid higher, more stable income" in comparison their jobs in the external labour job market. It was therefore more beneficial to have a GAship because it reduced the need to have several part-time jobs, likewise, it brought prestige and professionalization to their status within the university. Shona's story illustrated this point. As a doctoral student she obtained a graduate assistantship in her third year which made a marked improvement in her academic life:

Last year, the money I got from my part time job was not enough so I had to look for another job out of campus. I was devastated because for one term, I didn't really have time to study because I was working away from here. I had another job outside of campus. I had some family obligations and I'm expected to study and to do my readings and so on. So, I found it very hard. This is one of the reasons I'm so glad I get my G.A. because now I don't have to do it, but how about those of us who don't have one? I think it is important not only for the money but for the experience, career and so on ... (Interview 7, December 2000, Page 8).

For Shona and others like her, the added bonus was that now they can spend more time on campus and can now contribute to the various departmental activities such as student politics. However,

as Shona quickly pointed out, she is in the minority.

Another dimension to the financial problem is that most participants had certain familial responsibilities. This was the same for participants who were single with no children as well as those who had families of their own. In case of the former, only three of the participants in the study had no children. Some of the single participants talked about the fact that they were expected to help out with family obligations when necessary. I can speak to this issue personally coming from a Caribbean background. Most Caribbean households comprised of extended families who share contribution toward household finance, child care etc. So when family members immigrate, there is an obligation they adhere to and the expectation is that they will support those in their homeland, which could take the form of money, food or clothing. It becomes difficult for many full time minority students to meet these family obligations as well as their financial obligations for graduate school. Although family members understand by allowing that individual to pursue his or her graduate studies, there remain feelings of guilt for not being able to “help out.” Sometimes, elderly family members might require expensive health care treatments with medication that are more easily obtainable in Canada. In such situations, those who are residing here might take the responsibility for providing such care.

As Shona pointed out, she had to meet family obligations which meant taking several jobs. One of the difficulties for families receiving funding through the Ontario student aid program (OSAP) is that it was not intended to support families. The fact is that OSAP is premised on the middle class nuclear family values of funding. It presupposes that students will get financial help from their families. It does not consider alternative family arrangements or obligations so the financial needs of some minority graduate students and those from the working class are outside

the norm. So students who have kin based familial relationships might find themselves in a position contrary to the funding protocol for the “general” graduate student population.

One group of students who deserved particular attention in addressing the research question was international students. Like all graduate students, international students experienced similar financial difficulties but theirs appeared to be more extreme. Most international students exist on scholarships from their home countries. However, the high cost of living (i.e., rent, food and clothing) combined with high tuition fees in Canada exhaust their financial resources quite quickly. Since international students’ fees are twice as high to those of Canadian students, and they are not legally allowed to work in Canada, they faced enormous financial pressures. These students are not only concerned about their financial constraints but also the quality of their graduate training in terms of applying theory to practice. I would make the analogy of training graduate students to that of training a doctor. Doctors cannot practice medicine if they are not trained in theory and practice, irrelevant of their student status. International students appear to be in need of the same consideration. There are some universities such as the University of Western Ontario, in an effort to provide training and to alleviate the financial hardship these students encounter provide assistantships.

I asked participants about the way in which they coped with their under-funding constraints. The way they have chosen to negotiate graduate studies depended on whether they were a graduate or non-graduate assistant. As I have stated above, most participants worked outside the University as this participant outlined:

I cope with my under funding by getting work, paid employment outside of the University. It would be wonderful to get a GAship, but I think ...the only way I can cope is ...by getting

a job (Interview 6, December 2000, Page 11).

This was the case for most participants who were non-graduate assistants. They were engaged in a combination of part time and full time employment. Most worked several part time jobs while attending full time studies and in the minority of cases, they worked full time. The major implication for working outside the University was that they spent more time juggling their family, work and academic lives. The financial impact of under-funding among non-graduate assistants resulted in increased emotional and academic stressors. As a result, most participants felt that they were unable to participate in campus life as it was almost impossible to do both. According to Williams (2000), financial assistance (such as receiving assistantships and fellowships), full time enrollment and developing collegial relationships were strong indicators of academic success and social integration in graduate school. The fact that these students felt unable to participate in students activities speaks to the extent to which they are integrated into their various departments.

For graduate students who had children to support, they cope by sharing babysitting with friends or having family members help out (Interview 4 and 9). Typically, some have family members, usually grandparents, migrate to Canada who can care for children in order to keep down day care expenses. To illustrate this point, a friend who is a Ph.D. colleague whom I met while we were in the first year of our programs, is currently in his second year of his Ph.D program and has only received a GAship. Since receiving his GAship, he appears to be more relaxed, more self assured. He related the story that his family had increased as he now had a new baby and found that he couldn't cope financially because his wife was also a student. In order to meet rising child care expenses, he had his mother migrate to Canada to take care of their children temporarily so that they can survive financially. I remember meeting this student several times during our first

year as graduate students and he appeared to be constantly worried. Now that he has attained a GAship in his second year, he seemed content, more enthusiastic about his graduate studies. Although the financial stress is not altogether alleviated, having the assistantship made a great difference in his outlook. This story is typical of the many minority graduate students who I have spoken to on a formal and informal basis throughout the course of this research. These students have to negotiate how to survive not only graduate school but also family life on a stringent budget.

CHAPTER SIX: DISCUSSION

When I began this research, my intention was to allow the data to speak for itself. I had hoped that any themes and theories that emerged would be grounded in the data. I started out by examining minority students' perceptions of representation as graduate assistants. I asked how does funding organize graduate students academic life? How do they feel about policies/procedures in regard to funding graduate students? What are the relations of ruling from graduate students perspective? What is lost and/or gained in the process of securing funding? Through these questions, I have been able to obtain a glimpse of the ways in which they negotiate their funding dilemmas and still maintain successful graduate careers. In the ensuing discussion, these questions will be related to the literature and also their implications considered for graduate education.

Under-representation

In interviews with students, I asked about the representation of minority students as graduate assistants. All participants believed strongly that they were under-represented as graduate assistants and felt that the number of GAships should be substantially increased. One of the problems in the discussion of under-representation is that of "empirical evidence" in determining quantitatively whether minority students are indeed under-represented in these positions. There is indeed some justification to this concern which highlights the need for more rigorous data collection on graduate assistant representation within universities. Minority students might be well-represented within some departments, but within the university as a whole, the story might be entirely different (Thomas, 2001a). However, since this is an exploratory study, it leaves this

topic open for further investigation.

The issue of increasing the numbers of GAships is of great concern to all graduate students as reflected in a survey undertaken by the students' union. Although the participants were all graduate assistants, they ranked increasing the numbers of GAships as one of the primary issues that need to be addressed (CUPE Survey, 2001). One of the interesting findings in my study is that due to the difficulties experienced in obtaining a GAship several participants expressed concerns about their ability to either continue graduate school or complete their studies in a timely manner. The fact that non-graduate assistants spent longer time working outside the university may have affected the amount of time that they can allocate to their graduate work. It was also apparent that non-graduate assistants tended to have less contact with their supervisors and departments in general. These students ended up relying on their friends for information to help make important, life altering decisions. I have had to deal with these situations on many occasions, whereby I would act as a "middle-man" by going directly to the department to get the necessary information because my colleagues were unable to get to the office before closing time.

Another important observation was that the participants who were Masters students appeared to be most vulnerable to a discontinuation of their studies. That is, they were less likely to pursue a Ph.D. as they viewed their dismal prospects for getting a GAship, in addition to their rising debts. Those who showed an interest indicated that it might be on a part-time basis only. Despite the difficulties encountered, none of the participants mentioned wanting to drop out of their programs. One possible explanation is that the presence of visible minority faculty and students may have been a motivating factor in wanting to complete their programs. The other implication for the graduate assistant selection criteria at the University of Toronto is that it is set

up in such a manner which serves to favour Ph.D. students. The end result is that many potential Ph.D students who are at the Masters level are screened out of this pool. The alternative for many students is to seek out “better” funding possibilities in other universities. In the past year, I have spoken to many Masters students who have expressed concerns about funding and have sought to continue their studies where the funding possibilities are greater. Likewise, some students have decided not to continue their Ph.D. because of this dilemma.

This finding is corroborated by a survey on graduate student funding in the fall of 1999 for the Dean’s Committee on Student Funding. The respondents in this survey consisted of full-time doctoral stream students only. One of the findings was the high in-completion rate among graduate students. When asked about the influence of certain factors in their decision whether or not to register, 44.8 percent of respondents noted current debts, and 41.4 percent noted available student funding as influential factors. The study did not clarify the racial and ethnic background of the respondents but the finding is important in recognizing that student funding and rising debt have enormous implication on graduate students’ ability to successfully complete their studies. Like this study, the participants in my research enjoyed their program but as mentioned earlier, their funding stresses made it difficult for them to consider the possibility of continuing to the Ph.D. level. Like this survey, research on minority graduate students (DeFour and Hirsch, 1990; Williams, 2000) conclude that institutional support in the form of assistantships and fellowships had direct influence on not only financial well being but social integration into their departments.

These participants were quite aware that their funding experiences were partly due to departmental and governmental factors that mitigate against full participation in their graduate education. Like these participants, anti-racist theorists (Dei and Karumanchery, 1999) noted that

part of the issue has to do with the severe cutbacks in higher education and deregulation of tuition. Due to these severe cutbacks, issues around equity are pushed to the sidelines for the sake of the bottom line. Instead, the current debates on funding use merit and competition in an effort to justify decisions. Such explanations tend to nullify concerns about inequities since merit equals neutrality and objectivity. As a result, many students feel that they are at a “crisis” point in their education.

In order to address the problem of under funding, some departments have shown their good intentions toward helping alleviate graduate student funding crisis by taking equity measures to rectify the problem. However, as Fine (1991) noted, good intentions are not enough, since we cannot ensure that such efforts will continue nor will they result in desired long term change for graduate student funding. It is important to stress here that anti-racist theory is not concerned about the intentions of a program or policy, rather they prefer to examine how they work to alienate and or marginalize others. What is needed is an inclusive graduate funding policy but as Dei and Karumanchery (1999) argue, the current education system is not designed to meet the needs of all students. What is most apparent is that the issue of graduate student funding cuts across the board, as it affects most students, regardless of their racial background. Although these authors were writing in the context of secondary education in Ontario, their findings are also applicable to graduate studies in general.

One might ask the question: Does under-representation mean inequity? Or, is higher education fair to minority graduate students? To answer the first question, critical feminist theorists such as Prentice (2000), argue that one of the difficulties in addressing issues of under-representation is that the traditional discourse on equality in the academy is premised upon

classical liberalism. In this framework, rights and opportunities may not be assigned by ascribed personal or group characteristics such as race, sex, religion or physical ability. Instead, such opportunities are to be distributed by individual merit and personal accomplishment. However, as the results indicate in this study, notions of merit and personal accomplishment do not guarantee students' attainment of GAships. As Calliste (2000) notes, what is discounted in such policies are the ways in which the hidden curriculum (such as what knowledge is being valued, climate and tone of the campus) may serve to exclude minorities from being recruited into these positions (p.149). Blackmore (1993) shows that merit is not a value free or objective measure, but is used by those who have succeeded because a particular interpretation of merit maintains their advantage by claiming criteria such as objectivity, rationality and neutrality are elements of not only masculinity but of knowledge itself. Therefore, intellectual work which does not fit the pattern established by white heterosexual males can be declared to be devoid of merit (pp.38-39).

Like feminists, anti-racist and critical theorists (Prentice, 2000) believe that the liberal framework of merit relies on formal equality because it is embedded in the administrative and legal processes which are seen as neutral, objective, merely common sense. Under these formal terms, they further argue, the university sees its role as that of ensuring equality of opportunity. Therefore, in order for one to claim under-representation or discrimination, it must be shown to be direct and intentional. Furthermore, they postulate that under-representation does not constitute discrimination and that concerns about under-representation build non-merit criteria into academic decisions (p.199). This reasoning has the effect of "blaming the victims" since minorities' under-representation can be attributed to their lack of personal achievement and inadequacies. The liberalists use of naturalization of the status quo avoids the important reality of how power has

been, and currently is, distributed. The view that individuals are inextricably raced, sexed, classed gendered and otherwise marked by social divisions are conveniently over-looked. In that sense, as Acker (1984) would argue, the university is not fair to minority students or those who are deemed "different."

Institutional Policies and Practices

Another meaningful approach to understanding the experiences of minority graduate student funding is through institutional policies and practices. In this study, we have seen evidence of the ways in which institutional policies and practices regarding the distribution of resources influence the type of curriculum and ultimately the type of students who are funded. It thus speaks to what knowledge is valued in the academy (Scheurich and Young, 1997; Giroux, 1983; Dei, 2000). Of the few researchers who have examined minority and majority graduate students' experiences, Turner and Thompson (1993) note the ways in which the distribution of institutional resources affects training and socialization mechanisms in graduate school. These researchers note that minority students were well aware of the way in which the distribution of resources such as scholarships affected their ability to compete with their counterparts. One student's remedy was to personally distribute upcoming calls for scholarships and other funding proposals to minority graduate students. While the notion of resource distribution is not new, few studies have attempted to look at this interplay in depth.

A major part of resource distribution has do with managerial practices and the marketization of education. The students' accounts are linked to research in Canada, Britain and the United States on the marketization of post secondary education. However, although much is

written about the “marketization of education,” I have yet to see studies addressing how such policies affect minority graduate students.

In a study about the commodification of education, McCoy (1998), using Dorothy Smith’s institutional ethnography, analyzed accounting procedures in a community college and how these procedures are used to distribute academic resources such as class time, class space, the number of students per class and the number of classes that must be taught. While we see the tremendous negative impact on those who teach, there was little mention of how these managerial practices affect students. One of the few comparative studies on the marketization of education was undertaken by Slaughter and Lesley (1997). They conducted a comprehensive analysis of what they referred to as “academic capitalism” in Britain, Canada, the United States and Australia. While the study concentrated on policies, it said little about how these policies affect students in post secondary education.

At the heart of the under-funding dilemma is the epistemological question of what counts for knowledge and how it should be encoded, and what is the cost for going against the grain (Dei and Calliste, 2000). Essentially, this entails the processes of validation and legitimization of knowledge. Since post secondary educational institutions are the gatekeepers of legitimate knowledge, the question of historically disadvantaged groups inserting their excluded and devalued stories is a difficult one. The conflict within that these students’ experience was seen to be caused by forces rooted within the institution (Dei and Calliste, 2000). A further contribution to this conflict was their continued investment in the liberal enlightenment notions of education. They tended to expect that their qualification and experience would ensure a graduate assistantship as demonstrated through high grades and past experience, which would convince administrators of

their worthy presence in the academy. The tension of living with difficult knowledge for these students is enormous. It left students feeling diminished by structurally imposed victimhood, puzzling over their purpose within the academy (James and Mannette, 2000). It can be contended that the lack of graduate assistantships participated in reproducing social relations of a certain designation.

The issue of minority graduate funding has implications for a much broader societal analysis. Not only is it directly implicated in the marketization of education, but it is intricately connected to the way in which institutions take up relations of difference within its structure. The current corporate model of higher education is premised upon eurocentric middle class and patriarchal curricular, assumes the same outcome for all members of society. It is therefore imperative that post-secondary institutions interrogate the ways in which they perpetuate cultural hegemonies when arguing for action to produce social change. Effective institutional strategies such as increasing funding through increased GAships (or scholarships) must move beyond mere grades or merit and must “take seriously the politics of difference” that is, they must be concerned with all forms of domination at the individual, structural and institutional levels (Dei and Calliste, 2000).

In this study, being accepted into graduate school does not automatically confer acceptance into academia. Indeed, acceptance into departmental cultures is sometimes dependent upon gender, ethnicity, race, class and sexuality in the construction of knowledge. Students’ differences must be acknowledged not only in terms of merely having a voice, but as Mohanty (1993) suggests, “the sort of voice one comes to have as the result of one’s location—both as an individual and as part of collectives” (p.61). Thus, universities must engage in the “politics of inclusion”

(p.61). This means that they must accept responsibility for the structural factors that mitigate full participation of a diverse student population, thereby providing the impetus for long-term educational change.

In listening to students' account of how they negotiated graduate studies, it became clear that students were in dire need of support during their graduate studies. From this study, participants sought two primary means of support in their coping strategies. I have differentiated between institutional and social support. Institutional support appeared to be more a structured, formalized process embedded in procedural relations of the university. Typically, this consisted of seeking funding assistance from departments or counsellors in terms of filling out graduate assistant application forms, or meeting various deadlines for graduate funding. In this study, students tended to use this type of support less readily partly because it was too impersonal and intimidating.

In many cases, they did not know that they could seek out institutional advice in filling out application forms. Some students suggested that although the institution provided temporary funding measures such as bursaries to help alleviate their financial problems, they felt like they were asking for "handouts." So, while this type of institutional support might be needed, many participants felt that offering GAships was more beneficial because they gained experience and other networking opportunities with faculty and students. In that sense, GAships were seen as having not only a financial role but also important in giving participants a positive sense of self. In looking at those who held GAships, they tell of the confidence and the edge their position has given them. The psychological benefits appeared to have outweighed the other benefits.

Institutional support also came in the form of gaining access to professors and advisors. Participants have talked extensively about mentoring relationships, however, they were specific about the type of relationship they wanted from their professors. Students did not want to be “spoon-fed” as they called it. What they wanted was greater access to information concerning important decisions about their futures such as guidance on how to negotiate graduate studies that will help make a meaningful transition into the academic job market. It must be noted that students were not critical of their professors, since they are over-extended with teaching, research and publishing responsibilities, but they did note the difficulty in either gaining access to them or having the time to talk in a meaningful way.

In making connections between institutional support and minority students’ integration in graduate studies, Williams (2000) notes that in addition to students’ background characteristics, institutional support is linked with academic achievement for minority graduate students. This includes supportive social and academic environments on campus, positive faculty relationships, low perceived individual and institutional racism and assistance with adjustment and social integration issues (p.1004). The author further notes that lack of social integration such as involvement with faculty advisors and program activities directly and indirectly influence progress for minority students in Ph.D. programs (p.1009). The implication for graduate studies is that although students have positive perceptions of faculty, their lack of interaction with advisers and program activities may directly and indirectly influence progress for doctoral students (Williams, 2000, p.1009). Some students recognized these factors and have opted for a less formal process of support, which I refer to as social support.

Elsewhere (Thomas, 2001b), I have argued that in terms of social support, many participants sought the help of friends and colleagues. In this study, social support is defined as informal relationships among peers that provide a means for coping with funding stressors. The term social support has been utilized extensively in mental health research (Gottlieb, 1981), but many of its principles are also informative in this study. These informal interactions were important in helping participants navigate their way around graduate school, i.e., information sharing such as how to fill out graduate assistant application forms, advertisements for new positions, calls for papers and meeting at a friend's house to name a few.

In general, minority graduate students preferred to use social/familial support as opposed to institutional support. Many respondents had their own social network where they obtained information more readily. One reason is that their peers might be more accessible physically and emotionally. Informal interactions with colleagues reinforced students' identity as they proceeded through graduate school. In many ways, since the institution had become a distant place for those who did not hold an assistantship, the social support given by friends helped to inform the way in which some participants related to professors, students and the institution as a whole. Thus, social networks provided an important function of reaffirming their "social identities." Social identities are related to roles and to role performances, as well as to relevant aspects of self-concept (Gottlieb, 1981).

There was a strong connection between social networks and social identities which requires further examination in relation to graduate studies. It is possible that minority students arrive at graduate studies with fewer resources than their majority counterparts. Whether we want to call this "cultural capital," or the "hidden curriculum," the implied assumption is that minority

students have differential needs which must be addressed. We need to carefully examine the role of social support networks in accessing resources in graduate school. It is my hypothesis that racialized minority groups may have differential success in the ways in which they access certain information as they navigate their way around institutional procedures. There can be viewed as resistance strategies, whereby social networks help retain students' identity while helping them cope with the transition into the dominant academic culture. The notion of social networking and community building is important in accessing how information is disseminated at the graduate level. For many, crossing the border to graduate school requires more than just "cultural capital." It requires a support system for reaffirming identities which help in confidence building to give students the courage in seeking their individual goals.

Role of Graduate Assistantships

Throughout this study, all participants recognized and stressed the importance of GAships for their academic careers. In the preceding sections, three main roles have been discussed, academic, emotional and financial. It was particularly interesting to note that the participants did not view the role of GAships as merely financial. This is not to say that they dismissed the ways in which it could alleviate their financial stresses, but they were adamant that it was the academic and emotional roles which were of utmost importance. Participants viewed GAships as providing training in their area of expertise and opportunities for networking and mentoring. They felt that their lack of GAships had negative consequences on an academic career. Some of these students had applied to other universities, or knew of acquaintances who had applied for similar positions, but were not selected for teaching or research assistantships because of their inexperience.

The participants' responses about the importance of GAships corroborate research on student assistantships which found that it is highly valued in easing the transition from apprentice to faculty status. Smith and Simpson (1998) conclude that graduate student assistantships are not only important training functions but they also serve as possibilities for networking. However, Turner and Thompson, 1998; DeFour and Hirsch, 1990; Williams, 2000 all agree that minority women and visible minorities in general have fewer opportunities for apprenticeship opportunities such as research and teaching assistantships, introductions by faculty to a network of influential academics who could provide support for students seeking entry level jobs.

Williams (2000) in particular stresses that fellowships and assistantships are among the strongest predictors of progress in doctoral programs for minority students. In applying these findings to this study, the fact that students believe that there is a severe under-representation of minority graduate assistants suggest that they are increasingly marginalized within the graduate student culture. It appears that race, sex and class are important factors which cannot be easily denied. According to James Blackwell (1989), because minorities are under represented in faculty positions, such practices inevitably result in the under selection of minorities as proteges (p.11). This telling testimony is indicative of some of the covert ways in which minority students may be "streamed" in graduate school.

What does this tell us about the minority graduate experience? One way to look at this question is to view GAships as one of many "borders" that must be crossed in graduate school. In applying Tierney's (1991) notion of border crossing, this research suggests that there are power relations inherent in the negotiation of graduate education that create more difficulties for certain groups of students. These difficulties can only be minimized by exposing the borders of this power.

Typically the protocol for funding both institutions and students, and the differential allocation of resources for particular purposes is interwoven with government (provincial and federal) funding criteria. For example, judgements about merit at the institutional level are interwoven with government funding criteria at the provincial and federal levels. In many ways then, the allocation of GAships (and other assistantships such as fellowships) are implicated in the production and reproduction of gender, race, and other forms of inequality as it is actively involved in the selection of the academic professional.

As discussed in the discursive section, the use of the “hidden curriculum” is of special interest in this study. The “strong form” of the hidden curriculum utilized certain heuristics to decide who should be mentored, such as accents, dress code and sharing similar peculiarities with professors. According to Margolis and Romero (1998), the mechanics of the hidden curriculum are intricately linked to professional socialization. This includes the departmental culture, cliques or factions, mentoring or apprenticeship relationships, the informal and formal allocation system for teaching and research assistantships. These everyday practices serve to socialize students toward identifying with faculty. Professors reward assertiveness, confidence and independence because they see these personality traits as indicators of being a good student although this may vary according to race, class, ethnicity and gender. For instance, Lee, an international student, waited for her turn and did not speak over others in class discussion. Does it imply that she is uncompetitive or submissive? Margolis and Romero (1998) assert that “this may have been appropriate when education was essentially middle class white males teaching their own middle class white males.”

There appeared to be a positive relationship between mentoring and access to resources which in many cases requires the sponsorship of a mentor. No doubt, there are minority students who have obtained Ph.Ds without a GAship, just as there are students who found the funding process so odious that they decided against pursuing further graduate studies. When these concerns are taken up together, they suggest patterns of interactions with intended and unintended consequences that make it particularly difficult for minority graduate students to survive and thrive in graduate school.

So the diverse student body today presents a paradox. How can the hidden curriculum reproduce what does not exist, that is minority graduate students who are valued equally? Margolis and Romero (1998) suggest four ways by which the hidden curriculum operates in graduate school through stigmatization, blaming the victim, cooling out, deafening silences and tracking. They further suggest that “only by making the functioning of this curriculum visible can we overcome hidden assumptions, failures and gaps” that have made it unnecessarily difficult for some students to survive graduate school.

Crossing the border into graduate school then may require minority students to make certain adjustments to overcome these hidden processes. One participant believed that some minority graduate students have accomplished this by taking dual identities since “they either internalize the discourses of the dominant to play the game by their own rules, or they actually master the discourses by critically contesting them in their own research agendas” (Interview1). Applying this participant’s theory to Dei’s (1996a) notion of identity suggests that “students, like any other group, articulate multiple, overlapping and shifting identities” (p.32). Minority graduate students are also influenced by “cultural” identities which in turn impact their experiences in

negotiating graduate school.

Throughout the interviews, all participants discussed the roles that they see GAships played in their academic lives. For most, although the financial role was important for obvious reasons, it was the emotional and academic roles that served their higher motivation. This leads me to the conclusion that while minority graduate students are motivated by the financial rewards a GAship provided, there were other factors that influenced how they perceived its importance. Having a GAship indicated a marker of achievement and the reward of higher social status. Additionally, it brings “peace of mind” so that students can get on with the business of being “serious academics.” The psychological advantage for the holder was the feeling of being quasi-faculty, because in having a GAship, they felt at par with counterparts at other universities. It gave pride to family members and friends who view the holder in high esteem. So for many within and outside of the university, a GAship is a marker that students are on their way to becoming academic professionals. However, we need to ask: When does professionalization in graduate school begin? What are the signifiers that graduate students are on way to becoming a “professional?” If the process of socialization in graduate school are small steps toward “professionalization,” then we must ask, how do minority graduate students experience that process?

In the above discussion, I have reported only the findings from this study and a review of the available literature. However, many other factors exist in this complex issue of graduate student funding. This research has only shed some light on the few issues reported in the findings. Subsequently, I have learned through this study, that a lot of work still needs to be done. I have been able to report on my original questions with some confidence but I am now left with

unanswered questions. I have concluded each interview with new ideas and notions that required further investigation. At the beginning of this thesis, I asked the question: How can this research inform issues on minority graduate education? What emerged from these participants was concern about the funding protocol and its relation to the equitable allocation of resources. The conclusion, will attempt to summarize the study's findings briefly and demonstrate the implications for schooling and educational change.

CHAPTER SEVEN: CONCLUSION

Generally, the participants' overwhelming response to what most see as a funding crisis is to increase the number of graduate assistant positions available to all students. They hope that this will not only make funding more equitable but it will also help to improve access to resources for those interested in pursuing an academic and professional career. This is an important step since these participants believe strongly that inadequate funding is inhibiting minority graduate students from reaching their full potential. Some participants believe that this will only be achieved by minority students becoming politically proactive in bringing these issues to the forefront (Interviews 4,7 and 9). One of the problems noted throughout this study was students' inability to attend departmental/faculty meetings, discussions and student activism. In effect, students are concerned about their inability to participate in campus life since most work away from campus.

Another suggestion is to offer smaller, numerous scholarships which they feel are a fairer way to distribute departmental resources. Indeed, some departments have already adopted this solution in an effort to not only alleviate the financial burden but to recognize the unique academic achievement of all graduate students.

The creation of a mentorship program is another suggestion that is seen as highly necessary. The participants feel that a mentorship program will be beneficial to both students and faculties if it is embedded in institutional policy, such as being included in the faculty evaluation for tenureship. They are aware that faculty members are under enormous time constraints to do research, teach and publish and supervise. So, in making mentorship part of the evaluation process

many feel that they will be rewarded for this work which many professors are already doing informally. For these students, mentoring is one of the most important aspects of having a GAship since they believe that “more doors will be opened.” As the literature, these students stress that it is one way of networking, gaining references and being immersed in their area of expertise.

Most participants want a more transparent selection process. As discussed previously, only a few of the participants fully understood the selection criteria. Some had chosen not to apply given the difficulties they perceived. In making the selection for GAships more transparent, students feel that they would have more faith in and a clearer understanding of the process. What is apparent from the findings is that the decision to apply for GAships depends on the degree to which applicants believe that they have a reasonable chance for successfully attaining one of these positions. Given their perception and interaction with their peers they will decide whether or not it is worth their time and effort. To a large extent, students feel they can gain greatly from support groups for minority students, addressing many of the issues discussed.

It must be noted that these participants do not perceive themselves to be “victims” in the normal sense of the word. Indeed, their very presence in graduate school proves otherwise. The type of victimization experience is seen as institutionally imposed. While the university encourages graduate students to be “competitive,” “individualistic,” and “self-directed,” some students have been given very little opportunity for students to realize these goals.

According to Merton’s (1938) theory of anomie, the imbalance between ends and means produces anomie, a state of normative ambiguity. Anomie produces strain that hits hardest those who are of lower-class status, or in this study, those whose ethnicity and gender are different from that of the dominant. The tensions surrounding their funding dilemmas have led many to question

not only their purpose within the academy but also whether this is symbolic of their position within the university in general. Since they feel that they lack economic and political clout, minority students propose that graduate students have to become more “politically proactive” in taking up these issues within their departments and the university in general. This idea was endorsed by Dei (2000). Although Dei was writing with international students in mind, his recommendations that international students must be actively involved in planning and execution of orientation services on campus, ensure that their associations become active lobby groups combining academic studies with off-campus activities, such as community seminars, social events and programs, are also applicable to visible minority students. The notion of community and coalition building in the broadest sense is necessary for both international students and visible minorities since both groups encounter similar problems addressing sex, race, class, religion and other differences.

Future Directions

This exploratory study has raised many issues which cannot possibly be done great justice in this thesis. However, in taking students’ “standpoint”, I have found that GAships are not merely financial means to an end but that they have very important roles in students’ academic and emotional well being. There is a need for further research into how these roles facilitate minority students’ integration into graduate studies. Such a study would have to examine minority graduate and non-graduate assistants’ experiences and how they might be impacted by their differences. One useful approach entails the utilization of a longitudinal study to examine how minority graduate students make the transition into academic or professional occupations using either qualitative and, or quantitative methods.

Another suggestion for future research is to address the impact of funding on research, degree completion and career development of graduate students. There is little on-going research which explores the employment experiences of minority graduate students. This vacuum reinforces complacency of established practices and enables policy makers to draw their own conclusions about the effectiveness of the policies which they may have endorsed. Likewise, there is a silence around testing the relationship between specific institutional practices or funding strategies and graduate students behaviour, which needs further examination. These questions will help illuminate the relationship between the research process, policy and practice.

Another suggestion for future research is why minority graduate students have chosen to remain in certain departments given their funding difficulties. Despite the importance of this issue, little empirical information exists. Duncan (1976) and Williams (2000) found that minority graduate students were not socially integrated into their departmental communities, but many reported having little dialogue with faculty and peers in their field of interest. It is clear that minority graduate students have had to make difficult choices in pursuing graduate studies as they struggle with being successful students but while also adapting to a new academic culture. We need to look beyond the surface of grades and dissertations to the other challenges graduate students face as they become “educated” (Mazzuca, 2000, p.225).

Another suggestion for further research concerns the experiences of international students in graduate school. There have been very few studies conducted on international students which include their voices or lived experiences. Such a study could entail an examination of how the problems of international students are different from visible and non-visible groups within the education system. Likewise, how do history, race, ethnicity, class and gender intersect in this

discussion (Dei, 2000). This is an important question given the discursive framework adopted in this study.

Implications for Pedagogy and Graduate Education

This study raised many challenges that visible minority students face in terms of funding. However, as discussed, the core problem is not necessarily a lack of money, more importantly, it concerns dominating notions of knowledge production and knowledge validation which tend to marginalize other lived experiences in the academy. If funding at the national and institutional levels prefer certain discourses, what does it say about the construction of curricula in graduate programs? It may be that the funding discourse forces students to pursue issues that are more compatible with its agenda such as research which focuses on ethnicity instead of race, or quantitative instead of qualitative research that is more likely to be funded. Such work is likely to be among the more influential voices, because presumably it is believed to be presented in the language of disinterested truth.

As learners, minority graduate students come to the academy with a wealth of knowledge and experience which needs to be reflected in the curriculum. Like Osborne (1990), I believe that “any pedagogy which ignores students’ experience and culture is not only doomed to failure but, much worse, represents a form of ideological imposition which, in turn, reflects and enhances a particular balance of political and social power” (pp.50-51). In this sense, the notion of holistic education is important in addressing the physical, emotional and spiritual needs of all graduate students. Educators must therefore question the role of funding in the production of curriculum, not just its role in disseminating knowledge, and how it impacts upon certain bodies in graduate

studies (Williams, 1997).

In the previous section, I have noted that the decision to remain in graduate school is highly dependent upon the attainment of assistantships which serve various roles. In taking these different roles into account, graduate faculties can seriously address minority graduate students' needs. It is inconceivable that lack of GAships does not have an impact on minority students' academic experience and scholarly contributions. Researchers (Williams, 2000; Wemmerus, 1988) are only now beginning to recognize that receiving assistantships are among the strongest predictors of progress in doctoral programs for minority students. In light of students' perceptions in this study, universities would do well to address funding inadequacies as they not only affect progress in graduate programs, but also retention and recruitment into graduate studies. Intervention should also focus on improving connectedness by providing academic and social programming for minority students such as assistantships, faculty mentors and social support groups.

Recommendations for Reconceptualizing Graduate Student Funding

This thesis has sought to engage a discourse for what it proposes as an improved funding policy. Toward this end, a critical analysis of the current discursive practices was undertaken primarily from minority graduate students' perceptions. This thesis has therefore aimed to provide an under-current of critical reflection in its presentation of funding in an Ontario university. It is with this same objective that the presentation of various considerations related to funding policy and practice in Ontario (and Canada) has been offered. In keeping with students' narratives, the following recommendations are aimed at improving graduate student funding.

- **It is proposed that in order to attract and keep students, faculties should automatically offer graduate assistantships upon acceptance into their programs. The process of competition for graduate assistantships defeats the purpose since most students are more than qualified by way of academic merit or experience. Rather, these positions should be seen as enticements for training given the attention to “market forces” in education recruitment.**
- **Administrators and policy makers should track students’ placements for statistical purposes in order to be able to make decisions about distribution of resources across departments. It is only when students’ situations can be tracked that we can adequately make decisions which affect target populations.**
- **Policy makers and administrators should improve the allocation of funding by not only offering specific scholarships to minority graduate students, but also increasing the number of graduate assistantship positions available.**
- **Administrators should work across departments so that graduate students can take advantage of positions within the institution, thus creating a more supportive environment for students.**
- **Improve practical training by offering more volunteer positions and practicum in which students can take advantage of opportunities in their fields of interest. For example, most faculties have research centres which can be used for such purposes, but in most cases, these centres are not very visible to graduate students, hence, many are unaware of potential opportunities. While this will not alleviate financial burden, it will give exposure to students’ potential. Conversely, it will keep**

students connected to faculties and departments in more meaningful ways.

Toward a More Critically Reflective Funding Approach

Minority graduate student funding has been presented in this thesis in an effort to address the lack of attention given to its effect on this student population. To re-emphasize an earlier contention, funding is one of the most important factors in integrating minority students into the graduate student culture (Chapter 6). However, although funding plays a fundamental economic role, more importantly, it is the emotional and academic roles that ease the transition into academia (Chapter 5). How funding proceeds in Ontario should reflect our concerns and expectations for achievement and accomplishment by our graduate students. It is widely argued that there is a noticeable shortage of minority faculty and that the academic pipeline for their recruitment will soon dry up. If this is true, then our funding policy should be fully grounded in diversity. Only then will all students be able to fully experience their true and full potentials.

We cannot dismiss the myriad ways in which race, class, gender and culture influence students' social reality (from Chapter 2). The framing of research questions reinforces certain discourses and silences others. In allowing for different realities to be reflected into the funding protocol, graduate schools can only become better able to serve all students. This should not be seen as deviating from the main business of education, instead, it will only enrich the academic research tradition.

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SCHEDULE I- INTERVIEW GUIDE

December 2000

These questions served as a guide to the discussion on graduate assistantships.

1. Do you currently hold a graduate assistantship position?
2. What has been your experience in searching and accessing graduate assistantships?
3. How are minority students represented as graduate assistants?
4. Why is graduate assistantship important in a research university?
5. How does having a graduate assistantship affect minority students career development?
6. What is lost and/or gain in the process of securing graduate assistantships?
7. Do you currently have someone in your department who you consider to be your mentor?
8. What is department culture for mentor relationships?
9. What can be done to make minority graduate students more competitive in the academic marketplace?
10. How do the funding policies at your institution affect minority graduate students? In what ways do you think your department is attempting to address graduate funding issues?
11. How do graduate students cope with under-funding stressors?
12. What do you think about the government's policy for funding higher education? How do these policies affect graduate students?
13. What do you think are the solutions that will contribute to effective strategies for improving the funding to minority graduate students?

SCHEDULE 2 — INTERVIEW

DATE	NAME	GENDER	LOCATION	POSITION	DESCRIPTION
Dec. 2000	Shona– Sudanese Canadian Resident	F	GTA (Greater Toronto Area)	GA (Graudate Assistant)	Ph.D. candidate in her third year. Received GA in third year, has no family.
Dec. 2000	Margarite– W.Indian. Canadian Resident	F	GTA	Non-GA	Full time MA student in second year. Worked full-time outside the University. Has a family.
Dec. 2000	Laura– Canadian born–W.Indian	F	GTA	Non-GA	First year M.A. student. Worked full time outside the University. Lives with parents. No family.
Dec. 2000	Daniel– W.African. Canadian Resident	M	GTA	Non-GA	Ph.D. candidate in his first year. Has no family. Not working.
Dec. 2000	Lee – Japanese. International Student.	F	GTA	Non-GA	Full-time international M.A. student. Has no family, work outside the University.
Jan. 2001	Fred– Canadian born Chinese	M	GTA	TA (Teaching Assistant)	MA student complet- ing thesis. Has no family.
Jan. 2001	Theresa– W.Indian Canadian Resident	F	GTA	GA	Ph.D. candidate. Worked within the University. Has family.
Jan. 2001	Paul– W.African Canadian Resident	M	Non-GTA	GA	Full-time Ph.D. student. Has family, live outside of the GTA .
Jan. 2001	Anna – S.African Canadian Resident.	F	GTA	GA	Ph.D. candidate with a family.