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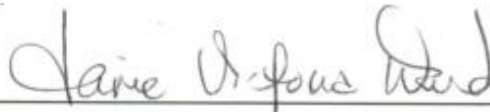
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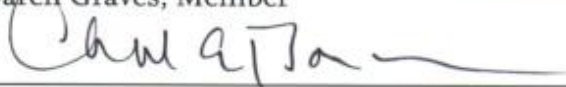
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Simmons College

The College of Arts and Sciences Graduate Studies

Department of Education

RACIAL/ETHNIC IDENTITY AS A FACTOR OF ACADEMIC RESILIENCE FOR
FEMALE BLACK AND HISPANIC UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS AT A
PRODOMINANTLY WHITE INSTITUTION

[a dissertation]

by

DELVINA MIREMADI

submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

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Dedication

I would like to dedicate this work to my husband, Craig Baldino. Without his encouragement, support and confidence in my abilities, I would not have had the perseverance to pursue my life time goal of completing my PhD.

Acknowledgements

First and foremost, I would like to thank my parents, Mehdi Miremadi and David and Barbara Keene. Without their love and support during my early years, I would not have developed the confidence, independence, and drive needed to embark on this journey. In addition, I want to thank my grandmother and late grandfather, Dr. John and Rita Seidel. Through their love of family and inspiring lifelong success, they provided the foundation and opportunity needed to pursue my dreams with fearless passion.

I would also like to thank all of my friends and family who have supported and encouraged me during this journey. I give a special thanks to my husband, Craig Baldino, who has patiently endured hours of reading and research, and countless weekends entirely dedicated to my library schedule. He unwearingly talked me through countless stressful deadlines and listened patiently as I vented about the challenges of the research and writing process. Most importantly, I want to thank him for supporting me throughout the many obstacles, challenges and rejections I faced prior to this journey. It was not an easy road, but because of his reassurance and confidence that this was my purpose in life, I was able to persevere and be where I am today. I want to thank my best girlfriends, Brooke Proulx and Amber Lane for always checking in on my progress and providing me the “You can do it” support I needed to push through. I would also like acknowledge my brothers, sisters, and parents-in-law who have supported me along the way through periodic check-ins and words of encouragement.

I am extremely grateful for the friendships I have gained during my doctoral training and educational journey. Without the invariable support and encouragement from my fellow PhD students, Nastasia Lawton-Sticklor, Tessa Misiaszek, and Charlotte Collins, achieving this goal

would have been lonely, difficult process. They all contributed a great deal of inspiration, motivation and lasting memories to this journey.

In my professional life, I have had the good fortune to work with many inspiring and understanding people who greatly contributed to this accomplishment. My friend and mentor, Dr. Nadja Reilly, provided insurmountable personal and professional development which helped guide me to find my niche and pursue an Educational PhD program. She is an individual, teacher and mentor whom I admire greatly and owe much of my academic and career success to. I would also like to thank Mark Schoder for his generosity and support. Through his understanding, supportive, and flexible leadership, I was able to accomplish this goal while balancing my life and full-time job.

Finally, I would like to thank my dissertation committee for holding me to the highest standard and guiding me through every leg of this journey. A special thank you goes out to Janie Ward, PhD, Chair of my dissertation committee, for pushing me to reach my full potential and helping me navigate the challenges and celebrate the successes that come along with this process. I would also like to thank my other committee members, Daren Graves, PhD, and Carol Bonner, PhD, for their added support and expertise. Dr. Graves was always able to offer valuable insight to my methodological approach resulting in exciting data collection and successful results. Dr. Bonner, provided expertise in the field of higher education administration and was able to ask the tough questions that helped me solidify the importance and value of this work.

ABSTRACT

RACIAL/ETHNIC IDENTITY AS A FACTOR OF ACADEMIC RESILIENCE FOR FEMALE BLACK AND HISPANIC UNDERGRADUATE COLLEGE STUDENTS AT A PREDOMINATELY WHITE INSTITUTION

Delvina Miremadi, Ed.M.

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This research explores the gap between Black and White and Hispanic and White student degree attainment in predominately white institutions (PWI). The cost associated with each individual who fails to matriculate and attain their degree is significant for the individual, the institution and for society as a whole. The purpose of this study was to explore the risk and protective factors associated with the Black and Hispanic undergraduate experience, as well as the multiple ways in which students' perceptions of their sense of racial/ethnic identity contribute to the specific protective mechanisms that buffer the effects of exposure to risk and foster students' academic resiliency.

For this study, phenomenology research methodology allowed Black and Hispanic students to describe their perceptions of the undergraduate college experience at a PWI. Data collection methods included in-depth, one-on-one, semi-structured, interviews with eleven undergraduate college students.

Findings indicate that Black and Latina students experience a variety of risk and protective factors that can positively or negatively impact their identity, academic resilience and success as a student. Data results highlight the importance of a positive Racial/Ethnic Identity as an important protective factor for academic success. Analysis revealed that *Isolation and a*

Lack of Sense of Belonging and Isolation, Racism and Microaggressions, and Financial Difficulties were among the most significant challenges faced by the students. The protective mechanisms of *family, group and peer support, internal purpose and goals, and identity duality* proved to be the most salient protective factors that contribute to student perseverance. This research revealed important insights associated with increasing positive college experiences for Black and Hispanic undergraduate students. Implications and recommendations for improving institutional commitments to these student populations will be highlighted and discussed.

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Chapter One: INTRODUCTION

This chapter contains my personal and professional relevance to this research topic, a background history of minorities in higher education, particularly Black and Hispanic populations in the United States, a statement of the problems concerning undergraduate attrition and the achievement gap, and the purpose of this study.

Personal and Professional Relevance

A variety of personal, experiential, professional, and academic factors have contributed to my interest in minority college students' resilience, wellbeing, and success. Through the experience of a family history of mental illness and a larger academic interest in psychology and education, I developed a professional passion for this field. Over time, it became a personal mission and career interest to investigate the factors involved in struggling adolescents and young adults. Even more important was my desire to translate and apply research to help practitioners and academic administrators create positive change. As I pursued my doctoral work, while simultaneously continuing my professional career in student wellness program development, I began to discover how my interests could provide valuable contributions to the field of education, resiliency, and student health and wellness. I have felt a higher purpose to use the knowledge and skills I gain to help vulnerable individuals-an impetus for my dissertation topic. What started as an interest in psychology and education early in my life grew into a broader vision to change how colleges and universities understand and address students at-risk and how institutions create an educational system that is sensitive to the direct link between students' social and emotional well-being and their success in school and life.

In addition to my academic experiences in this field, I have also pursued my passion in my professional work. Following the completion of my undergraduate degree, I took a position at Children's Hospital Boston (CHB) in the Department of Psychiatry. For five years I worked to develop innovative school-based depression and suicide prevention programs for adolescents and young adults. I worked to break the stigma around mental illness with adolescents, parents, teachers, and school administrators trying to increase early identification. Later, I took a position developing and managing online health and wellness prevention programs for college students. This was a dramatic shift away from depression and suicide. I was now focused on the larger mission to provide college students the knowledge and skills they needed to overcome challenges and thrive in their school environments (e.g. communicating with their roommate, reducing test anxiety, paying their tuition, etc.). This allowed me the opportunity to take a new approach to program development focusing not on mental illness, but on building resilience and well-being. The foundation of my practice was focused on the protective factors involved in a student's academic success despite the significant and challenging issues of college life.

As I continued my work, I developed a strong interest in minority populations, as the literature described the factors that place them at significantly higher risk for academic difficulties than their white counterparts. For minority students, the complex interplay between the risk and protective factors that contribute to positive outcomes is particularly complex. Further, because of this desire to identify the risk and protective processes, not just the outcomes, I became very interested in Qualitative research. While quantitative research-the numbers and correlations- are extremely important to research, they only tell part of the story. The rest of the story must come from the use of qualitative methods designed to hear the voices of the students. It allows us to uncover the honest experiences of students and reveal tangible, real life depiction

of the barriers, coping mechanisms, and processes affecting students' abilities to succeed despite the presence of significant risk factors. In order to develop effective, supportive, and responsive school environments that foster the success and degree attainment of *all* students, we must truly understand their perspectives and their needs.

As racial diversity in college student populations continues to increase, the degree attainment rates for certain racial and ethnic populations, such as Hispanic and African-American students, are decreasing in comparison to white and Asian students (Kim, 2011). This phenomenon must be better understood so that we can be confident that our education system equally supports the education and success of *all* students. This is the inspiration behind choosing this research topic: a research study that has the potential to impact the future of education and the lives of thousands of Americans who deserve the right to equal opportunity to higher education and an equal opportunity to flourish, succeed, and attain an undergraduate degree.

In this dissertation I explore the contribution of racial/ethnic identity to the academic resilience of female Black and Latina college students. I chose to conduct a qualitative study exploring the process by which people arrive at certain outcomes, rather than merely identifying a certain outcome. This research pays greater attention to individual students and the human understandings that occur in their experiences. "...The data and analysis are like a circular fishing net. You could try to examine each of the knots in the net to see what holds it together, but it's the strings between the knots that have to work in conjunction in order for the net to function" (Wilson, 2006 p. 120). Unlike a quick instantaneous response on a survey, the storytelling that emerges through qualitative methods enables both the listener and the teller to

participate in a deep reliving of events or experiences. Both subconscious and conscious detail Concepts and variables that improve research outcomes are discovered in the subconscious and conscious details. Because I am particularly interested in understanding the role of racial and ethnic identity development as it may contribute to protective mechanisms that contribute to students' academic resiliency, it is critical that I use a qualitative research methodology. Only through one-on-one interviews will I be able to uncover the variety of complex relationships and factors that contribute to the experiences of the academic environment for students of color. Through these students' stories, I hope to identify the factors that contribute to our overall knowledge and comprehension, following Wilson's idea that "It was up to the listener to piece together a lesson from the story and to apply the pieces where they fit to help in the current problem" (2006, p. 28).

Background

Since the United States of America declared its independence from the British, this nation has been called the "land of opportunity." This country is built on a foundation of ideas such as *freedom, prosperity*, and "all men are created equal." We are exposed to these ideological beliefs as early as kindergarten when we are taught to recite the Pledge of Allegiance, or when we learn how Christopher Columbus "sailed the ocean blue in 14 hundred and 92." And yet, as this foundation of equality was being built by our founders and written into the Declaration of Independence by President Thomas Jefferson, slavery was not only accepted, but encouraged. Black slaves were banned from exercising their right to an education. The power of the white male property owner over the black population prevented slaves from learning to read or write and banned access to any kind of education, books, or other written material. Slaves who

disobeyed this law and attempted to learn to read or write were subjected to imprisonment and punishment, including beatings and amputations (Williams, 2005). During this time before the Civil War, state provided education did not exist, as it was seen as the role of the church or the family. Further, education was seen as only necessary for white males, and only North Carolina among Southern states had established a comprehensive system of education for white children.

Later, in the years immediately following the Civil War, education became a top priority for the newly emancipated African American community. During this time known as The Reconstruction Era, over 3,000 schools for the newly freed black population were established in the south by the Freedman's Bureau, by volunteers from various missionary societies, and by blacks themselves. The Freedman Bureau was a government funded agency established in 1865 to aid freed slaves as they struggled to reconstruct their lives following the war. The schools established during this time became the foundation for public education in the region. In addition, it was during this time that the first black colleges-Howard and Fisk Universities and Hampton College - were also established. Fisk was founded in 1866 in Nashville, Tennessee, Howard in 1887 in Washington D.C., and Hampton in 1868 in Virginia. Between the 1860s and 1880s, a variety of other black schools were established, such as Tuskegee Institute and Tougaloo College, Morehouse College and Spelman College. Many of these still exist today as Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs)..

The end of Reconstruction brought about new movements, particularly for African American children in the South. In 1897 the Supreme Court case *Plessy v. Ferguson*, 163 U.S. 537 (1897), ruled in favor of “separate but equal” public facilities for minorities and encouraged policy makers to reconsider the policies in other public arenas, such as education. During this

time, inequality continued through this doctrine of racial domination and subordination in the United States (Allen, 1995).

Following the “separate but equal” doctrine of *Plessy*, from the 1890s to 1954, little progress was made in black education. With segregation still prevalent in the South, a majority of blacks received their education from Black colleges. A small number of blacks did attend elite White institutions, however, their acceptance was often accidental and done under the assumption that the applicant was white (Perkins, 1997). Despite the governmental efforts following WW II to increase higher education access to veterans which included African American and Black servicemen through the passing of the GI Bill (1944), inequality was still rampant in the segregated Black colleges vs. White colleges.

In 1954, the U.S. Supreme Court made a monumental decision in *Brown v. Board of Education*, 347 U.S. 483 (1954), declaring that separate public schools for Black and White children was, in fact, unequal (unconstitutional) and that racial segregation would now be considered illegal. This ruling was a victory for minorities, especially in higher education and, in fact, opened the door to future policies in their support and expanded civil rights. Within a few years of the abolishment of legal segregation in the US education system, the Supreme Court ruled in favor of equal access to higher education in *Hawkins v. Board of Control*, 350 U.S. 413, 414 (1956), (1995). In this case, Virgil Hawkins fought the University of Florida for admission into their law program. The Florida court had ruled that Hawkins could either attend law school outside of Florida or he could attend a law school at a predominantly black college and thus there was no need to admit him to the university. Hawkins continued to fight and in 1956 the U.S. Supreme Court expressed that Hawkins was a qualified applicant who was thus entitled to be admitted to the University of Florida Law School.

The biggest event impacting not only African Americans, but all minorities, was the civil rights movement of the 1960s and 1970s. This movement fought for equal opportunity and affirmative action programs that significantly increased the access and presence of minority populations (people of color, disabled, women etc.) into prestigious universities, corporations, and organizations. President at the time, Lyndon B. Johnson, was a supporter of equal rights in education and in 1965 signed an Executive Order mandating affirmative action for employing and hiring minorities. This raised recognition of minorities interested in higher education admissions and created an increase in the acceptance of Black and Hispanic populations into higher education. Further, it generated additional policies such as the Higher Education Act, which congress passed in 1965 to provide student loans and scholarships to students in financial need, minorities included.

For Hispanics living in the U.S. during the decades between 1900 and 1960, it was much less customary to attend higher education. Blacks were the dominant minority and Whites comprised about 87 percent of the nation's total population. However, over the last 50 years, increases in immigration and American born Hispanic offspring have contributed to a significant growth in the number of Hispanic sub groups. During the 1990s, the Hispanic population increased by nearly 58 percent (13 million), and accounted for 40 percent of U.S. population growth (U.S. Census Bureau, 1993). As the Hispanic population grows, the volume of Hispanic students entering college is also expected to increase, creating a need for research to focus on understanding the risk and protective factors for Hispanic educational success and degree attainment.

As access and equity grew in higher education, affirmative action also increased in importance, creating a range of controversy. In 1978, the case of *Regents of University of*

California v. Bakke was the first to call the policy of affirmative action in higher education into question. Allan Bakke, a white applicant, claimed that he had been rejected twice by the University of California at Davis medical school, even though he had a higher grade point average than a number of minority candidates who were admitted. While the Supreme Court held that race could be a consideration for higher education admission, they ruled that the use of racial quotas violated the clause of The Fourteenth Amendment. As a result of the decision, Bakke was admitted. While this case was the first, it soon became one of many affirmative action policies and practices in higher education employing the use of racial quotas as a means of assuring equal access to admission that raised serious legal questions. More recently, in 2003, a Supreme Court ruling in the *Grutter v. Bollinger* supported the University of Michigan Law School's use of race as only one of many factors considered in making a decision about admission, as they were seeking to create a diverse student body. This ruling supported the Bakke decision as unconstitutional; however it was a landmark case for demonstrating the importance of the use of race as one important factor to consider in the admissions process.

In these and other significant cases, affirmative action has played an important role in improving educational opportunity for minorities, for example, the consideration of race as one admission factor. However, access to higher education is only half the battle; equal opportunity for racial and ethnic minority students also means creating an academically, culturally, and economically compatible model of higher education. Such a model would assume that all students, regardless of race or gender have the same opportunity to access higher education, and more importantly persist and graduate. The majority of minorities in the U.S. entered into higher education primarily through changes in educational policy and legal action. Schools were forced to change the way they had previously operated and as a result they opened their door and

enrolled students of color in large numbers. However, most schools did so without ever changing their long standing education model which was build upon the cultural influences of white men, leading to many problems for minorities in these predominantly white institutions (PWI) have arisen.

Statement of Problem

Currently, college enrollment in the U.S is on the rise, with the U.S. Census Bureau projecting that the number of college-age individuals (ages 20–24) will increase from 21.8 million in 2010 to 28.2 million by 2050. Projections on an annual basis had expected that a record 19.7 million students would attend American colleges and universities in the Fall of 2011. Since the advent of Affirmative Action in higher education came into play, research suggests that while overall undergraduate enrollment rates are increased in general, so too are the enrollments rates for particular minority populations; including female and racial and ethnic minority students whose numbers to continue to grow. Currently, female students constitute more than half of the postsecondary student population and the numbers are growing every year, making them an important population to understand. Similarly, between 2000 and 2009 enrollment rates for Black and Hispanic students rose from 11.3 to 14.3 percent for Black students and 9.5 to 12.5 percent for Hispanic students (National Center for Educational Statistics [NCES], 2011, Table 235).

However, while the number of students enrolling in American colleges continues to increase, the proportion of students who obtain a degree prior to departure has not improved, especially among minority students (Sanchez, 2000; Strage, 1999). This points to a unique problem in the field. While the college experience can be challenging for all students in general, there are for minority students, additional barriers that make their matriculation through college

and degree attainment particularly difficult. According to the American Council of Education (2011), there is a great deal of evidence illustrating the problem that as diversity among college student populations continues to increase, degree attainment rates for certain racial and ethnic populations, particularly Hispanic and African-American students, are decreasing in comparison to White and Asian students (Kim, 2011).

Over the last few decades, 1975-2010, the gap in bachelor's degree attainment between whites and racial and ethnically diverse populations has grown significantly. For Blacks and Whites the degree attainment gap as of 2010 was 19 percentage points, and for Whites and Hispanics, the degree attainment gap was 25 percentage points. In addition, many institutions that grant bachelor's degrees fail to graduate even half of their African-American and Hispanic students in six years.

In a recent 2010 government report published by A Project of the American Enterprise Institute entitled, "Rising to the Challenge: Raising Hispanic Graduation Rates as a National Priority," President Obama calls attention to the rapidly growing Hispanic population in the United States and the importance of understanding their needs for academic success. "More than one-fifth of the students in the United States are Latino, and by 2050, which is not that far away, more than one-third of all the students in the United States will be Hispanic-Latino" (Reed & Scott, 2010, p. 7). Currently in the US, Hispanic students graduate at lower rates than do white students, with only 50 percent of Hispanic students who start college completing a bachelor's degree in six years, compared with 62 percent of white students (NCES, 2012). According to the research, Latino high school graduates have the second highest college enrollment rates in comparison to Asian/Pacific Islander, Black, and white high school graduates, yet they lag behind all other racial groups in college degree attainment (Fry, 2002). In fact, as illustrated in

Figure 1, the Hispanic population is the least educated of all major ethnic groups largely because there has been almost no growth in college completion over the last three decades

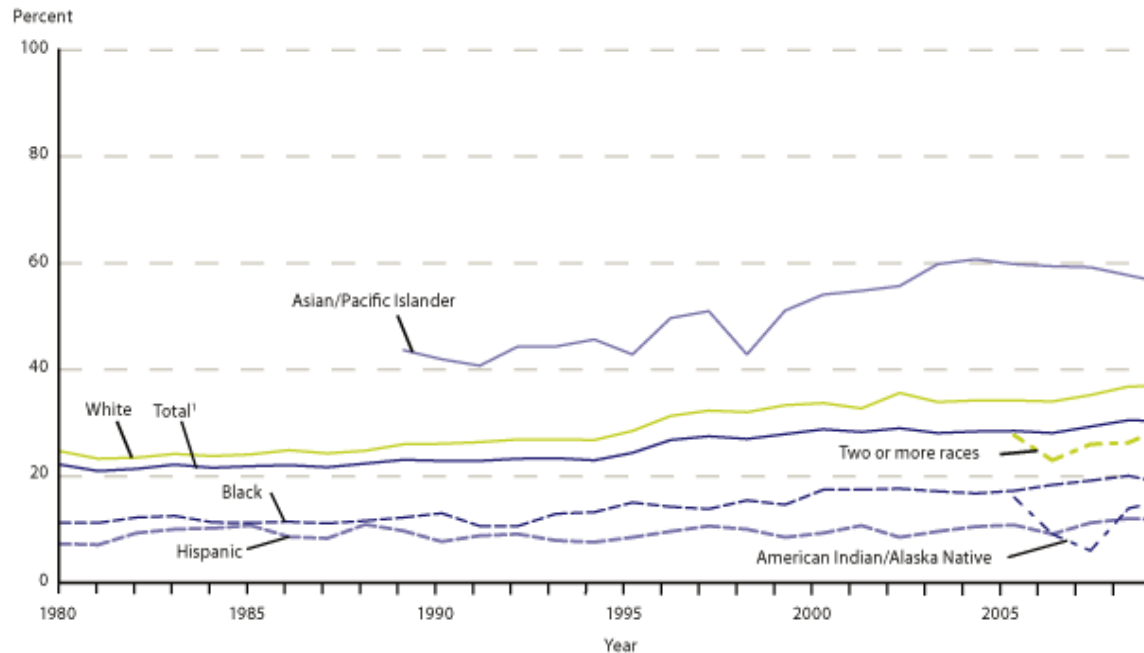
Figure 1. Bachelor's Degree Completion by Ethnicity

Ethnicity	Year					
	1975	1985	1995	2005	2008	2011
White	24	24	29	34	37	39
Black	11	12	15	18	21	20
Latino	9	11	9	11	12	13

The figure represent the percentage of 25- to 29-year-olds in the United States who completed a bachelor's degree or higher. Source: *U.S. Department of Commerce, Census Bureau, Current Population Survey (CPS), Annual Social and Economic Supplement, selected years, 1980–2011.*

Statistics reported in Figure 2. help to capture the consistency of the gap over time, despite progress and growth. This flat degree attainment among the fastest growing population in the US raises significant concerns and highlights the need for research to better understand the many barriers to academic success for these particular minority populations.

Figure 2. Percentage of 25- to 29-year-olds with a bachelor's degree or higher, by race/ethnicity: 1980-2011.



SOURCE: U.S. Department of Commerce, Census Bureau, Current Population Survey (CPS), Annual Social and Economic Supplement, 1980–2011.

Non-White Students in Predominantly White Institutions (PWI)

Because the majority of colleges and universities in the US today are predominantly white, it is important that we examine the specifics of this environment as it may impact the students of color who enroll and pursue degree attainment. While many of these colleges and universities have moved towards diversifying their student body, they continue to struggle with supporting the diverse needs of racially and ethnically diverse populations. The educational model of PWI's has remained relatively the same since equal opportunity increased access; catering to individuals who fit the financial, cultural and economic mold of the white dominant culture. Research maintains that this slow pace of institutional change, despite the changing

populations, has caused a significant problem in the retention of students of color through graduation, especially for PWI's (Museus, 2008).

Researchers have tried to identify the key differences in educating Black students in PWIs as compared to Historically Black Colleges and universities (HBCU). Most of the studies found that today's HBCUs play a significant role in the success of African Americans students. Researchers have found that HBCUs provide greater development opportunities, more positive social and psychological environments, increased feelings of acceptance, higher grades, and higher occupational aspirations for their Black students as compared to their peers at PWIs (Allen 1992). According to Allen (1992), "On predominately White campuses, Black students emphasized feelings of alienation, sensed hostility, racial discrimination, and lack of integration. On historically Black campuses, Black students emphasized feelings of engagement, connection, acceptance, and extensive support and encouragement" (p. 39). Additionally, degree attainment has also been researched and shows that the gap between Black and White student degree attainment grows when focusing on black students who attend PWIs (Gloria, Robinson-Kurpius, Hamilton and Wilson, 1999).

Research identifying the issues for Hispanic students at PWI's is limited, however recent findings similarly suggest a difference in student experiences when compared to Hispanic Serving Institutions (HSIs) (Laden, 1999, 2001, 2004). It is suggested in the research and in the data that students fair better in HSIs because they offer student support programs and services that are designed to increase Latino academic achievement, persistence and degree attainment (Laden, 2004). It is important for educators to pay close attention to the programs and services offered at HSIs because not only do HSIs provide greater access to higher education but they

also grant more associate and bachelor degrees to Hispanic students than all other American colleges and universities (Stearns, Watanabe, & Snyder, 2002).

All Women's Colleges

Another factor contributing to the college experience and potential for academic resilience and success is whether the female student is attending an all women's college or a coeducational institution. Because this study takes place in a single-sex women's college, it is important to understand the literature examining the positives and negatives of this educational environment. Women's colleges were founded during the mid- and late-19th century as a means for advancing education for women at a time when most higher education institutions did not allow them to attend. Since this time, and following the acceptance of women into previously all male institutions, many women's colleges have either closed or become co-educational institutions. Those that still exist however, maintain that this specific all women demographic creates for a better learning environment. Advocates of women's colleges often cite the research demonstrating that the quality of the learning environment for their students at women's colleges is far superior to the experiences women generally face in coeducational institutions. (Astin, 1993; Riordan, 1994; Tidball, Smith, Tidball, & Wolf-Wendel, 1999).

According to researchers, women attending all women's colleges are 1.5 times more likely to earn a bachelors degree in Math or Science than are women at a coeducational schools (Sharpe & Fuller, 1995). Other research suggests that women at single-sex institutions experience intellectual self-confidence (Kim, 2002); they were more engaged in effective educational practices and they perceive greater support (Kinzie, Thomas, Palmer, Umbach, and Kuh, 2007). For students of color in particular, women's colleges enroll a higher percentage of

African American, Hispanic students compared to coeducational institutions (Tidball, Smith, Tidball, & Wolf-Wendel, 1999). In addition, women's colleges report significantly more experiences with diversity than women at coeducational institutions, through more encouragement and opportunities for students to interact with people of different economic, racial, and social backgrounds (Kinzie et al., 2007).

Rational

It is in our shared national interest to create conditions in higher education that not only increase access, but more importantly, that foster student success and degree attainment. Today only slightly more than half of students who enter college actually stay long enough to earn their degree. The cost to society, to the educational institutions, and to the individual is significant (Schneider & Yin, 2011). For the institution, the loss of each individual student who fails to matriculate results in a loss of thousands of dollars of future tuition and expenses (e.g. residential life and food services). The loss of a student also impacts taxpayers across the country. According to a 2011 report prepared by the American Institutes for Research (AIR), taxpayers pay millions of dollars a year for government grants and financial support for students. This report showed that states spend more than \$1.3 billion per year on students who drop out during their first year of college and the federal government spends an additional \$300 million per year on these student's departures. Looking at the statistics from fall 2002, for full-time students who failed to graduate from their bachelors program in six years, a total of approximately \$3.8 billion was lost in income; \$566 million was lost in federal income taxes; and \$164 million was lost in state income taxes (AIR, 2011). Given that this is just one academic year, imagine the economic impact of a student who makes it through their junior year but never finishes.

Students also bear much of the debt associated with college attendance in accumulated student loan debt. For students who leave without earning their degree, job opportunities often lead to making a low wage that doesn't match up to their loan debt. In addition, students who attain a bachelor's degree benefit beyond economics; approximately 92% of those who attained a bachelor's degree (compared to 79% with no postsecondary degree) have health insurance coverage (Perna, 2005). Also, 30% of those who attained a bachelor's degree (compared to 15% with no postsecondary degree) volunteered in civic or community organizations, which benefits society on multiple levels (Perna, 2005).

The benefits of earning a bachelor's degree can also have a significant positive influence on society and on the current unemployment crisis. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics Americans with bachelor's degrees and higher have an unemployment rate that is about half that of Americans with some college or associate degrees. In 2010, 74 percent of young adults with a bachelor's degree or higher were employed full time, while only 55 percent of young adults who only completed high school were employed full time (Perna, 2005). Clearly, the cost of leaving school without a bachelor's degree can have a significant impact for students, for society, and for taxpayers as a whole. Not only is it important for institutions to increase access and attainment for students, but due to the fiscal underpinning of college attainment, arguably all of this Nation's citizens should appreciate the value of investing in student graduation degree attainment. Further, due to the changing demographics of the United States and of the student population in higher education, our efforts should focus on improving access and success among those diverse student populations.

Purpose of the study

The purpose of this study is to investigate the risk and protective variables that may predict the resilience of Black and Latina female undergraduates. In particular this study explored how the process of racial and ethnic identity influence these factors and the overall experiences of these women as they matriculate in a small, predominately white, private, four-year, all women's college. The high enrollment yet low degree attainment statistics for this student population (Black and Latina women) has an insurmountable impact on the individual student, the institution they enroll in and society in general. Despite the alarming attainment gap, there are still many students who are able to persevere academically and persist to graduation. These are the students who are able to grab on to available environmental supports and enlist their own unique characteristics in ways that provide them the resiliency necessary to overcome the challenges they face during the college years. The concept of resilience suggests that, regardless of a variety of adverse challenges student may face during their college experience, they can succeed if they have protective factors helping to buffer the risk (Cabrera & Padilla, 2004). The psychological literature suggests that resilience can serve as a valuable construct to explore when investigating the significant gap in degree attainment of white students versus students of color because it provides a lens through which we can better understand the internal processes and external supports that contribute to their ability to overcome the challenges that college students of color may encounter (Morales, 2008; Morales, 2000; Martin & Marsh, 2006; Hartley, 2011; Masten et. al., 1999; Luthar, Cicchetti, and Becker, 2000). Further, significant research suggests that racial and ethnic identity may impact academic achievement in a variety of ways (Oyserman, Gant, and Ager., 1995; Chavous et. al., 2003; Thompson et.al. 2009; Sellers &

Shelton, 2003; Wong, Eccles, and Sameroff, 2003). This study contributes to the need for research to determine the academic impact racial and ethnic identity has on academic resilience and achievement. This study explores racial/ethnic identity as a factor of resilience to better understanding the processes contributing to the success of female Black and Latina women at a single sex, predominately white institution and to gain insights related to the achievement gap.

The Study Setting

This study was conducted at Boston City College, a small, urban, private college for undergraduate women and male and female graduate students. The stated mission of the college is to provide transformative learning that links passion with lifelong purpose. The college is committed to educate, empower and transform the lives of its students by preparing them to be intellectually equipped, professionally skilled, and technologically proficient so that they become leaders, and responsible citizens.

Historically, Boston City College has been long dedicated to the education of students of color. As early as 1914, this institution graduated its first black student, followed by a slowly increasing population of Black and other minority students over the next few decades. Between 1950- 1960s the college graduated thirty black students. It was during the decade of the 60's that the college also founded it's Civil Rights Club, that later became the Black Students Organization, a student organization that is currently one of the most active on campus. In recent years, Boston City College has continued to show a strong commitment to diversity, winning a spot in the *Black Enterprise Magazine's* "50 Top Colleges for African Americans" in 2006. Less is known about the history of Latina female students at the college, however, emphasis has been placed on recruiting this population and collecting retention data over the last few years.

According to data from the National Center for Educational Statistics (2012), this institution had a total female undergraduate population of 1,829 and a total graduate student population of 3,000 enrolled in Fall 2011. Ninety-one percent of the undergraduate population was full-time and 9% were part-time. Of the 1,829 undergraduate students, 7% Black or African American non-Hispanic/Latino, 8% Asian, non-Hispanic/Latino, 5% Hispanic/Latino, 1% American Indian or Alaska Native, 69% non-Hispanic/Latino, 0% Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander, non-Hispanic/Latino, 7% Race/ethnicity unknown, and 3% non-resident alien. In addition, the NCES also reported the 6-Year Graduation Rate by Race/Ethnicity for students at Boston City College pursuing Bachelor's Degrees is 52% Black or African American non-Hispanic/Latino, 69% Asian, 0% Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander, 63% Hispanic/Latino, 100% American Indian or Alaska Native, 72% white non-Hispanic/Latino, 50% Race/ethnicity unknown and 79% non-resident alien (NCES, 2012). As reported here, African American and Hispanic/Latino students have the lowest retention rate.

The institution offers a variety of activities and organizations for students to be involved in, with over 50 clubs and 10 NCAA Division III varsity sports teams. The cost of tuition and fees at this institution are quite high, with tuition costing \$33,356 (2011-12) and room and board adding an additional \$12,906 (2011-12). There is some financial aid support provided by various grants, loans and government aid. In 2011, 74 percent of full-time undergraduates received some kind of need-based financial aid.

Study Overview

The literature reviewed in this chapter describes the depth of the degree attainment gap for Black and Hispanic undergraduate college students at Boston City College as well as the

various factors related to race and ethnicity identified by the students as contributing to their perceived negative experiences on campus. If Black and Hispanic students' racial and ethnic identity level contributes to their resilience and perceptions of college experiences then it is critical for researchers to better understand how and why their experiences vary according to their racial and ethnic background. This study interrogates students' perspectives of and expectations regarding their college experience, as well as how these perspectives are shaped by their sense of racial/ethnic identity. In addition, this study examines the process by which Black and Latina students at Boston City College demonstrate resilience as it is evidenced in their ability to overcome negative factors in the college environment. This work provides a possible means for understanding what Black and Latina college students may need in order to be successful students and persist to degree attainment.

This study used a qualitative, exploratory design. Through semi-structured, open-ended interviews with Black and Latina female undergraduate students at a small women's college in the Northeast, this research contributes to the following bodies of research literatures-- racial and ethnic identity, resilience, and college academic achievement and persistence by examining the characteristics of a group of female Black and Latina students who are in the process of attaining their BA/BS degree over the course of four or five years. More specifically, the research examines the role of racial and ethnic identity development and its expression as it may contribute to the specific protective mechanisms that contribute to student's academic resiliency. These mechanisms are important because they are the processes through which college students face adversity and successfully manage the developmental, social, and environmental challenges. If we want students to be successful, to stay in school and reach their highest achievement abilities, we must understand the unique characteristics that contribute to their ability to be

resilient and persist. In particular, based on a number of research findings (Lotkowski Robbins, and Noeth, 2004; Finn & Rock, 1997; Oyserman et. al., 1995; Altschul, Oyserman, and Bybee, 2006; Morales 2008, 2010; Martin & Marsh; 2009; Hartley, 2011), I hypothesize that within a sample of female college students of color at a predominantly white institution (PWI), racial and ethnic identity development plays a critical role in fostering all aspects of resiliency and helps to explain how these women are able to achieve a positive college experience.

Methodology

This research employed an open-ended interview method to collect data. Each participant was enrolled as an undergraduate student at Boston City College at the time of the interview. They were each given a consent form that was signed before discussion or data collection began. The researcher conducted one-on-one, open ended, semi-structured interviews which allowed each participant the ability to freely discuss her individual situation, and in so doing provided evidence as to how her internal ethnic identity and resilience characteristics have or are currently impacting her college experience. Questions were open-ended and followed a relatively unstructured interviewing format. Interviews were held in a private, enclosed student rooms in the college's Library. All interviews were conducted at the convenience of the interviewee during a day and time selected by the student.

The questions that framed this study are as follows:

Research Question #1: How do female Black and Latina students at Boston City College describe the key factors contributing to their overall positive or negative experiences at the institution?

Research Question #2: How do female Black and Latina students at Boston City College describe the protective factors that helped them cope with institutional, social, and academic

challenges they faced as a student.

Research Question #3: How do female Black and Latina students at Boston City College perceive their ethnic/racial identity and its impact on their satisfaction and social and academic experience as an undergraduate student of color at a PWI?

These questions targeted both the key external stressors and protective factors that contribute to a positive or negative perspective of the campus climate, as well as how the two internal processes (racial/ethnic identity and resilience) play a role in a student's ability to overcome these stressors and persist through to degree attainment.

Definition of Terms

The operational definitions of the terms used in this study are as follows:

Retention: This is the institution's enrollment percentage of a student's progression from one academic year to the next, toward completion of their academic degree. Generally this refers to a full or part-time student who has been accepted into a four year baccalaureate degree program and who remains enrolled in that institution through the completion of the academic program (at the same institution in which they initially enrolled) (Tinto, 2012).

Persistence (completion): This describes a student's progression through an institution. It refers to the rate at which a student who starts their higher education degree continues until they earn their degree (regardless of where) (Tinto, 2012).

Resilience: This is the dynamic and multifaceted process of positive adaptation in the presence of adversity, involving the interaction between risk and protective processes (Luthar, et. al., 2000).

Academic Resilience: This is the heightened likelihood of success in school and other life

accomplishments associated with educational attainment despite environmental adversities brought about by early traits, conditions and experiences (Wang, Haertal, & Walberg, 1994).

Racial/Ethnic Identity: This is a complex concept capturing both ethnic and racial identity. It defines an individual's sense of belonging to one's own ethnic group as well as an individual's racial self-concept and his or her beliefs, attitudes, and values relative to other racial groups (Phinney, 1990; Helms, 1993).

Chapter Two: LITERATURE REVIEW

This review of the literature begins with a discussion of the various factors associated with academic success for Black and Latina undergraduate students, followed by a close examination of college retention theory. Next, a discussion around the importance of academic resilience in Black and Latina undergraduate students is provided. Lastly, an exploration of the influence of racial and ethnic identity on academic resilience and student success is examined.

Introduction

While higher education institutions are enrolling more racial and ethnically diverse students, research suggests that these institutions are failing to foster learning environments that address the specific needs of these diverse populations in ways that successfully support their academic achievement and persistence. Recent reports show that degree attainment rates for certain ethnic populations, such as Hispanic and African-American students are decreasing in comparison to white and Asian students (American Council on Education (ACE, 2010). In 2009, the percentage of the population ages 25–29 with bachelor's or higher degrees was 19% for blacks, 12% for Hispanics, and 37% for Whites. This achievement gap points to the need to both better understand the specific unmet needs of Black and Hispanic undergraduate college students, and also the various factors related to race and ethnicity identified by the students as contributing to their perceived negative and positive experiences on campus. If Black and Hispanic students' racial and ethnic identity level contributes to their resilience and their perceived value of the college experience then it is critical for researchers to develop a better understanding of how the experiences of Black and Hispanic students vary according to their racial and ethnic background. Understanding first, students' perspectives of and expectations

regarding their college experience, second how these perspectives are shaped by their sense of racial/ethnic identity, and third, the process by which they demonstrate resilience to overcome these negative experiences they must navigate in college life, provides a possible means for understanding the needs of Black and Hispanic students in order to be successful students and persist to degree attainment.

Retention and Persistence Theory

In order to begin our examination of the role that racial/ethnic identity plays in the academic resilience and success of Black and Latina undergraduate college students, we must first understand the theoretical lens through which research has investigated student persistence through graduation and degree attainment. A significant body of the literature when discussing student's academic achievement and persistence focuses on three theoretical perspectives: Tinto (1975, 1993) focused on the students themselves, Astin (1975, 2005) and Pascarella & Terenzini (2005) highlight environmental factors, and several authors considered institutional factors (Bean, 1990; Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Hurtado, Carter, and Kardia, 1998; Rendón, Jalomo, & Nora, 2000).

Vincent Tinto's model of student integration is one of the most influential retention models in the field and has been the foundation from which a majority of the research has emerged over the last 30 years. While previous studies had attempted to investigate the myriad, interrelated factors involved in student retention, Tinto was the first to create a model that captured the complexity of the issue by addressing the interaction between the student and college in order to better comprehend the student's overall decision to leave college before graduating. Historically, retention research focused on traditional academic factors, such as high school GPA and test scores (SAT or ACT) to identify students at risk of dropping out, missing

thereby important implications of factors like social support, academic self-confidence, academic goals, institutional commitment, and financial support. While researchers such as Spady (1971) had examined how personal attributes and the institution environment influenced student departure, Tinto was the first to articulate a theoretical framework in his seminal 1975 article, “Dropouts from higher education: A theoretical synthesis of the recent literature.” Tinto’s well established model took a sociological approach to the issue. He argued that integration into college, both socially (that speaks to the students’ sense of fitting in) and academically (students’ motivation to attend class and study), is a key factor in why students leave college (Tinto, 1975). Since it’s publication, Tinto’s model has become the most widely used theoretical model exploring the issues of higher education retention. His theory is based on the idea that student characteristics (social economic status, parental educational level, academic ability, race, gender, high school grade point average (GPA), and test scores) directly impact the level of commitment to an institution; the higher the level of commitment the more likely students will persist (Tinto, 1975, 1993).

While this body of research has helped to identify the various factors involved in student departure, criticism exists with regard to the cultural bias of Tinto’s and other similar models of college retention. Many researchers have identified this problem and called for more research to investigate the factors related to the college drop out phenomenon specific to a more racially and ethnically diverse population (Rendón, Jalomo, & Nora, 2000; Braxton, Hirschy, and McClendon, 2011; Tierney, 1999).

Tinto’s integration theory (1987,1993) was developed from Van Gennep’s (1960) three stages of cultural transition. According to Van Gennep’s theory, there are three stages by which an individual transitions into another culture; 1) the person *separates* from their former self , 2)

the person engages in *liminality*, (a state of being in-between) and makes the transition over time and, 3) the person *incorporates* the new culture and values of the new status to establish their sense of self (Museus & Quaye, 1999). Tinto's "Model of Institutional Departure" (1993) states that persistence is a result of how well students integrate, both socially and academically, into a particular school. He wrote,

In the final analysis, it is the interplay between the individual's commitment to the goal of college completion and his [or her] commitment to the institution that determines whether or not the individual decides to dropout from college and the forms of dropout behavior the individual adopts. Presumably, either low goal commitment or low institutional commitment can lead to dropout (Tinto, 1975, p. 96).

With regard to understanding the relevant factors associated with student departure before graduation for students of color in particular, Tinto's model has received much scrutiny. Tinto's theory assumes that students must adopt the values of the dominant campus culture, leaving behind the values and cultural orientations brought from home, in order to succeed. Tierney (1992) argued that Tinto's model reflects essential cultural limitations because Tinto drew from Van Gennep (1960), who had originally argued that a student must abandon past traditions and values and adopt those of the institution. He stated that Tinto's interpretation of Van Gennep's theory of transition should not be applied to minority students because his model designed to address transition within the same culture. Tinto's work, however, applied the model to explain the context of assimilation into another culture, e.g., the tensions that emerge when a students' ethnic culture and values of home conflict with the culture and values of a dominant white institution (Tierney, 1992). Tierney argues that students should not have to leave their culture behind and that this dependence on assimilation in order to be successful raises significant conflicts and ignores the positive and supportive nature that a student's home, cultural traditions, and values may contribute to academic persistence.

Astin, (1975, 2005) and Pascarella & Terenzini (2005) believe that both the individual and the resources available in the institutional environment play a role in student integration. Astin's Input-Environmental-Output (I-E-O) theory highlights the need to understand three critical elements of student integration; 1) the students' qualities and characteristics exhibited upon their entry into an educational program, 2) the nature of the educational environments with which they come into contact, and 3) the students' qualities and characteristics exhibited as they exit the program.

Bean and Eaton's (2001) psychological model of college student retention incorporated four psychological theories to help explain student retention; attitude-behavior theory, coping behavioral theory, self-efficacy theory, and attribution theory. According to their model, it is ultimately the individual factors and psychological processes that influence student retention decisions (Bean & Eaton, 2001). Further, they state that understanding psychological processes involved in developing academic and social integration is critical to the successful development and implementation of student retention programs. In other words, we must understand the underlying processes involved in individual attitudes, self-efficacy, coping, and attribution, in order to create programs that target and address the core needs of college students who are at risk of leaving early.

A criticism of much of this research is that it was conducted before students of color became a "critical mass" on college campuses (Rendón, Jalomo, & Nora, 2000), and therefore, does not take into consideration the unique racial and cultural factors that play a role when we consider the experiences of students of color enrolled in PWIs (Tierney, 1992). The conclusion among many researchers (Rendón, Jalomo, & Nora, 2000; Braxton, 2000; Tierney, 1999) is that much of the existing research on student retention has produced a one sided view of the factors

related to early student departure, much of which completely ignores issues of race/ethnicity, culture, gender, politics, and identity.

More important to this dissertation is the research that has taken place over the last decade which has focused on college retention for more diverse populations. What these studies have started to reveal is that minority and nontraditional students can be academically successful *without* having to engage in a total disconnection from their culture, as Tinto and other previous studies had suggested (Kuh, Kinzie, Buckley, Bridges, and Hayek, 2006). Tierney (1992, 1999) offers a model that is based on cultural integrity to explain why the idea that students must disconnect from their home culture is not needed. His model addresses the criticism of Tinto's theory (1987,1993) that minority student success necessitates that they must abandon their home culture and assimilate into the dominant college culture, by arguing that colleges can and must develop ways of affirming, honoring, and integrating students' individual culture and values into the larger campus culture. In particular this model was developed for students who are most at risk of departing from college: low-income, urban, Black, and Hispanic youth (Tierney, 1999).

Each of the above theories on student departure take into consideration the multiple, social, psychological, and organizational factors that play a role in a student's transition into and throughout college. They *attempt* to explain the characteristics and processes involved when students make the decision to leave college before completing their undergraduate degree. However, these models struggle to incorporate the unique characteristics and processes contributing to individual minority student departure. In addition, they are focused specifically on understanding the negative aspect of student departure and do not help us understand the protective mechanisms at play for students who persist despite facing significant challenges. For this dissertation, retention theory provides a foundational understanding of the historical

investigation of what contributes to a student's inability to persist and finish their higher education degree. However, the lack of evidence to support that these models are relevant to students of color raises concern and highlights the need to incorporate other theories into these retention models when specifically attempting to explain the experience and reasons for persistence and academic success for Black and Hispanic students.

Resilience

Due to the lack of focus in retention theory specifically on Black and Latina college students, this study recommends the incorporation of resiliency theory when examining the achievement gap as a valuable theoretical framework. While the literature commonly approaches the achievement gap by focusing on risks and failure, resilience theory provides an opportunity to understand the protective factors that help buffer the effects of risk. Given the attainment gap between Black, Hispanic and White students (ACE, 2010), and the risk factors associated with students of color which contribute to a student's failure (e.g. discrimination, lack of sense of belonging, one's racial/ethnic identity etc.) (Ancis, Sedlacek, and Mohr, 2000; Nora & Cabera 1996; Hu & St. John, 2001; Schneider & Ward, 2003; Johnson et al., 2007), the literature suggest that Black and Hispanic students may be more *at-risk* of dropping out of college than their white counter parts. By moving away from a focus on the at-risk nature of college student persistence and attainment for Black and Hispanic students, and incorporating more of a focus on protective factors, this study attempts to better understand the protective processes that contribute to a student's resilience and academic achievement. For the purpose of this study, resilience is defined as "the process of, capacity for, or outcome of successful adaptation despite challenging or threatening circumstances" (Masten, Best, & Garnezy, 1990,

p. 426), resilience served as the positive outcome measure representing the students success and potential for persistence and academic persistence.

The emergence of resilience research came about in the 1970's with scientists seeking to understand and prevent the development of psychopathology (Masten, 1989, 1999, 2001, 2007, 2011). Over the last four decades scientists have focused on defining this phenomenon, testing promising theories, and finding explanations for those who still thrive after experiencing immense trauma. Much of the early work was focused on children and addressed how children can survive despite extreme adversity (Garmezy, Masten, & Tellegen, 1984; Rutter, 1985; Masten, Best, & Garmezy, 1990). What came from these early findings is a new field of study which negates all earlier conclusions that the experience of adversity or disadvantage always results in a poor outcome. During this early stage in the research, resilience was defined in simple terms and measured through the consideration of two constructs (a) risk or threat to the person and (b) positive adaptation (Luthar, & Cicchetti, 2000).

More recently however, advancements in research and theory have shifted our understanding of resilience to a more dynamic and process-oriented approach. Resilience is a dynamic process involving the interaction between both risk and protective processes, internal and external to the individual which enable healthy adaptation to a stressful event (Rutter, 1990, Luthar, Cicchetti, & Becker, 2000). The research in this field is vast and covers a number of characteristics or factors that may contribute to a person's ability to thrive in the face of adversity. Such research includes a variety of the intrapersonal and environmental factors that have been found to moderate the negative effects of high risk exposure (Bernard, 1995; Masten, 1994; Werner & Smith, 1992).

This approach of seeking to understand the processes, moderators, and mechanisms that facilitate positive adaptation is an important shift in psychological research history and points to the need for incorporating resilience concepts into the investigation of at-risk students.

According to the research, we must understand both the risk factors and protective factors that are contributing to the experience in order to understand how a positive outcome could occur.

According to Wagnild and Young (1993), resilience is defined as a two-dimensional construct, that moderates both the negative effects of stress while also promoting positive adaptation. This definition has given researchers the opportunity to approach the concept from two directions.

The first is through a perspective that focuses on the risk factors involved in maladjustment. The literature suggests that risk factors can be internal or external. For example, racial discrimination, psychological difficulties, social incompetence, lack of purpose, community violence, familial difficulties involving poverty, disruption, alcoholism, and violence are all factors (both internal and external) that have been shown to negatively affect students' lives and interfere with both their learning and academic success (Borman & Overman, 2004; Frieman, 2001; Waxman, Gray, and Padron (2003).

Conversely, the second approach sheds light on positive adaptation and deals specifically with the experience of establishing equilibrium, often referred to as "bouncing back" despite exposure to extreme stress or risk factors. This literature focuses on the qualities or mechanisms which "protect" individuals from the negative effects of adverse situations. According to the literature, protective factors can include internal or external factors and include characteristics such as good problem-solving skills, positive self-concept, motivation, a positive racial/ethnic identity, caring and supportive relationships, and a positive school environment (Holleran & Waller, 2003; Luthar, & Cicchetti, 2000).

According to Wagnild, resilient individuals may experience the same stressful experiences as non-resilient people, however, they have protective mechanisms in place to deal with these difficulties and return to a state of balance (Wagnild, 2009). When these protective factors are present for an individual at the time of experiencing the adverse event, they help to buffer the effects of the negative experience and provide a more positive outcome. Resiliency theory is centered around the strengths of individuals and the process by which they adapt to their environments and succeed in the face of adversity (Bernard, 2004). Because of this, resilience theory provides a solid framework for investigating the protective factors involved in the undergraduate experience for Black and Latina students. Higher education institutions cannot always control the risk factors that impact individual students, but resilient protective factors create the opportunity for a strength-based perspective which encourages administrators to understand the positive processes and create interventions or educational environments that foster these strengths.

Academic Resilience

The college environment can be a challenging place, full of distractions and stressful events. In addition, student populations are growing and changing, and these factors introduce new issues, needs and stressors. Given this, it is the responsibility of higher education institutions to better understand how they can support their students and offer services that help their students succeed in college. In addition, students are faced with the challenge of adaptability and adjustment to manage the stressors of this significant life transition. Students leave behind the comfort and support of their families and friends, and the familiarity of home, to live and learn with hundreds of strangers. Research suggests that while these factors may make students vulnerable and more at-risk to leaving school before degree attainment, students employ

an innate coping mechanism that gives them the resilience necessary to experience academic success. For example, literature suggests that a connection exists between levels of resilience and student achievement among African American students (Glantz & Sloboda, 1999; Luthar, Cicchetti, & Becker, 2000; Masten, 1999). For the purposes of this research, “student success” in college refers to positive academic outcomes, persistence through to graduation attainment, and overall satisfaction with their college experience. Based on the resiliency research, the capacity for all of these positive academic outcomes can be determined through the resilience of the individual. In other words, the more resilience concepts involved in the individuals experience, the more likely they will have the capacity to overcome risk and have a successful college experience.

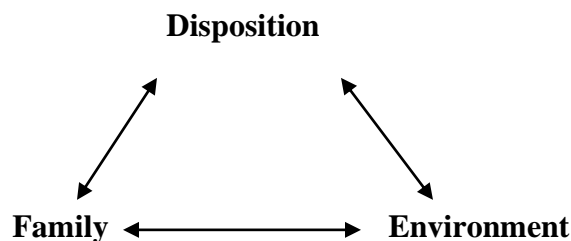
While a variety of variables have been identified to clarify the complexity of resilience across the developmental life-span, findings that relate specifically to educational achievement are especially important to help colleges and institutions understand the factors and processes that contribute to a student’s success. This phenomenon of exceptional educational outcomes for students ‘at risk’, is referred to as “academic resiliency” (Morales and Trotman, 2004).

Academic resilience is a valuable construct to consider when investigating the significant gap in degree attainment because it provides a lens through which we can better understand the internal processes that contribute to their ability to overcome the challenges that students of color may face (Morales 2008, Martin & Marsh, 2009, Hartley, 2011). Specifically, as opposed to a focus on student failure, resilience as a construct has shifted the research towards a focus on success and, more specifically, how students attain success despite the presence of risk factors that can potentially lead to failure (Garmenzy 1991; Masten 2001). This positive approach to understanding retention and attainment can help capture the various protective mechanisms

African American and Latina students employ while navigating the challenges higher education institutions present. By focusing on how individuals navigate situations and the protective processes that help them recover from adversity, we will be better able to translate those processes into effective interventions (Masten, 1994).

For the purpose of this study's intention to examine the protective processes of undergraduate Black and Latina college students, the resilience model used is one that is comprised of three protective factors: dispositional, familial, and environmental (*Figure 3*). This model, termed by Garmenzy (1991) as the "Characteristic Triad" allows for a thorough examination of all aspects of the individuals life. The *Dispositional Factors* are the individuals inherent characteristics that ultimate contribute to their positive academic achievement. The *Familial Factors* are the characteristics of one's familial experiences that allow them to become academically successful. The *Environmental Factors* are the characteristics of the participants' environments that lead to their academic success, for example schools and communities. The interactions within these three areas provide a framework for analyzing the External Protective factors of family and environment and the Internal Protective factors of disposition for specific individuals and their experiences with respect to the academic achievement. This model is important to the student of Black and Hispanic resilience because it provides a solid foundation for explaining how the interaction of protective factors within the triad can lead to the development of resilience within the lives of individuals (Morales & Trotman, 2004).

Figure 3. Characteristics Triad (Garmenzy, 1991; Morales & Trotman, 2004)



Risk and Protective Factors Contributing to Academic Resilience and Success

Educational researchers have devoted a great deal of attention to understanding the psychological, environmental and social factors that influence a student's overall experience on campus and to those factors that contribute to either positive or negative outcomes in academic achievement, persistence and degree attainment (Attewell, Heil, & Reisel, 2011). However, given the wide and growing achievement gap, a better understanding of the issues students face that put them at risk for not completing their degree is needed. The findings in the literature suggest that there are a variety of challenges Black and Latina students face on college campuses that interfere with their success as a student (Astin, 1999; Guiffrida & Douthit, 2010; Torres, Baker & Robnett, 2012; Sedlacek, 1999; Mayhew, Grunwald, & Dey, 2005; Schneider & Ward, 2003; Johnson et al., 2007; Antonio et al., .2004).

Relationships with faculty is an area in which students of color have reported difficulties. Black students have expressed concerns that White faculty are culturally insensitive and therefore they hesitate to approach them for help (Schwitzer, Griffin, Ancis, & Thomas, C. R 1999). This frame of mind could have a significant impact on the students success, if indeed, they are in need of extra help or attention and don't feel comfortable reaching out to their White Faculty. Similarly, students have also been found to perceive White faculty as much less willing than Black Faculty to "go above and beyond" to help students of color be successful. Guiffrida (2005) found that high achieving African American students perceived African American faculty as much more willing than White faculty to (a) offer students in depth academic, career, and personal advising; (b) advocate for students at college and at home; and (c) exhibit beliefs in students' academic abilities (Guiffrida, 2005). Other factors impacting student success for Black

college students includes pressure to conform, perceived prejudice and racial discrimination, support systems, and insufficient financial aid (Ancis et.al, 2000; Nora & Cabera 1996; Hu & St. John, 2001; Blake, 2011).

For Hispanic populations in particular, studies have found a significant need for various types of support systems including; peers, family, faculty, and institution. (Schneider & Ward, 2003; Johnson et al., 2007). These support systems help integrate students into the college community, increasing their belonging and decreasing the likelihood that they would leave (Fischer, 2007). In addition, they can help buffer the effects that “acculturated stress” (caused by incongruent cultural values and practices, language difficulties, and discrimination) can have on psychological factors, such as anxiety and depression (Crockett et al., 2007). Similarly, familial involvement and connections with family, peers, and university personnel are critical to the educational coping of Latina first-generation college students (Gloria, & Castellanos, 2012).

Internal factors are also important to examine when trying to identify the factors contributing to student adaptation and achievement. For example, having a personal optimistic outlook, a drive to succeed, and an ethnic source of strength, pride, and support are all important factors related to success for Hispanic undergraduate students (Arellano & Padilla,1996). It is also extremely important for students of color, particularly Hispanic students, to have a positive perception of their college environment (Gloria, Castellanos, Lopez, & Rosales, 2005). When students of color have a negative perception of the campus racial climate they are less satisfied with their college experience and are more likely to leave before degree attainment (Fischer 2007). Particularly for the ethnic and minority students who are attending a PWI, dissatisfaction with their overall college experience is more likely compared to the satisfaction rates of their white peers (Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Nagasawa & Wong, 1999).

This research points to the existence of factors that help protect and buffer the effects of at-risk situations (Arellano & Padilla, 1996; Werner & Smith, 1992), generating a valuable lens through which we can better understand exactly what minority student need to be academically resilient and persist. This positive approach to examining the challenges Black and Latina students face suggests that, regardless of the economic, cultural, and social barriers, students can succeed (Cabrera & Padilla, 2004) and successfully adjust to the environment (Garmezy, 1991). Further, because we are addressing the specific barriers faced by minority populations in particular, research suggests that racial/ethnic identity may be an important variable to examine. Holleran and Waller (2003) found a positive effect of ethnic identity on resilience, indicating that that a strong positive ethnic identity may protect against risk and contribute to resilience.

Integrating Racial and Ethnic Identity Resilience

Based on the data presented earlier in the literature review, the examination of Black and Latina students may require specific adaptations to this model in order to account for their specific needs and challenges. As demonstrated in previous research, the risks and protective factors associated with Black and Latina undergraduate students point to significant differences along the path to educational achievement, compared to their white counterparts. Because of these differences, a closer look at racial and ethnic identity may help illuminate the process by which race impacts the various interactions between the protective factors within the Characteristics Triad (Model 1). Important yet limited research has examined ethnic identity as a potential internal resilient factor that may have a positive relationship with ethnic minority group members. Resiliency research has found ethnic identity to be positively related to measures related to wellbeing, such as levels of coping ability, self-esteem, and optimism and negatively

related to loneliness and depression (Roberts et al., 1999). More importantly, following the definition of resilience, ethnic identity has been found to have a moderating effect by buffering against the effects of perceived discrimination and well-being outcomes (Sellers, Copeland-Linder, Martin, & Lewis, 2006; Sellers & Shelton, 2003). More specifically, certain ethnic identity characteristics, including *centrality, public and private regard, and other group orientation*, have been shown to relate to resilience (Sellers, Shelton, Cooke, Chavous, Rowley, & Smith, 1998; Phinney, 1992). Because of the potential protective nature of ethnic identity highlighted in these studies, ethnic identity may be a critical factor to examine when investigating the resilience of students of color.

Racial and Ethnic Identity Development

Identity development, as a whole, has been identified as a critical psychosocial dimension to consider when addressing persistence and attainment of college students (Meeus, Iedema, Heisen & Vollebergh, 1999). Particularly, for students of color, this developmental process is further complicated by the negotiation of race and ethnicity as critical aspects of identity development (Helms, 1995). Foundational identity development theorists, Erikson (1968) and Marcia (1980), emphasized personal reflection and observation of oneself in relation to others as a process of developing identity. These traditional models were developed using a series of steps to track the progression of identity growth through linear stages.

According to Erikson (1968), the process of identity development is mediated by the values and expectations of the surrounding society. For Erikson, identity is knowing who you are as a person and what you offer to society. It is the answer to the questions many college students face: “Who am I?” and “What is my purpose in this world?” Erikson’s belief that having a clear sense of identity correlates with well-being, satisfaction with one’s being, a sense of

direction in one's life, and a sense of purpose lays a strong foundation for the importance of identity development in college students (Erikson, 1968). The construction of identity is critical to the development of personality and has been found to directly relate to positive outcomes (Marcia, 1993).

For students of color in particular, transitions and adaptation are strongly influenced by one's ability to develop a positive sense of oneself as an individual and as a member of a specific racial and/or ethnic group. Racial and ethnic identity are a crucial part of a person's overall identity framework, in which an individual applies increasingly complex cognitive-affective ego statuses to perceive of him or herself as a racial being (Phinney, 1996; Sellers et al., 1998; Cross, Strauss, & Fhagen-Smith, 1999; Helms, 1995; Phinney & Ong, 2007). Healthy identity construction is strongly influenced by one's ability to develop a positive sense of oneself as an individual and as a member of a specific racial and/or ethnic group. While race and ethnicity are considered important aspects of a person's identity, the problem appears that the concepts are often confused and used interchangeably, despite their different meanings (Cokley, 2005).

Ethnic identity is defined as a conscious thinking, perception, feeling, and behavior due to the common bond of having similar traditions, values and beliefs (Chavez & Guido-DiBrito, 1999). More simply, it is understood as a sense of belonging to one's own ethnic group (Phinney, 1990). In contrast, racial identity theory refers to an individual's racial self-concept as well as his or her beliefs, attitudes, and values relative to other racial groups. Racial identity development is the process in which an individual applies their perceptions of their racial statuses to identify race as a factor of self (Phinney, 1996; Sellers et al., 1998; Cross et al., 1999; Helms, 1995; Phinney & Ong, 2007). Because the participants in this study often use these terms interchangeably as though they are the same, while it is recognized that racial identity and

ethnic identity are different, they will be used as one concept. This is supported by the research, as their influences on identity are often intertwined (Phinney, 1996; Pizarro & Vera, 2001; Smith, 1991).

The development of a racial and ethnic identity is influenced by experiences individuals have throughout their life (Holleran & Waller, 2003; Torres, 2003). Previous literature points to the significance of ethnic identity in areas such as resilience (Holleran & Waller, 2003) and academic achievement (Chavous et al., 2003; Oyserman, Kemmelmeier, Fryberg, Brosh, & Hart-Johnson, 2003; Sellers et al. 1998), especially for African American students.

Holleran and Waller (2003) is one of the few studies that have explored the effect of ethnic identity on resilience. The authors investigated Mexican American adolescents (age 13 to 18) who were considered to be at risk for delinquent behavior because of their minority status and other risk factors related to economic deprivation (Holleran & Waller, 2003). This study found that a positive ethnic identity, rooted in traditional Mexican culture, may have served as a protective factor that contributed to the adolescent's resilience. Given this potential for racial and ethnic identity to serve as a protective factor, it is important for us to better understand the process of identity development, specifically racial and ethnic identity development, and how these processes may contribute to a student overcoming the obstacles they face in higher education.

Racial/Ethnic Identity Development Theory

Jean Phinney (1990, 1993) proposed a three-stage process model of ethnic identity development designed to be applied to all ethnic groups. The first stage, "Diffusion-Foreclosure," is characterized by a lack of exploration and a lack of interest in ethnicity. "Ethnic Identity Search/ Moratorium," is the second stage where the person encounters an event and is

forced to start to explore their identity. The last stage is known as Ethnic Identity Achievement. This is when individuals develop a clear understanding of their ethnic identity. One criticism of the applicability of this model is that it was developed based on research with middle and high school students and therefore may not apply to the specific racial and ethnic challenges or developmental stages as experienced as a college student.

In contrast, other models of ethnic and racial identity have been developed to explain the implications of race and ethnicity as a process, as opposed to a psychological state that is located in fixed stages. According to William Cross (1995) identity is a complex map of various pathways through which we process our social and material realities. In the context of an ethnically diverse world, one can assume based on this perspective, that all individuals are influenced by their racial and ethnic identity development. Cross (1978, 1995) developed one of the first models of racial identity which he called “psychological nigrescence” to help explain the shifting psychological experiences African Americans encountered following the tumultuous years of the civil rights era in the United States (1950-1980). According to the Cross theory, (1995) during the progression of his five stages of identity development the black individual is thought to move from a period of “pre-encounter”, “encounter”, to “immersion-emersion”, and finally “integration”, in which the individual is able to secure a stable racial identity referred to as internalized.

While Cross’s framework was helpful in establishing racial identity as a developmental process, it is not the only model (Spencer & Markstrom-Adams, 1990). Some believe there is more complexity to racial and ethnic identity development. Because of the complex nature and unique challenges of the college environment, Spencer’s phenomenological variant of ecological systems theory (PVEST) (1995), is another important model to consider. This model uses an

identity-focused cultural-ecological perspective to connect identity and context by integrating the normative maturational and developmental process within a social, historical, and cultural context.

Spencer's PVEST, integrates identity and self-appraisal process with experiences in contexts and subsequent life outcomes. Unavoidable self-appraisal processes, which involve evaluating one's own standing with regard to one's bidirectional experiences in multiple contexts, are crucial in identity development. (Swanson, Spencer & Dell' Angelo, p. 75)

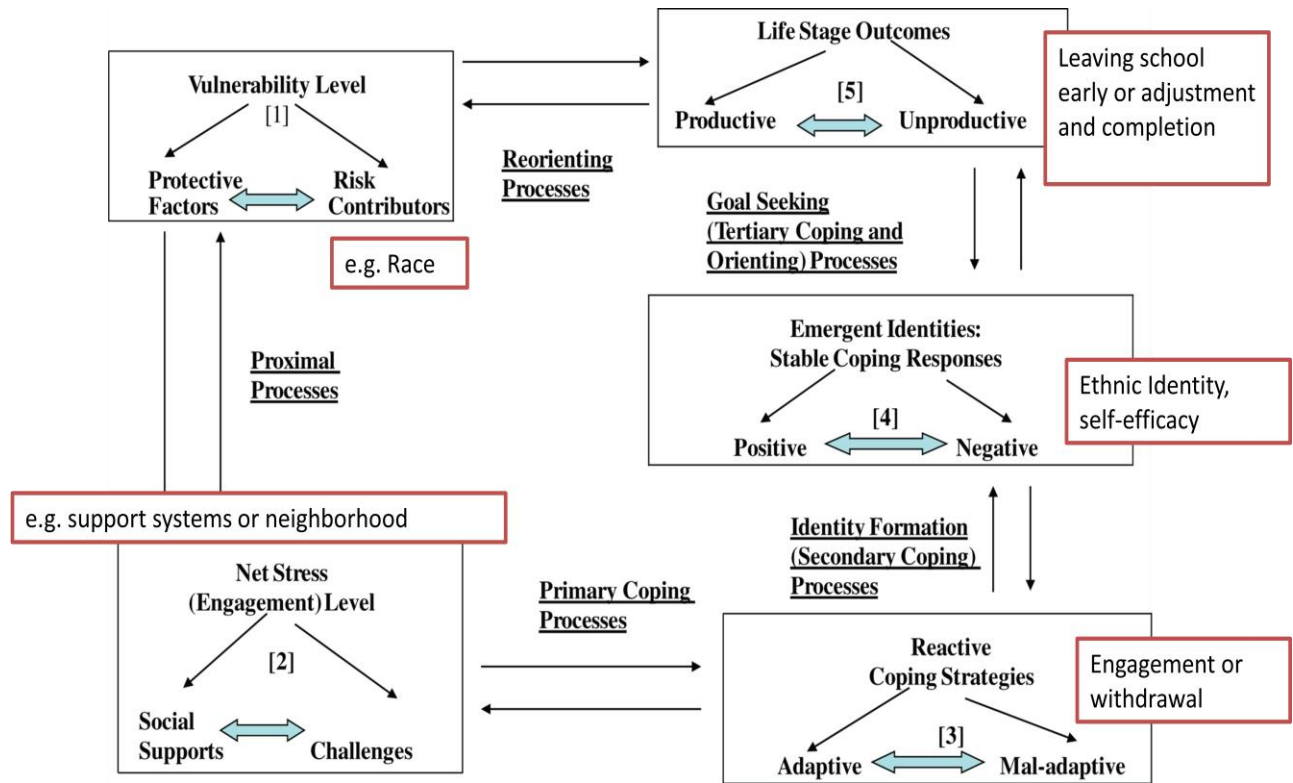
PVEST is grounded in and builds on the ecological model of development of Urie Bronfenbrenner (1977, 1979). This theoretical perspective proposes a set of systems which influence a person's development, taking into consideration the many complex contextual factors at play throughout an individual's developmental process. According to the PVEST model (Model 2), not only is the immediate campus environment important to understanding a student's development, but of equal importance are the larger social and institutional contexts. Considering the long standing history of racial segregation, prejudice, and discrimination, as well as the slow pace of cultural changes in institutions despite increasing diversity, this framework is a valuable means to studying how racial and ethnic identity contributes to an individual's resilience and experience as a Black or Hispanic undergraduate student at a PWI.

For female African American and Latina college students this process is especially complex, as it involves the appraisal of one's social status as a minority group member as well as how to make meaning of this information in the context of a predominately white institution. Further, the theoretical framework of the PVEST is similar to that of retention theory in that it incorporates the contribution of risk and protective factors to explain the processes by which one navigates their life. In the first stage of PVEST, known as the net vulnerability level, during particularly challenging circumstances, there are both risk factors that may predispose the

individual to adverse outcomes, as well as specific protective corresponding protective factors.

The following stages include: net environmental stresses and supports, adaptive and maladaptive coping mechanisms, emergent identities, and life stage outcomes. This model, represented in Figure 4, provides a multifaceted lens to further explore and better understand multiple constructs that impact a student's identity development, resilience and race/ethnicity, within the social, historical and cultural context of a PWI.

Figure 4. Spencer's PVEST



Sellers and colleagues (Sellers et al., 1998) developed The Multidimensional Model of Racial Identity (MMRI), which combines the ideas of many existing racial identity models, particularly models of African American racial identity (Sellers et al., 1998). The MMRI focuses on two important concepts. The first is the importance the individual places on race in their own identity, which is captured in the following two dimensions: the salience of identity and the centrality of the identity. The second is the individual's understanding of what it means to be Black, which is captured in the following the three dimensions; the centrality of the identity; the ideology associated with the identity; and the regard in which the person holds African Americans. Recent studies using this model have found that ethnic identity is one of the social identities individuals have which help moderate the effect of discrimination on well-being. For example, Sellers and colleagues (Sellers et al., 2006; Sellers & Shelton, 2003) found that the racial identity dimensions of centrality and public regard buffered the effects of perceived discrimination that contributes to the psychological distress of African Americans.

As outlined in the literature above, researchers have proposed that the social and psychological issues related to race can be found within the study of ethnicity, while others claim they are separate constructs that hold different psychological and social implications (Phinney, 1996; Helms & Talleyrand, 1997). Because both constructs contain concepts that impact a student's overall experience and potential adjustment to college, resilience, and race and ethnic identity development, this dissertation refers both to the aspects of identity related to one's sense of cultural belonging (Helms & Parham, 1996), as well as the process of developing or maintaining a positive sense of self as a member of one's own racial group (Helms, 1995). More specifically, for the purpose of this dissertation, both of these dimensions - centrality and public

regard - will be considered and integrated into the explanation of Black and Latina college student identity development. *Centrality* identifies whether race is a core part of an individual's self-concept and. *public regard* identifies the extent to which individuals feel that others have positive or negative perceptions of their race.

Racial/Ethnic Identity and Resilience

Racial/Ethnic identity has been shown to be an important element in Black and Latina students' ability to adjust and cope with the challenges they face throughout adolescence and young adulthood (Chickering & Reisser, 1993; Cokely & Moore, 2007). In addition, a great deal of research has revealed the critical role ethnic and racial identity can play on the student's academic achievement (Chavous et al., 2003). Research suggests that when African American and Latino students face negative stereotypes about their engagement in school, and negative feedback about their effort and achievement levels, there is a stronger likelihood of low academic achievement (Oyserman et al., 1995). Certain factors, such as having strong connections to their racial group and an abiding belief that achievement despite the odds historically has been a characteristic of African Americans throughout their history, have been shown to positively impact academic achievement through the attainment of higher grades, more time spent on homework, and fewer days missed in school (Altschul, et al., 2006).

Oyserman et. al (1995) found a positive relationship between Racial-Ethnic Identity, with high levels of Racial and Ethnic Identity (in all three racial and ethnic identity components- Connectedness, Awareness of Racism, and Embedded Achievement) acting as a buffer that may help protect students from declining grade point averages (GPAs) and subsequently dropping out of college. Given the potential protective nature of racial identity, it is important to better

understand how specific factors of racial identity serve as a meaningful predictor of persistence and degree attainment.

Thomas, Caldwell, Faison, and Jackson (2009), investigated the moderating effects of different dimensions of racial identity in African American and Caribbean Black adolescents, and found that perceived teacher discrimination was negatively related to academic achievement (Thomas et. al. 2009). In addition they found that among African American girls, positive racial identity is both directly related to academic performance and indirectly related to achievement as it serves as a barrier to the negative effects of discrimination (Thomas et. al., 2009).

Cokley and Chapman (2008) examined 274 African American college students (216 women, 58 men) at a historically Black university, to investigate the notion that ethnic identity and racial identity have an influence on academic achievement. According to their findings, ethnic identity was indirectly linked with grade point average (GPA) through academic self-concept and devaluing academic success. Academic self concept was defined as how a student views his academic abilities in comparison to other students (Cokley, 2000). In other words, having positive attitudes toward other ethnic groups (i.e., other-group orientation) was an indirect predictor of GPA (Cokley & Chapman, 2008). Further, these findings suggest that a positive ethnic identity is related to a positive academic self-concept. The findings also support that positive ethnic identity is negatively linked to devaluing academic success, both of which are strongly predictive of academic achievement.

According to Cokley and Chapman (2008),

Given the consistent relationship found between academic self-concept and GPA, it is important to identify factors that predict academic self-concept. The findings suggest that high schools should foster a strong ethnic identity for African American students while continuing to promote positive attitudes toward academic success. With bolstered ethnic identity, academic self-concept increases, devaluing academic success decreases and academic achievement is enhanced. (Cokley & Chapman, 2008)

This supported the findings of Oyserman et. al (1995), who found a positive relationship between racial and ethnic identity and achievement, with high levels of Racial and Ethnic Identity (in all three REI components- Connectedness, Awareness of Racism, and Embedded Achievement) acting as a buffer may help protect students from declining GPA and drop out.

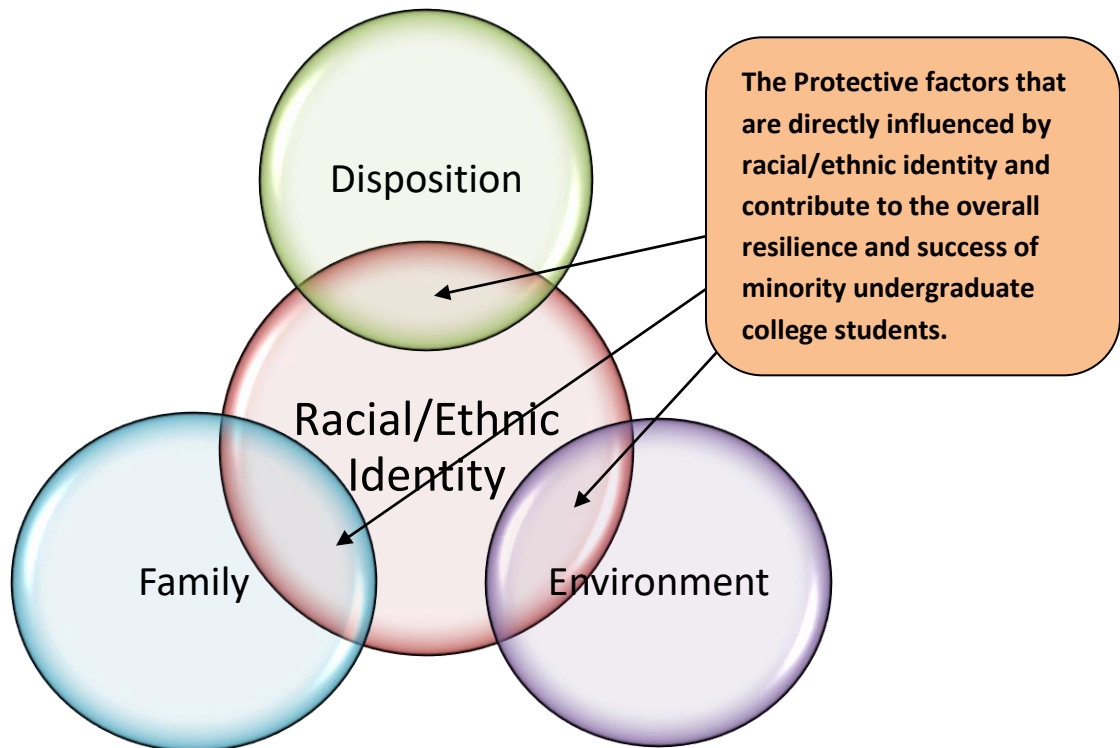
While few studies have explored the direct impact of ethnic and racial identity on academic resilience in college students of color, the literature does support the development of a defined sense of ethnic identity as it relates to academic achievement, self-esteem, positive social interactions with others, and resilience (Holleran & Waller, 2003; Phinney, 1992; Phinney & Kohatsu, 1997). Given the potential protective nature of ethnic and racial identity highlighted in this research, it's important to better understand how specific factors of ethnic and racial identity influence the student's resilience and serve as a meaningful protective factor.

Conceptual Model

The resiliency process is the result of the interplay between all of the three components of the Characteristics Triad. "The interaction among these three areas provide a framework within which the specific lives of individuals can be analyzed with respect to their academic achievement despite some unfavorable background factors" (Morales & Trotman, 2004). In addition, based on the salient nature of race and ethnicity for students of color, and the literature to support ethnic identity as a critical protective factor, this study incorporates a fourth element into the model, therefore taking into account the influence of racial and ethnic identity more broadly. As a student moves through the development of their racial/ethnic identity, the protective factors contributing to their capacity for resilience in all three aspects of the triad will be influenced. For students of color in particular, understanding how racial/ethnic identity

influences these characteristics may be critical to explaining how they are able to succeed despite the specific risks they face as a minority at a PWI. The protective mechanisms found in the overlapping sections are critical for understanding the specific needs of Black and Latina students in order to better support their academic achievement and success (Figure 5)

Figure 5. Adapted Conceptual Model



Predominately White Institution

To understand student success and academic resilience we must consider the environment in which this process is taking place. Researchers suggest that student success will be influenced by different factors including the characteristics and conditions of the institution. Since the desegregation of American public schools, when college institutions were legally mandated to allow access to African American students, higher education has slowly become racially and

ethnically diverse. In particular, predominantly white institutions (PWI) are currently enrolling African American students at significantly higher rates than HBCUs, however, despite these increasing enrollments, PWI's struggle to graduate African American students at the same rate as HCBUs (Allen, 1992; Dayton, Gonzalez-Vasquez, Martinez, & Plum, 2004). In addition, research has found that students who attend HBCUs have more positive outcomes. Freeman (1998) found they experience more intellectual gains, greater psychosocial development, more positive self-image, and stronger racial pride, than black students who attend PWIs.

While limited research has been conducted on Latina students at PWIs specifically, the current retention and degree attainment statistics point to what is seen as a growing issue for the Hispanic population in the United States. Currently Hispanic students have lower rates of educational attainment in comparison to other racial/ethnic groups (Harvey & Anderson, 2003). The literature reveals that as a group, many Latina/os have difficulty successfully completing college degrees and few succeed in predominantly white institutions (Kohler & Lazarín, 2007).). In 2005, only 12% of the Hispanic population holds a bachelor or higher degree compared to 18% of the Black population, and 30% percent of the White population (NCES, 2006).

Looking beyond retention and degree attainment, the student experience on campus is also important. Ancis, Sedlacek and Mohr (2000) found that African American students report more racial-ethnic conflict on predominately white campuses. In particular, the pressure to conform to stereotypes, the perceptions of mistreatment by faculty, campus police, staff and teaching assistances were highlighted issues. Reid and Radhakrishnan (2003) discovered in their research that on predominately white campuses African American, Latino, and Asian American students perceive a more negative campus climate, (racial and academic climate) than their White counterparts.

All-Women's College

Another significant environmental factor that can influence the experience of higher education for students significantly is whether they are attending a coeducational versus a single sex college. Despite significant advances by women in education, in government, and in the corporate world, women still face gendered expectations and stereotypes. These gendered ideas carry over into higher education and are reflected in women's reports of their negative experiences of the campus climate. According to Pascarella and his colleagues (1997), women attending coeducational institutions showed a negative relationship between perceived lack of campus support and their learning and developmental growth (Pascarella et al, 1997). Conversely, students attending all women's institutions reported more engagement in effective "educational practices" (which refers to reading and writing, preparing for class, collaborating with peers on projects, problem-solving tasks, community service, and interacting with instructors) and higher levels of "feelings of support achievement" (which refers to how the institution deploys its resources to impact persistence, satisfaction, learning, and graduation) (Kinzie et al., 2007).

Jillian Kinzie is an influential researcher in the field of undergraduate education improvement. Her work examines a variety of factors including, differences in student engagement by gender, race-ethnicity, and first-generation status; and the impact of programs and practices designed to support student success. Kinzie et al. (2007) studied a sample size of over 42,000 female first-year and senior-year students from 290 institutions who completed the National Survey of Student Engagement in 2000, 2001, and 2002, to determine female students' engagement with their college experiences. This research found that in comparison to women attending coeducational institutions, women who attended women's colleges were generally

more engaged and interacted more frequently with their faculty, both of which have the potential to positively impact student success. Her research supports women's colleges and the Women's College Coalition, suggesting that women are more likely to attain a degree in a male-dominated field such as math and science, make greater gains intellectually, and they have higher self-esteem being educated in and graduating from women's colleges. In fact, research has found that students who attend women's colleges experience many benefits, such as active classroom participation, faculty/student interaction, leadership roles on campus, and perceived academic rigor (Kinzie, et al., 2007). With regard to race and ethnicity, Kinzie et al. (2007) did find racial differences in her reported findings. Specifically, the study found that African American students reported a smaller number of interactions with faculty when compared with their white peers. This study points to the continued inequality faced by African American college students and shows that even in a women-only environment, female students of color still experience less advantages and positive outcomes than do other (generally white) female students.

Little research has looked at the benefits of Hispanic students attending all women's colleges vs. coeducational institutions. However, given the research suggesting that support systems including; peers, family, faculty, and institution contribute to persistence for Hispanic undergraduate students (Schneider & Ward, 2003; Johnson et al., 2007; Crockett et. al, 2007), one might assume that all women's colleges can better meet their needs. Pascarella and Terenzini state that the "evidence tends to support those who claim that a women's college provides a uniquely supportive climate for women to explore themselves and other members of their gender in a wide range of intellectual and social leadership roles" (2005, p. 383).

Chapter Three: METHODOLOGY

This study sought to understand the experiences of Black and Latina female undergraduate students on a predominantly White campus. The purpose of this study is to investigate protective variables that may predict the resilience of Black and Hispanic female undergraduates, particularly how racial and ethnic identity influence these factors and the overall experiences of these women as they matriculate in a small, predominately white, private, four-year, all women's college. This chapter presents a detailed description of the procedures implemented in accordance with the phenomenological methodology used in this study. Procedures are discussed in terms of population, participant recruitment, research questions, and methodological framework. These procedures also include the Institutional Review Board Approval and all documentation, such as informed consent, which can be found in Appendix.

Research Questions and Variables

This study used a qualitative, one-on-one semi-structured interview method to collect data.

Research Question #1: How do female Black and Latina students at Boston City College describe the key factors contributing to their overall positive or negative experiences at the institution?

This question was measured qualitatively by asking the students to share stories about their school experiences, and reflect on the current climate of the school, as it relates to their success as students.

Research Question #2: How do female Black and Latina students at Boston City College

describe the protective factors that helped them cope with institutional, social, and academic challenges they faced as a student.

This question was measured qualitatively by asking students to reflect on the challenges they have experienced as a female Black or Hispanic student at a PWI and share the factors that protected them so they could achieve and persist.

Research Question #3: How do female Black and Latina students at Boston City College perceive their ethnic/racial identity and its impact on their satisfaction, social experience, and academic achievement as an undergraduate student of color at a PWI?

This question was measured qualitatively by asking students to share thoughts on their own racial/ethnic identity development and reflect on how that identity has played a role their academic and social college experience at Boston City College.

This study used qualitative variables for data analysis. The variables are as follows:

Academic Resilience: This qualitative variable includes themes such as, self belief (confidence), a sense of control, low anxiety (composure), persistence (commitment), and coordination (planning).

Racial/Ethnic Identity: This qualitative variable includes themes such as, a consciousness of self within a particular group, racial and ethnic preference (the manner in which a minority group views itself), racial and ethnic attitude (the view of minorities reflected in society at large), and reference group orientation.

Interview Questions

1. Thinking back to middle school, high school, and your college career so far, how would you describe yourself as a student?
2. How would you describe your family's history with education? Is it important to them? What is their role in your decision to attend college and your persistence throughout college thus far?
3. Back when you were a senior in high school, and you were thinking about college, what mattered most to you?
 - a. Can you tell me what led you to choose Simmons for your undergraduate degree?
4. What have you noticed to be the biggest issues you have faced during college?
 - a. How did you learn to navigate that situation? What did you do and what did you learn from that experience?
5. What do you see as some of the major issues your peers deal with here at Simmons? How have they navigated those situations?
6. What have been your biggest accomplishments since attending college?
7. What are your biggest strengths? Has it always been a strength or did you have to work on it?
8. Do you feel you have activities on campus that interest you and keep you interested?
 - a. What extracurricular activities are you involved with at the school? (Student government, clubs, sports).
 - b. Tell me why you got involved. And, if at all, has this involvement positively or negatively shaped your college experience?
9. What has been the most meaningful experience in your college career thus far?
10. How would you describe yourself in terms of race or ethnicity?
11. Does being_____ have a lot to do with how you feel about yourself?
 - a. If so, how does that play out in your college experience? Why?
12. Do you ever wish that you belonged to another racial or ethnic group?
 - a. If yes, why and how has that influenced your college experience?
13. Would you say you are happy or proud to be part of this racial group? How does that impacted your experiences academically and socially on a predominately white campus?

14. Overall, how do you think your peers on campus see your racial group? Explain why? How has this impacted your experiences academically and socially on a predominately white campus?
15. How would you describe your current interactions with peers outside and within your racial/ethnic group? Who are members of your close groups of friends?
16. What has been your experience/relationship with your professors and other staff members? Do you feel they support you in ways that contribute to your academic achievement?
17. Do feel you have a close sustained relationship with at least one caring and supportive adult on campus who is a positive role model- like a mentor on campus? Is this important to you? Has it positively or negatively impacted your success as a student?
18. Are there people on campus you can rely on or go to when you need academic support? (Student? Deans Office? Faculty? Friends Outside of Simmons?) Why do you turn to those people?
19. Would you say that you have a strong sense of belonging or attachment to this school and people at this school?
 - a. Why and how has that influenced your college experience?
20. How do you feel overall about campus diversity at Simmons?
 - c. How about diversity in the curriculum in general?
21. Is there more your school could do to better support students of color? Do you have any recommendations for programs or services that Simmons could provide that would help other _____ students persist?
22. Is there anything else you would want to share with other _____ students here at Simmons that might be helpful to them?

Methodological Framework

Due to the complexity of the variables in this research, academic resilience, racial/ethnic identity, and academic success and persistence of female Black and Latina students of color, a qualitative research method was chosen. Because qualitative methods allow for a focus on the effects of culture on consciousness, these methodologies have been identified as useful when examining issues of race, class, and gender (Creswell, 2009). Qualitative methods, particularly discussions with student focus groups and one-on-one interviews, reveal the in-depth and complex processes involved in development, adaptation, and coping (Bennett & Okinaka, 1990). Qualitative research is focused on explaining the process by which people arrive at a certain idea or conclusion and pays special attention to individual cases and the human understandings that occur in those cases. According to Shawn Wilson, experienced qualitative researcher and author of *Research is ceremony: Indigenous research methods* “. . . the data and analysis are like a circular fishing net. You could try to examine each of the knots in the net to see what holds it together, but it’s the strings between the knots that have to work in conjunction in order for the net to function” (Wilson, 2006 p. 120).

In particular, the qualitative strategy of phenomenology is one approach in seeking to understand a particular phenomenon. Phenomenological research is where “the researcher identifies the "essence" of human experiences concerning a phenomenon, as described by participants in a study” (Creswell, 2009). Phenomenological research seeks to understand reality through the perception and description of the participant experiences. It allows the researcher the opportunity to uncover commonalities between all participants through a shared experience of a particular phenomenon with the ultimate goal to understand it’s universal essence (Creswell, Hanson, Plano, & Morales, 2007). As participants share their lived experiences, commonalities

and patterns within the participant's stories point to what is significant and creates meaningful relationships (Moustakas, 1994). Since phenomenological research focuses on the participants' individual perceptions and perspectives, this method would allow Black and Latina students to describe their perceived experience as a student of color on campus and how they perceive race and ethnicity playing a role in their academic resilience.

This study used a qualitative, semi-structured interview design to answer the three research questions. One-on-one interviews were used to investigate questions #1, #2 and #3 because they allow for the sharing of detailed personal stories, in-depth intimate or personal thoughts, decisions, and experiences. Qualitative interviews give firsthand accounts of how female students of color perceive their racial/ethnic identity within the campus environment, and tell stories that express how they addressed the challenges and obstacles they have faced along the way. A qualitative interview replicates the everyday, comfortable interaction among people; they listen, learn, and gain a better understanding of each other's experiences, and the world view (Kvale, 1996). Through the telling of stories and sharing of thoughts and feelings, the researcher can gain the information needed to paint the picture of who the interviewee is and how their experiences contribute to how they make sense of the world. Telling stories is a process whereby the individual shares details from their consciousness in order to capture and explain their experience (Seidman, 2006). Unlike a quick instantaneous response on a survey, storytelling allows both the listener and the teller to participate in a deep reliving of the event or experience. Both subconscious and conscious detail can help uncover concepts and variables that greatly impact and improve the quality of the research. Because this research is particularly interested in understanding the role of racial and ethnic identity development and its expression as it may contribute to the specific protective mechanisms that contribute to student's academic

resiliency, the use of a qualitative research methods is most appropriate. Only through one-on-one interviews can the variety of deep, complex relationships and factors that contribute to the experiences of the academic environment for students of color be uncovered. “The primary way a researcher can investigate an educational organization, institution, or process is through the experience of the individual people, the “others” who make up the organization or carry out the process” (Seidman, 2006 p.10). For the purpose of this research, the interviews constitute a major part of data collection. The employed semi-structured interview design allowed the researcher to ask pre-determined, open-ended questions that elicited reflection and allowed the interviewee the freedom to share her own stories on her own terms.

The use of qualitative interviews will strengthen our knowledge and understanding of the college experience for female Black and Hispanic students at a PWI. More specifically, by studying academic resilience in this population we can better identify the factors related to exceptional educational outcomes for these “at risk” students. Further, this research will help us to better understand the factors of racial/ethnic identity growth and development and how those factors interact in the academic, social and personal experiences of Black and Hispanic at a PWI.

Population

This study was interested in investigating Black and Latina undergraduate students on an all-female predominantly White campus. The research site was a small all women’s (undergraduate) college in the heart of Boston, MA with a population of approximately 1,746 full-time undergraduate students. Purposeful sampling, where the researcher selected subjects with a particular purpose or goal in mind, was used. Participant volunteers were required to identify as Black and/or Hispanic and were enrolled as an undergraduate student at the particular institution of higher education under study. The research study included 11 in-depth interviews.

All participants were currently enrolled as undergraduate students in Boston City College. All participants were between the ages of 18 and 29.

Participant Recruitment

Participants for this study were recruited through a variety of outreach methods. This turned out to be a very challenging task that required a great deal of time and flexibility. In order to recruit study participants, the researcher created signs and posters and posted them around the school publicizing the study with instructions explaining how to volunteer (see Appendix A). The researcher also utilized relationships with key on-site faculty who offered to function as liaisons. The researcher consulted with these liaisons to determine the best way to access the students, as well as the best approach to be utilized. Research site liaisons were asked to distribute a flyer informing students of the research and announce that students meeting the desired characteristics are invited to participate in the study. Additional recruitment strategies included email distribution to student organizations such as the Organizacion Latino Americana (OLA) and the Black Student Organization (BSO), to inform them of the research and request their assistance in student recruitment. Finally, participants who completed the interview were also encouraged to share this opportunity with their peers.

Student volunteers were asked to contact the researcher via email or text message. Prior to the interview, a consent form (see Appendix B) outlining the purpose of the study, the procedure, any potential risks, and contact information for any preliminary questions, were provided for all students who choose to participate. A participant incentive in the form of a movie ticket was included in the invitation to potential participants as a means to increase the response rate (Singer, Groves, & Corning, 1999). All students who participated were over 18

years old; therefore consent forms were signed by them on site. The only criterion for participation was that they were currently an undergraduate student at Boston City College and self-identifies as Black, Hispanic, or Racially Mixed.

Once the respondents agreed to participate, the researcher sat down with them and read over the consent form, making sure they understood the procedure and any potential risks associated with the study. All participants also filled out a brief demographic survey (Appendix C) prior to the interview being conducted. From this research site population, a total of 11 students agreed to be interviewed. This population was comprised of 4 freshman, 2 sophomores, 3 juniors, and 2 seniors. Six participants identified as Hispanic (one of whom identified as Hispanic/Jamaican) and 5 identified as Black/African American or Black Caribbean (one of whom identified as Black/Mixed).

Instrumentation

To increase the validity of the semi-structured interview questions, the researcher conducted a pilot interview with a student with characteristics similar to the targeted study population (undergraduate, Black or Hispanic, female student) at the research site. During this pilot process, the researcher tested the quality and construct validity of each question in order to identify whether 1. the research structure of the questions are actually studying the constructs the researcher intended to study, (resilience and racial identity) and 2. the researcher was actually measuring the outcomes that were meant to be measured (student's perceptions, student's personal experiences, and student's perspectives).

This step was critical to ensure that the questions were understandable and related to the overall research questions. Based on the results of the pilot, slight modifications were made to more closely categorize the questions within the constructs of resilience and racial and ethnic identity.

In addition, the order of the questions were changed so that questions targeting the resilience of the individual were asked first, followed by questions about racial/ethnic identity. This change was put in place because the researcher observed in the pilot study that once the issue of race was raised by the interviewer, the interviewees tended to reframe the subsequent responses around the topic of race. The decision to reorder the questions was undertaken in an attempt to ensure that the interviewees had ample opportunity to discuss their perceptions and experiences as students in general. In this manner it was up to the student to choose to make race a salient feature of their description and analyses, without being unduly influenced by the researchers' specific questions.

Data Collection

Following the pilot process, the interview questions were formalized. Eleven students responded, via email or text message, to the invitation to participate and arranged for a meeting time when the interview would take place. This research employed the interview method to collect data. Interviews were held in the participant's natural school setting within a private room in the intuition's library. This location was specifically chosen as it was extremely convenient for the students while also being quiet, secluded, and private. The researcher conducted semi-structured interviews which allowed participants the ability to freely discuss their individual situations, and in so doing provided evidence as to how their internal ethnic identity and resilience characteristics have or are currently playing a role in their college experience. In an effort not to alienate my volunteer participants, I refrained from asking questions about their socioeconomic status and hoped that I would gain that information through the in-depth interview. While the interview questions were developed using themes identified in the academic resilience and racial/ethnic diversity literature, the questions were open-ended and

followed a relatively unstructured interviewing format. This unstructured interview format allowed flexibility for new themes to emerge through the open sharing of student perspectives and experiences.

Each interview was audio-recorded with the participants' permission. The researcher and interviewee sat close together with the researcher at the head of the table and the interviewee on the side next to her. The interviews ranged in time from 45 minutes to one hour. Each participant was asked the same broad questions, but each were also asked follow up questions that were designed to encourage the interviewee to provide more in-depth detail.

Analysis

The data collection process was facilitated by utilizing a qualitative software called HyperRESEARCH to help with the highlighting, organizing, and grouping of significant statements and meanings. Before starting the analysis the researcher documented all of the potential areas where her own personal biases could impact their perspective. Research has suggested that regardless of how hard researchers try to rid themselves of all biases and view the data through a fresh perspective, this process is imperfect and unattainable in full (Moustakas, 1994). To begin the analysis, the researcher sent all of the digital recordings to a transcription service in the city of Boston, MA.

Once the interviews were transcribed, the researcher moved on to the next step of phenomenological analysis which involved reading through the transcripts and highlighting the commonalities and patterns between the participants that pointed to a significant or meaningful experience. Since phenomenological research focuses on the participants' individual perceptions and perspectives, this method allowed the researcher to uncover how the participant described their perceived experience as a Black or Hispanic student on campus and how they perceived race and ethnicity playing a

role in their academic resilience. As the researcher read through these transcripts, a list of the themes identified in the data was created to pull out the major thematic codes. For example, how do students describe the peer relationships on campus? What are students' families' expectations for their higher education? How do students perceive their racial/ethnic identity playing a role in their college experience? What are students' perceptions on being a student of color at a PWI, and how do they perceive its influence on their academic performance and persistence?

The interview data was organized around the components of academic resiliency, the *Protective Factors*, termed by Garmenzy (1991) as the "Characteristic Triad." The *Dispositional Factors* are the individuals inherent characteristics that ultimately contribute to their positive academic achievement. The *Familial Factors* are the characteristics of one's familial experiences that allow them to become academically successful. The *Environmental Factors* are the characteristics of the participants' environments that lead to their academic success, for example the influence of schools and communities. The interactions within these three areas provide a framework for analyzing the External Protective factors of family and environment, and the Internal Protective factors of disposition, for specific individuals and their experiences with respect to the academic achievement. According to Morales and Trotman (2004), the interaction of the internal and external protective factors among the "characteristic triad" results in the development of resilience within the lives of individuals (p. 7). This framework is important to this analysis of Black and Latina students at a PWI because it recognizes that neither the individual's internal process, the family nor the school environment occur independent of one another.

Further, important albeit limited research has examined ethnic identity as another potential internal resilient factor that may have a positive relationship with ethnic minority group

members. For example, resiliency research has found ethnic identity to be positively related to measures related to wellbeing, such as levels of coping ability, self-esteem, and optimism and negatively with depression and loneliness (Roberts et al., 1999). It has also been found to have a moderating effect by buffering against the effects of perceived discrimination and well-being outcomes (Sellers et al., 2006; Sellers & Shelton, 2003). Because of the potential protective nature of ethnic identity, this study focused on ethnic identity as a critical factor to examine when investigating the resilience of minority students. As a result, the characteristics of ethnic identity that have been found to relate to resilience; *centrality, public and private regard, and other group orientation*, were identified and organized with the resilience protect factor categories (Sellers et al., 1998; Phinney, 1992).

With Garmenzy's framework for resiliency and the correlating factors of ethnic identity in mind, the researcher uncovered the general thematic aspects of the undergraduate experience through the selective highlighting approach outlined by Van Manen (1990). Using this approach, the researcher selected two interviews and read them each several times, highlighting statements that appear to be revealing about the various phenomenon. Following the preliminary identification of themes, the researcher met with a senior researcher, who had also read the same interviews and developed his own themes. During this meeting the two coders shared their results looking for commonalities and differences.

This established the overall coding approach and determined the codes that would be used to further analyze the remaining interview data. Next, the master list of codes were organized under the larger umbrella of the resilient composite themes; family, disposition, and environment.

These themes were categorized by overall general resiliency and resiliency influenced by racial/ethnic identity. The overall general resiliency codes included: *Disposition*: Lifetime goals, Drive and work ethic; *Family*: Emotional and Financial Support; and *Environment*: Campus Engagement (Figure 6). A second round of analysis was conducted by analyzing the descriptive stories within the codes in which race and ethnicity played a central role. Keeping race and ethnicity in mind, the researcher identified codes that captured the complex nature of being a Black or Latina student at a PWI, and organized these new emerging themes within the characteristics triad. These codes included: *Dispositional*: Self-motivated work ethic, Defying stereotypes, Identity Duality, and Racial/Ethnic identity expression; *Family*: High Achievement Expectations, Reciprocity towards family; and *Environment*: Activism and changing stereotypes, Finding individual or group with shared race/ethnicity, Lack of Diversity, Racism and Microaggressions, and Financial Obstacles (Figure 6).

Figure 6 Themes Identified in the Data

Codes	General Resilience Themes	Themes Influenced by Racial/Ethnic Identity
Family	Emotional and Financial Support;	High Achievement Expectations, Reciprocity towards family
Disposition	Lifetime goals, Drive and work ethic	Self-motivated work ethic, Defying stereotypes, Identity Duality and Pride, and Racial/Ethnic identity expression
Environment	Campus Engagement	Activism and changing stereotypes, Finding individual or group with shared race/ethnicity, Lack of Diversity, Racism and Microaggressions, and Financial Obstacles.

The organization of this data added greater clarity to the conceptual model used for this study. This model utilizes the theoretical framework guiding the study: Resiliency's Characteristic Triad and Racial/Ethnic Identity Development Theory, in order to better capture the full experience of the undergraduate college student. This data helps to identify and organize the themes that emerged highlighting the risk factors, and protective factors that are specifically influenced by the students' perception of their racial/ethnic identity.

As a final step, the researcher reread the most frequently trending and meaningful statement descriptions within the codes outlined above, to gain a deeper understanding of the phenomenon central to that experience. This meaning making process allowed the researcher to delve deeper into the phenomenon of risk and protective factors contributing to the students' experience. This deepening process and the conclusions drawn from it are outlined in the discussion chapter.

Researcher Bias

This dissertation topic emerged from my experience as a doctoral student in the Educational Leadership program, after being exposed to the many challenges students face on a daily basis that interfere with their ability to be successful students. My work in the health and wellness industry is focused on developing educational prevention programs to help students cope with college life and develop the knowledge and skills they need for a successful and positive college experience. This work, as well as my doctoral program course work, exposed me to the current education crisis in higher education and significant achievement gap between students of color and white students. While I had always been passionate about building student resilience, I developed a particular interest in the need to better understand the specific

challenges faced by minorities from different backgrounds. This passion and interest helped drive the development of this paper and also provided me a way to raise awareness around the problem and propose a new perspective for researchers and administrators to consider when evaluating the attainment gap.

Because of my passion and closeness to this topic, it was extremely important that I become aware of the ways in which my interest and past experiences might impact my interviews and research. I have been working in the field of program development to address student issues for many years and therefore had to be very careful not to let my previous knowledge of this population create a biased opinion. I made a conscious effort to remain open-minded and not subconsciously drive my research in a certain direction simply because it is a direction that aligns with what I already assumed to be true. As a researcher, I understand that this “closeness” to the topic could potentially prove to be my biggest challenge. It was important, throughout my interviews, that I sought out information that extended beyond what I already thought I knew.

Additionally, I acknowledged the “othering” that could have potentially impacted my research. Because of my passion and experience in this field I did hold some power during this research process. I have not only personally experienced difficulties throughout high school and college, I have helped family members and friends work through these difficult time periods as well. As a researcher I remained aware of this perspective and made a conscious effort not to let it impact my body language, tone, or question formations. I viewed each of my subjects from a clean slate and drew a picture of who she was solely by what I learned from her interview.

Protections Against Risks

Students were well informed about the nature of the study and that the information collected will be available to the institution and interested general public. They were, therefore, able to make an informed choice about what information to share. They were always given the choice not to answer particular questions, and that they were told that they may stop and terminate the interview at any time without negative repercussions. The participants were given an institutional resource form which included contact information for the Counseling Center and Student Affairs Office in the event that the participant had any issues or concerns following the interview.

Because the researcher was a student at Boston City College, special precautions were taken to ensure that none of the students who participated in the interviews were in subsequent classes, or in organizations with which the researcher was affiliated on campus. Specifically, the researcher only interacted socially and academically with graduate students and no graduate students were included in the participant sample.

As much as possible, identifying information was eliminated from the data. Participants were given pseudonyms that were decided by the researcher. Only the researcher had access to the match of pseudonyms numbers and names, and they were kept in a private folder on her personal computer. The audio files will be stored separately from the transcripts in a private folder on the researcher's personal computer only. All identifying information has been eliminated from the transcriptions.

Benefits

The results of this research will be beneficial for administrators at Boston City College as they try to better understand the processes involved in supporting the successful matriculation of

female students of color at a single sex, PWI as they make decisions regarding how to increase, student satisfaction, retention, and academic achievement. In addition, this dissertation will also present recommendations for services to meet the needs of the students of color at Boston City College which will be very beneficial. This research may also benefit administrators of other PWI's. The participants in the research may benefit from the study through self reflection on their academic journey. I believe that by discussing the hurdles they have overcome, the accomplishments, and the sense of achievement despite challenging stressors, the reflective process can have a positive impact. In addition, students may feel a sense of pride and leadership by participating in research that may ultimately lead to institutional improvement.

Chapter Four: RESULTS

In this qualitative study, I explored the academic resilience of female Black and Latina women at a single-sex PWI. More specifically, I examined how their racial and ethnic identity influenced their resiliency to gain insights related to their experiences as a minority student attending a PWI, and the factors related to their desire and ability to persist and achieve academic success. In order to do so, I scheduled and conducted individual semi-structured interviews with each participant, ranging 45 minutes to an hour and a half in length. The interviews were designed to gain an understanding of how each participant's life history and educational experiences impacted her personal resilience as a Black or Latina student in higher education. Consistent with the phenomenological model, the intent of this study was to illuminate the specific experiences of Black and Latina undergraduate students at a PWI to identify phenomena related to how their racial identity and academic resilience impact their experience. Because so little is known regarding the impact of racial identity on the resiliency of successful Black and Latina undergraduate students in PWIs, it was essential to make use of a research process that encourages detailed descriptions of real life experiences and supports new phenomenon to emerge.

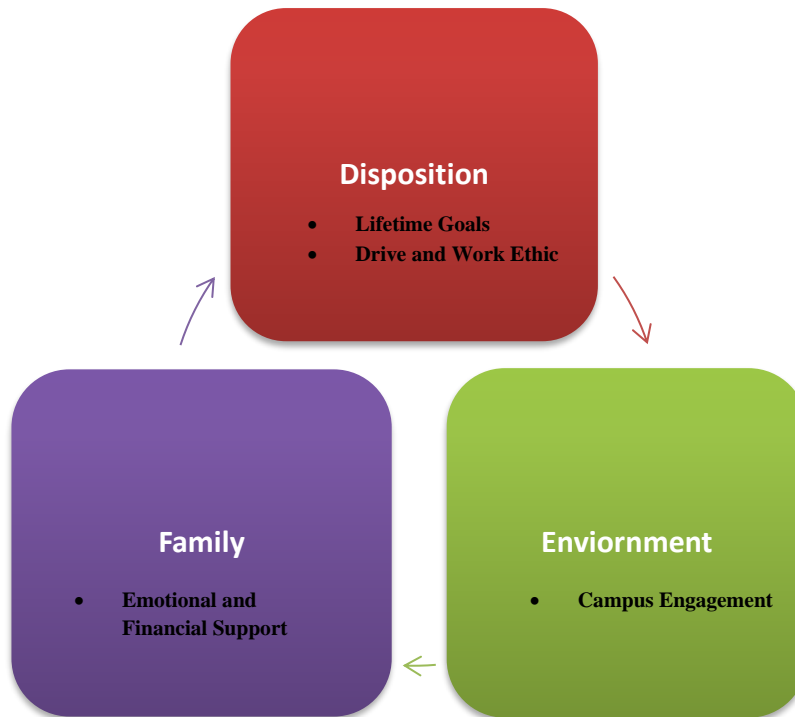
It is important to note that the following themes represent a very limited, specific population. These themes represent the experiences of eleven female undergraduate students, each reporting on their own perception of their college experience. The following individuals are represented in this study self identified their race/ethnicity and were assigned pseudonyms following the interview: Alicia, a Hispanic, Junior in college; Beth, a Caribbean Black, Senior in college; Casey, an African American/Black, freshman in college; Devin, a Hispanic/White, Junior in college; Ellen, a Hispanic/Jamaican, freshman in college ; Fiona, a Hispanic, freshman

in college; Gia, a Hispanic, sophomore in college; Hady, an African American, freshman in college; Isabel, a Hispanic, senior in college; Julia, a Black/Mixed (Afra-Cuban), sophomore in college; and Kala, an African American/Caribbean, junior in college.

Themes

As the researcher, I completed the first round of analysis by organizing the themes identified across the interview data around the components of academic resiliency *Protective Factors*, termed by Garmenzy (1991) as the “characteristic triad.” The *Dispositional Factors* are the individuals inherent characteristics that ultimately contribute to their positive academic achievement. The *Familial Factors* include the characteristics of one’s familial experiences that allow them to become academically successful. The *Environmental Factors* include the characteristics of the participants’ social environments that lead to their academic success, for example schools and communities. The interactions within these three areas provide a framework for analyzing the external risk and protective factors of family and environment, and the internal risk and protective factors of disposition, described by individual students and their experiences with respect to academic achievement. According to Morales (2004), the interaction of the internal and external protective factors among the “characteristic triad” results in the development of resilience within the lives of individuals (p. 7). The framework is important to this analysis of Black and Latina students at a PWI because it recognizes that neither the individual’s internal process, the family, nor the school environment impact the students’ experience independently of one another. The data presented in this first set of findings categorizes the thematic codes, identified by the students, within the characteristics triad that are unrelated to race or ethnicity.

Figure 7. Characteristics Triad Codes



Environmental Themes

Campus engagement

Almost all of the participants discussed their involvement in a variety of organizations, spiritual groups, or volunteer opportunities as being a critical factor in their adjustment to college life, as well contributing to, their motivation and ability to do well academically. Gia, a self-identified Hispanic sophomore, described how she is involved in multiple clubs on campus and how that involvement plays a role in her life as a student.

So, I think they help me stay in check, because I know if I don't keep my academics up to par, I can't be in the clubs. I've been told that before, which is also one of my motivations for last semester and getting my act together like that. I was like, being

involved on campus is so important to me. I can't afford to not do well in school, because then I can't be in those clubs.

As Gia has highlighted through her explanation of the importance of being involved on campus, eligibility to continue to participate in these groups provides her the motivation to keep her grades up and do well academically.

Dispositional Themes

Lifetime goals.

The Lifetime Goals category describes when participants expressed dedication to their long-term career aspirations and goals. Throughout their academic experience, they remained focused on their goals and therefore found additional motivations to do well. Fiona, a self-identified Hispanic freshman, spoke of her future aspirations to go to Harvard Medical School and become a doctor.

For me, it's my goals. So I want to be a doctor. So like for that, I keep thinking like whenever I don't want to do a homework segment or I don't want to go to a meeting for the pre health, I'm just thinking well, this is going to be helpful for me in the future, so I'd better do it.... my goal is to go to Harvard Med. So whenever I don't want to do this, I remember, you're not going to get into Harvard Med if you don't do this assignment. So I think its tangible things [goals] that help me get to where I want to be.

For Fiona, the goal of Harvard Medical School motivates her to work hard and stay focused on her academics, even when she wants to give up. She points out that when she doesn't want to do her work, she takes a moment to remind herself that she will not achieve her ultimate goal if she doesn't complete this smaller task.

Drive and work ethic.

The Drive and Work Ethic illustrates when participants described themselves as good students who work hard and are determined to do well. In high school, almost all participants

expressed being very good students. Now that they are in college, they feel they're even more driven to succeed because the stakes are higher. They want to work as hard as they can and perform as well as possible while they have the opportunity. Julia, a self-identified Black/Mixed sophomore, talks about always having a strong work ethic, but this seems to mean more when she talks about her drive to succeed in college

I think that I've just always known to try hard and do the best that I can. And in college, this is serious, I'm paying for it. And what I'm doing now kind of dictates what I'm going to do for the rest of my life so that ideology has been really important to me and played into the success that I've had since I've been in college.

Here not only does Julia continue to have an innate desire to put her best effort forward, but now there is the added pressure that this effort represents the "rest of her line." Her success in college will lead to a successful life outside of college, and this is what drives her work ethic.

Family Themes

Emotional and financial support.

The Family Support category describes both explicit and implicit student descriptions of their college life experiences, however, no themes emerged that were completely removed from the influence of their culture, race, or ethnicity. Two students did describe examples of how support from their families helped buffer potential negative experiences, but the remaining discussion related to family support or involvement in their education all revolved around other issues related to their minority status, immigration or race/ethnicity. Isabel, a self-identified Hispanic senior, described her relationships with her grandmother and the closeness they share.

[My family contributes to my success in college through] love and that moral support. My grandmother, she's the cutest thing ever. She always tells me she feels guilty that she can't financially help me but just having her. She calls me every week to make sure that I'm okay. When she sees that I'm getting sick or very stressed out she comes down and

visits me so just having her support and knowing that there's that huge belief in you just makes you want to hold on.

As Isabel discussed, having a grandmother who is proactively involved and who shows her a great deal of love and support positively influences her experience and helps her through vulnerable times. Alicia, a self-identified Hispanic Junior, also relates how her mother is involved.

...my mom, this is very personal, but she borrowed money from a wealthy friend of hers, twice, so that I could keep coming here. So it's because of this woman that I can, that I was able to finish my second semester of freshman year and then first semester of sophomore year.

Alicia revealed this personal story about how only through the generosity of a family friend and her mother's ability to suck up her pride and ask for help, was she able to afford her tuition and remain a student.

Racial/Ethnic Identity's Influence on Resilience

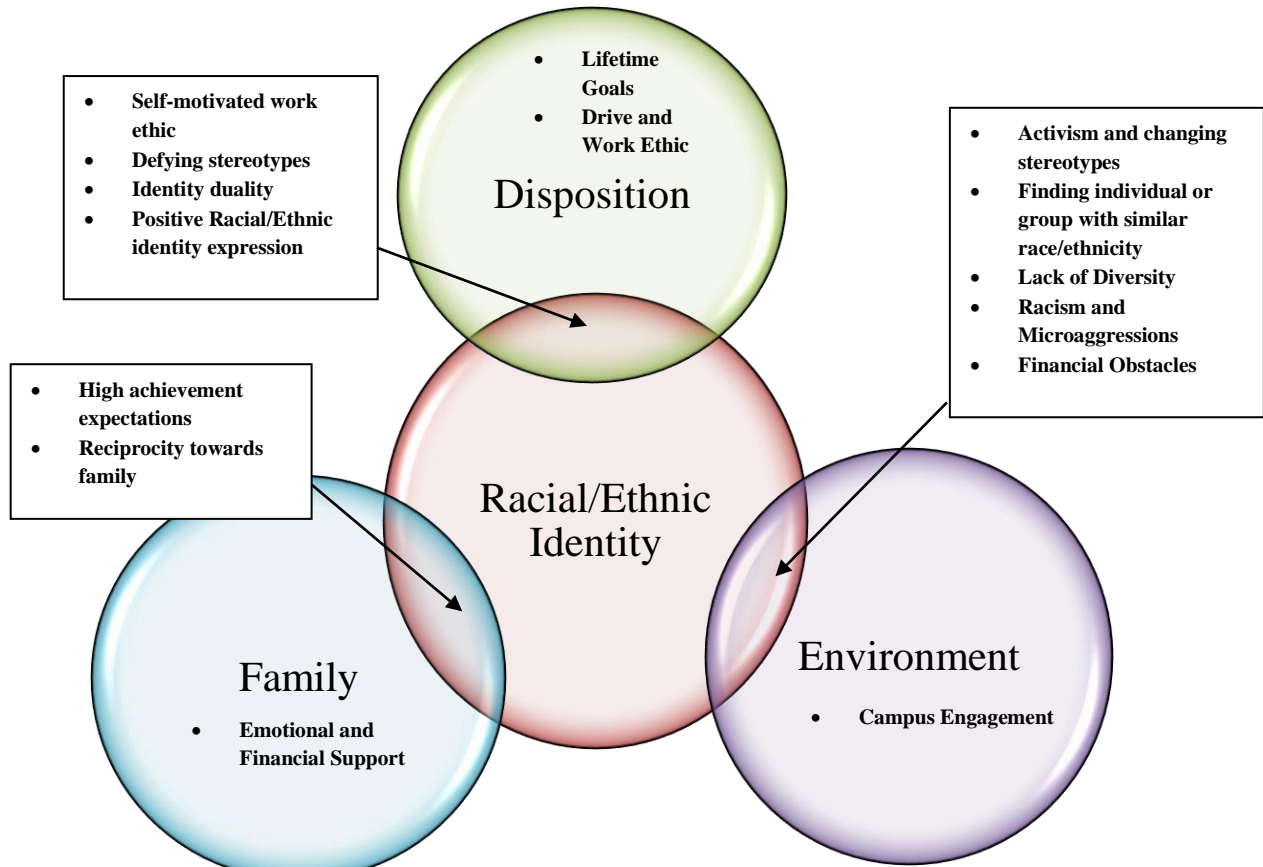
Based on the important yet limited research which has examined ethnic identity as a potential resilient factor that may have a positive relationship with ethnic minority members, I prepared for the second round of analysis by analyzing the descriptive stories within the codes in which race and ethnicity played a central role. Resiliency research has found positive ethnic identity to be positively related to measures related to wellbeing and has also been found to have a moderating effect by buffering against the effects of perceived discrimination and well-being outcomes (Sellers et al., 2006; Sellers & Shelton, 2003; Roberts et al., 1999). Because of the potential protective nature of ethnic identity, I focused my second round of analysis on students' perceptions of racial and ethnic identity and their descriptions of how it influenced their academic and social experiences as a minority student at a PWI.

Keeping race and ethnicity in mind, I engaged in open coding, allowing for new themes to emerge that better captured the complex nature being a Black or Latina student at a PWI. In order to continue to follow the resiliency framework presented above, I organized these new emerging themes within the Characteristics Triad. For example, interviewee discussions of their participation in the campus community often related to campus organizations that were race/ethnicity focused or promoted activism for diversity and inclusion on campus. Further, interviewees discussed mentorship, which is a known protective factor in the resiliency literature, often describing mentoring as being a more positive experience when the mentor was from a similar cultural or minority background.

Conceptual Model

The data presented in these results are organized based on the conceptual model that I developed for this study (Figure 8). This conceptual model is based on the theoretical framework guiding the study: Resiliency's Characteristic Triad and Racial/Ethnic Identity Development Theory. The model captures the full experience of the undergraduate college student by identifying and organizing the vulnerability areas and protective factors that are specifically illustrated by the students' descriptions of their racial/ethnic identity, and those that are not.

Figure 8. Characteristics Triad Influenced by Racial/Ethnic Identity



Environmental Themes Influenced by Racial/Ethnic Identity

The Importance of Finding an Individual or Group With Similar Racial Experience

This category describes when the participant discussed their experiences with Black and Hispanic cultural organizations and student activities or talked about a mentor of the same racial or cultural background. All eleven participants described how they were able to find a sense of comfort and support that resembled a “piece of home.” Additionally, five of the participants discussed how peers or a mentor of the same race understand them and what they have been

through because of their shared cultural background. Ellen, a self-identified Hispanic/Jamaican freshman, discussed the importance of being part of a cultural organization on her campus, and the sense of “comfort” the group provided to her.

getting to know them [other students of color], and having that community of people that know what you’re going through. Not to say that people of other races don’t, because that would be untrue and judgmental. But there’s, like, a comfort level in there. I think that definitely knowing more people of color first semester definitely helped me second semester, because there was, like, that community there.

Ellen describes her first semester as a student of color at a PWI, and how having a group of peers who were of the same race helped her with the difficult adjustment to a new predominately White culture.

Racism and Microaggressions

The Racial and Microaggressions category described when participants discussed their experiences of race related discrimination. Microaggressions are defined as, “brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioral, or environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative racial slights and insults toward people of color” (Sue et al. 2007). All eleven participants discussed at least one experience in which they had to cope with discrimination that they faced on their college campus due to their race. For some participants this discrimination occurred through a negative racial comment from a peer or roommate, for others it took place during classroom discussion, and for students like Alicia, the discrimination occurred on a more global level through campus events. Alicia tells the story of a campus wide event organized by the students on campus and held on Cinco De Mayo, in which she felt the “white” students displayed stereotypical and discriminatory actions.

...Last spring, there was a Cinco De Mayo concert and they [white students on campus] dressed-up as Mexicans for their advertisements and there was a photo shoot and they were wearing mustaches and ponchos and they were all white and it was just like

horrifying, but if I were white, I could -- the only reason that they could do that was because they were white and, you know, they have the privilege to put on someone else's culture as a costume.

Alicia was clearly insulted and frustrated by the students' actions and the institutions blind eye to allow these actions to take place. Additionally, Alicia also expresses another level of discrimination that she has to confront: white privilege. Attending a PWI institution allows these white students the comfort and ignorance to feel they have the privilege to portray the stereotypical view of a minority culture for so-called humorous intent.

Lack of Diversity on Campus

This theme describes when participants discussed how they experience the lack of *others like them* represented in the student body. Participants discussed how the campus environment did not represent different cultural perspectives. Nine participants expressed how the majority students were misinformed and held stereotypical points of view about cultural difference that these attitudes effected their overall academic classroom experience and social interactions. Gia expressed her feelings that her institution was really missing out by not being as diverse as it could be, while at the same time voicing her frustration with the close-mindedness of those around her.

“I feel like it would broaden so many peoples' minds and learn about new things, and so much more inclusive of race and gender and all these other things, because if you're around different people, you're probably more inclined to accept all types of different people. There are just some people here at Boston City College that are so closed-minded and so judgmental that you wonder how Boston City College could have ever even accepted them. You know, it's just things like that that I really question in a safe-space environment, you know?”

Gia expressed strong feelings about how the lack of diversity is affecting the overall culture of the campus and she wonders if in fact, she can feel safe in a culture that fosters such a

close-minded, judgmental environment. Gia believes that more diversity will produce a more inclusive, accepting, and non judgmental environment, and therefore it is in the institutions best interest to increase the number of students of color. The two students who did not express this sentiment as a major concern were students who had relatively limited contact with the campus community as they attended the college as commuter students. One young woman had a small group of peers who she connected with outside of school, and the other lived at home and primarily relied on her friends from childhood for support. According to both of these students, the lack of diversity did not have a direct impact on their experience because they already had the support they needed in their relationships off campus and were simply in college to attend classes and to obtain their degree.

Participation in activism and changing stereotypes

This theme describes participants' discussion of their involvement on their campus and in the neighboring community through work that promoted an awareness of their culture in an effort to reduce prejudice, create change and/or by give back to others from similar backgrounds. A major priority in Julia's college experience is her commitment to cultural organizations, events, and initiatives on campus that were focused on race, diversity and inclusion.

I have really mixed myself in with a lot of the diversity inclusion programs at Boston City College. And I've surrounded myself with a lot of like-minded people like a lot anti-racist people and a lot of people who are starting initiatives to make changes.

Julia's engagements in campus activities as well as the peer groups she has chosen to surround herself with all incorporate some aspect of race and ethnicity. Further, her involvement expands beyond sharing similar cultural backgrounds, to also sharing a common mission to address inequalities, discriminations, and prejudices that exist on a predominately white campus.. Being

a student of color on campus for Julia, means sharing that culture and using it to help others understand perspectives beyond their own.

Financial Obstacles

The Financial Obstacles category describes when participants discussed tuition payments, loans, and scholarships as having a significant role in their persistence through to graduation. Five of the women discussed their almost full board scholarships as being the only reason that are able to attend. Others voiced the difficulties they have faced due to the financial burden of affording a private college education and they had to struggle hard to figure out how they are going to afford school from one semester to the next.

... I have to work a part time in order to pay my rent and maintain myself financially and then I see that many girls are lucky enough to not have to worry about work whereas for me it's different and sometimes it interferes with my school schedule and I don't have the luxury to say well I'll just call out this day because I need to study for this exam. I don't have that luxury. I have to work so it definitely causes a lot of stress and I feel guilty going back to my family and relieving, venting off to them just because it causes stress on them and then they feel guilty for not being able to help me.

In this quote, Isabel shares how being a student of color on a PWI white campus adds an additional level of minority status when compared to her white peers, whose parents have the money to pay for their education. In addition, she had to cope with the stress of managing a part-time work scheduled, her academic courses, and paying her tuition and living expenses. She describes her frustration that her white peers do not seem to have to struggle with this issue as much as she and her other student of color peers must. Similarly, two of the participants expressed this same frustration and shared specific stories about their peers, other students of color, who had to transfer or leave school due to financial struggles.

Dispositional Themes Influenced by Racial/Ethnic Identity

Self-motivated Work Ethic

This theme describes when participants discussed their self-motivation and work ethic. Seven participants describe themselves as driven and hard working students. One even said she would call herself a perfectionist. As they describe their self-motivation, most participants also related this to their race or culture. Devin, a self-identified Hispanic/White junior, talks about her success as a student and relates most of it to her own self motivation.

I feel like a lot of its self-motivated. I feel like if I had to describe all my Latina friends at Boston City College I feel like we're all really self-motivated. So yeah, I think just kind of an inner pride to do well and get the material down and really excel. I think that's another thing is definitely a lot of us want to excel. When I think of like my group of Latina friends here I'm not saying that's all Latinas everywhere but definitely here at Simmons. They just want to do a lot of big things.

Devin's descriptions of an inner pride and desire to excel, is discussed in reference to her Latina culture, "a lot of *us* want to excel." She was very confident about her ability to perform academically and believed strongly that the Latina students at her institution carried the same self-motivation and determination. The students who did not identify with this theme still expressed motivation; however they were more driven by external elements rather than self. For example, two students shared a concern for how expensive their education was and therefore they felt an obligation to focus and do well, while another student discussed sustaining her eligibility to participate in extracurricular activities as her main motivating factor.

Defying the Stereotypes

The Defying Stereotypes category describes when participants discussed their attitude toward their college attendance and having an internalized mind-set of "I have to do this." Six participants described this motivation as a threat of negative stereotypes that leads them want to

set high achieving goals and drives them to be successful. In addition, participants attributed their desire, will, and/or effort to do well and graduate from college to their family and cultural heritage. Fiona describes her experience with the negative stereotypes for Latina girls, and how this motivated her to do the opposite and pursue a higher education degree.

Yeah. So for me, I know that one of the things about me getting to college was the fact that I'm Latina. So if I didn't go to college, I was just going to prove to everybody else that Latinas are not good for anything except getting pregnant at 16 and not going to college. And I don't want to do that. I didn't want to make everybody believe that stereotypical Hispanic girls' future is that.

For Fiona, and many of the other participants in this study, academic success went far beyond the personal desire to get good grades, persist and graduate. She felt a larger responsibility to her cultural community to “prove” to society that Latina women can succeed academically and move on to have successful professional careers.

Identity Duality

The Identity Duality category describes when participants discussed identity development and expressed the development of multiple identities, their cultural identity and their identity as a young student and American citizen. Participants shared feelings of frustration, and a need to act differently, as they struggled to adapt to the predominately white culture without disconnecting from their native culture. Julia describes her experience and new awareness since coming to a PWI and how she has learned to “wear different [identity] hats”.

“...I know how to behave when I’m in like black communities and in Latino communities and I know how to behave when I’m in a room filled with white people. And it’s sad that I have to put on different hats in different groups that I can’t like just be myself in all those groups..”

Julia struggles to define herself within one racial/ethnic identity and describes how she must alter that identity and the behavior that follows depending on the situational context. Julia discusses how she is saddened by this fact because she can't confidently be true to who she is and to the race/ethnicity she most identifies with.

Isolation and a Lack of Sense of Belonging

This theme describes the participant's description of their experience of isolation and lack of belonging in the college community that is associated with their minority racial group identification. Participants discussed situations when they felt they had to hold back their opinion or participation out of fear that others wouldn't understand where they are coming from. In addition, participants expressed having to alter elements of their personality in order to fit the "acceptable" norms of the campus community. Casey, a self-identified African American/Black freshman, described the difficulty she had being an African American student at a PWI, and how it is affecting her behavior and her ability to form relationships.

I've like made a few friends. Not as many as Id like, but because like, I don't know, I feel like my personality that I had back home, it wouldn't really fit in this environment, so I try to tone myself down so, you know, I won't stick out like a sore thumb. And I don't know, it's just, I don't know. I feel like I'm conserving myself.

Casey expressed a need to hold back on who she really is due to a fear that she doesn't belong in this intuitional environment. Because of this, she struggles to form close relationships and doesn't fully engage in the campus community. Her fear of 'sticking out like a sore thumb' stems from her being the majority in her high school and hometown, and now being the minority surrounded with students who are of a different race and ethnicity from her.

Positive Racial/Ethnic Identity Expression.

This theme describes when participants discussed their perceptions of their racial and ethnic identities. More specifically this theme discusses how nine of the participants self-identified as members of the group, how they evaluated their group, how they felt pride in their group membership, and how they engaged in ethnic traditions. Isabel, a self-identified Hispanic senior, described her deep sense of pride and identification with her Hispanic culture.

I just think everyone should be proud of who they are. I think that everyone is put into this world to provide a different perspective and I feel like how I was raised and what I've experienced in my life will mold me to be this different person can provide something different and I feel like molding into the majority isn't doing anyone or myself or my family any justice. So I don't want to dishonor my family or my culture by turning away from it like oh no. No, I'm proud of who I am. It won't change just because I'm here for four years. It's who I'm going to be for the rest of my life.

Isabel holds her cultural upbringing close to her heart and believes strongly that what makes her different from the majority is what makes her valuable to society. She identifies with her racial and ethnic background and supports the many positive aspects of her culture that have played a role in developing into the person she is today. She also expresses how disassociating from that race or ethnicity would be dishonorable. While these nine participants expressed attitudes that would categorize them as having a positive racial/ethnic identity based on the literature, two participants were less clear about how their racial/ethnic background played a role in their college experience. However, while these two participants may have had difficulty describing the importance of their race or ethnicity in their lived college experiences, their stories about their peer groups, involvement in cultural organizations, and family background did suggest that they too held a positive racial/ethnic identity.

Family Themes Influenced by Racial/Ethnic Identity

High Achievement Expectations.

Comments were coded into this category when participants described their families' previous experiences with education and how those experiences influence the expectations set for them. Ten of the participants discussed how the high expectations placed on them by family, as well as the support and encouragement provided these by relationships, pushed them to continue their academic achievement and pursue higher education. Participants like Fiona, attributed these expectations to her parents desire to create a better life for their children. Fiona credited most of her academic support to her family and their emphasis on educational success.

... my parents always pushed me to do good in school because it's a big factor and like my family, it's really important for my parents for me and my siblings to do good in school. So I always try to do my best.

Fiona, and many of the other participants come from families where, because of their minority, financial, or immigration status, their parents did not attend or complete college despite their desire to do so. Therefore, these young women were very attuned to their parent's and grandparent's emphasis on bachelor degree attainment. Despite being first-generation college attendees, it was clear from the interviews that most participants, like Fiona, grew up in homes where doing well in school and going to college was "expected" of them.

While ten participants shared this theme, one participant remained an outlier. This participant was an older student, as well as a single mother, who did not attend college immediately following high school graduation and who did not grow up in a home with high college expectations. While her family has been and remains very supportive of her choice to pursue a bachelor's degree, her continued persistence for degree attainment is motivated mostly by her internal desire to be successful and create a better life for her child.

Reciprocity Towards Family

The Reciprocity Towards Family category describes when participants discussed the role of their family's racial/ethnic background, and how that influenced their determination and sense of responsibility to do well in college and achieve degree attainment. Eight of the participants described how their upbringing in a Black or Latina family played a major role in the decisions they have made while attending college, including the most common theme of reciprocity. The participants discussed the sacrifices their parents made to in order to provide them this opportunity to go to college and because of this they felt like they owed it to them to do well and succeed. Isabel shared a story of how her grandparents and parents came to this country and became citizens, and the responsibility she has to make the best of the opportunities they have provided to her through their own sacrifices.

I think the reason I'm in college is because of my family. My grandparents left the Dominican Republic in order to give my aunt and my dad the best education opportunities that they could but it was harder for my dad and my aunt just because they weren't citizens of this country. They were residents and they had to work to help my grandparents out and my grandfather I think only went up to the sixth grade so it's just because of lack of education they valued it so much more and they put that - - they emphasized that on me during my upbringing so I always applied myself at school just because I wanted to make them proud and show them that yes, just because we're - - we come from a very underprivileged background doesn't mean that I can't be as educated as anybody else.

In Isabel's mind because her family has worked so hard, for two generations, to provide her the privilege of going to college, she must reciprocate and make them proud by doing well and succeeding in her academic studies.

Summary of Findings

The previous section provides a brief review of the themes identified in this research study. Each theme was followed by a detailed description and example from the data as articulated by the student herself. Listening closely to how the young women narrate their experiences allow the themes to come to life and develop meaning through the shared descriptions and perspectives of the student participants. Findings were aligned with the established resiliency framework focused on environment, disposition, and family. Findings suggest that a variety of risk and protective factors influence the women's experiences and play a role in the resilience of Black and Latina students. The most salient resilient themes include; *Campus Engagement, Lifetime goals, Drive and work ethic, and Emotional and financial support.*

In addition, further examination of the data identified that for Black and Latina students in particular there were additional factors, influenced by the student's descriptions of their racial/ethnic identity, that provided an even more comprehensive depiction of the undergraduate college experience for these particular minority populations. The most salient of these themes include, *Importance of finding a group or individual with similar racial experience, Racism and Microaggressions, Lack of diversity, Participation in activism and changing stereotypes, Financial obstacles, Self-motivated work ethic, Defying stereotypes, Identity duality, Isolation and aLack of sense of belonging, Positive racial/ethnic identity expression, High achievement expectations and Reciprocity towards family.* A more detailed discussion of how these factors contribute to resilience and racial/ethnic identity will be shared in the following Discussion chapter.

Chapter Five: DISCUSSION

Summary of the study

This study was prompted by the need for educational research studies that provide in depth portrayals of the impact of racial/ethnic identity on academic resilience. The literature reviewed for this study showed the significant and problematic educational attainment challenges for Black and Latin students, specifically those attending PWI's. The literature covered the span from the history of education for Black and Latina students in U.S., the current achievement gap, the critical role resilience and racial/ethnic identity have on the development and emotional wellbeing of students, and the impact of these factors on academic resilience and educational attainment. I focused this study on the educational experiences of undergraduate Black and Latina students who have overcome the odds against them to attend college and are currently enrolled in one single-sex four-year U.S. College. These findings could help us gain insights related to the achievement gap and the success of female Black and Latina women at a single sex, predominately white institution. If Black and Hispanic students' racial and ethnic identity level contributes to their resilience and perceptions of college experiences then it is critical for researchers to better understand how and why their experiences vary according to their racial and ethnic background. This study interrogates students' perspectives of and expectations regarding their college experience, as well as how these perspectives are shaped by their sense of racial/ethnic identity. In addition, this study examines the process by which Black and Latina students at Boston City College demonstrate resilience as it is evidenced in their ability to overcome negative factors in the college environment. This work provides a possible means for understanding what Black and Latina college students may need in order to be successful students and persist to degree attainment.

To answer these questions, I conducted 11 in-depth, semi-structured interviews with Black and Latina female undergraduate students. Given the breadth and depth of the research topic, I employed multiple phases of data analysis. For the initial analysis I utilized the Characteristics Triad resiliency framework to consider the internal and external factors that make up the student experience as defined by the participants. I then conducted a second round of analysis focusing on the themes identified in the initial analysis which incorporated elements of what the young women had described as it related to their racial/ethnic identity. This round of analysis was intended to further explore the factors of racial/ethnic identity that proved most influential in the participant's academic resilience and overall college experience.

The stories revealed in this study help to capture the complexity of the Black and Latina students' academic experience. Further, this research revealed the unique contribution of racial/ethnic identity to the dispositional, familial, and environmental factors that influence student academic resilience and therefore their educational trajectories. Most importantly, the goal of this study was to uncover Black and Latina student's perceptions of their educational experiences to better inform administrators and faculty of the components which may contribute to a supportive campus environment that fosters success and academic achievement for *all* students.

The theories presented in the retention and persistence literature attempt to explain the characteristics and processes involved when students make the decision to leave college before completing their undergraduate degree. However, most of these models lack the requisite, incorporative, or integrative focus on minority students needed to provide an understanding of the unique characteristics and processes contributing to individual minority student departure. In addition, the bulk of retention theory had been focused specifically on understanding the

negative aspect of student departure and does not provide the analysis needed to understand the protective mechanisms at play for students who persist regardless of their experience with the same challenges as their peers who depart. For this research study, retention theory not only provided a foundational understanding of what contributes to a student's inability to persist and finish their higher education degree, but more importantly, it highlights the need to incorporate other theories in order to clarify the specific and unique experiences that help explain persistence and academic success for Black and Hispanic students.

This study utilized resilience theory as an additional lens to examine retention, persistence and degree attainment. Instead of just focusing on risks and failure, resilience theory allows us to also better understand the protective factors that help buffer the effects of risk. By moving away from a focus on the at-risk nature of college student persistence and attainment for Black and Hispanic students, and incorporating a focus on protective factors, this study is better able to explain the protective processes that contribute to students' resilience and academic achievement despite the unavoidable challenges minority students of color might face in PWI's.

Because this study defined resilience as "the dynamic and multifaceted process of positive adaption in the presence of adversity, involving the interaction between risk and protective processes" (Luthar, Cicchetti & Becker, 2000), it is important to draw conclusions integrating all of the factors contributing to the students experience, including both risk and protective factors. For Black and Latina students in PWIs, persistence and degree attainment is much less likely than it is for their white counterparts. More importantly, it can be assumed that Black and Latina student's perceptions of the college experience and their exposure to risk and protective factors will look differently in their population than that of their white peers. Because of these factors, this study emphasizes racial/ethnic identity as a unique and important element to

examine when trying to understand why some Black and Latina students are able to succeed academically and persist through to graduation and others are not. The literature supports the conclusion or proposition that the development of a defined sense of ethnic identity does have a positive relationships with academic achievement, self-esteem, positive social interactions with others, and resilience (Holleran & Waller, 2003; Phinney, 1992; Phinney & Kohatsu, 1997), however the process by which racial/ethnic identity does this is much less understood. This study expands our understanding of this process by identifying the multiple social, psychological, and environmental factors that are influenced by racial/identity and that play a role in a student's transition into and persistence through the college years.

Discussion of Findings

In the Findings chapter, I shared the themes that aligned with the various internal and external factors for resiliency found among the Black and Latina participants. Based on the second phase of analysis, findings below further identify how racial/ethnic identity penetrate all areas of an individual's capacity for resilience through the presence of dispositional, environmental and familial risk and protective factors. Because the research supports the understanding of *both* the risk factors and protective factors that are contributing to the experience in order to understand how a positive outcome could occur, and because this research defines resilience as "the process of, capacity for, or outcome of successful adaptation despite challenging or threatening circumstances," (Masten, Best, & Garmezy, 1990, p. 426), the conclusions drawn from these findings are presented through an examination of *both* risk factors and protective factors.

Because this study was particularly interested in the unique risk and protective factors related to the experience of Black and Latina students attending a PWI, the discussion points

made in this chapter focus on how racial and ethnic identity influenced the process by which students perceived race impacting the various risk and protective factors within the Characteristics Triad. The following conclusions focus on the factors revealed through the participants' perceptions of their experience with racial/ethnic related hardship, followed by the perceived racially/ethnically influenced protective mechanisms that contributed to their overall academic resilience. Based on the findings from this study, I argue that the participants' perception of being a minority student at a PWI contributed to risks associated with cultural isolation, the lack of a sense of belonging, financial stress, racism, and microaggressions. Finally, through a closer examination of the participants' perceived racial/ethnic identity, this study found three significant protective factors, which helped buffer against the effects of these specific risks, including; family expectations and support; finding an individual or organization with shared racial/ethnic orientation, and having developed a strong sense of purpose and goals for the future.

Risk Factors

As discussed above, the participants did experience a variety of challenges, or risks, that had the potential to negatively impact their academic resilience and success as a student, including; *Isolation and the Lack of a Sense of Belonging, Racism and Microaggressions, and Financial difficulties*

Isolation and the Lack of a Sense of Belonging

This study found significant themes related to the students' perspectives that they did not belong and that often felt as though they were alone due to the absence of other student "like them" in their classes and on campus. These findings support the data that students of color on

predominantly White campuses feel alienated and experience anxiety around being members of a numerical racial/ethnic minority background (Carter, 2006). Gia reported her struggle with this, especially during her first year.

... When I first started at Boston City College, yeah, I was eager, but I was also kind of lost and lonely because there was no one that looked like me in my classes. It wasn't until I found cultural groups and affinity groups that I was like, oh, wow, like, I fit in here. I don't know why I felt the need to fit in, but I think just coming from my high school and things like that, where they're so socially based, that I was just like, what do I do now? I'm lonely.

Devin also explained how the isolation expands beyond not having others around who look like her, but also not having people who identify with where she came from and what she believes.

I feel like sometimes I do feel a little out of place because sometimes I feel like I look at things in just a different way and am coming into situations with a different [cultural] perspective than some people do.

Tinto's social integration theory does not account for the differences between White students and students of color in terms of their institutional integration process and the factors at play, particularly in a PWI. Research suggests that a student's sense of belonging can affect how she interacts with their institutional environment (Hurtado and Carter, 1997). These interactions, ranging from debilitation to seemingly inconsequential, can ultimately affect departure decisions among student of color, thus it's important that we consider how Black and Latina students think and negotiate social isolation when examining the risks for academic resilience for these female student of color (Braxton et al., 2004; Gloria, Castellanos, & Orozco, 2005).

Fiona described a particular experience in the classroom during a discussion about diversity and white privilege. Because she was only one of three minorities in an otherwise, white class, she described feeling "really uncomfortable." In particular, she recalls the majority

of white students making comments like “I don't like this because it makes me feel bad for being white”, or “I don't like this because it makes us look like we're bad people and stuff like that.”

As a result, Fiona and her peers did not engage in the discussion and “stayed quiet.”

Fiona expressed her dislike for this “silence” because she was comfortable in the debate situation and had a lot of experience with difficult conversations in her old school. However, in this setting, where the other side was expressed in the way that is was, Fiona felt uncomfortable and afraid to speak up during class.

I couldn't really say anything. It just kept to myself. I felt like I was in a box. I felt like if I said something than everybody else wouldn't agree, simply because they weren't like my race and didn't share like my background. I felt like they were going to say something [mean] to me, or just like get on me about it. I don't like it [being the only student of color in the classroom] because I can't express myself as I could in other areas where people can actually relate with me. ... And in this class, it was just really uncomfortable and awkward, and it felt weird, and I didn't really want to be there.”

Similarly, Hady had an experience in the classroom environment where she too felt uncomfortable or “awkward.”

It was kind of awkward for me to speak up as the only black person in the class. ... So to try to speak against that was really, really hard for me because I felt like no one was going to understand what I was saying. No one was going to be like oh, well that's a good way to look at it.

The stories shared by these participants highlight the unique and potentially negative isolating experiences that occur due to their minority status. Their inability to speak up and engage in the class discussion points to a significant problem which could interfere with their educational learning process. Effective communication is essential to the educational process, however, as seen in by these participants stories, their mode of interaction reflected their home culture and upbringing which clashed with the predominately white culture of the classroom.

Racism and Microaggressions.

Participants in this study experienced a variety of situations in which they were exposed to or had to deal with racism or microaggressions in the college community. There are many different ways to define racism, but for the purposes of this study racism will be used to discuss experiences where, one group acted in such a way that they believed themselves to be superior and that believed “superior” group holds the power to carry out a racist act (Solorzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000). Microaggressions are “subtle insults (verbal, nonverbal, visual) directed toward people of color, often automatically or unconsciously” (Solorzano et.al., 2000, p. 60). The participants in this study experienced racism and microaggressions in various forms, including, a lack of understanding from their peers, an expectation in the classroom that they represent the voice of their entire racial group, and low expectations from their faculty.

Beth, a Caribbean Black student experienced a situation within a group project where she was the only minority in the group and one of her peers claimed she was too aggressive. She shared her story as well as the experience of another Black friend who had lived through a similar situation.

I was the only black girl in my group. And we had to give feedback, and one of the girls said that I was too aggressive with how I talk, or dictate, whatever it is. I found that kind of, like, really? I’m aggressive?... . So, last semester, my girlfriend – one of my classmates – took the same class with a whole different group of people. They also said she was aggressive when she delivers her information. So I’m thinking, are they just not comfortable? Do they just not get how we are when we talk, because I know some white girls who are loud. And I know some Hispanic girls who are loud, and I know when we get excited, we’re loud.

Another student, Gia, who identities as a dark skinned Hispanic, shared her experiences with White peers holding stereotypes:

A lot of people judge you just because you’re black. For instance, because I am black or dark-skinned, I must be African American and I must understand what the love of watermelon or fried chicken means, but lo and behold, I’ve never grown up with any of those foods in my house because my mom doesn’t make fried chicken.

Hady, an African American student, also experienced microaggression through the inappropriate “jokes” or comments made by her White peers. She seems to have an understanding that the comments are not made to intentionally hurt her, but they are based on an unconscious belief in a stereotype.

Something is said as a joke, but they still hold a stereotype within them. I don't think it's a negative connotation about blacks because oh, you're black, so you must be this kind of person -- they just make comments about things that you do or say like, you're black so you must like chicken. I'm like, okay, yeah, I do, but it's not because I'm black.

Other participants shared stories in which they felt their race impacted the perceptions of their faculty. A common issue participants shared was the expectation that when they were the minority in the classroom, and a discussion came up about their particular race or ethnicity, they were expected to provide an opinion or perspective representing their entire race. They were no longer an individual student with individual points of view, they were a “Black student” or a “Hispanic student” and therefore they were there to represent the whole collective group.

Some professors aren't, you know, inclusive of race or gender. I know in one of my classes last year – and in my friend's class that I had heard about, they're an African-American student, the professor was apparently like, “Oh, what's your view on it? What's the Black view on it?” ... Or, like, “Oh, how do you say this in Spanish?” It's like, why do you assume that we speak Spanish?

Gia expressed how being called out in this fashion can interfere with her academics: “Once you see a professor in that light, you're like, I don't like this class anymore. That gets in the way of your academics, I think.”

In another case, participants felt their white professors held them to a lower standard:

One professor her class was one of the hardest nursing classes and she - - I think 35% of the class failed so I had seen her the following semester and she was like “Oh, so will I be seeing you this summer to retake that class?” I'm like no, why would you cause I passed the class. She said, “Oh, I assumed you failed” and just like I knew that it was because of being a minority student that she has that thought.

Isabel expressed her frustration that she had been such a good student throughout the whole semester, and yet, still, her professor had such low expectations of her. Like Isabel, many of the participants acknowledged that the color of their skin or what they “looked like” sometimes lead to negative experiences with both their White peers and White faculty. As many of these shared stories point out, the experience of racism and microaggressions can lead to more than feelings of isolation and frustration. For many, this creates a campus climate that does not support their academic achievement and can interfere with their ability to perform, engage in classroom discussion, or participate in group work.

Financial Difficulties.

In this study, financial difficulties appeared as a reoccurring and significant theme among the participants. Many students struggled with the expense of their tuition and wondered where they were going to come up with the money from one semester to the next. Some participants had family members who had sacrificed a lot to help, while others were left to pay for their education on their own. Finances play a major role in student persistence and these findings further support the importance of incorporating the impact of college cost into student retention models (Cabrera, Nora, & Castaneda, 1992).

Casey, an African American freshman, shared that her biggest college struggle was financial issues.

I don't know how I'm going to get to work tomorrow because I literally don't have a dollar to get on the bus. And I see a lot of people going out shopping a lot and I'm just like, where are they getting this money from?" I'm like, oh, probably their parents.

According to Casey, the financial stress and concern experienced on a daily basis was having an effect on her social interactions on campus, and often the time she has available to concentrate on her studies. Cabrera, Nora, and Castaneda (1992) conducted a study

investigating the role of college cost on academic persistence and found that financial concerns contribute to the process of persistence indirectly through its impact on student's academic integration, socialization processes, as well as his or her resolve to persist in college. This study highlights the complexity and interconnectivity of the student experience. Financial challenges cannot be compartmentalized into one aspect of a student's experience and as they most likely have a significant impact on the other areas of college life.

Similarly, the financial conflicts were also discussed through the young women's comparison to their White peers. As Hady, an African American freshman, discussed her college experience, she highlighted the challenges she faces being a student of color from a low socioeconomic background attending a PWI where most of her peers are White women from more affluent backgrounds. From her perspective, her White peers have the financial stability and support from their parents to not only cover tuition, but living costs and extra's as well. Most of her White and Middle Class peers don't work, which she described, contributed to the feelings of separation and alienation she experienced. Despite the assistance of financial aid to help with her tuition she still struggled to afford the necessities of books, travel, and the cost of social activities.

A lot of my friends [white middle/upper class], get an allowance from their parents every month. And for me, if I want to buy something, if I want to go home, I have to buy my own plane ticket, bus ticket, however I'm getting home. For a lot of my friends, they just call their parents and ask if they can come home and they just buy their ticket. So it's hard to have people around you that are just being given money when they want to do stuff and having to tell them, I can't do this because I don't have enough money right now. But I can do it later when I get paid. It's just kind of weird [and awkward] to be in that situation with some of my friends.

In addition to difficulties that can occur due to a lack of funding, like Casey and Hady's stories, the findings from this study also highlight the negative judgment Black and Latina's face

from White peers because they receive tuition grants and support through institutional financial need.

There's this girl, a white girl, who doesn't get any financial aid because of the amount of money her parents make and she said it's not fair that you guys get all that money just because your parents didn't go to college and just because they didn't do all the work that my parents did, they shouldn't have to pay all this money. If I didn't get the money that I do, then I wouldn't even be here, no questions asked.

While Casey receives financial assistance from the institution which allows her to attend, she faces other repercussions from her white peers whose comments cause her to have to defend why she is deserving of the financial aid she receives, and in the end, make a case as to why she deserves to attend Boston City College at all.

As the participants' stories highlight, the process by which financial challenges affect a student's college experience is not cut and dry. Contrary to the research which suggests that students who received financial aid support from their institution, are more socially and academically integrated into the campus culture, worry less about their finances and are more satisfied and engaged in academic and intellectual endeavors (Cabrera, Nora, & Castaneda, 1992), the findings from this study suggest that the process is much more complicated. Offering financial assistance may help solve the one problem of access, but there are many additional financial stressors that can impact a student's experience, regardless of tuition assistance or not.

Protective Factors

In order to fully understand the process by which Black and Latina students achieve academic success, we must identify the factors that protect these students amidst the various obstacles they encounter. This study argues that due to the protective nature of these factors and their ability to actually buffer the negative effects of the risks encountered, they are a critical

component to consider for retention theory models and efforts to close the attainment gap. According to Gordon (1995) protective factors are “those that moderate the impact of stress on competence; that is, stress does not have as deleterious an impact on competence when accompanied by protective factors” (p. 240). Participants in this study displayed a great deal of resilience, both socially and academically. All the participants viewed themselves as good students, “motivated” to do well and achieve their goal to graduate. Further, all participants self reported GPA’s at or above average, with nine out of the eleven reporting GPA’s of B or higher.

Participants in this study shared their perspective on the challenges they faced being a minority student of color on a predominately White campus. The participants all came from varied cultural backgrounds and life experienced, however, the findings in this study suggests that their racial/ethnic identity did help buffer against negative experiences during their attendance in a predominately white campus culture. Based on the shared stories and experiences of each participant, the findings support that all participants, with some variation, fall closer to having a positive racial/ethnic identity than a negative racial/ethnic identity. According to the literature, individuals with a positive ethnic identity can be defined as those who self-identify as members of the group, feel pride about that membership, endorse positive evaluations of their group, and engage in ethnic traditions (Ontai-Grzebik & Raffaelli, 2004). Those with a negative ethnic identity have little interest in their ethnic culture or background, endorse negative evaluations of the group and of their membership in the group, and lack knowledge of, or loyalty to their group culture (Phinney, 1991). As multiple studies reveal, there are significant positive outcomes associated with strong and stable ethnic/racial identities, including psychological well-being, positive self-esteem, reduced stress, decreased depression,

decreased anxiety, and greater academic achievement (Ortiz& Santos, 2010; Torres & Ong, 2010; Greene, Way, & Pahl, 2006).

Given the protective nature of positive racial/ethnic identity, the findings from this study demonstrate the nuanced ways in which family, peers, internal motivation, and participation in a cultural organization contribute to the process by which a student makes sense of their ethnic identities and their capacity to overcome challenges and be academically resilient. Additionally, through participants shared experiences we were able to learn how ethnic/identity served as a protective factor for academic resilience. Of the themes identified in the findings, a variety of them appeared to be significant protective factors for a majority of the participants. Based on the following protective factors identified in the students perceived experiences we can conclude that Family: *high expectations and support*; Environment: *finding a group or individual with shared racial experience*, and Disposition: *sense of purpose and goals for the future*, clearly indicate a process through which an individual's experiences contribute to their racial/ethnic identity development, and lead us to better understand academic resilience in female Black and Latina undergraduate students.

Family.

The findings from this study support parental expectations and parental support as the most significant family protective factor for academic resilience and an important factor in the development of a positive racial/ethnic identity. According to resilience research, family support can impact all aspects of the student's life, including their academic achievement. In support of previous research, this study found that high parental expectations and parental support for educational goals served as important protective factors for student resilience and academic achievement (Okagaki, Helling, & Bingham, 1995). More importantly, these expectations were

strongly influenced by the families' racial/ethnic background and desire to create better opportunities for the next generation.

All of the participants in this study identified the expectation within their family that they would attend college. Often times this was described as an overt pressure from their parents to do well; college was not an option but an expectation.

Fiona, a Hispanic student, described how this expectation pushed her to do well.

As a student well I was always really, my parents always pushed me to do good in school because it's a big factor and like my family, it's really important for my parents for me and my siblings to do good in school. So I always try to do my best.

Hady, an African American student, shared how college “was never an option” for her.

I mean, they put me into private school because they saw how much I liked to learn, so it would have been, I don't know, I thought it would have been a little bit pointless for me to pay money to go to [high] school and get that kind of education and not go to college. It was always expected that I was going to college, regardless of what was going on financially or whatever. So I just, like it was, I don't know. I never had the option of not going to college. It was always like, after high school you're going to college. Then after college, it's your decision.

In addition, participants in this study who witnessed their immigrant parents or grandparents struggle and work hard to provide a better life for them, felt a sense of obligation to the family, and motivated them to make them proud and achieve academic success. According to the work of John Ogbu (1987) students who have a close relationship with their families' history of immigration, frame their circumstances differently and therefore react to academic challenges in a way that contributes to their academic success. In other words, they use their families experience with immigration, to motivate themselves (Ogbu, 1987; Gibson 1987).

Isabel, a Hispanic student, shared her families immigration story and described that as the “reason I'm in college”

My grandparents left the Dominican Republic in order to give my aunt and my dad the best education opportunities that they could but it was harder for my dad and my aunt just because they weren't citizens of this country. They were residents and they had to work to help my grandparents out and my grandfather I think only went up to the sixth grade so it's just because of lack of education they valued it so much more and they put that - - they emphasized that on me during my upbringing so I always applied myself at school just because I wanted to make them proud and show them that yes, just because we're - - we come from a very underprivileged background doesn't mean that I can't be as educated as anybody else.

Isabel went on to talk about how this family history contributed to her determination to succeed academically by instilling an overwhelming pressure not to fail. Coupled with this pressure to succeed, is also the support her family provides when she needs to cope with difficult or stressful times. The literature often supports the importance of family support as a motivating factor, with students often referring to a parental "push" or pressure to succeed (Ceja, 2004; Kenny, Gallagher, Alvarez, & Silsby, 2002). However, contrary evidence warns that this "push" can also add a great deal of pressure on the student (Hernandez, 2000). The findings from this study maintain that parental encouragement and their push for college served as a motivating factor for students to do well, especially when coupled with a caring, supportive relationship.

I'm very scared of failing and making you know - - failing my family. I'm the first one in college so I just feel like I have all that riding on my shoulders that I don't want to fail so I work very hard for that and my family provide a lot of support so when there's been moments where I felt like giving up they've been there for me and that's helped me push through.

Finding a Group or Individual with Similar Racial Experience.

The findings from this study indicate that finding either a group or individual with similar racial experiences or a mentor of the same race/ethnicity are significant environmental protective factors for academic resilience and an important factor in the development of a positive racial/ethnic identity. The study points to the environment as being a critical component of

resilience in the Characteristics Triad, in terms of protective factors contributing to student's success. All eleven participants shared stories about the importance of finding a group or finding individuals with shared ethnoracial experiences. These results support the literature that highlights the importance of support from family and friends, and university environment for successful and resilient students (Wang & Gordon, 1994; Hernandez, 2000). The participants in this study identified a variety of group and individual supports that they felt contributed significantly to their experiences in college. In fact, most of the participants highlighted supportive peer or mentoring relationships as the most important experience during their college career.

Almost all participants discussed how their participation in a cultural organization was essential to their adjustment and positive perception of their college experience. Ethnic identity development research emphasizes the critical role ethnic organizations can play in a student's discovery and dedication to their ethnic identity. These institutions provide students a supportive environment where they can build solid friendships, embrace and learn about their race or ethnicity, and feel protected from prejudice and discrimination (Ortiz & Santos, 2010). Gia explained how being around other people of color in the Organización Latina América (OLA), provided her a community to belong to and a sense of "comfort" and therefore helped her through a difficult adjustment to the predominantly white campus.

...getting to know them, and having that community of people that know what you're going through, in a way... there's a comfort level in that. I think that knowing more people of color first semester definitely helped me second semester, because there was, like, that community there.

Later, Gia went on to describe her relationships with the women in OLA as a "sisterhood".

You know, that sense of community that we have that is just a pick-me-up. There are ways that Spanish parents raise their kids that are not like - other ethnicity parents won't raise their kids like that. So it's funny to joke around about, like, the way that we were

punished when we were younger, or how our parents curse in Spanish all the time. Things like that. It's a really great support system.

Kala, an African American student, echoed the same sense of "comfort" provided by her involvement with the BSO. In this situation, the BSO serves to protect her against the negative effects of isolation or discomfort in her predominately white classroom by giving her a space to speak her mind and express herself without reservation.

I think we are very comfortable with each other as an organization to say whatever I feel when I feel like that wouldn't be the case maybe in just like - - in general, even if we were having a class discussion in one of my classes. I think the level of comfort is higher. You don't feel like everything's being schlepped under the rug and you kind of have to go along with whatever everyone's doing. You can be yourself and have your own opinions and understand that people have them too and that they're supported.

Isabel described how OLA served as the non-judgmental support system she needed to "push through" difficult times.

Just knowing that there's a group of people that are going through what I'm going through and if they're able to push through so can I. That feeling of you're not alone in this kind of thing just because when you're sitting in a classroom of a hundred people and there's only two other people that look like you it kind of makes you feel like okay, I'm in this alone, I won't get through. And just having that group that you can go to afterwards definitely calms you and provides a sense of comfort so that helps a lot..... And just knowing that you're in a space where you're not being judged for being different or looked at as inferior to everyone else.

Hady further explained how being part of the Black Student Organization (BSO) was important because it allowed her to find other people who "looked like her." For Hady, finding people of the same race meant having people who experienced the same racism and microaggression that she did and that she could rely on for support.

I think more so, it's like you see someone that looks like you and automatically, for me at least, I think they've gone through some of the same things that I have. They know what it's like. Especially being at a place where you're not the majority, so they know what

it's like to be the only, maybe, black person in your class or be the only -- or at least for me, I know what it's like to be the only black person in your class and have someone say like, oh can you just talk about this for your entire race and it's just like, no. I really can't.

In this particular example, Hady described how participating in BSO works to protect her against the risk factor identified earlier, racism and microaggressions.

Participants in this study identified the value of mentorship in their college experience. The literature suggests that when a student is involved with mentoring and can acquire career, social, and emotional support, they experience a more positive academic and personal outcome (Coles, 2011). Mentoring for low-income and minority students, in particular, has been shown to be extremely beneficial to the academic success of students, resulting in them being twice as likely to persist and to have a higher GPA than non-mentored minority students (Crisp and Cruz, 2009). According to the research, not only did students' GPAs increase after one year of mentoring but they were also more likely to stay in college and develop the knowledge and skills necessary to succeed in their careers (Coles, 2011; Campbell & Campbell 1997; Schlosser, Knox, Moskovitz, and Hill 2003). What is significant to highlight from the findings of this study is that many participants made statements suggesting that the strength and meaningfulness of their mentor – mentee relationship was enhanced when the mentor was also a person of color.

Ellen shared how her mentor helps her when she is struggling:

She's actually Haitian. She's an RD. I love her. She is the one person I can go to if I'm ever in any type of trouble or I'm having a depressed day. She really feels like a mother. She's like my mother figure I guess on campus ...I text her when I have problems. And she's always looking out for me and stuff.

Ellen shares how her mentor helped keep her “focused” like her mother at home did, and helped keep her” level-headed” with social issues. Overall, the relationship provided her the balance she needed to not let issues interfere with the academics or social relationships. In addition,

Ellen discussed in great depth how their common racial/ethnic identity contributed to the strength and impact of this support system.

But I feel like the fact that she's Caribbean definitely makes a difference because we still identify with the same culture, the same parents, the way we were raised and stuff like that, it's definitely the same.... but the fact that she's, like I said, Caribbean and black means a lot you know because she understands where I'm coming from. We stand on the same areas about certain issues, about like the black culture and African American culture and where we are as people and stuff like that. So she's understanding there and it helps because I feel a little more comfortable because I know that she understands me in a way.

Similarly, Fiona discussed her relationship with a Hispanic faculty member that ended up providing some support and mentorship as well.

My Boston City College 101 instructor, she is from, I think she said she was from Guatemala, but I don't know. So I met with her, and her situation, like when she went to college, and she left her country to come here to go to college. And where she went, she went to like Ohio, which is obviously really white. So she said she understood where I came from... after I really talked to her about it, I felt like she was somebody that I could go talk to for like to make me feel better about my decision here, or just if I felt uncomfortable with anybody here, stuff like that.

Isabel is another Hispanic student who formed a mentor-mentee relationship with a professor in her nursing program. This mentor was very supportive and involved in Isabel's academics as well as other parts of her life.

She goes out of her way to make sure that you have all the resources that you need to be successful in class and she goes even as far as to make sure that you yourself feel like you're well. She's always asking, "Do you feel really stressed, do you feel like - - you know what's going on with your life? Do you need to talk about just work and your stresses?" It doesn't even have to be school related. She always makes sure to go that extra mile. So I go to her a lot for moral support and I look up to her a lot.

Again, Isabel's perception of the relationship was greatly influenced by the fact that this mentor was also a woman of color:

Well her experience is she's also a woman of color so her experiences of going through nursing school kind of parallels my experience now so I work, I have to work a part time schedule in order to pay my rent and maintain myself financially and then I see that many girls are lucky enough to not have to worry about work whereas for me it's different and sometimes it interferes with my school schedule and I don't have the luxury to say well I'll just call off this day because I need to study for this exam. I don't have that luxury. I have to work so it definitely causes a lot of stress and I feel guilty going back to my family and relieving, venting off to them just because it causes stress on them and then they feel guilty for not being able to help me. So it's good to have someone outside of that circle to kind of vent to who I know I'm not causing extra burden to and she just helps me realize that many people do it.

Sense of Purpose and Goals for the Future.

The findings from this study support sense of purpose and goals for the future as the most significant dispositional protective factors for academic resilience and an important factor in the development of a positive racial/ethnic identity. Research indicates that internal protective factors are important to examine when trying to identify the factors contributing to student adaptation and achievement. For example, having a personal optimistic outlook, a drive to succeed, and an ethnic source of strength and pride are all important factors related to success for Hispanic undergraduate students (Arellano & Padilla, 1996). This internal characteristic, a sense of purpose and goals for the future, was found to be the strongest factor within all eleven participants. In previous literature, this sense of purpose has been described as possessing a strong sense of educational achievement, strong goals, persistence, and a positive view of the future (Bernard, 2004). Participants in this study demonstrated this characteristic through their discussion of a wide range of personal, social, and educational experiences.

Many of the participants discussed how their desire to move beyond the struggles of their family background or upbringing to make a better life for themselves motivated them to do well in school. Gia shared her story of how getting out of her neighborhood motivated her to do well in college so she could start a different life.

Like, where I'm from. So, like, I couldn't stay in that neighborhood. I couldn't stay around that environment of people. I knew that I wanted to get away from all of that, so I knew I needed to clean up my act and, you know, really strive to get out, because – like, I'm from Brooklyn, New York. So, like, if you don't leave by a certain age, you're never going to leave.

Gia knew she wanted more out of life than staying in Brooklyn and working a minimum wage job; she was meant to do something bigger. Similarly, Fiona also shared her sense of purpose to not only get through college, but really “prove to people” that she is able defy the stereotypes and be successful.

...If I didn't go to college, I was just going to prove to everybody else that Latinas are not good for anything except getting pregnant at 16 and not going to college. And I don't want to do that. I didn't want to make everybody believe that stereotypical Hispanic girls' future is that.

Beth, another participant shared their sense of purpose through her desire to prove to herself and to the world that her race could accomplish more in life than the stereotypical expectations.

The violence, the drugs, and everything that they think we all are – it definitely helps me to say, I don't want to be that person. If I can be the one person in any field to change how people perceive us to all be the same, it definitely helps me to do that, or even go into corporate America and want to be the CEO. It definitely pushes me to want to be more than just what the TV shows [portray].

Beth, like many others, not only wanted to do well for personal or family reasons, but she also felt a greater purpose to succeed for societal reasons. Being a minority Black student, she knew the stigma surrounded her success: the low expectations and narrow minded view of achievement. Her goal to enter the corporate world and become a CEO, a career position commonly held by predominately White employees, provided her purpose to push through hardship, attain her degree, and advance towards accomplishing her goal.

Also related to the internal characteristic of sense of purpose and a future orientation, participants discussed how they always had dreams of going to college and did everything they could to make that dream come true. Casey spoke of her desire to come to college as being completely an independent and self-motivated goal.

In my community...like the value of education is just not as big as it should be, so a lot of my brothers and sisters didn't graduate and my parents, they graduated high school, but that's it. But I always knew that I wanted to come to college, so it was different for me, I guess.

Casey's sense of purpose was education, and despite there being no role model or paved path for her to easily follow, she was determined to go to college and graduate.

Almost all participants had extremely ambitious goals to continue on to graduate school, the more prestigious the better, or to have successful careers in the corporate world or in the entertainment industry. All of the participants displayed a significant sense of purpose as well as far reaching goals for the future which they identified as they persisted through college.

Identity Duality and Pride.

The findings from this study suggest that identity duality is another significant dispositional protective factor for academic resilience and an important factor in the development of a positive racial/ethnic identity. For the purpose of this research, identity duality refers to a participant's identity development and the process whereby the individual adopts or develops multiple intersecting identities, their cultural identity and their identity as a young student and American citizen. Participants shared their struggle to clearly establish their racial/ethnic identity as they experience college life within a predominately white culture. For example, participants often spoke as though they were unclear or confused, "it's hard for me to fully describe how I identify." They also used the term "technically" when speaking of how they

identify even though “technically” it may not be exact. For example, “Technically I guess I would be Mexican American because I’m a citizen of the United States, but I’m Mexican,” or “I have to say I’m American ‘cause I can’t say I’m Peruvian because I wasn’t technically born there.”

However, to cope with this, students were engaged in a process where they began to redefine how and with whom they identify. Because of their exposure to the predominantly white culture, some of the interviewees went through a process where they reflected upon and sometimes reassessed how they had identified in the past and they sought new ways to think about themselves that felt more accurate and appropriate within the predominately white culture.

[In the beginning of college] I was like, okay, I’m Hispanic, but I’m white and I was telling people that, but I really don’t think of myself as white now, considering the implications of what white means and the privileges that come with being white.

Alicia is biracial, and prior to coming to Boston City College, she always identified as both, Hispanic and White. She was raised in Miami where her Hispanic culture was a prominent part of her upbringing. Shortly after her arrival at this small PWI, Alicia began to reevaluate her “White” identity as she began to associate it with her White, affluent peers on campus. She couldn’t have felt more different from them, and so, overtime, she began to only identify with those who shared her Hispanic culture.

Similarly, Beth described how she identifies differently now that she is in college because the culture of her institution doesn’t support how she always identified growing up.

Growing up in Canada, it’s more diverse, so we consider ourselves wherever our parents came from, which was – I would tell people I’m Caribbean, and usually they’d ask me what part, and I’d let them know Mom’s from Haiti, Dad’s from Tortola. Cause they’re more – there’s more diversity over there than I see here in Boston. So, I would say I’m black, American, Caribbean – whatever category you stick me in. Besides that, I think

everyone just sees the surface, and go, she's a black American. Which isn't really – I'm obviously black American. It doesn't bother me. It doesn't bother me either/or.”

Beth seems to be confident enough in her racial/ethnic identity that she doesn't let it bother her too much that she has to slightly adjust how to talk about her identity because people are ignorant of her cultural upbringing and background. She tries to simplify how she identifies so that it better fits with categories accepted within her predominately white environment. In addition these choices are made in ways that will hopefully protect her connection to, pride of or engagement with the racial/ethnic identity that she came into college with.

Such difficulty experienced by the participants is well recognized in the literature and better known as acculturation: the process of cultural and psychological change that occurs due to interactions with people from different cultural groups or backgrounds (Berry, 2005). Further explanations of acculturation have found that students experience what is called biculturation (Rendón, Jalomo, & Nora, 2000). Unlike acculturations which suggests either full adaptation into the new culture or no adaptation at all, biculturation asserts that students of color live two lives. The findings in this study suggests that participants are experiencing a form of biculturation as they struggle to find a balance where that can still hold on to their racial/ethnic identity while also finding a way to fit that identity into the predominately White culture of higher education.

The findings suggest that by engaging in this process of biculturation, participants are able to hold on to their cultural pride and embrace their culture while still finding ways to adjust and fit into the dominant white culture of their campus environment. Julia describes that although it can cause some difficulty in her life, she is extremely proud of where she comes from and who she is.

I'm proud of who I am and how I identify and I'm proud of who my parents are and where they've come from. I'm glad that I'm multiracial even though sometimes it can be difficult. I've never thought of being proud to be multiracial. I've been proud of like certain aspects of myself and where those things come from. So I guess I'm proud to be multiracial and to be Afro-Cuban-White.

Devin experiences this same sense of pride and shares how it contributed to her ability to have positive experiences on her college campus and not feel intimidated or as though she doesn't belong.

I think it gives me a confidence that if I was -- if I wasn't proud to be black, I might feel more intimidated and even though I feel like people think I don't belong, like somebody who had less confidence, a lesser confidence than mine, they might just give up altogether, but I won't.

Devin's experience fits with the literature which supports racial/ethnic identity as a protective factor. Because a strong sense of pride and connection to your ethnic group categorizes her as having a positive racial/ethnic identity, and because positive racial/ethnic identity has been found in several studies to have a positive impact on constructs such as self-esteem and psychological well-being, we can see how Devin's pride assists her in not giving up on herself or her academic career (Phinney & Alipura, 1990). Even more important, a secure racial identity has been shown to have a possible buffering effect which allows individuals to better cope with a discriminatory university environment (Miller, 1999; Sellers & Shelton, 2003).

Differences Between Black and Latina Students

Microaggressions

In this study, both Black and Latina students experienced incidence of microaggressions- subtle insults directed towards people of color, verbal or non verbal, unconscious or automatic.

However, based on the students' stories, there were slight differences in the type of microaggression experienced by each racial group. For example, three of the women who identified as Black or African American in this study, described events where a White peer insinuated that they were "too aggressive" when they speak. Beth shared her story

I was the only black girl in my group. And we had to give feedback, and one of the girls said that I was too aggressive with how I talk, or dictate, whatever it is. I found that kind of, like, really? I'm aggressive?... So, last semester, my girlfriend – one of my classmates – took the same class with a whole different group of people. They also said she was aggressive when she delivers her information.

Similarly, Casey expressed her reaction to the same perceived microaggression that she is "too aggressive."

Like I guess Im kind of aggressive back home, but not really here. I have to just step back, and try to walk away just so people wouldn't be like oh, that black girl, this, that, and the other.

Contrary to this type of microaggression, the Latina young women in this study shared stories more closely related to their culture. For example, Gia shared the story about a campus event that took place on Cinco De Mayo.

Last spring, there was a Cinco De Mayo acapella concert and they dressed-up as Mexicans for their advertisements and there was a photo shoot and they were wearing mustaches and ponchos and they were all white and it was just like horrifying...

Alicia, another Hispanic students spoke of how she believed her White peers held stereotypical views of Hispanic people in today's society, "I think they see them as the people who serve them food."

Skin Tone and White Privilege

The findings from this study suggest that there are differences in the experience of Black and Latina women attending a predominately white culture based on skin tone. The women who identified as Black, shared the difficulty they experience with how their White peers categorize them as African American. All three of the Black participants in this study who identified as Caribbean Black expressed the difficulty of being labeled African American just because of their dark skin tone. Beth shared her experience and identified the difficulty she faces with being judged by the color of her skin.

A lot of people judge you just because you're black. For instance, because I am black or dark-skinned, I must be African American and I must understand what the love or watermelon or fried chicken means, but lo and behold, I've never grown up with any of those foods in my house because my mom doesn't make fried chicken. I've never really eaten fried chicken.

Similar to Beth and the other Black or African American young women in this study, the Latina women acknowledged their differences from their White peers, however, they tended to have a more optimistic perspective on how their "Latina features" or skin tone impact their experience at a PWI. Isabel shared her thoughts on being light skinned and how that had played a role in her college experience.

It's really hard because I feel like I live a sort of white life. I think being lighter-skinned than say someone who is like from the Dominican Republic gives me privileges that, you know, maybe they don't have. I think being and looking the way I am, it's more like I'm kind of this more exotic-looking white person and a lot of times that's what I think Latinos kind of are and are turning -- they're assimilating and becoming what people like the Italians and the Irish did, but it's taking a longer time and eventually maybe we will be white, but I don't know if that's what I am right now.

Individual Story

In the follow section I share the story of an individual participant using her own words and to describe her college experiences. By sharing the full and detailed story of this participant, I am better able to demonstrate how the risk and protective factors, identified in this research, integrate it into a student's daily life and better illustrate the Characteristics Triad of Disposition, Family and Environment.

Isabel's story.

Isabel identified herself as a 21- year old Hispanic female. She was a full-time undergraduate student in her Senior year of college with a self-reported GPA of 3.3 (B+).

Dispositional

Protective- racial/ethnic identity development.

Isabel primarily identified as Dominican American but at her PWI she would often just say she was Hispanic. She did this to avoid questions from the many individuals who follow her answer with, "So what's that? Is that - - does that mean you're black or are you Latina?" Because many of her white peers did not understand or know anything about the various Latina ethnicities, Isabel found it was just easier to say she was Hispanic because the questions usually stopped there.

Isabel identified very strongly with being Hispanic. She grew up entirely in the Dominican culture so the language that she always instinctively wanted to speak is Spanish. The food that she ate growing up was Latin influenced cuisine. The music that she listens to was and continues to be Spanish music. As she defined it “it’s just it’s how I communicate with my family so it’s just who I am”

This strong Hispanic identity played a huge role in Isabel’s college experience. Unlike some of her peers who she felt “stepped away from who they really are, their culture, in order to fit in better and get through school.” Isabel stayed connected to her culture. Her participation in a cultural academic program and student organization, OLA, helped her stay grounded in who she was and find the acceptance she needed to survive and thrive as a minority in a predominately white campus culture. She is proud of who she is, the culture she comes from, and what she has to offer this world because of her ethnic background.

Protective - Self-motivation and work ethic.

Isabel described herself as a straight A student in high school who was very determined, ambitious and always applied herself. She spent most of her high school career, working against the stereotypes that Latina girls don’t care about school and are either going to become a teenage mom, drop out, or go to work at the local supermarket. Because the high school she went to was ranked last in the state, she worries that her high school diploma was not going to be worth anything. She also did not have access to resources at her high school that would help her reach her academic goals of going to college. She knew that was what she wanted, so she made it happen all on her own: “ my school didn’t provide those resources so I had to self teach more and kind of push myself harder than I feel like some of the girls in my program here in college.” Isabel’s self-motivation and drive for academic success exemplifies her capacity for resilience,

particularly her self-reliance. Based on the literature which supports self-reliance as a key characteristic of resilient individuals, Isabel's belief in her own capabilities and recognition of her own strengths and weakness serve as a protective factor against the academically poor and unsupportive high school she attended (Wagnild & Young, 1990, 1993).

She discussed her college academic success as also being a very good student, both ambitious and determined, although she pointed out that the challenges she faced in college were different from those she faced in high school. More specifically, the struggles she now faced in college were related to being a minority student at a PWI.

“...the struggle is different than what it was in high school and middle school just because of the environments are complete opposites and my home town where the majority are Hispanics so you aren't working against anything really whereas here you know that you have more barriers to your success.”

Isabel went on to reflect on how this shift in environmental demographics played a role in her academic experience as a student and how she was still able to apply her resilient characteristics to help buffer these new challenges. She still saw herself as a very good student who applied herself, only now she had a new awareness about her motivations for success. Whereas in high school, she did well because she saw herself as a good student “whereas before it was just cause I was a school girl...”, in college she felt she had “something to prove.” Being a minority in her academic setting drove her to be more self-motivated and succeed.

Protective- Work ethic.

Regarding her family's history, Isabel believed it helped her develop a very strong work ethic not only in school, but also in all aspects of her life. She has been working since she was sixteen in order to help alleviate some of the financial the stress in her family. She attributes all of this work ethic to her watching her grandparents and parents work extremely hard to provide

her a better life with more opportunities: "... things aren't just handed to you. You have to go get them and work for them."

Family.

Protective- Family support.

Isabel received a lot of family support from her family. While they weren't able to provide financial support, they are there for her when she needs them most, "when there's been moments where I felt like giving up they've been there for me and that's helped me push through." Isabel gets a lot of love and moral support from her grandmother. She calls weekly to check in and when she sees that Isabel is getting sick or is very stressed out, she comes down and visits her. Isabel felt that having someone believe in her like this and just having the extra support system helped her cope and make it through the difficult times.

Protective- Reciprocity towards family.

Isabel credits the whole reason she is in college to her families influence. Her grandparents left the Dominican Republic in order to give her aunt and her dad the best education opportunities possible. Her father and aunt struggled to obtain an education because they weren't citizens of this country and they had to work to help my grandparents. It was because of this lack of education that her family emphasized to Isabel the value of education and encouraged her to do well. During her adolescence, Isabel recognized the importance education held in her family and always applied herself at school just because she "wanted to make them proud and show them that yes, just because we come from a very underprivileged background doesn't mean that I can't be as educated as anybody else."

Environmental.

Risk- Racism and microaggressions.

Isabel did experience some difficult situations where she faced negative racial slights and insults toward people of color from her classmates. Isabel was frustrated by her white peers when she became the poster kid for people of color in her class just because she was the only Hispanic student. “I’d definitely experience that in classes where they’d be like yeah so what’s your opinion on this. I don’t speak for an entire group of people, I don’t know...”

In other situations, because of her slight accent, students will ask “So you have a bit of an accent, where are you from?” Isabel would answer that she was from Brooklyn originally, but would often get the response, “no, but I mean where are you *from*?” In these situations, Isabel knew she was being judged and seen as different because she was Latina and felt very uncomfortable.

Isabel also encountered a lot of stereotypical perceptions of her Latina heritage. A few times during her college experiencing she encountered comments from her peer like “Oh, I’ve known Hispanics to be” - - in which case they would relate us to the Mexican cartel and drugs and that kinds of stuff. Or she would hear comments like, “Oh, you guys are very uneducated and into gang life and all that,” or “Oh, you guys go to college? I haven’t seen that. You’re one of the few people that I’ve met that are Hispanic and go to college.”

Isabel learned to deal with all of this by simply putting the ignorant comments into perspective and not letting them affect her positive attitude. She felt she had made it this far and it just wouldn’t be worth it to have the comment of one ignorant person erase everything that she’d worked for. “In ten years that person will be nowhere in my life so why would I let that play a huge role in how my future might play out.” She learned to put the negativity and racism

behind her and accept that some people will be ignorant, but that she isn't going to let that determine her future or success. "I know that it's something that I'll probably deal with the rest of my life in this country but I think being different is a good thing. I think if you're proud of who you are it kind of helps you."

Risk- Belonging and isolation.

Isabel had a difficult time during her freshman year because she didn't feel like she belonged at this institution and she was having a difficult time forming meaningful relationships. In fact, during this time she really wanted to transfer to a different school, but her parents wouldn't let her. She was shy and didn't know how to handle the ignorant racial comments her white peers would make. She was also insecure about her academic abilities and felt far behind all of her peers, which further isolated her and made her feel like even more of a minority outsider. "I would sit in my classes and see how far behind I was and kind of it just made me feel very different."

Over time, Isabel was able to make friends, which she said really helped her not feel alone. She also gives a lot of credit to her successful adjustment to her involvement with Organización Latino Americana's (OLA). Through this organization, Isabel took on a new sense of leadership and advocacy. She felt she was doing something to make a little bit of a difference in the community, and overall, that helped her gain the sense of belonging that she needed.

Risk - Financial obstacles.

Financial aid was a huge determining factor for Isabel choosing to attend this institution. She knew that all of the financial burden of tuition and expenses would fall on her, not her parents or grandparents, and so she needed as much financial assistance as possible. Fortunately

for her, she was awarded student loans and outside scholarships that allowed her to choose this expensive, small private college.

Despite this, Isabel does not think her college provides adequate financial aid for its minority students. Some students are more privileged to have family help and yet, as she has observed, still receive assistance. This year, three of her friends that are students of color, who were going to be seniors, didn't come back at the end of the semester and it was because of financial aid.

Protective- Finding a group/individual with shared racial experience.

During her sophomore year, Isabel joined an academic scholarship program which was a program for minority nursing students. The program offered a mentor who she could meet with once a week and workshops that help with leadership skills, resume writing, and stress relieving skills. Through her participation in this program, Isabel was able to "build a sisterhood" where she and her peers looked out for one another and supported each other. In addition, having a mentor with similar career interests and experiences helped give her a perspective of what a real life nursing career looked like.

Most important to Isabel was the fact that she knew she had a group of people on campus that were going through the same challenges that she was. Her belonging to this group gave her the feeling that she wasn't alone. As a student of color in a predominantly white nursing program, at a PWI, she often felt isolated and out of place, saying, ".. when you're sitting in a classroom of a hundred people and you only see others - - there's only two other people that look like you it kind of makes you feel like okay, I'm in this alone, I won't get through."

However, having the influence of her mentor and the group of other minority students who were part of the scholarship program, made all the difference in the world. "Just having that

group that you can go to afterwards definitely calms you and provides a sense of comfort so that helps a lot.”

Also, Isabel was part of Ola, the Latino Hispanic Group on campus which she’s been involved with since freshman year. Her involvement in the group had a lot of importance for her because of her attachment to her Hispanic culture. Coming from a hometown where she could go days without speaking English, attending a PWI was a complete culture shock for her. But through Ola she was able to find people who were from similar backgrounds, could understand her culture, understand her language, and “build that sisterhood and it’s kind of like my oasis when I feel like okay, I need to go home and I can’t go home, I go be with my girls from Ola.”

Isabel’s connection to this group of girls, “sisters”, provides her a space within the predominately white culture where she expresses she “isn’t being judged for being different or looked at as inferior.” In the classroom specifically, her affiliation with this group prevents her from looking around and thinking “oh I’m alone and how am I going to do this”, she knows that there’s a group of people that are “just like her” and also working to achieve the same goals.

Protective – Mentorship.

Isabel was able to build a strong relationship with the mentor she was paired with through the nursing program, which helped her tremendously throughout her educational experience. Israel found that having a mentor who was also a women of color greatly helped facilitate their connection and relationship. Being a woman of color allowed them to share similar experiences, thus, Isabel felt understood and more closely connected. She felt as though her mentor could relate to her on a level that a white individual would not be able to, “with her I know that it’s - - that she’s been through it so she knows.”

Protective - Peer supports.

One of the most meaningful experiences Isabel had while attending college was the very strong friendships she built with her peer group. What was significant about these relationships, was that three of the five were white. Isabel had never had close relationships with other white females her age and when she first came to Boston City College, she never thought it would happen. But having these relationships meant a great deal to her and helped reassure her that there are white individuals who are open to who she is, and want to learn about her and her culture. The friendships included open communication where she knew they were not judging her because of her differences. These friendships gave Isabel “hope that things can be different and not everyone is as close minded as some people that you encounter.”

Words of Wisdom from the Women in this Study

The following excerpts highlight the inspiration, strength and overall resilience of the young women interviewed in this study. Through their stories, we are better able to identify the challenges they face, but more importantly, we gain a deeper understanding of the positive characteristics and factors that contribute to their overall success. Lastly, we must celebrate their success and never forget the positive influence these women’s stories can have on the other women of color in higher education today. The following words are shared from Isabel’s interview.

If you keep an open mind and try not to be too affected by what people say, especially when you’re first starting out... just open your mind and realize that you’re not alone. It just may seem like it because there aren’t so many of us on campus, but it’s a comparable experience to that of a white student.

Stay yourself. I always try to remember, I made it this far and to have the comment of one ignorant person erase everything that I’ve worked for it just wouldn’t be worth it. In ten years that person will be nowhere in my life so why would I let that play a huge role in how my future might play out kind of thing and

I know that [discrimination] is something that I'll probably deal with the rest of my life in this country but I think being different is a good thing. I think if you're proud of who you are it kind of helps you.

"I just think everyone should be proud of who they are. I think that everyone is put into this world to provide a different perspective. I feel like how I was raised and what I've experienced in my life will mold me to be this different person that provides something different to this world. I feel like molding into the majority isn't doing myself or my family any justice. I don't want to dishonor my family or my culture by turning away from it. No, I'm proud of who I am. It won't change just because I'm here for four years. It's who I'm going to be for the rest of my life."

Summary

As demonstrated by Isabel's story, there are a variety of interconnected factors that contribute to a student's academic and social experiences in college. While these factors may all play out a little differently, depending on the individual, common themes do occur. For Isabel, the experience of being a Hispanic student on a PWI institution did cause some additional difficulties with which she had to cope with. She encountered negative racial slights and insults toward people of color which left her feeling isolated and struggling to find meaningful relationships. Additionally, she also had a difficult time affording school, which created added stress and anxiety. Despite these difficulties however, Isabel also discussed multiple positive experiences and personal characteristics that helped buffer the potential negative effect of these risk factors. These included, finding a group/individual with shared racial experience, reciprocity towards family, family support, work ethic, self-motivation, mentorship, and peer supports. Most important to highlight is the way in which Isabel's racial/ethnic identity penetrated each of these environmental, familial, and dispositional resiliency components, creating a more positive, resilient, college experience.

Chapter Six: CONCLUSION, LIMITATIONS AND

FUTURE IMPLICATIONS

Conclusion

The current college achievement gap between students of color and their White counterparts is alarming and calls for research and practice to closely evaluate this problem. This study calls attention to the growing problem related to low degree attainment for Black and Latina students in particular. The literature on retention and persistence literature attempts to explain the characteristics and processes involved in a student's decision to leave college before completing the undergraduate degree. Historically however, this literature lacks a focus on minority students and fails to incorporate the specific concerns and issues of Black and Hispanic female students. Due to the rapidly changing population of colleges and universities, where minority students of color will soon become the majority, it is critical that we understand the risk and protective processes contributing to the identification of students who persist through to graduation. This research study addressed student retention by incorporating racial/ethnic identity theory and resilience theory in order to clarify the specific and unique experiences that help explain persistence and academic success for Black and Hispanic college students.

Through a qualitative design, utilizing in-depth, semi-structured, one-on-one interviews, this study was able to uncover the risk and protective factors associated with the Black and Latina undergraduate experience as well as the multiple ways in which students' perceptions of their sense of racial/ethnic identity, contribute to the specific protective mechanisms that buffer the effects of exposure to risk and foster students' academic resiliency. If administrators in higher education want to improve the success and degree attainment for their Black and Latina

student populations, they must start by better understanding the unique characteristics that contribute to academic resilience and student success. Based on the research (Lotkowski et al., 2004; Finn & Rock, 1997; Oyserman et al., 1995, Altschul et al., 2006; Morales 2008, 2010; Martin & Marsh, 2009; Hartley, 2011), I hypothesized that within a sample of female college undergraduate students of color at a predominantly white institution (PWI), racial/ethnic identity development would play a critical role in fostering all aspects of resiliency (disposition, family, and environment) and helps to explain how these women achieve academic success.

The findings of this study illustrate that Black and Latina students may experience a variety of challenges or risks that have the potential to negatively impact their academic resilience and success as a student. The most salient of these include; *Sense of Belonging and Isolation, Racism and Microaggressions, and Financial difficulties*. In addition and most importantly, the findings from this study demonstrate the nuanced ways in which *family, group and peer support, internal purpose and goals, and identity duality* contribute to the process by which these young women make sense of their ethnoracial identities and their capacity to overcome challenges and become academically resilient.

The results of this study highlight the importance of a positive Racial/Ethnic Identity as an important protective factor for academic success. Specifically, participants *demonstrated how family connections help them self-identify as members of the group, how their participation in ethnic student organizations help them feel pride and engage in ethnic traditions, how their internal purpose and goals helped drive their desire for success and achievement and how adopting a dual identity helped them achieve a more positive college experience*. The results of this study describe the specific protective factors, related to racial/ethnic identity, that contribute to a Black or Latina students' academic resilience.

In this study, the role of family background, and the expectations provided by the family were noted as directly related to Black and Latina student's resilience. As members of ethnoracial minority groups, the young women who participated in this study witnessed the challenges their parents and grandparents faced in their efforts to "make it" in the United States, ranging from navigating their immigrant status to dealing with socioeconomic restrictions and constraints. These family histories created a dynamic where it was understood that the parents and grandparents had undertaken significant sacrifices to create a better life for their children, and therefore, their children were absolutely going to attend college. While this expectation put added pressure on the participants, it mostly served as a motivating factor for them to not only attend college, but obtain their degree.

Finding a student organizations or an individual with shared racial/ethnic experiences at the college afforded the participants the opportunity to find a sense of comfort and security on campus. These relationships, formed within campus ethnoracial student organizations, or with an RA or faculty mentor who also belongs to a minority group, or those close relationships established within a peer group, provided a space where the participants felt appreciated and not judged. It was a space within the predominately white culture where they could express themselves unfiltered, and where they would truly be understood. The significance of this research is the potential for administrators to recognize the power and value of not only providing ethnic organizations, but also increasing the diversity on campus in order to increase the likelihood that students can interact with supportive peers and mentors of the same race.

Internal purpose and goal setting were additional protective factors cited by the participants in this study. The women expressed a deep sense of educational purpose to do well in school and accomplish well beyond their families educational and professional attainment.

Many women were pursuing professions in medicine or business and hoped to reach the highest, most difficult professional levels to achieve status in their field. The desire to make their families proud and to show them that all of their hard work and sacrifice was worth it, provided the young women with a source of inner strength that they needed to persevere. Additionally, it was also important for the women to defy the stereotypes applied to their race/ethnicity as “lazy”, “uneducated”, or “impoverished” and to prove to society that they can accomplish what any other young adult can, regardless of their race/ethnicity, social background or previous educational experiences.

Lastly, this study suggests the importance of identity duality as it greatly contributed to the positive adaptation to the PWI. The culture of the dominant white campus can often pose a variety of challenges for Black and Latina minority students, however, the student’s ability to embrace aspects of the new environment while still staying true to their identity as a Black or Latina female created a more positive transition into and throughout their educational experience. The women held on to their ethnoracial pride and found peer groups, organizations, or campus events that helped them continue maintaining positive connections with the people within and the needs of their race/ethnic communities. At the same time, the women embraced the predominately white school culture in which they were living by focusing on their course work, involving themselves in campus activities, and learning with and from their multi-racial student peers. By adopting these multiple identities, and finding a way to integrate them into the predominantly White campus culture, the women expressed a more positive perception of their academic experience thereby contributing to their academic resilience and desire to persist.

This study suggests that while female Black and Latina women at a PWI experience a variety of risk factors, the protective factors influenced by their racial/ethnic identity addressed

above, play a critical role in their overall academic resilience, ability and determination to succeed.

Limitations

This study was conducted at a specific single sex, PWI institution in the Northeast and therefore may not be generalizable to other institutions. In addition, the participants in this study varied greatly in their racial/ethnic background, their socio-economic background, their immigration and first-generation student status, their previous educational background and their current major and status in college. As a result, the conclusions drawn must be approached with caution. The lack of longitudinal data following the participants through to graduation and the limited number of participants represented in this research inhibit the studies ability to draw causal conclusions about persistence and retention.

Implications for Research and Practice

The research presented above gives voice to a minority experience that is not well understood and demands further investigation. Findings of this study indicated that retention theory can be used as the basis for examining the achievement gap, however the incorporation of ethnic identity theory and resilience theory into this model can provide further insight into the process by which students of color persist. While this work introduces an exciting addition to retention theory, further research, both quantitative and qualitative, is needed to further establish an evidence based retention model incorporating these factors.

The findings of this study also demonstrate the importance of understanding the particular risk and protective factors associated with the academic resilience of Black and Latina

undergraduate students enrolled in a PWI. Given the lack of literature investigating academic resilience for Black and Latina students in particular, more research is needed to better understand the process by which students overcome challenges and persist. In addition, based on the potential protective nature of racial/ethnic identity, continued research on how this factor contributes to or correlates with academic resilience is needed.

The findings from this study will serve as a valuable resource for PWI's who are focused on closing the achievement gap by improving their minority students' and academic resilience and potential for success. The insights provided by this study emphasize the complex nature of the Black and Latina undergraduate student experience and shed light on the significant challenges higher education administrators face. The implications of this study emphasize that one way educators and administrators can begin to understand the factors that contribute to the academic achievement of Black and Latina undergraduate students at a PWI is through the lens of resilience, specifically the Characteristics Triad of environmental, familial, and dispositional factors. Additionally, this study reinforces racial/ethnic identity as a critical factor to incorporate into all efforts.

The following risks identified in this study, *Sense of Belonging and Isolation, Racism and Microaggressions, and Financial difficulties*, underscore the need for administrators to develop and implement intervention programs, student service activities, and campus initiatives that help eliminate and buffer against the potential negative consequences of these risks.

Institutional staff and administrators must work collaboratively to develop a strategy for increasing the diversity on campus. According to the findings of this study, diversity is not only important within the student population, but it is also a critical factor to consider for the faculty, staff and administration. Because students find more comfort and acceptance among those

individuals and organizations with a shared racial/ethnic background, it's important that there be diversity across all levels in the institution.

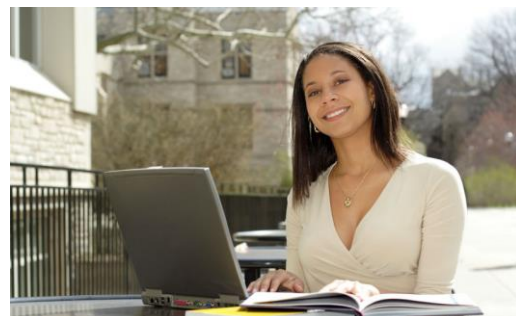
Providing more financial assistance, should be highlighted as a beneficial way to eliminate one of the most significant risk factors for leaving school, as reported in the students stories. If financial assistance cannot be provided for particular students due to lack of resources, then administrators should establish a secondary process where the college might support the students' efforts to seek outside scholarship or financial support.. By providing this secondary resource, students would establish a connection to a financial mentor right from the beginning, and could then utilize that resource to exhaust all possibilities before dropping out. One of the participants in this study shared the story of three of her friends who did not return to school for their senior year due to financial reasons. Had there been more support mechanisms in place, these students could have probably found a way to come back and finish their last year of school.

Faculty and administrators should also participate in regular diversity trainings and seminars to help them better understand the experience of being a minority student of color in a predominately white classroom. Because issues of race can be complex and are often accompanied by strong emotions and opinions including expressions of unconscious stereotypes and the multiple dimensions of white privilege, it's important that faculty know how to handle difficult discussions that may arise. Additionally, many students in this study experienced racial microaggressions not only from other students, but also from their professors. Because microaggressions are often unconscious and unintentional, they can be extremely detrimental to the academic success of a student. It is the institution's responsibility to continue to educate the faculty on these matters in order to reduce the occurrences of these events.

Finally, based on the literature that supports the usefulness of protective factors to help mitigate risk, this study highlights the need for administrators to focus on *family, group and peer support, internal purpose and goal, and identity duality* when developing their programs and activities. If higher education institutions are able to enhance these protective factors among their individual students, they will increase their capacity to foster resilience which will lead to more positive outcomes, such as academic success and persistence.

Appendix A

HELP PROVIDE INSIGHT INTO THE STUDENT EXPERIENCE AT SIMMONS!



Participate in this research and receive a **FREE** movie ticket

If you are interested in Participating please contact dmiremadi@gmail.com
or
Send a text to
207-807-3334



We need female Black and Latina undergraduate students to participate in an INTERVIEW to share thoughts on your college experience.

Please participate in a short, 60-minute interview
and receive a movie ticket.

You must be 18 years or older and identify as Black or Latina to participate.

Please note: Interviews follow all Institutional Research Board protocols and federal regulations pertaining to the protection of human subjects. You will need to sign a consent form. If you want more information on human subjects protection, please contact: <http://www.simmons.edu/offices/sponsored-programs/irb/>

Appendix B

CONSENT FORM

Participant ID _____

Interview

Racial/Ethnic Identity and Academic Resilience in Female Black and Hispanic Undergraduate College Students

Investigator: Delvina Miremadi.

INTRODUCTION

You are invited to participate in a research study conducted by Delvina Miremadi, from the Education Department at Simmons College. Participation is voluntary; you are free to decide not to participate in this research or to withdraw from the study at anytime without affecting your relationship with the researchers or Simmons College.

You were invited to participate in the study because you are an undergraduate ALANA (African, Latino(a), Asian, and Native American) student at Simmons College. Please see the description below to learn more about what this study is about.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY:

This study seeks to identify the conditions, characteristics, motivations, and internal and external influences that have contributed to your educational success. The study will attempt to identify the factors contributing to your positive and negative experiences here at Simmons College. The questions will consist of topics related to resilience, racial identity, and campus climate.

PROCEDURES AND ACTIVITIES

If you decide to participate you will be asked to participate in an interview lasting between 60-75 minutes. You will be asked to fill out a brief demographic survey that includes your self-reported education background, GPA, age, class year, and ethnic heritage. This should take approximately 3 minutes to complete and will be conducted before the interview. These

interviews will be audio recorded to ensure the accuracy of the collected information and all interviews will be transcribed into a written record. If you have any concerns, you may ask the interviewer to turn off the audio recording equipment at anytime during the interview.

Every effort will be taken to ensure that your participation is confidential, so that only the researcher will know who is participating and who is not. The information you will share in the interview will be kept completely confidential. Reports of study findings will not include any identifying information. Your name will not be used in the dissertation dissemination process; rather it will only be known to the researcher. Pseudonyms will be used for participants.

You will be offered a movie ticket to AMC Fenway Theater in appreciation for your time and willingness to share your experiences at the end of the interview. This movie ticket is simply intended as a thank-you gift. Your participation will not result in any course credit, community service fulfillment, or tuition reimbursement.

POTENTIAL RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS

During the interviews I will be asking information about racial/ethnic identity, characteristics of resilience, family support, faculty support, and how the institution supported the participants in their goals toward graduation. If, at any time you feel discomfort answering questions, or distress, you may choose not to answer, or stop the interview at any time. (1) You will be asked to describe your experiences as a student of color on campus, and therefore may have a risk of re-living a negative experience. (2) Coercion could occur if you feel that participation will affect your school standing because the researchers may be seen as an authority figure (graduate student and faculty). (3) Another risk is breach in confidentiality; because the findings will be published as part of a doctoral dissertation, there is potential for administrators to identify you in the study, in spite of precautions to eliminate identifying information. (4) Researcher bias is also a problematic risk factor. Because both researchers are a member of the institution, results may be impacted by and inadvertent desire to protect the institution against negative results. You will not be at physical or psychological risk and should not experience any discomfort resulting from completing the interview.

PROTECTION AGAINST RISK

Every possible precaution will be taken to protect the confidentiality of any personal information you may share as a participant in this study. This includes any identifying information about you such as age, race, ethnicity, class status, etc. Only the faculty researcher and I will have access to the match of pseudonyms numbers and names, and it will be kept in a private folder on our personal computers. The researcher will also limit any identifying information shared by the participant in the final dissertation discussion. For example, “President of Student Government would be changed to “President of a Student Organization.” Also, all specific identifiers related to faculty, specific staff, and administrative offices will be appropriately disguised when data is reported. You will be well informed about the nature of the study and that the information collected will be available to the institution and interested general public. You will, therefore be able to make an informed choice about what information to share. You may choose not to answer particular questions, and you may leave the interview any time without negative repercussions. The researcher is knowledgeable of Simmons College referral resources for counseling and other services should it be necessary to make a referral. You will receive a referral sheet that lists available resources that you can take with you, in case you wish to talk with someone after your participation is complete. This resource sheet will include information for the Counseling Center as well as the Dean of Student Life's Office.

You will willingly choose to participate and will be given the opportunity to stop participation in the interview at any time if they feel uncomfortable or do not wish to complete the discussion for any reason. Also, the incentive of Movie ticket is not coercive because the theater is one all students already have access to. Because I am a student at Simmons College, I will ensure that none of the students that will be part of the interviews will be in subsequent classes, or in organizations with which I am affiliated on campus. Specifically, I only interact with graduate students and no graduate students will be included in the participant sample.

As much as possible, identifying information will be eliminated from the data. You will be given pseudonyms in the report. Only the faculty researcher and I will have access to the match of pseudonyms numbers and names, and it will be kept in a private folder on our personal computers. Following data transcription, this identifying information will be deleted. The audio tapes will be stored separately from the transcripts and will be safely stores in a private file on the researcher’s personal computer for 3-5 years. All identifying information will be eliminated from the transcriptions.

POTENTIAL BENEFITS

The results of this research will be beneficial for administrators at Simmons College as they try to better understand the processes involved in female students of color and how they can provide services that better meet the needs of their students and increase student satisfaction, retention and academic achievement. As a participant in this research, you may benefit from the study through self reflection on their academic journey. I believe that by discussing the hurdles you have overcome, the accomplishments, and the sense of achievement despite challenging stressors, the reflective process can have a positive impact. In addition, you may feel a sense pride and leadership by participating in research that will lead to institutional improvement. If you are still at Simmons when the research is completed, you may benefit from the institutions understanding of what supports (prevention and intervention strategies) can be delivered inside of the universities to improve quality of life, overall wellness and to decrease drop out for students of color. The study procedures are conducted at no cost to you.

PARTICIPATION AND WITHDRAWAL

You can choose whether to participate in this study or not. If you volunteer to participate, you may withdraw at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you might otherwise be entitled. You may also refuse to answer any questions you do not want to answer and still remain in the study.

IDENTIFICATION OF INVESTIGATORS AND REVIEW BOARD

If you have any questions or concerns about the research, please feel free to contact:

Delvina Miremadi (207) 807-3334 dmiremadi@gmail.com

Dr. Janie Ward (617) 521-2255 janie.ward@simmons.edu

Human Protections Administrator in the Office of Sponsored Programs at 617-521-2414.

Do not sign this consent form unless you have had a chance to ask questions and have received satisfactory answers to all of your questions.

SIGNATURE OF RESEARCH PARTICIPANT

By signing this form, I willingly choose to participate in the study outlined above. I have read this consent form and I understand the procedures described. I have had the opportunity to discuss this research study with the investigator, and my questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I understand that information regarding my personal identity will be kept confidential. I have been provided a copy of this form. By signing this consent form, I have not waived any of the legal rights that I have as a participant in a research study.

Name of Participant (please print) _____

Signature of Participant _____ Date _____

SIGNATURE OF INVESTIGATOR

In my judgment the participant is voluntarily and knowingly providing informed consent and possesses the legal capacity to give informed consent to participate in this research study

Name of Investigator or Designee _____

Signature of Investigator or Designee _____

Date _____

Appendix C

Participant ID _____

Demographic Questionnaire

Please answer the following questions.

Section 1: About You

1. What year are you? Freshman___ Sophomore___ Junior ___ Senior___
2. When do you expect to graduate? Fall 20___ Spring 20___
3. How old are you? _____
4. Please indicate your ethnic background or race by circling the answer that applies to you.
Choose no more than 2.
 - a. African
 - b. African-American
 - c. Black
 - d. Hispanic
 - e. Hispanic non Black
 - f. Mixed
 - g. West Indian/Caribbean Black
 - h. Native American
 - i. Caucasian/White American
 - j. Asian American
 - k. Other _____

Section 2: About Your Family

5. Choose the statement that best describes how you were raised. (Circle one)
 - a. I was raised by my biological mother and father.
 - b. I was raised by my biological mother.
 - c. I was raised by my biological father.
 - d. I was raised by my grandparents.
 - e. I was adopted.

6. What is your parents' marital status? (Circle one)

Single Married Divorced Separated Widowed Never Married

7. What is the highest level of education your mother and father received? (Check one for each).
- a. **Elementary School** Mother_____ Father _____ Some_____
 - b. **Completed Middle School** Mother _____ Father_____ Some_____
 - c. **Some High School** Mother_____ Father_____ Some_____
 - d. **Completed High School** Mother_____ Father_____ Some_____
 - e. **Business or Trade School** Mother_____ Father_____ Some_____
 - f. **Some College** Mother_____ Father_____ Some_____
 - g. **Completed College** Mother_____ Father_____ Some_____
 - h. **Some Graduate Work** Mother_____ Father_____ Some_____
 - i. **Graduate Degree** Mother _____ Father_____ Some _____

Academic Questions

1. Choose the answer that best describes the high school you attended.
 - a. Public
 - b. Charter
 - c. Private or Parochial

2. What Year did you first enter college? _____

3. What is your enrollment status? Full-time Part-time

4. If you could make your college choice over, would you still choose to enroll in your current college? (circle one)
 - a. Definitely Yes
 - b. Probably Yes
 - c. Probably No
 - d. Definitely No

5. What is your approximate GPA? (Circle one)
 - a. Freshman Year A A- B+ B B- C+ C C- D+ D
 - b. Sophomore Year A A- B+ B B- C+ C C- D+ D
 - c. Junior Year A A- B+ B B- C+ C C- D+ D
 - d. Senior Year A A- B+ B B- C+ C C- D+ D

 - e. Overall GPA _____
 - f. GPA in your major _____

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