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# The Impact of Expenditures and Financial Aid on Racial Gaps in Institutional Graduation Rates in the U.S.

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## ABSTRACT

*There is a persistent gap in institutional-level graduation rates between U.S. Whites and underrepresented minorities (URM). This gap remains as graduation rates have increased for both Whites and URM. We tested whether these six-year graduation rate gaps among incoming undergraduate freshman cohorts were a function of institutional expenditures and financial aid. Our results were mixed. The gaps were much wider at institutions that spent more on academic and student services and who enrolled cohorts with higher average student loan amounts. Yet, these gaps between Whites and URM narrowed at institutions where students had larger average institutional and state/local grants. Our discussion centered on the changing financial context of higher education and the contributing roles of capital and institutional racial climate.*

**Keywords:** financial aid, graduation rates, institutional expenditures, undergraduates, underrepresented minorities

# INTRODUCTION

**A** baccalaureate degree is an earned credential and promotes social mobility in the U.S. (DeAngelo & Franke, 2016; Hout, 2012). This degree is increasingly important and the minimum requirement for entry into the post-Great Recession middle-class labor market (Carnevale et al., 2010; Sawhill, 2013). Research found that returns from a college degree accrued more for individuals from underserved backgrounds, including underrepresented minority students (URM) (Bauldry, 2015; Schafer, Wilkinson, & Ferraro, 2013). Compared to their White peers, URM receive greater returns from a 4-year college degree in terms of social (e.g., civic engagement) and economic (e.g., income) benefits, but are often the least likely to finish college (Goldrick-Rab et al., 2016). Therefore, increasing graduation rates is not only beneficial to individuals across a wide range of outcomes, but also a potential lever to reduce social inequalities. According to the National Science Foundation (2019), the term "underrepresented minority" refers to the racial categories of Black, Hispanic, and American Indian or Alaska Native. In this study, due to data limitations (see below) and to allow our research to be compared to prior studies (Education trust, 2015, 2016). Blacks and Hispanics comprised our URM groups and were analyzed separately.

Racial gaps in enrollments persist in college. In 2013, 55% of Whites where enrolled in a 4-year institution immediately after high school compared to 47% for Blacks and 38% for Hispanics (U.S. Department of Education, 2016). Compounding this disparity is that the graduation rates of URM from 4-year institutions have historically trailed those of Whites and continue to do so today. The 6-year cohort graduation rate in 2017 for Whites was 24.4 and 9.4 percentage points higher than those for Blacks and Hispanics, respectively, with higher gaps among males (NCES, 2019). These continuing gaps led Sawhill (2013) and Zarifa et al. (2018) to argue that higher education as a mobility-enhancing vehicle is no longer through enrollment rates, but through completion rates. Lucas (2017) concurred arguing that URM groups have benefitted from greater access to higher education but are being disadvantaged by lower completion rates.

Previous research on race differentials in graduation rates have largely been at the individual level instead of the institutional level (e.g., Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005), which does not reflect the emerging attention to institutional-level racial gaps in graduation rates. The shift to the institutional level is the result of two trends: (a) whereas graduation rates are generally increasing for all students, the gains by URM at 4-year institutions have not been large enough to close the gap with White students; even

though (b) some institutions have no gaps whereas others have large gaps (Pike & Graunke, 2015; Sawhill, 2013; The Education Trust, 2015, 2016). Furthermore, there is widespread understanding that institutional characteristics—especially resources—are important to student success. Both Kuh et al. (2007) and the Education Trust (2016) argued that institutions must abandon the status quo and intentionally organize their efforts to induce higher levels of student success among URM while also benefitting White students. Resource choices create between-institution differences in educational environments so institutions must make informed decisions to promote the success of URM students to narrow the institutional-level graduation gap (The Education Trust, 2016).

In this study, we aimed to fill this research space by using data at the institutional level and examining how racial gaps in graduation rates were a function of a variety of institutional financial resources. No research of which we are aware has examined racial graduation gaps with national data, institutional-level variables, and a regression-based statistical approach. In this study, we used institutional panel data from the 2009 – 2017 Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS). The institutional variables we focused on captured expenditures on instruction, research, academics, and student services as well as financial aid and grants that foster aggregate student development and achievement and boost 6-year graduation rates (Bound et al., 2010; Bowen et al., 2009; Castleman & Long, 2016; Tinto, 2012). Our research question was straightforward: To what extent were White-URM racial gaps in institutional graduation rates a function of institutional expenditures and financial assistance? We addressed this question through a simultaneous regression equation that modeled racial gaps as a combined function of financial aid and expenditures, which allowed us to compare the relative impacts of each resource.

## BACKGROUND

The persistent racial gaps were a focus of Young Invincibles (2017) "blueprint for higher education equity." They argued that until this gap can be narrowed, higher education inequalities will remain in U.S. society and income and economic insecurities will also remain. Currently, higher education institutions are only held accountable for aggregate institutional-level graduation rates that are indicators of productivity and inputs in performance funding models (Heck et al., 2014; Rabovsky, 2014). There are no formal thresholds in terms of racial differences in 6-year graduation rates (Young Invincibles, 2017).

Publicly available national data on graduation rates among incoming cohorts have been required legally only since 1990, compiled initially with the incoming 1996 cohort, and published annually since the incoming cohort of 2000. Table 1 (NCES, 2019) showed that the 6-year graduation rates for Whites, Blacks, and Hispanics have improved, albeit unevenly, between the initial 1996 cohort and the 2011 cohort. Even though the cohort graduation rates increased for all race-gender categories, this rate increased the most for Hispanic males (21.1%) and females (17.5%) and the least for Black males (3.4%) and females (0.7%) with little increase for Black females. These race-specific graduation rates and uneven changes have led to persistent racial gaps as shown in Table 1. Using the initial 1996 cohort as our starting point, the White-Black gap has increased (21.4% among males; 29.1% among females) whereas the White-Hispanic gap has decreased (-21.5% among males; -26.3% among females) but still remains substantial at 10.6 and 8.7 percentage points among males and females, respectively. The graduation gap between Blacks and Hispanics continues to increase.

## LITERATURE REVIEW
### Conceptual Approach

We framed racial gaps between institutions through the institutional-contextual approach common in higher education studies on differential outcomes (e.g., Titus, 2004). The institutional-contextual approach posits that higher education institutions differ by structural characteristics, investments, decision-making, and environments that influence the types of and emphasis on policies, practices, and programs that characterize the institution. In turn, these characteristics create varying environments that differentially impact student learning, engagement, support, and success including graduation rates (Astin & Osequera, 2002; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Tinto, 2012). Because there is no inferential research at the institutional-level, we reviewed and reconciled individual-level and institutional-level studies on graduation rates.

This institutional approach is a cornerstone of Astin's well-known I-E-O evaluation and developmental model of educational outcomes (Astin & antonio, 2012). In this model, educational outcomes (O) are a result of what students bring with them to college (I) and the educational environments (E) that they encounter. Environments include differential programs, curriculums, strategies, interventions, and social influences experienced by students that are a function of differences in between-institutional structures and characteristics. For our study, institutional expenditures and financial

aid resources are institutional environments (E) as they differentially fund academic, administrative, and student programs and practices.

**Table 1**

*Six-year graduation rates and racial gaps at 4-year institutions in the US: 1996-2011*

| | MALES | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | RATES | | | GAPS | | |
| Incoming Cohort | White | Black | Hispanic | White-Black | White-Hispanic | Black-Hispanic |
| 1996 | 54.8 | 32.8 | 41.3 | 22.0 | 13.5 | -8.5 |
| 2000 | 57.1 | 35.6 | 44.6 | 21.5 | 12.5 | -9.0 |
| 2001 | 57.3 | 34.6 | 44.1 | 22.7 | 13.2 | -9.5 |
| 2002 | 57.3 | 34.0 | 44.1 | 23.3 | 13.3 | -10.1 |
| 2003 | 58.4 | 34.1 | 44.9 | 24.3 | 13.5 | -10.8 |
| 2004 | 58.9 | 34.3 | 45.7 | 24.6 | 13.3 | -11.4 |
| 2005 | 59.4 | 34.2 | 47.2 | 25.2 | 12.2 | -13.0 |
| 2006 | 59.8 | 35.2 | 47.8 | 24.6 | 12.0 | -12.5 |
| 2007 | 60.0 | 35.3 | 48.6 | 24.6 | 11.4 | -13.2 |
| 2008 | 60.1 | 35.3 | 48.9 | 24.8 | 11.2 | -13.6 |
| 2009 | 60.0 | 34.3 | 49.1 | 25.7 | 10.9 | -14.8 |
| 2010 | 60.7 | 34.3 | 50.1 | 26.4 | 10.6 | -15.8 |
| 2011 | 60.6 | 33.9 | 50.0 | 26.7 | 10.6 | -16.1 |
| %Change | 10.6 | 3.4 | 21.1 | 21.4 | -21.5 | 89.4 |

| | FEMALES | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | RATES | | | GAPS | | |
| Incoming Cohort | White | Black | Hispanic | White-Black | White-Hispanic | Black-Hispanic |
| 1996 | 60.9 | 43.0 | 49.1 | 17.9 | 11.8 | -6.1 |
| 2000 | 62.8 | 46.4 | 52.4 | 16.4 | 10.4 | -6.0 |
| 2001 | 62.8 | 46.2 | 51.5 | 16.6 | 11.3 | -5.3 |
| 2002 | 62.5 | 44.2 | 52.5 | 18.3 | 10.0 | -8.3 |
| 2003 | 63.3 | 43.2 | 52.2 | 20.1 | 11.1 | -9.0 |
| 2004 | 63.9 | 43.3 | 53.5 | 20.6 | 10.4 | -10.2 |
| 2005 | 64.2 | 43.0 | 53.8 | 21.2 | 10.4 | -10.8 |
| 2006 | 64.9 | 43.6 | 54.9 | 21.3 | 10.0 | -11.3 |
| 2007 | 65.4 | 44.6 | 55.5 | 20.8 | 9.9 | -10.9 |
| 2008 | 65.9 | 44.8 | 57.0 | 21.1 | 8.9 | -12.2 |
| 2009 | 66.1 | 43.2 | 57.0 | 22.9 | 9.1 | -13.8 |
| 2010 | 66.6 | 43.7 | 57.8 | 22.9 | 8.8 | -14.1 |
| 2011 | 66.4 | 43.3 | 57.7 | 23.1 | 8.7 | -14.4 |
| %Change | 9.0 | 0.7 | 17.5 | 29.1 | -26.3 | 136.1 |

Source: Digest of Education Statistics, National Center for Education Statistics (2019)

Such funding, we proposed below, have the potential to narrow the outcome (O) of racial gaps in institutional graduation rates as shown and suggested by The Education Trust (2016).

**Prior Research and Hypothesis: Financial Aid Resources**

*Our first research hypothesis was that racial gaps in graduation rates would be smaller at institutions that provided more financial aid and grant resources*. Existing research at the individual level has shown that these resources boost academic outcomes including graduation rates. For example, Goldrick-Rab et al. (2016) and Chen (2012) found that the provision of financial add was especially beneficial for URM and other underserved groups. As argued by the authors, financial aid for these students partial relieved issues they were more likely to face than their White counterparts including but not limited to lowering the cost of attending college, adding value to other sources of financial aid, reducing the amount of work hours, heightening campus integration, reducing stress, and taking more credits.

Research has generally found that financial aid and grants were positively associated with individual-level academic outcomes, although the results were not unambiguous (Castleman & Long, 2016; Chen, 2012; Chen & DesJardins, 2008, 2010; Linn et al., 2018). For example, Goldrick-Rab et al. (2016) examined the effect of a renewable need-based $3,500 grant and found that it increased on-time bachelor's degree completion rates by 4.7 percentage points. The impact of the aid on credits earned was larger for racial minorities (1.5 percentage points). Further, the aid reduced the gaps between Pell Grant recipients and the average rate from 14 to 9 percentage points. Similar results were found by Castleman and Long (2016) in Florida and by Gershenfeld et al. (2019) in Illinois. However, three studies using state-wide data on Indiana college students (Gross & Berry, 2016; Gross et al., 2015a; Gross et al., 2015b) found that many forms of grants and aid slowed leaving school before an earned degree and transfer rates but overall reduced the likelihood of earning a bachelor's degree.

At the institutional level, there is much less research. Several studies have found that institutional graduation rates were lower when a larger percentage of the students received federal aid (Marsh, 2014; Scott et al., 2006) and at higher levels of aid per student (Webber & Ehrenberg, 2010). Research by Heck et al. (2014) also demonstrated that institutions with a higher share of students who received federal aid had lower 6-year graduation rates. But institutions with a higher share of students who received federal aid experienced greater growth increases in their graduation

rate over a 10-year period. This relationship between aid and graduation rates is argued by Heck et al. (2014) to occur because the negative association between aid and 6-year graduation rates was not due to the aid, per se. Rather, students who received aid also had other incoming characteristics (e.g., low standardized test scores) associated with lower 6-year graduation rates.

**Prior Research and Hypothesis: Institutional Expenditures**

*Our second research hypothesis was that racial gaps would be lower at institutions with higher expenditures in academic, instruction, and student services*. Existing research at the institutional level has shown that these three broad expenditure categories generally boost academic outcomes including graduation rates. As with Goldrick-Rab et al. (2016), Webber and Ehrenberg (2010) also found that URM and other underserved groups especially benefitted. Within categories, "instruction" refers to general and specialized academic programs, "academic" refers to activities that support the institution's primary missions of instruction, research, and public service, and "student services" refer to non-instructional activities that contribute to student support and development.

For expenditures, all extant research at the institutional level examined aggregate graduation rates, not gaps. The results were mixed. Using IPEDS and state data, Heck et al (2014) found that the proportional amount of all expenditures going to instructional and institutional expenditures were negatively associated with 6-year graduation rates (standardized effects of -.039 and -.087, respectively) but positively associated with 10-year changes in these rates. Yet, other studies found that instructional and academic expenditures were associated with higher graduation rates (Gansemer-Topf & Schuh, 2006; Hamrick et al., 2004; Ryan, 2004; Scott et al., 2006). Using the IPEDS cohort of 2004-06, Horn and Lee (2016) found higher institutional graduation rates at institutions that spent more per FTE on student services, academic support, and instruction. Webber and Ehrenberg (2010) found a positive association between instructional and student services expenditures per FTE and 6-year graduation rates but a negative association for research expenditures. They found that an increase in student services expenditures of $100 per student led to a 0.2 percentage point increase in an institution's 6-year graduation rate. The same increase in instructional and academic support services expenditures led to a 0.08 percentage point increase. Similar increases in research expenditures drop graduation rates by 0.9 percentage points. Importantly for our study, Webber and Ehrenberg (2010) found that student

services mattered more at institutions with lower average entrance test scores and larger average Pell Grant aid—institutions that also enrolled more URM and other underserved groups.

There is much less research at the individual level that examined how institutional expenditures impacted graduation rates. Chen (2012) discovered that higher levels of institutional student service expenditures equally lowered the risk of all students dropping-out over a 6-year period. The institutional level research by Webber and Ehrenberg (2010) suggested that certain expenditures may help graduation rates for less prepared and underserved students by better balancing expenditures across categories and perhaps providing optimal support systems as argued by The Education Trust (2015, 2016). Webber (2012) found that higher student services but not instructional expenditures increased the graduation rates only for students who entered with low ACT scores. Data from IPEDS and the Cooperative Institutional Research Program's (CIRP) annual survey found that expenditures on instruction, student services, and academic support services enhanced four-year degree completion for all student groups with some expenditure categories helping graduation rates more for URM (Oseguera, 2005).

## METHODS
**Data and Analytical Sample**

We used institutional-level panel data from the 2009 – 2011 and 2015 – 2017 IPEDS to estimate the 6-year graduation rate gaps of the incoming 2009, 2010, and 2011 Cohorts of freshman at 4-year public and private not-for-profit institutions. We included the most recent three cohorts for which IPEDS final release graduation data were available to make our results as contemporary as possible and to smooth out year-to-year fluctuations and yearly outliers (Jaquette & Parra, 2014; The Education Trust, 2016). IPEDS collects data from postsecondary institutions in the United States and other jurisdictions (e.g., Puerto Rico). Participation in IPEDS is a requirement for the institutions that partake in Title IV federal student financial aid programs such as Pell Grants during the academic year. The IPEDS definition of "cohort" refers to full-time, first-time, degree-seeking students.

Six-year cohort graduation rates are those required by the 1990 "Student Right-to-Know and Campus Security Act" (SRK), represent the only common metric to compare rates across the array of 4-year institutions in the U.S., and are used for federal policy decisions (Cook & Pullaro, 2010; Hess et al., 2009). We focused solely on 4-year institutions to guard against

the substantial differences between 2-year and 4-year institutions (Newell, 2014) and to allow our findings to be compared to other studies (The Education Trust, 2016, 2016; Bound et al., 2010). We followed the methodology of The Education Trust (2016) that required each cohort to have at least 30 students of each race and limited the races to White, Black, and Hispanic. This size restriction further minimized potential influential and outlier observations and provided more conservative estimates. The focus on White, Black, and Hispanic graduation rates occurred because graduation data on Asians, Pacific Islanders, and two or more races have been collected only since 2011 and relatively few institutions satisfied our cohort size requirement if we included American Indians. Our final analytic sample included 627 institutions and 1,881 institutional data points.

**Variables and Analysis**

Our outcomes measured the 6-year graduation race gaps between Whites and Blacks and Whites and Hispanics separately for males and females to mimic the approach of NCES (2019) as in Table 1. We first calculated race-gender specific 6-year graduation rates by dividing the sum of the 2015, 2016, and 2017 completer cohorts by the sum of the 2009, 2010, and 2011 entering cohorts, respectively. Then, the *race-gender specific gaps* were calculated by subtracting the Black and Hispanic rates from White rates. We choose White as the comparison baseline group for two reasons: (a) White males and females historically and currently have higher 6-year graduation rates than do their Black and Hispanic counterparts (NCES, 2019); and (b) White males and females comprised the modal groups. Our focal independent variables included four IPEDS-created institutional expenditure categories measured in absolute dollars per student FTE: instructional, research, academic support, and student services. We analyzed four IPEDS-created measures of average financial aid resources received by students at each institution: federal grants, state/local grants, institutional grants, and student loan aid. All variables are in Table 2.

A parsimonious set of varying institutional characteristics that consistently predict differences in graduation rates when modeled with expenditures and financial aid served as control variables to guard against spurious relationships. We measured all controls at the entry year of each cohort to explicitly recognize the importance of first-year environments on 6-year graduation rates (Heck et al., 2014; Tinto, 2012). They included the institutional 1-year retention rate, cohort year, cohort size, the 2005 Carnegie classification code (doctoral, master's, baccalaureate), selectivity,

control (public or private), percent of URM, FTE student/faculty ratio, average total cost to attend, and average faculty salary.

**Table 2**
*Description of study variables: IPEDS cohorts of 2009, 2010, and 2011 (n=1,881)*

| Variables | Coding/Range | M | SD |
|---|---|---|---|
| *Graduation Rate Gaps* | | | |
| *Male* | | | |
| White-Black | -2.67 – 45.18 | 23.09 | 11.00 |
| White-Hispanic | -4.88 – 40.49 | 8.61 | 8.51 |
| *Female* | | | |
| White-Black | -2.33 – 55.74 | 18.27 | 12.77 |
| White-Hispanic | -3.01 – 45.39 | 7.18 | 6.36 |
| *Expenditures per FTE* | | | |
| Instructional | 3,456.00 – 28,134.00 | 7,137.67 | 3,689.41 |
| Research | 0.00 – 22,078.00 | 3,423.48 | 4,171.98 |
| Academic | 241.00 – 8,152.00 | 1,947.33 | 1,228.33 |
| Student services | 377.00 – 3,419.00 | 1,168.97 | 522.82 |
| *Average Aid Received per Student* | | | |
| Federal grant aid | 840.00 – 10,221.00 | 4,072.09 | 905.52 |
| State/local grant aid | 552.00 – 9,682.00 | 3,345.70 | 1,488.48 |
| Institutional grant aid | 70.00 – 31,540.00 | 6,220.19 | 5,818.20 |
| Student loan grant aid | 1,152.00 – 15,464.00 | 5,357.20 | 1,859.90 |
| *Institutional Characteristics* | | | |
| 1-year retention rate | 48.81 – 99.27 | 79.20 | 19.34 |
| Cohort year | 1=2009; 2=2010; 3=2011 | 2.02 | 0.83 |
| Cohort size | 341.00 – 8458.00 | 2995.18 | 1660.56 |
| Doctorate | 0 = no; 1 – yes | 0.61 | --- |
| Masters | 0 = no; 1 – yes | 0.29 | --- |
| Baccalaureate | 0 = no; 1 – yes | 0.10 | --- |
| Selectivity | 1 = noncompetitive to 6 = most competitive | 3.73 | 1.11 |
| Control | 0 = private; 1 = public | 0.67 | --- |
| Percent URM | 8.00 – 88.00 | 32.52 | 14.50 |
| FTE student/faculty ratio | 4.85 – 148.19 | 28.57 | 20.01 |
| Average total cost | 15692.00 – 54718.00 | 29026.60 | 9406.76 |
| Average faculty salary | 42189.00 – 140052.00 | 80809.17 | 14642.47 |

To test our predictions, we estimated a series of ordinary least squares regression equations by modeling graduation rate gaps as a function of expenditures and financial aid resources while controlling for the set of controls. In the regression analyses, we transformed the expenditures variables to represent the effect of every $1,000 per FTE and the financial aid variables to represent the effect of each average $1,000. Doing so made the presentation and interpretation of the coefficients more manageable. Our analyses were complicated by two data issues. First, each institution was represented three times. Second, institutions were clustered in states suggesting that our outcomes could have been correlated given the role of states in funding and legislating higher education, especially the wide disparities in funding, tuition costs, and financial aid since the Great Recession of 2008 (Horn & Lee, 2016; Mitchell & Leachman, 2015). To minimize these issues, all statistical inferences were estimated with cluster-robust standard errors (Cameron & Miller, 2015). Our regression diagnostics indicated that these robust standard errors were normally distributed with no influential observations and indicated no multicollinearity among the independent and control variables.

**FINDINGS**

Table 2 revealed the persistent aggregate racial gap in institutional graduation rates. This gap was largest between Whites and Blacks for both males (23.09) and females (18.67), while smaller though notable between Whites and Hispanics (8.61 for males and 7.18 for females). However, the ranges contained negative values suggesting that a few institutions graduated Blacks and Hispanics at slightly higher rates than Whites—consistent with data presented by the Education Trust (2015, 2016). The IPEDS data also revealed wide differences in institutional expenditures and the amount of aid their average student received. The regression results in Table 3 showed a remarkably consistent pattern for the association between expenditures and financial aid with gender-specific racial gaps in graduation rates.

**Institutional Expenditures**

The results for expenditures *generally opposed our research prediction* that racial gaps in graduation rates would be lower at institutions with higher expenditures for instruction, academics, and student support services. The most consistent results were for student services where higher levels of expenditures were associated with wider institutional racial gaps in

graduation rates between URM and White students. The sizes of the practical effects were noticeable: an additional $1,000 per FTE in expenditures was associated with a widening in the graduation gap from a low of 1.6 percentage points for the male White-Hispanic gap to a high of 2.1 percentage points in the female White-Black graduation gap. The widening of the gaps for White-Black males and White-Hispanic females were also robust at 2.0 percentage points each.

For academic expenditures, each additional $1,000 per FTE was associated with a widening in three of the gender-race specific gaps: about 1.4 percentage points each for the male White-Black and White-Hispanic gap and the female White-Hispanic gap. We did not find any statistical association between instructional expenditures and racial gaps in graduation rates. Lastly, while not part of our predictions, we found that increased expenditures in research also contributed to a widening of two of the gaps—White-Black males and White-Black females.

**Financial Aid**

The results for the sources of financial aid *generally supported our research prediction* that racial gaps in graduation rates would be lower at institutions where students had more financial aid. There was one glaring exception: student loans. At institutions where students carried more student loan debt there was a much wider gap in graduation rates between Whites and URM. The effect sizes were non-trivial. An additional $1,000 in student loans was associated with a widening in the graduation gap from a low of 1.2 percentage points for the male White-Hispanic gap to a high of 3.0 percentage points for the female White-Black gap. On the other hand, other forms of financial aid were associated with the narrowing of the racial gap in graduation rates. The most consistent results occurred for state/local aid where higher levels of aid were associated with narrower institutional racial gaps. Again, the practical effects were robust: an additional $1,000 in aid was associated with a narrowing in the graduation gap from a low of 1.3 percentage points for the female White-Hispanic gap to a high of 2.4 percentage points in the female White-Black graduation gap. Higher state/local aid narrowed the male graduation gap among White-Black (1.6 percentage points) and White-Hispanic (1.9 percentage points). Institutional aid was significant only for the White-Hispanic graduation gap where each additional $1,000 in average aid narrowed the gap by 1.3 percentage points each among males and females. The final significant result was for federal financial aid where it only narrowed the female White-Black graduation gap but no other gaps.

**Table 3**

Regression coefficients for 6-year graduation rate gaps among IPEDS of 2009, 2010, and 2011 (n=1,881).

| Variables | Male Cohorts | | Female Cohorts | |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| | White-Black | White-Hispanic | White-Black | White-Hispanic |
| *Expenditures per FTE ($1,000)* | | | | |
| Instructional | 0.83 | -0.49 | 0.59 | 0.79 |
| Research | 0.98** | 1.69 | 1.76*** | 0.33 |
| Academic | 1.41*** | 1.48*** | 1.07 | 1.43** |
| Student services | 1.95*** | 1.62*** | 2.09*** | 2.01*** |
| | | | | |
| *Financial Aid ($1,000)* | | | | |
| Federal | -0.14 | -0.65 | -2.65** | -0.31 |
| State/local | -1.62*** | -1.88*** | -2.43*** | -1.31** |
| Institutional | -1.21 | -1.33** | -0.19 | -1.28** |
| Student loan | 2.81*** | 1.22** | 3.03*** | 1.36** |
| | | | | |
| *Institutional Controls* | | | | |
| 1-year retention rate | -0.34*** | -0.20*** | -0.40**** | -0.11* |
| Cohort year | -0.85 | -0.77 | -0.23 | -0.54 |
| Cohort size | 0.01*** | 0.02*** | 0.02*** | 0.02*** |
| Doctoral (Reference) | --- | --- | --- | -- |
| Masters | 2.71*** | 3.33*** | 4.44*** | 2.87*** |
| Baccalaureate | -0.33 | 0.17 | 0.23 | -0.12 |
| Selectivity | 0.97*** | 1.03*** | 2.02*** | 1.87*** |
| Public | -4.99*** | -4.02*** | -3.88*** | -3.43*** |
| Percent non-White | -0.78*** | -0.39*** | -0.26*** | -0.64*** |
| Faculty-student ratio | 0.00 | 0.00 | 0.01 | 0.00 |
| Faculty salary | -0.18 | -0.09 | -0.07 | -0.11 |
| Average cost to attend | 0.22*** | 0.17** | 0.33*** | 0.21*** |
| | | | | |
| Intercept | 19.05 | 13.65 | 34.23 | 9.76 |
| R-square (no controls) | 0.13 | 0.10 | 0.14 | 0.12 |
| F-value | 9.06*** | 8.33*** | 8.85*** | 6.12*** |
| R-square (with controls) | 0.33 | 0.36 | 0.40 | 0.31 |
| F-value | 8.03*** | 7.08*** | 6.34*** | 4.98*** |

*Note*: Statistical tests for the coefficients were estimated using cluster-robust standard errors.
* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$ (two-tailed)

## Model Fit and Institutional Controls

The R-square values indicated how well the model fit the data and the explained variance. We presented two sets of R-square values: those for models with only the expenditures and financial aid variables and those for models that also included the institutional controls. The R-square values without controls showed that these eight variables capturing expenditures and financial aid explained a modest amount of institutional variation in graduation gaps between white and URM students, ranging from a low of

10% for the male White-Hispanic gap to a high of 14% for the female White-Black gap. With controls in the regression equations these R-squares values increased by 20 percentage points or more to explaining between 31 – 40% of the racial gaps in institutional graduation rates. The F-tests revealed that these R-square values were statistically significant.

The results for the institutional controls operated nearly identically across all four racial gap comparisons. While these variables served entirely as controls and no research expectations were addressed, the results do shed light on the institutional characteristics that were associated with wider or narrower gaps.  There were two findings especially relevant for URM. First, we found that all racial gaps were narrower in institutions with better 1-year retention rates. Second, we found that all racial gaps in graduation rates were lower at institutions with a higher percentage of URM. We will return to these findings in the next section.

## DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

We examined an important but empirically neglected academic outcome—the enduring racial gaps in institutional-level graduation rates (Education Trust, 2015, 2016; Young Invincibles, 2017). Our institutional-centric approach found that expenditures and financial aid created differences in the width of these racial gaps across institutions. Lukas (2017), Sawhill (2013), and Zarifa et al. (2018) all argued that higher education as a mobility-enhancing vehicle is no longer through enrollment rates, but through completion rates. Indeed, our results and the R-square values suggested that our institutional approach in understanding racial gaps in graduation rates had merit and can add to our understanding of the historical and enduring disparities in academic outcomes between URM and their White counterparts. The results also indicate that the 1990 SRK Act needs to be updated to hold institutions not just accountable for aggregate graduation rates but for race-specific graduation rates and gaps.

Before discussing our results, it is important to point out the two main limitations of the study. First, it is possible that the data did not contain institutional characteristics that could further account for the racial gaps in graduation rates given our modest R-square values. Second, as per the SRK, we followed institutional cohorts over 6 years, where this cohort was comprised of first time and full-time freshmen who stayed at the same institution. This definition covers about 25 – 30% of all college students in 4-year institutions, depending on the institution's characteristics, and does not take into account the academic outcomes after transferring out of the initial institution or part-time students (Hess et al., 2009).

We fully expected that racial gaps in graduation rates would be narrower at institutions with higher expenditures on academic- and student-related programs and policies. By all accounts, this expectation was soundly contradicted. Instead, we found that racial gaps in graduation rates between White and URM students were wider at institutions that had higher levels of academic and student services expenditures as well as research expenditures. The most consistent result across gender-race comparisons was for student services. Further, the results showed that the magnitude of this widening for each additional $1,000 per FTE was practically meaningful. For example, each $1,000 dollar increase in student services widen the graduation gap between 1.62 and 2.09 percentage points, which is about one-fifth of the gap between White and Hispanic males and one-tenth of the gap between White and Black females.

Our other research question focused on financial aid sources where we expected racial gaps in graduation rates to be narrower at institutions where the average student had more aid. We found a consistent set of findings that provided mixed support. At institutions where the average student had more student loan debt, we found a significantly wider gap in graduation rates among White and URM students for both genders. Yet other forms of financial aid, especially state and local grants, were associated with a narrowing of these racial graduation gaps.

The implications of these results are important given several trends in higher education. First, research finds that institutions dramatically increased their expenditures per FTE since 1987 and easily outpaced inflation (Hinrichs, 2016). Between 1987 and 2013, in constant dollars, academic expenditures increased by 42% or about $850 per FTE, student services expenditures by 54% or about $550 per FTE and research expenditures by 62% or about $2,000 per FTE. As our findings showed, increases in these expenditures appeared to benefit White students the most—institutions with greater academic and student services expenditures also had wider graduation gaps between White and URM students.

Secondly, the institutional graduation gap between White and URM students was narrower in the presence of higher levels of grants but wider in the presence of higher levels of student loans. This importance of grants in achieving educational equality was also found at the individual level by Goldrick-Rab et al. (2016) and Gershenfeld et al. (2019). Thus, it appears that the source and type of aid matters for reducing racial gaps in graduation rates. Fortunately, there has been an increase in both institutional and state grants in absolute dollars as well as in their share of total aid going to undergraduate students (College Board, 2019). These increases may help to

narrow the racial gap in graduation rates. However, as many states switch to merit-based grants instead of need-based grants this may affect URM and low-income students from entering and completing college because (a) grants from merit-based programs are disproportionately given to White and upper-income students and (b) adequate financial aid is a significant predictor of college persistence (National Academy of Sciences, 2011)

Unfortunately, in the U.S. one of the major source of grants for URM and underserved students—Pell Grants—continued its downward trend. Between 2011 and 2019, the share of undergraduates receiving Pell Grants declined from 38% to 31% and total Pell Grant expenditures declined from $40 billion to $28 billion in constant 2019 dollars. Much of these decreases occurred because of federal changes in eligibility standards and maximum grant formulas. As a result, Pell Grant awards can now fund only 28% of the cost of college, down from 35% just a decade ago (The College Board, 2019).

As a result of these trends, URM students are much more likely to carry student loans in order to afford the rising cost of higher education. For example, the NCES (Radwin et al., 2018) estimated that 86.8% of black students and 65.0% of Hispanic students borrow federal student loans to attend a four-year public college compared to 59.9% of their White colleagues, and Black students graduate with the most student debt. Unlike grants, student loans must be repaid either during college or after leaving college depending on whether the loans were subsidized. This pressure may disproportionately affect URM academic success as loan burdens cause stress and anxiety especially among URM that then may negatively influence persistence and completion (Johnson & Rochkind, 2009; Tran et al., 2018). Our results certainly supported this assertion.

Our results for expenditures are troubling, especially for academic and student services that are two categories directly targeted at enhancing student development and success. It is important for future research at the individual and institutional levels to further examine why heightened expenditures disproportionally benefit White incoming freshman cohorts compared to their URM counterparts. We offer two possible interconnected issues at the institutional level. First, much like the college choice model approach, it is possible that URM have less social and cultural capital as it pertains to higher education institutions and this may restrict their willingness to, awareness of, access to, and use of institutional resources. Indeed, Ovink and Veazey (2011) found that institutional programs aimed at developing the social and cultural capital of URM students allowed them to better navigate the university environment, supporting our I-E-O approach.

Given that URM students are less likely to reach out for help, we concur with The Education Trust (2016) that institutions must be proactive with their programs in order to reach and help URM students. This will be especially important during the first year given our results for the impact of 1-year retention rates on narrowing the graduation gap.

Second, an institution's racial climate may affect the way that URM leverage their capital and access and use resources given that our study found that racial gaps were narrower at institutions with a higher percentage of URM students. Cabrera et al. (1999) and Johnson et al. (2014) argued that the racial ecology of a campus is often omitted in theories and studies on academic achievement. Part of this ecology is the Whiteness of a campus— or race and space—that influences culture, climate, ecology, and student development and would be an important environment in our I-E-O approach. Indeed, research finds that when URM perceive a campus to be dominated by Whiteness, prejudice, and discrimination they are also less likely to use institutional resources, have more negative social experiences, have lower commitments to program and degree completion, and experience lower academic and intellectual development (Cabrera et al., 1999; Dancy et al., 2018; Johnson et al., 2014). The processes that led to these outcomes included their feelings of limited mobility, lack of entitlement of space, and heightened hostilities, especially at predominately White institutions.

Numerous studies have found that the Whiteness of a campus, often measured by the racial composition of the student body and campus spaces, increased the likelihood that racial minorities reported having experienced micro-aggressions, feelings of being unwelcomed and inferior, that certain spaces were off limits to them, heightened levels of stress and coping, and institutional alienation, exclusion, and commitment (Anderson, 2015; Ballinas, 2017; Cabrera et al., 1999; Evans & Moore, 2015). Karkouti (2016) summarized that a racially and ethnically diverse campus environments led to positive outcomes for URM students, including a more richly varied educational culture, enhanced social, cognitive, academic, and psychological skills, less self-segregation, less stress, and a greater sense of being able to navigate the social and educational benefits of the campus. Thus, the racial climate of the institution may be an institutional environment that influences the relationship between expenditures and graduation gaps.

Our study filled an important research gap in identifying two prominent institutional characteristics that can both widen and narrow persistent racial gaps in institutional graduation rates. It is incumbent upon institutions to use emerging research to better inform their policies and

practices if these racial gaps are to be closed. Besides financial aid and expenditures, we offered two theoretical possibilities—social and cultural capital and racial climate. Both of these features can be addressed though developmental programs (e.g., orientation, first-year seminars, advising, workshops) as well as structural considerations (e.g., hiring, admissions). Indeed, as suggested by Kuh et al. (2007) and The Education Trust (2016), institutions must "institutionally intentional" about narrowing the graduation gap through resources, practices, and programs.

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# The Role of Academic Self-Confidence on Thriving among International College Students in the U.S. and Canada

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## ABSTRACT

*Set in the context of four-year colleges and universities in the United States and Canada, this study examined how the level of thriving differs for international students and their domestic peers, how the level of thriving differs across various subgroups within international students, and how academic self-confidence is associated with the level of thriving for international students. Using data from the 2017 Thriving Quotient, this study found that international students were less likely to thrive during their college years than their domestic peers and that Asian international students were less likely to thrive than their international peers of other racial groups. Findings also suggested that academic self-confidence was significantly and positively related to international students' thriving during their college years.*

**Keywords:** academic self-confidence, international college students, thriving

# INTRODUCTION

**W**hile the higher education landscape has been increasingly globalized, international students are often ignored in student success literature (Telbis et al., 2014). Furthermore, studies on the success of international students tend to rely on a narrow definition of student success that focuses on graduation rates and learning outcomes (Telbis et al., 2014). To address this research gap, the current study focuses on student thriving[1] as an integrated outcome measure of college students, which entails students' academic success as a portion of their overall well-being (Cuevas, 2015). The concept of thriving derives from positive psychology and it is a particularly important success outcome to consider for international college students because of its holistic approach to student success (Sherry, Thomas, & Chui, 2010). Furthermore, research has documented the positive relationship between academic self-confidence and academic success among international and other populations in universities and colleges (Lemoyne et al., 2017; Shoemaker, 2010; Stankov et al., 2012; Telbis et al., 2014; Wang, et al., 2018). Therefore, this study also attempts to add to the literature by examining the role of academic self-confidence on international college students' thriving.

The purpose of this study is to improve understandings of international college students' success by examining the effect of academic self-confidence on thriving among this population. Specifically, the authors seek to answer the following three research questions: (1) Are there differences in the level of thriving between international undergraduate students and their domestic peers attending four-year colleges and universities in the United States and Canada? (2) Are there differences in the level of thriving among various subgroups of international undergraduate students in these institutions? (3) How does academic self-confidence affect the level of thriving for international undergraduate students, after controlling for student demographics, college environment, and college experience?

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[1] The authors use lowercased thriving when referring to the idea of thriving (i.e., flourishing). On the other hand, the authors use uppercased Thriving when referring to the Thriving Quotient, the Thriving Project, or Thriving literature, which are proprietary. The Thriving literature refers to empirical and conceptual articles, books, dissertations, and presentations on Thriving.

# LITERATURE REVIEW

## Thriving

In recent decades, student success scholarship has expanded beyond graduation, retention, and GPA in order to encourage leaders in higher education to consider other student success measures. Braxton (2006), for example, expanded these definitions of achievement, outlining eight markers of student success: academic attainment, acquisition of general education, development of academic competence, development of cognitive skills and intellectual dispositions, occupational attainment, preparation for adulthood and citizenship, personal accomplishments, and personal development. Kuh, Kinzie, Schuh, and Whitt (2005) likewise expanded the dominant paradigm of student success to include more communal and psycho-social aspects while others consider satisfaction to be an optimum goal of student success (Curtis, 2020). More recently, Schreiner (2010b, 2010a) and Schreiner, Louis, and Nelson (2012) broadened the dominant student success paradigm to a more holistic approach that concerns one's engaged learning, diverse citizenship, social connectedness, positive perspective, and academic determination.

Within the Thriving literature, much research has been conducted on thriving among non-international students of color. There are four posited pathways to thriving concerning how non-international students of color specifically achieve thriving differently than White students: Psychological sense of community, institutional integrity, spirituality, and faculty interaction (Ash & Schreiner, 2016). For these students, spirituality, for example, is a more salient predictor of thriving than other experiences. Consideration of these four predictors of thriving among non-international students of color elucidates unique pathways, such as improving faculty sensitivity to the needs of diverse learners (Ash & Schreiner, 2016). In other words, when students feel that their experiences with faculty are that they are sensitive to diversity, the students are more likely to report a higher thriving score.

Across other marginalized populations, research has also documented some important findings with regard to thriving. Studies have found that academic determination and institutional integrity predicted thriving for high-risk students (Tharp, 2017) while mentoring and psychological sense of community were predictive of thriving among first-generation college students (Pothoven, 2015; Sparks, 2017). A significant volume of studies also suggest that psychological sense of community is predictive of thriving among diverse student subgroups such as low-income students, community college students, and Latinx students at Hispanic-serving institutions (Dy, 2017; Romero, 2016). Despite this robust research on pathways of thriving

amongst various marginalized populations in higher education, little is known about thriving of international college students.

**International College Student Success**

Some scholars have examined the challenges international college students face during their college years, and the research clearly indicates that culture, finances, and language are significant barriers to international students' academic and social success in postsecondary institutions in the North America (Andrade, 2006; Martirosyan, et al., 2015; McClure, 2007; Sherry et al., 2010; Smith, 2016; Yeh & Inose, 2003; Zhou, et al., 2008). However, much of this literature begins with a deficit model of success, viewing this population as lagging in certain characteristics that prohibit success, with some exceptions (Le et al., 2016; Sümer et al., 2008). Lee and Rice (2007), for example, challenge the pervasive idea that cultural adjustment, or an international student's inability to adjust, is the issue. Instead, they suggest that institutions in the United States bear the burden of responsibility; it is these institutions that have the inability to host international students, not the other way around. Similarly, Vasilopoulos (2016) warns against essentializing international student success into clearly linear relationships, as the complexity and unpredictability of ever-changing processes can affect the success of international students. Notwithstanding the deficit approach of most research on international students' success, there are three major themes in the literature concerning predictors of college success among international students: social connectedness, support, and confidence.

**Social Connectedness**

When international students indicate belonging on campus, they are more likely to succeed (Glass et al., 2015; Palmer, 2015). This sense of belonging or community is a widely articulated finding in student success literature, and appears to hold true for most measures of success among international students. Van Horne, Lin, Anson, and Jacobson (2018), for example, found that feelings of being welcomed and social satisfaction lead to a sense of belonging for international students at large research universities. At historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs), international students struggle to connect socially as they maintain their national and cultural identity while adjusting to racial expectations in the United States (Mwangi, 2016). International students of Asian cultural heritage also struggled to adjust to cultural differences and therefore had difficulty in building social connections (Yao, 2016). Still, some scholars see the value in international student cultural heritage as a cause of success, rather than as an

obstacle. Metro-Roland (2018), for example, found that developing a sense of community across national identity can lead to belonging and success. Similarly, participating in service-learning or volunteerism can help diverse international students identify common ground and build a sense of connection and belonging (Manguvo, et al., 2013). Regardless of institutional type and cultural heritage, the research generally agrees that when international students, like most other students, feel socially connected, they are more likely to succeed. There are unique challenges that international students face, such as cultural and linguistic adjustment; however, these challenges can also be a source of connection and belonging when there is a critical mass of international students on campus.

**Support**

If sense of belonging and connection leads to success, what leads to belonging and connection? A survey of the literature suggests that when international students feel supported, they are more likely to feel socially connected (Encinas & Ammigan, 2016; Tchoh & Mertan, 2018; Wolf & Phung, 2019). García et al. (2019) found, for example, that international students who are more socioacademically integrated tend to graduate and be retained at higher rates in community colleges. They explained that when international students feel supported socially and academically, they have a higher sense of belonging, which in turn leads to success. Further, when international students appreciate the support around them, they are more likely to feel that they have mastered their environment and surpassed the stressors that might have inhibited their success earlier in their arrival (Aldawsari et al., 2018). These findings challenge researchers and student affairs professionals to better understand the contours and complexities of supporting international students (Briggs & Ammigan, 2017; Madden-Dent et al., 2019).

As a part of the effort to better support international students, Smith (2016) devised a typology of support services that international students may require: academic, financial, health/wellness, sociocultural, transition, immigration, accommodation, and employment. Other support may include more specified services such as targeting writing support, family member programs, residential, and professional development or vocational support (Martirosyan et al., 2019; Montgomery, 2017). Other studies have also identified peer support as an important contributor of college success for interactional students (Lee, 2017; Luo et al., 2019). At the institutional level, Bai (2016) found that when international students perceive little to no academic, cultural, or moral support, they are more stressed.

**Confidence**

Social connectedness and support, including institutional and peer support, highlight the importance of community and institutional intervention in ensuring success among international students. However, there are individual characteristics in the literature that influence international students' success. An individual's characteristics are an incomplete predictor of success, as institutions still may structurally be inadequate at helping international students succeed (Nguyen, 2016). Nevertheless, research has shown that some individual characteristics may predict success for international college students. Brunsting, Smith, and Zachry (2018), for example, found that a specifically tailored transition course designed to improve international undergraduate students' intercultural skills increased students' self-efficacy and social connection, thus leading toward their success. Self-efficacy is a student's belief about their capacity of accomplishing a task (Zorkina & Nalbone 2003). As such, it is a referent of motivation and achievement, and has been found to predict success among many populations, including international students (Mostafa & Lim, 2020; Wang et al., 2018). Another characteristic, self-esteem, has also been shown to relate to social connection and support (Lopez & Bui, 2014). Lopez and Bui (2014) found that an international student's English language confidence predicted self-esteem, which influenced their success in colleges and universities.

Students' self-confidence, however, has been rarely studied in the literature on international college students; hence, scholars and practitioners need more studies on international students' self-confidence and its impact on their success. In sociocultural theory, self-confidence is a composite of self-efficacy and self-esteem (Bandura, 1977). Self-efficacy refers to one's belief that they can effectively accomplish a task or goal, or influence the events in one's life (Bandura, 1977) whereas self-esteem refers to one's belief that they are inherently worthy (Branden, 1969). Confidence, then, refers to a level of assurance in one's capacities (as opposed to abilities), judgments, and qualities (Bandura, 1977). The concept of self-confidence is much more difficult to evaluate because it is focused on the future based on the past, rather than one's efficacy or esteem in the present (Gebregergis, Mehari, Gebretinsae,& Tesfamariam, 2020). However, the well-documented positive relationship between academic self-confidence and academic success among international and other populations in universities and colleges (Lemoyne et al., 2017; Shoemaker, 2010; Stankov et al., 2012; Telbis et al., 2014; Wang et

al., 2018) warrants the examination of the role of academic self-confidence on thriving among international college students.

## CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

This study draws upon Astin's (1975, 1993) Input-Environment-Outcome (IEO) model. In this model, individual students bring various characteristics with them to college, the inputs. As these characteristics interact with the college or university environment, various outcomes can occur. For example, researchers often hypothesize that students' demographic variables (inputs) interplay with college environment (e.g., faculty interactions, peer interactions), resulting in a desired college outcome (thriving in this case). The authors understand there to be an importance of individual student characteristics interfacing with institutional and structural factors to produce certain outcomes. In this study, the authors conceive of "self-confidence" as an important input, students' experiences with community as part of the university "environment," and "thriving" as a key outcome. In essence, the authors focus on the investigation of the relationship between international students' academic self-confidence and their thriving, controlling for their input characteristics and institutional experience and environment.

## METHODS

### Data Source and Sample

This study used data from the 2017 Thriving Quotient. The Thriving Quotient is comprised of 24 survey items to measure students' thriving, which include academic, intrapersonal, and interpersonal aspects of student success (Schreiner, 2010a; 2010b). Specifically, the concept of thriving is captured by its five subscales in the survey instrument: engaged learning, diverse citizenship, academic determination, positive perspective, and social connectedness. The survey also includes a variety of other variables such as psychological sense of community, interaction with faculty, and quality of campus experience as well as student demographic and outcome variables. The survey was distributed in fall 2017 to domestic and international students across colleges and universities in the U.S. and Canada via Qualtrics. Institutions, who voluntarily registered to participate in the survey, randomly sampled their undergraduate students, and the survey was sent to this sample, resulting in 3,984 student respondents. Out of these respondents, 148 were international undergraduate students at fourteen institutions in the United States and Canada. These institutions consisted of nine public research universities and five private liberal arts colleges.

**Table 1**

*Demographic Compositions of International Student Sample (n =148)*

| Demographic Characteristic | n | % |
|---|---|---|
| Gender | | |
|    Male | 56 | 38.6 |
|    Female | 89 | 61.4 |
| Ethnic Heritage | | |
|    African | 22 | 14.9 |
|    First Nations | 3 | 2.0 |
|    Asian/Pacific Islander | 35 | 23.6 |
|    Caucasian | 25 | 16.9 |
|    Latinx/Hispanic | 39 | 26.4 |
|    Other | 20 | 13.5 |
|    Prefer not to respond | 4 | 2.7 |
| | | |
| Household Income | 58 | 39.7 |
|    < $30,000 | 54 | 37.0 |
|    $30,000 - $59,999 | 19 | 13.0 |
|    $60,000 - $89,999 | 9 | 6.2 |
|    $90,000 - $119,999 | 6 | 4.1 |
|    $120,000 + | | |
| Class Level | | |
|    First-year | 50 | 34.3 |
|    Sophomore | 37 | 25.3 |
|    Junior | 24 | 16.4 |
|    Senior | 29 | 19.9 |
|    Other | 6 | 4.1 |
| Enrollment Status | | |
|    Part-time | 17 | 11.56 |
|    Full-time | 129 | 88.4 |
| Residential Status | | |
|    On-campus | 77 | 67.5 |
|    Off-campus | 37 | 32.5 |
| First-generation College Student | | |
|    Yes | 49 | 33.1 |
|    No | 99 | 66.9 |
| Age | | |
|    < 17 | 6 | 4.1 |
|    18-20 | 73 | 49.7 |
|    21-23 | 42 | 28.6 |
|    24+ | 26 | 17.6 |
| | | |
| Transfer Student | | |
|    Yes | 25 | 16.9 |
|    No | 123 | 83.1 |

Table 1 demonstrates the descriptive statistics on demographic compositions of the international student sample (n = 148) of the study. The majority of students in this study identified as female (61.4%), non-first-generation (66.9%), lower income (76.7%), and full-time (88.4%). Students derived from across continents and were primarily in residence at their institution (67.5%). Overall, the sample was comprised primarily of students in their first or second year (59.6%) as well as students who lived on campus (67.5%).

**Variables**

The dependent variables of this study were students' overall thriving and its five subscales (i.e., engaged learning, diverse citizenship, academic determination, positive perspective, and social connectedness). The level of thriving was a factor scale and measured by the average score of its five subscales aforementioned. Table 2 displays indicators of five thriving subscales and an overall thriving factor scale.

**Table 2**
*Thriving Construct and Its Five Subscales*

| Factor Scale | Measures |
|---|---|
| *Academic Determination.* | *A composite measure comprised of six items (α = .83):* |
| | *a.  I am confident I will reach my educational goals* |
| | *b.  Even if assignments are not interesting to me, I find a way to keep working at them until they are done well,* |
| | *c.  I know how to apply my strengths to achieve academic success* |
| | *d.  I am good at juggling all the demands of college life* |
| | *e.  Other people would say I'm a hard worker* |
| | *f.  When I'm faced with a problem in my life, I can usually think of several ways to solve it* |
| *Engaged Learning.* | *A composite measure comprised of four items (α = .85):* |
| | *a.  I feel as though I am learning things in my classes that are worthwhile to me as a person* |
| | *b.  I can usually find ways of applying what I'm learning in class to something else in my life* |
| | *c.  I find myself thinking about what I'm learning in class even when I'm not in class* |
| | *d.  I feel energized by the ideas I am learning in most of my classes* |

*Positive*
*Perspective.*   *A composite measure comprised of two items (α = .83):*
  a.   *My perspective on life is that I tend to see the glass as "half full" rather than "half empty"*
  b.   *I look for the best in situations, even when things seem hopeless*
*Social*
*Connectedness.*        *A composite measure comprised of six items (α = .81):*
  a.   *Other people seem to make friends more easily than I do (reverse-scored)*
  b.   *I feel like my friends really care about me*
  c.   *I don't have as many close friends as I wish I had (reverse-scored)*
  d.   *I feel content with the kinds of friendships I currently have*
  e.   *I often feel lonely because I have few close friends with whom to share my concerns (reverse-scored)*
  f.   *It's hard to make friends on this campus (reverse-scored).*
*Diverse*
*Citizenship.*   *A composite measure comprised of six items (α = .80):*
  a.   *I spend time making a difference in other people's lives*
  b.   *I know I can make a difference in my community*
  c.   *I value interacting with people whose viewpoints are different from my own*
  d.   *It's important for me to make a contribution to my community*
  e.   *It is important to become aware of the perspectives of individuals from different backgrounds*
  f.   *My knowledge or opinions have been influenced or changed by becoming more aware of the perspectives of individuals from different backgrounds*
*Overall*
*Thriving*   *A composite measure comprised of the five subscales above (α = .81)*

Note*: Each individual item is measured on a 6-point scale: 1=strongly disagree to 6=strongly agree.*

Academic self-confidence is the primary independent variable in this study. Academic self-confidence is a composite measure and consists of three items that assess students' self-ratings on their academic ability: (1) I am confident that, if I wanted to, I could adjust the extent of my involvement in student organizations and leadership roles, (2) I am confident I will reach my educational goals, and (3) I am sure of my major. Table 3 displays the items and factor loadings for the academic self-confidence factor scale.

**Table 3**

*Factor Loadings and Reliability Estimate for Academic Self-Confidence Factor Scale*

| Item | Factor Loading | Cronbach's Alpha |
|---|---|---|
| Academic Self-Confidence | | .80 |
| I am confident that, if I wanted to, I could adjust the extent of my involvement in student organizations and leadership roles | .88 | |
| I am confident I will reach my educational goals | .73 | |
| I am sure of my major | .68 | |

*Note*. Sample size = 148

This study also includes some control variables including psychological sense of community, spirituality, and faculty interaction. The psychological sense of community derives from positive psychology and refers to a student's sense of belonging. This scale is comprised of four items: "I feel like I belong here," "Being a student here fills an important need in my life," "I feel proud of the college I have chosen to attend," and "There is a strong sense of community on this campus." The spirituality scale is comprised of three items: "My spiritual or religious beliefs provide me with a sense of strength when life is difficult," "My spiritual or religious beliefs give meaning and purpose to my life," and "My spiritual or religious beliefs are the foundation of my approach to life." The faculty interaction scale is comprised of several items regarding students' various encounters with their faculty: "Interaction with faculty outside of class," "Discussed career or grad school plans with faculty," "The amount of contact you have had with faculty this year," "The quality of the interaction you have had with faculty on this campus so far this year," "Faculty sensitivity to the needs of diverse learners," and "Faculty encouragement for students to contribute diverse perspectives in class discussions." The authors also utilized some student demographic variables (e.g., race, gender, and income) as control variables.

<center>**DATA ANALYSIS**</center>

To answer the authors' first research question, the authors utilized a set of independent-samples t-test to identify if there was a difference in the level of thriving between domestic and international college students. Creswell (2014) suggests that a t-test should be used to analyze mean difference between two groups. To answer the authors' second research question regarding the differences in the level of thriving across various students subgroups within the international student sample, the authors utilized a series of one-way ANOVAs with Tukey HSD post-hoc analysis, following Creswell's (2014) suggestion. Lastly, the authors used hierarchical multiple regression analysis to answer the authors' final research question regarding the effect of academic self-confidence on thriving among international students, following Creswell's (2014) best practice. For the regression analysis, the authors entered independent variables in three blocks. The first block consisted of student demographic variables including gender, income, and age variables. The second block consisted of college experience variables such as advising support, faculty interaction, psychological sense of community, and spirituality, while the third block consisted of the main independent variable of the study: the academic self-confidence factor.

<center>**RESULTS**</center>

**Level of Thriving for International and Domestic Students**

To assess differences in the level of thriving between international and domestic college students a set of independent-samples t-test was conducted. Table 4 summarizes the results of independent-samples tests, which answer the authors' initial research question. Results demonstrate that there is a significant difference in the mean thriving score between international and domestic students ($t(4,130) = -2.31, p < .05$). The results indicate that international students tend to thrive at lower levels ($M = 4.55$, $SD = .69$) than their domestic peers ($M = 4.68, SD = .63$). The effect size $d$ is .20, which is a small typical effect size. Two of the thriving subscales also rendered a significant difference: academic determination ($t(4,130) = -2.27, p < .05$) and diverse citizenship ($t(4,130) = -2.24, p < .05$). Results again demonstrated that international students thrive at statistically lower levels than their domestic counterparts in these two sub-areas of thriving.

**Table 4**

*Comparison of International and Domestic Students on Thriving*

| Item | International | | | Domestic | | | $t$ | $df$ | $p$ | Cohen's $d^a$ |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Mean | SD | $n$ | Mean | SD | $n$ | | | | |
| Overall Thriving | 4.55 | .69 | 148 | 4.68 | .63 | 3,984 | -2.31* | 4,130$^b$ | .021 | .20 |
| Social Connectedness | 4.02 | .96 | 148 | 4.11 | 1.03 | 3,984 | -1.05 | 4,130$^b$ | .293 | .09 |
| Academic Determination | 4.74 | .91 | 148 | 4.88 | .76 | 3,984 | -2.27* | 4,130$^b$ | .023 | .17 |
| Diverse Citizenship | 4.76 | .75 | 147 | 4.89 | .69 | 3,984 | -2.24* | 4,129$^b$ | .025 | .18 |
| Engaged Learning | 4.69 | 1.11 | 148 | 4.83 | .92 | 3,984 | -1.74 | 4,130$^b$ | .082 | .20 |
| Positive Perspective | 4.60 | 1.03 | 147 | 4.68 | 1.01 | 3,977 | -1.03 | 4,122$^b$ | .305 | .08 |

$^a$ $d$ is a measure of effect-size and was calculated using t-values.
$^b$ Equal variances were assumed.
*Note*: Sample size: international students = 148; domestic students = 3,984
$^*$ $p < .05$

## Different Level of Thriving within International Students

The authors also examined how the level of thriving differs across various subgroups of the authors' international student sample and Table 5 displays the results to answer the authors' second research question. Results showed that there were no significant differences between male and female international students for any of the thriving measures. However, there was a significant effect of race/ethnicity on the level of overall thriving, social connectedness subscale, and the academic determination subscale. Tukey HSD post-hoc tests also revealed that the difference in such thriving measures

**Table 5**

*Differences in the Level of Thriving across Subgroups within International Students (M and SD)*

| Student Subgroup | Thriving Average | SC | AD | DC | EL | PP |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Gender** | | | | | | |
| Male | 4.54 | 4.05 | 4.71 | 4.75 | 4.69 | 4.65 |
| | (.60) | (.90) | (.89) | (.59) | (1.17) | (1.00) |
| Female | 4.59 | 4.00 | 4.80 | 4.79 | 4.76 | 4.60 |
| | (.74) | (1.02) | (.89) | (.84) | (1.02) | (1.03) |
| $F(\eta^2)$ | .184 | .09 | .37 | .08 | .14 | .02 |
| | (.001) | (.001) | (.003) | (.001) | (.001) | (.001) |
| **Ethnic Heritage** | | | | | | |
| Black | 4.69 | 4.04 | 5.03 | 4.81 | 4.89 | 4.68 |
| | (.83) | (.83) | (1.12) | (1.01) | (1.10) | (1.13) |
| Indigenous | 3.82 | 3.80 | 3.61 | 4.09 | 3.25 | 4.33 |
| | (.79) | (.48) | (1.27) | (.80) | (1.39) | (.76) |
| Asian | 4.20 | 3.57 | 4.27 | 4.50 | 4.42 | 4.21 |
| | (.56) | (.85) | (.90) | (.64) | (1.25) | (1.03) |
| Caucasian | 4.70 | 4.09 | 4.27 | 4.72 | 5.06 | 4.58 |
| | (.72) | (1.06) | (.90) | (.85) | (.98) | (1.22) |
| Latinx | 4.71 | 4.27 | 4.89 | 4.88 | 4.66 | 4.90 |
| | (.64) | (1.11) | (.74) | (.63) | (1.09) | (.74) |
| Other | 4.72 | 4.29 | 4.92 | 4.97 | 4.84 | 4.61 |
| | (.42) | (.66) | (.39) | (.54) | (.69) | (1.11) |
| Prefer not to respond | 4.64 | 3.63 | 4.67 | 5.21 | 4.94 | 4.75 |
| | (.41) | (1.03) | (.56) | (.63) | (.55) | (.65) |
| $F(\eta^2)$ | 3.43** | 2.19* | 4.06** | 1.78 | 1.99 | 1.47 |
| | (.13) | (.086) | (.148) | (.078) | (.078) | (.059) |
| **Household Income** | | | | | | |
| <$30,000 | 4.60 | 3.97 | 4.83 | 4.78 | 4.66 | 4.79 |
| | (.72) | (.92) | (.97) | (.82) | (1.23) | (.93) |
| $30,000-$59,999 | 4.61 | 4.03 | 4.74 | 4.76 | 4.81 | 4.72 |
| | (.69) | (1.13) | (.85) | (.64) | (.95) | (.95) |
| $60,000-$89,999 | 4.37 | 3.93 | 4.67 | 4.66 | 4.64 | 3.94 |
| | (.44) | (.73) | (.62) | (.65) | (1.06) | (4.42) |

| Student Subgroup | Thriving Average | SC | AD | DC | EL | PP |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| $90,000-$119,999 | 4.73 | 4.33 | 4.80 | 5.24 | 4.67 | 4.61 |
| | (.51) | (.83) | (1.06) | (.46) | (1.40) | (.96) |
| $120,000+ | 4.00 | 4.10 | 4.20 | 3.87 | 4.35 | 3.50 |
| | (.96) | (.73) | (1.00) | (1.33) | (.84) | (1.54) |
| $F (\eta^2)$ | 1.506 | .310 | .631 | 2.872* | .305 | 4.35** |
| | (.041) | (.009) | (.018) | (.076) | (.009) | (.110) |
| **Class Standing** | | | | | | |
| First-year | 4.60 | 4.03 | 4.77 | 4.70 | 4.75 | 4.74 |
| | (.72) | (1.04) | (.98) | (.85) | (1.18) | (1.00) |
| Sophomore | 4.43 | 3.92 | 4.73 | 4.58 | 4.60 | 4.30 |
| | (.67) | (1.03) | (.76) | (.70) | (.95) | (1.06) |
| Junior | 4.50 | 4.00 | 4.63 | 4.84 | 4.68 | 4.48 |
| | (.68) | (.78) | (.97) | (.66) | (1.05) | (1.11) |
| Senior | 4.63 | 4.19 | 4.63 | 4.97 | 4.62 | 4.76 |
| | (.69) | (.93) | (.99) | (.71) | (1.32) | (.88) |
| Other | 4.87 | 3.97 | 5.19 | 4.89 | 5.04 | 5.25 |
| | (.52) | (.99) | (.68) | (.71) | (.68) | (.82) |
| $F (\eta^2)$ | .818 | .318 | .561 | 1.29 | .270 | 1.972 |
| | (.023) | (.009) | (.016) | (.035) | (.008) | (.053) |
| **Enrollment Status** | | | | | | |
| Part-time | 4.45 | 3.95 | 4.50 | 4.56 | 4.53 | 4.71 |
| | (.66) | (.75) | (.85) | (.66) | (1.44) | (.66) |
| Full-time | 4.59 | 4.03 | 4.79 | 4.79 | 4.74 | 4.60 |
| | (.68) | (.99) | (.89) | (.76) | (1.05) | (1.05) |
| $F (\eta^2)$ | .612 | .088 | 1.561 | 1.37 | .535 | .172 |
| | (.004) | (.001) | (.011) | (.009) | (.004) | (.001) |
| **Residential Status** | | | | | | |
| Off-campus | 4.60 | 3.95 | 4.72 | 4.89 | 4.74 | 4.72 |
| | (.77) | (1.09) | (.91) | (.85) | (1.10) | (1.10) |
| On-campus | 4.50 | 3.95 | 4.70 | 4.75 | 4.64 | 4.47 |
| | (.57) | (.89) | (.84) | (.61) | (1.10) | (.99) |
| $F (\eta^2)$ | .610 | .001 | .017 | 1.044 | .180 | 1.462 |
| | (.005) | (.000) | (.000) | (.009) | (.002) | (.013) |

| Student Subgroup | Thriving Average | SC | AD | DC | EL | PP |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Aggregate Sample | 4.55 (.69) | 4.02 (.96) | 4.74 (.91) | 4.76 (.75) | 4.69 (1.11) | 4.60 (1.03) |

*p < .05, **p < .01

Note: SC = social connectedness; AD = academic determination; DC = diverse citizenship; EL= engaged learning; PP = positive perspective. Sample size = 148.

mostly occurred between Asian and other racial groups. Also, there was a significant effect of household income on diverse citizenship and positive perspective subscales. In contrast, there were no significant differences on any thriving measures depending on students' class level, enrollment status, and residential status.

**Table 6**

*The Effect of Academic Self-Confidence on Thriving among International Students*

| Variables Entered | Thriving Outcomes | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Thriving | SC | AD | DC | EL | PP |
| SOC | | | | | -.089 | |
| Wealthier | | | | | | -.167* |
| PSC | .319*** | .121 | .333*** | .284*** | .263*** | .209** |
| Faculty | .182** | | .014 | .229** | .185** | |
| Spirituality | .162** | | | .228** | | .565*** |
| Confidence | .383*** | .205* | .509*** | .227** | .419*** | |
| Adjusted $R^2$ | .62 | .07 | .54 | .49 | .51 | .36 |

* p < .05,
** p < .01,
***p < .001

*Note*: SC = social connectedness; AD = academic determination; DC = diverse citizenship; EL= engaged learning; PP = positive perspective; SOC = students of color; Wealthier = wealthier students; PSC = psychological sense of community; Faculty = faculty interaction; Spirituality = spirituality index; Confidence = academic self-confidence. Sample size = 148.

**The Effects of Academic Self-Confidence on Thriving**

After identifying that international students thrive at statistically lower levels than domestic students and after finding a variety of effects of race and income on various outcomes associated with the thriving score, the authors sought to examine the relationship between academic self-confidence and thriving among international college students as part of the authors' third research question. Results of hierarchical multiple regression analysis indicated that academic self-confidence had a significant, positive effect on international students' overall thriving even after controlling for the confounding effects of student input characteristics and other college experiences (ß = .38, p < .001). This result suggests that international students who are more academically confident in themselves tend to thrive at higher rates. The results also showed that academic self-confidence had a significant, positive effect on most of the thriving subscales: social connectedness (ß = .21, p < .05), academic determination (ß = .51, p < .001), engaged learning (ß = .42, p < .01), and diverse citizenship (ß = .23, p < .01).

**DISCUSSION**

The findings of this study prompt important points of consideration that mirror, challenge, and enhance existing findings in the literature. In recent years, scholars have increasingly realized that higher education institutions and their members should adapt to different demographics of college students (Güzel & Glazer, 2019). Earlier deficit-minded approaches to college student success assumed that lack of success was a student's fault, which inherently exonerated institutions from responsibility (Clycq Nouwen & Vanderbroucke, 2014). Although institutions certainly hinder or help international students succeed, this study evidences the weight that an individual student's self-confidence has a significant impact on their thriving. An international student's self-confidence in reaching their educational goals, for example, may meet several uncontrollable challenges on the way to graduation (Bai, 2016); however, when international students' self-confidence remains throughout college, they are more likely to thrive.

In the literature, scholars seem to emphasize the importance of community and social connectedness for international students (Mwangi, 2016; Van Horne, Lin, Anson, and Jacobson, 2018; Yao, 2016). Our findings mirror previous studies and theories, suggesting that psychological sense of community and social connectedness are two of the most highly reliable estimates of a student's success, particularly international students in a new context and culture. Glass et al. (2015) and Van et al. (2018), for example, found that positive student-faculty interactions led to international students'

sense of belonging and success. Palmer (2015) highlighted how linguistic and cultural challenges can inhibit a sense of belonging. Though the authors' research did not specifically address experience with faculty or campus climate, these findings would still support that establishing a positive environment for international students leads to a sense of connection, which in turn can influence thriving for international students (Shane, Carson, & Macri, 2020). In contrast to Mwangi (2016) and Yao (2016), the authors' findings suggest that even when international students encounter challenging cultural, linguistic, and even racist environments, their self-confidence can still guide their ability to thrive (Ma, 2020).

Some scholars have previously identified the importance of other internal characteristics for international student success. Typically, however, these scholars highlight international students' language abilities or students' confidence in English as predictive of success (Lopez & Bui, 2014). Other scholars have considered the importance of self-efficacy (Gebregergis et al., 2020). Wang, et al., (2018) suggest that self-efficacy is an index of motivation and achievement. However, self-efficacy is also merely an indicator of one's belief about one's *ability* to accomplish tasks, in this case academic tasks (Shoemaker, 2010). It has been found to actually overinflate success, and has many negative conditions, such as narcissism and self-aggrandizement (Baumeister, 1996). In fact, longitudinal meta-analyses of self-efficacy have long indicated that the variable has at best a questionable correlation with educational success (Hansford & Hattie, 1982). Lopez and Bui (2014), in their reflections on language confidence, distinguish self-efficacy from self-esteem, the latter of which refers to one's believe in their inherent value and can also predict success. However, some research has indicated that self-esteem, as well as self-concept and self-efficacy, is not as strong a predictor of success as self-confidence (Stankov et al., 2012).

Self-confidence, in contrast to self-efficacy and self-esteem, is a more general referent of one's confidence in their *capacity* to succeed, beyond accomplishing tasks. It is more of a holistic measure that may include elements of self-esteem and self-efficacy. Zorkina and Nalbone (2003) highlighted the importance of academic confidence, as opposed to esteem and efficacy, by dividing groups of college students into two induced groups, high-confidence and low-confidence. The high-confidence group was told they were taking a test for high school students, while the low-confidence group was told they were taking the same test, but it was for Ivy League students. The high-confidence induced group scored statistically higher than the low confidence group. Following this study and Telbis et al. (2014), this

study similarly indicates that international students' self-confidence, which is a student's belief in their capacity to succeed, leads to thriving.

## IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Our findings suggest that when international students are academically more confident they tend to thrive at higher rates. The individual characteristic of confidence is a small yet significant part of building students' capacity to thriving in the midst of a campus environment that promotes a sense of community. If confidence is an internal construct or input, what might student affairs practitioners, faculty, or other higher education professionals *do* to ensure international students' self-confidence and thriving? How can higher education institutions help shape international students' self-confidence? Informed by the findings of this study, the authors provide recommendations to student affairs practitioners, faculty, and institutions.

First, student affairs practitioners are extremely important in helping students build confidence, which can lead to thriving. For example, student activities and multicultural mentoring programs provide the space for colleges and universities to proactively build confidence through building strong relationships and cultural orientation. Here, it is of utmost importance to understand the difference between self-efficacy and confidence. Self-efficacy is domain-specific; an international student's self-efficacy is inevitably related to their academic success. However, thriving as an outcome is broader than merely GPA or graduation attainment. Thus, international student affairs professionals can help build confidence in all areas of life, including, but not limited to, a student's academic success, sense of efficacy, and even vis-à-vis their family (Grimm et al., 2019). Thriving includes measures for positive thinking, social connectedness, engaged learning, diverse citizenship, and academic determination. Student affairs practitioners have an important responsibility in helping international students build confidence relationally and psychologically. Relationally, international student support groups provide spaces for students from other countries to bond because of the differences. Facilitating opportunities to connect with one another, such as through mentoring or group facilitation activities, provides a level of social support that is interrelated to one's individual confidence (Shane et al., 2020). Psychologically, student affairs professionals can encourage positive thinking and reflection; rewards and celebrations acknowledge accomplishments that are stepping stones to success (Poyrazli & Mitchell, 2020).

Second, faculty are instrumental in helping students of all kinds succeed and thrive. Their influence in and out of the classroom as kind,

encouraging, and confidence-building leaders, educators, and mentors, for example, has a palpable impact on international student thriving. Yet many faculty at colleges and universities are not trained in student success and cultural humility. One important recommendation on building confidence for international students by faculty derives from language acquisition educational theory. Importantly, as many international students are learning English, this theory appropriately addresses language acquisition but can also be applied to other forms of confidence-building in the classroom. Krashen's (1982) Input Hypothesis refers to a language learners' ability to understand meaning, though they might not understand all individual words or full syntax. Educators, then, can develop curriculum that builds meaning and reduces stress through comprehensible input, which allows students to understand and learn, but also be challenged to learn more (input + 1) (Lin, Su, & McElwain, 2019; Ma, 2020). For language learners, teachers must modify their language so that students can understand. For international students, comprehensible input may mean that when faculty use certain metaphors, phrases, or language, meaning is obscured, hindering international student academic success. Faculty may need to allow international students the time to think and articulate, as even an initial sense of failure can produce a lack of confidence (Billeter, Kalra, & Loewenstein, 2010). Beyond language, however, faculty interactions with international students may hinder their success when these interactions are not comprehensible. Advising in North America, for example, may be a foreign experience that may not convey meaning to an international student; miscommunication and misunderstanding is bound to happen when interacting with students from other cultures. Importantly, faculty can make the effort to learn their students' cultural background to try and accommodate their unique needs and learning styles (Ma, 2020). When international students feel like their classroom experiences and other interactions with faculty are positive, they may build confidence, which will help them thrive.

Third, at the institutional level, administrators also have an important responsibility in developing international student confidence. There are many challenges that can deflate an international student, including visa, financial, and health concerns, among others (Hunter-Johnson & Niu, 2019). Removing obstacles, or minimally providing kind customer support, can build a student's confidence as they navigate foreign institutional norms. For example, staff, in particular, should be trained in customer interaction with students of different cultures. International students should also know what resources are available at the institution, such as counseling or health centers (Chen et al., 2020). Many international students may not be familiar with

departments and resources on-campus and they may also need assistance becoming accustomed to new cultural forms of support. Institutions may also need to better adjust their own services—such as providing multicultural counselors or therapists that specialize in international student concerns (Chen et al., 2020). Further, those that are available and known may not be accommodating for international students; in fact, they may be structurally setup to prohibit international students from participating (Ma, 2020). In order to help build international students' confidence, which can lead to their success and thriving, institutions and administrators are responsible for removing roadblocks and building students' sense of confidence.

## LIMITATIONS

This study has some limitations. First, there was a surprisingly higher number of low- income international students in the authors' data. Given common understanding that international student families are paying in-full for tuition, these findings may not be generalizable to international college students who came from higher earning families. Another limitation is that while there are some important student support variables for international students such as wellness support and family/peer support, these variables were not available in the authors' dataset. Lastly, international students' citizenship country was not collected in the survey, and therefore data could not be disaggregated based on regions or cultural heritage of the study's participants.

## CONCLUSION

Conclusively, in light of these recommendations, implications, and limitations, further research is needed to elucidate more nuanced aspects of thriving for international students. In particular, identifying student region or citizenship, language, and English-speaking status would further integrate the thriving literature to the international student success literature. Likewise, additional metrics of support, such as how students feel supported by their families back home, would develop a support construct that may affect international students' thriving, among other success metrics. Despite these limitations and the need for further research, this study provides a salient contribution to the thriving literature and the international student success literature. The study expands definition of success for international students to thriving and shows that self-confidence has a significant effect on thriving and success for international students.

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# Demographic and Metacognitive Variations among Female University Students in the Arabian Gulf

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## ABSTRACT

*This study examined the presence of significant associations among demographics (i.e., monthly income and the number of family members) and metacognition (i.e., understanding pictures representing real-life situations and objects) between two groups (N = 112) of female university students with and without niqab (i.e., only the eyes were visible). It also explored if there were significant differences between the two groups in metacognition. Participants responded to a computerized metacognitive instrument. Correlation results revealed that the females who wore niqab were significantly and more likely to have more family members and less income when compared with the females without niqab. ANOVA analysis showed no significant differences between the students with and without niqab on the metacognitive test, in reaction time (i.e.,duration in seconds), and on the metacognitive test scores divided by the mean of the reaction times. Implications and limitations are discussed.*

**Keywords:** demographics, females, metacognition, niqab, university students

## INTRODUCTION

**M**any research studies (Al-Hilawani, 2006, 2016, 2018a) used the concept of metacognition (Flavell, 1978) or the ability to think about how one thinks to examine individual differences in daily-life interactions among various groups of individuals. Traditionally, the research formats of examining metacognition are self-report, observation, think-aloud, interviews, performance rating, and diaries (Al-Hilawani, 2000, 2018b). Al-Hilawani, Easterbrooks, and Marchant (2002) extended the use of this concept by focusing on the understanding of one's ability to develop and understand the mental states and interpretations of events and, by extension, the mental states and intentions of others that are based on those mental states (Bartsch & Estes, 1996) which is also called the Theory of Mind. Al-Hilawani et al. (2002) stated that in metacognition, the mind is the connection between the outside world and the individuals' reactions to it. They added that mental states like perceptions, intentions, emotions, desires, remembering, and thoughts are all initiated in the mind. The task of metacognition is to deduce and infer the thoughts of others and predict their behaviors where consciousness, social interactions, and experiences play a major role. Al-Hilawani et al. conceptualized metacognition in this context as simultaneous mental processing which refers to processing concurrently through the sense of vision all the elements or features of the viewed images compared to sequential and step-by-step processing as the case with linguistic processing. Individuals perform simultaneous mental processing via visual-spatial perception to explain and account for significant differences in visual analyses and discrimination of daily-life interactions (Al-Hilawani, 2003, 2006, 2008). Al-Hilawani (2003) indicated that this kind of analysis and discrimination is important for exploring individual differences in making predictions, acquiring knowledge, conducting effective interpersonal communication, and behaving and responding intelligently to events in one's environment.

Accurate analyses and interpretations are not enough for individuals to function effectively in their surrounding environment. Effective functioning depends also on their reaction time to events that could affect social interactions because individuals who are slow in responding to demands, requests, and/ or social cues may face negative consequences (Al-Hilawani, 2016). Initially, reaction time was studied with reference to students' intelligence quotient (IQ). Research shows that there is a correlation between reaction time and IQ; individuals with a high ability processed information faster than those with a low ability (Bates & Stough, 1998). Reaction time was also examined in college students' emotional states. Studying undergraduate college students revealed that subjecting these students to social exclusion led to emotional distress and slow reaction

time to the presented stimuli. Twenge, Catanese, and Baumeister (2003) reported that undergraduate students who were rejected by their peers exhibited a slower reaction time when compared with socially accepted students, who were more accurate in their estimation of the elapsed time, in a reaction time game. Social rejection affected executive functioning by slowing down responses to unfamiliar tasks but not automatic responses to familiar ones.

One approach to measuring metacognition as a simultaneous mental process is visual analyses of real-life pictures (Al-Hilawani, 2006). When implementing this approach, the individual chooses a response from the presented options to indicate which choice is the best explanation of what is being depicted (Al-Hilawani et al., 2002). This direction to metacognition makes it connected with the concept of intelligence (Al-Hilawani & Abdullah, 2010; Al-Hilawani, 2018a) and with the visual perception which transforms visual inputs into an accurate understanding and representation of the surrounding environment (Eysenck & Keane, 2003). Consequently, it becomes partially feasible in this context to explore the use of metacognition to account for group differences by examining exposure to different instituted cultural models that vary from one society to another and influence, at the same time, the individuals' learning and consciousness (Hollan, 2000). Al-Hilawani (2014) reported that cultural differences in interpreting daily life events and situation (i.e., metacognition in real-life situations) could be attributed to variables including knowledge of events and behaviors, familiarity with the nuances that accompany these events and behaviors, and the time needed to process and reflect on the distinctive features of events, behaviors, and actions. Al-Hilawani added that taking time to reflect and process information is a trait introduced to individuals by others like teachers and family members during social interactions in which individuals are urged to think before they act. Overall, variations in understanding and interpreting behaviors and nuances are reduced but not completely vanished when cognitively capable individuals live in the same community (Hollan, 2000). Living in the same community allows social mediation and interaction to affect the mind, shape action, and influence the interpretations of actions and events (Gauvain, 1998) in a way that inter-individual differences are reduced but not necessarily eliminated because perception and exposure to instituted cultural models are not the same for any two persons even when living and/or being raised in the same community. Dweck, Chiu, and Hong (1995) revealed, in their presentation of a model which explained individual differences, that people's implicit theories and beliefs about human attributes, not to mention cognitive abilities, play a role in the way people interpret, analyze, understand, and react to the actions and outcomes of events and behaviors. Therefore, exploring the association among variables related to any phenomenon (e.g.,

metacognitive and demographic variables) might vary when studying groups of individuals with defining traits who are living in the same community.

Consistent with the notion those individual differences in beliefs and interpretations can be present in all aspects of life within and between societies, the author conducted this brief exploratory study to examine differences in metacognition, as related to the perception that leads to varying behaviors in daily-life interaction, and demographics between female participants who are wearing and not wearing a niqab (i.e., a face veil where only the eyes are visible and it is worn with an abaya, a long black gown). The author also conducted this study to find if there were significant associations, based on whether or not the participants were wearing the niqab, among the following study variables: Metacognitive test score (which refers to the correct interpretations of the visually presented stimuli), the time the participants took to respond to the presented stimuli known as reaction time, the correct responses calculated based on the mean reaction time known as the metacognitive test score based on the item mean reaction time to each test items, monthly income, and the number of family members.

Searching the literature revealed that the type of attire and headdress affects perceptions and behaviors when examined within the context of the mind and internal interpretations to appreciate and enlighten how humans transform stimuli received and perceived through the visual system into overt behaviors (Eysenck & Keane, 2003; Margolis, 1987). Kret and deGelder (2012) reported that fear was recognized fastest by a white European sample when facial expressions were partly hidden by a niqab (i.e., only the eyes were visible) and that cap and scarf headdresses were associated with happiness. Other studies examined the metacognitive beliefs about beauty, body appearance, and attractiveness between female participants who were wearing hijab (i.e., the whole face was visible), niqab, and those who were not. For example, Swami, Miah, Noorani, and Taylor (2014) found that body image among women wearing the hijab was more positive than that of women not wearing the hijab. They did not value appearance as much as women not wearing the hijab, and they had low acceptance of media massages about beauty standards. Đurović, Tiosavljević, and Šabanović (2016) reported that females who wore the hijab were considerably less pressured to attain the western standards of beauty and had the highest level of body satisfaction even though they had the highest body weight compared to Muslim adolescent girls who did not wear hijab and followed Western-influenced fashion trends. Finally, Kertechian and Swami (2016) mentioned that women who wore hijab reported considerably lesser weight discrepancy, body dissatisfaction, drive for thinness, and social appearance anxiety and pressure to thin ideals than those who did not.

It is hypothesized in this brief research, based on the apparent differences between females who wore the niqab and those who did not, that

females who wore the niqab had more family members but less income compared with the females without niqab. The author stated this hypothesis even though both groups were born in the same geographical area and regarded proper citizens of the same country. It is also hypothesized that no significant differences would exist - contrary to the literature reviewed above which focused on matters including attractiveness and body appearance (being measured subjectively from the participants' point of view as opposed to being measured objectively) - between the two groups (i.e., with and without niqab) in metacognition (i.e., interpreting via visual perception varying real-life situations) because it is associated with intelligence (Al-Hilawani, 2018a; Wagner, 2000). However, compared with intelligence, metacognition is considered, in this research, a process that relies on the individual's visual analyses and discriminations and regarded a private psychological process that is more likely to be enhanced and advanced through incidental learning if or when no direct coaching is involved. Metacognition, in this case, is amenable to instruction and influenced by experiences. At the same time, it converges with other traits linked to abilities needed for developing expertise to perform accurate prediction, monitor one's self, reach appropriate solutions, automatize steps and procedures to deal with the encountered issues, and possess and acquire vast knowledge in a given domain (Sternberg, 1998).

## RESEARCH METHOD

**Participants**

The participants in this study were 114 native female undergraduates who were born and raised in the same country and held its nationality (mean age = 20.38 years; SD = 1.70 years; age range = 17.44 to 25.84 years; n =112; the author deleted two cases due to missing information). They were students at a local university in the Arabian Gulf region in the Middle East. The participants had normal (n=95) or corrected-to-normal vision (n=19) when asked about their visual acuity and were not on any kind of medication before taking the test. They represented the colleges of Education (n = 77), Law (n = 2), Arts (n = 8), Science (n = 13), Engineering (n = 2), Allied Health Science (n = 7), and Social Science (n = 3). There were 29 students with niqab (mean age = 20.23 years; SD = 1.70 years; age range = 17.57 to 24.28 years) and 83 students without niqab (mean age = 20.44 years; SD = 1.73 years; age range = 17.44 to 25.84 years). There were 29 freshmen, 35 sophomores, 30 juniors, and 18 seniors.

**Instrumentation**

The author used in this study the test of metacognition in real-life situations (Al-Hilawani, Dashti, & Abdullah, 2008). This test was in a picture form and based on the work of Wellman and Gelman (1992) who

presented three foundational knowledge domains that individuals probably used to gain certain knowledge. These three knowledge domains constituted usually the bases for later conceptual acquisitions. They were naïve physics, naïve psychology, and naïve biology. Examples of these domains, as reported in Al-Hilawani et al's (2008) study, included internal mental states such as desire, sadness, pain, fear, anger, disgust, surprise, and happiness which represented the naïve psychology domain; cause-effect relationships and understanding the identification, classification, and transformation of physical objects represented the naïve physics domain; and identifying and understanding the processes of organic growth, reproduction, inheritance, classification, eating and sleeping, and illness and death represented the naïve biology domain.

Al-Hilawani and colleagues searched the internet and Master Clips unlimited (1990-1998) to find adequate images to represent the above three domains. The Master Clips unlimited is a collection of over 303, 000 photos and images grouped into main categories and subcategories including plants, animals, people, objects, cartoons, transportations, military, and home. This process yielded 28 test items each of which consisted of a target picture and four options of pictures. One of the four options was the correct choice because it matched with or related directly to the target picture. The 28 questions comprised 12 test items representing the biology domain, 7 test items representing the physics domain, and 9 test items representing the psychology domain.

Al-Hilawani and colleagues piloted the tool in paper form with four faculty members in the college of education. They informed the reviewers that the purpose of the instrument was to measure the students' knowledge of real-life problems and situations as well as their reasoning and problem-solving skills. They asked each reviewer to comment on the clarity as well as the relationship between each target picture and the assigned four choices and indicate whether the target picture matched with or related appropriately to the correct option. This piloting process yielded a 71 % agreement. The reviewers commented on 8 out of 28 items by stating that some target pictures had more than one correct option and that some options were unclear and confusing. The authors addressed all the reviewers' comments by going back to the internet and Master Clips to search for new pictures to replace the ones in question. When finished replacing these pictures, the authors asked the same four reviewers to comment again on the newly modified instrument to determine if their comments and suggestions were implemented satisfactorily. This second round of the piloting process yielded 100% agreement that there was only one correct answer among the four options that reflected correctly the relationship with the target picture and that the other three options functioned appropriately as distractors.

The paper version of the metacognition test was then transformed into an electronic one using an IMB compatible desktop computer preinstalled with Microsoft programs. The screen resolution was set at 800 x 600 pixels for clarity of the images displayed. The author used this computerized tool to present the test content and measure accurately the students' reaction time (which refers in this study to the duration of a test item on the computer screen for the maximum of one minute. A portion of this reaction time is called inspection time (which refers to the period that is required by a participant to process accurately the presented information) which is a factor that underlies performance on the tests of intelligence (Deary & Stough, 1996). Reaction time and inspection time are inseparable and are intertwined in this current study).

The 28 test items presented randomly and in a counterbalanced manner to each participating student. Each test item was timed to appear on the computer screen for one minute. If the student did not select within the one-minute period one of the four options as an answer to the presented picture, the next test item would appear immediately on the computer screen. The maximum time allowed to complete this test was 30 minutes: 28 minutes for the actual test and 2 minutes for the two trial exercises. The computer program assigned one point to each test question answered correctly. Thus, the maximum possible score that any student could receive was 28 out of 28.

The author found when examining the reliability of this instrument that three items did not correlate significantly with the total score; but they were not excluded from the analyses. The correlation of these items with the total score was .10, .13, and .17. The rest of the items correlated significantly with the total score; their correlation ranged from .19 to .53. The 28 items yielded a reliability coefficient (alpha) of .73. Previous research with university students from the Arabian Gulf region showed that this instrument had a reliability coefficient (alpha) of .74 when used with male and female university students (Al-Hilawani, 2016) and .83 alpha when administered to elementary school students (Al-Hilawani, 2014).

Because responding appropriately to items on the constructed instrument depended on the individual's ability to perform visual analyses of the presented pictures in terms of similarities and differences in themes and contents, the author expected those older and more able participants with much experience to perform better than the individuals who were not as revealed in previous studies. These studies showed that the performance on metacognitive tools was influenced by the participants' age (Al-Hilawani, 2003, 2014). Therefore, a ceiling effect was expected when dealing with more capable and older participants who would probably answer correctly every item included in the instrument (Al-Hilawani, 2016). Overall, using pictures to embody these three domains was appropriate for representing various types of information, including illustrating intentions (Bloom &

Markson, 1998), whether or not they were presented to young or older participants.

This study collected information not only on the participants' correct responses and how much time they took to choose an answer but also on whether the correct response to each item on the test was influenced by the mean of the reaction time to that item. Therefore, the author calculated 28 means of reaction time and used them as benchmarks to decide whether a participant should receive a zero point or one point for each of the 28 test items when the selected option was correct. If the response was correct and fell at or below the calculated mean of the reaction time, the computer assigned one point for responding to that item. If the response was wrong or was correct but exceeded the assigned mean of the reaction time designated to that item, the computer gave a zero point for that particular item. Finally, the author collected additional data on each participant which included age, number of family members, and monthly income.

**Procedures**

The author of this study obtained all necessary approvals from the university research ethics committee as well as from each participant to conduct this study. The author informed all students enrolled in his classes that he was looking for volunteers to participate in this brief exploratory study. The announcement stated that each student agreed to take part in this study may visit the author's office to sign a consent form, fill out needed demographic and health data, and then respond to items in the form of pictures presented on a computer screen. The author did not disclose nor did he provide details on the nature of pictures that the students would be seeing on the computer screen.

The author administered the test to all participating students following steps reported in previous research (Al-Hilawani et al., 2008; Al-Hilawani & Abdullah, 2010). The data collection began by administering the two training test items followed by the actual test items. Each participant sat at a table in the line of sight of the computer screen which was set at 40 centimeters away from each participant.

The author began each testing session by administering the two training test items followed by the actual test items. One training test item involved presenting on the computer screen a target picture (i.e., an apple) and four options (i.e., two kittens, three bananas, an open book, and a robot). The author asked each participant to point to the option that was related to or matched with the target picture. The second training test item depicted a target picture of a red circle and then the options of three red triangles and a red circle. The author also asked each participant to point to the shape that was related to or matched with the target picture. When students selected the best option out of the four available pictures in each one of the two training

test items, the author clicked on that option with the mouse to store the response. When students finished taking the two-trail exercises, they proceeded to take the actual test.

While the two training items appeared easy and straight forward, the actual test items were more difficult and required accurate analyses and interpretations to find the right answer. The following two examples represented the psychology domain: A picture was selected to show a robber holding a sack of money in his hand along with four other pictures one of which showed the consequence of such act (i.e., being behind bars). The second example showed a drawing of a scared man holding a bedcover up close to his eyes and the four options of pictures one of which showed a masked man pointing a gun.

The author entered the students' answers into the computer to control for unnecessary time variations, inconsistent data entry, and/or unintended answers that would more likely to happen had the students themselves been asked to enter their answers into the computer. When a student finished taking the test, the computer program generated automatically a new set of randomized test items for the next participant. The author read and implemented the following instruction and sequence of events with each participant: The author said: *"I would like to show you a game on this computer (the author pointed to the computer). I want you to try this game and then I want you to tell me if you like it. I want you to play this game fast; but I also want you to be accurate when choosing your answers"*. The author started the first practice test item by saying: *"What is this picture? (the author pointed to the target picture)*. When the student answered the question, the author then said: *"I want you to find a picture (the author pointed with the index finger in a sweeping manner from left to right to the four pictures underneath the target picture) that goes with this picture (the author pointed to the target picture)"*. When the student pointed to one of the four pictures, the author used the mouse to enter the student's answer into the computer.

The second practice test item started immediately followed by the author saying: *"What is this picture? (the author pointed to the target picture)"*. When the student answered the question, the author then said: *"I want you to find a picture (the author pointed with the index finger in a sweeping manner from left to right to the four pictures underneath the target picture) that goes with this picture (the author pointed to the target picture)"*. When the participant pointed to one of the four pictures, the author used the mouse to enter the student's answer into the computer.

When the participant finished the second practice test item, the author said: *"Do you understand this game?"* If the answer was no, the author restarted the two practice test items on the computer and repeated all the previous steps. If the answer was yes, the author said: *"Do you want to go through the two practice test items again?"* If the answer was yes, the author

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restarted the practice exercises. If the answer was no, the author said: *"Now I will start the game. I want you to point to one of the four pictures that goes with the picture in the middle of the computer screen. Do this game fast but be accurate in your responses. Do not ask questions when the game starts because I am not allowed to talk. Shall I start the game?"* If the participant decided not to play the game, the author would thank her and then finish the meeting. If the participant wanted to play the game, the author would start the game.

Because reaction time was measured, the author did not repeat instructions nor was he pointing to options during the actual test administration.

## RESULTS

The metacognitive instrument yielded three dependent variables: The students' correct responses on the metacognitive test, reaction time to the metacognitive test items, and the correct responses calculated based on the mean of reaction time to each of the 28 test items. Table 1 shows the raw scores of both groups which appeared comparable on all three variables.

**Table 1**
*Means (M) and Standard Deviations (SD) of the Metacognitive Test Scores, Reaction Time, and Test Scores Divided by Mean Reaction Time on the Computerized Tool.*

| Student groups | Scores on the metacognitive test | | Reaction time in seconds | | Metacognitive scores divided by mean reaction time | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | **M** | **SD** | **M** | **SD** | **M** | **SD** |
| All females (N=112) | 19.85 | 2.82 | 144.22 | 32.20 | 12.59 | 4.37 |
| Females with niqab (n=29) | 19.17 | 2.36 | 137.03 | 26.93 | 12.93 | 3.71 |
| Females without niqab (n=83) | 20.06 | 2.96 | 146.71 | 33.91 | 12.46 | 4.60 |

Also, the table shows the effect of reaction time on performance on the metacognitive instrument. It demonstrates that setting a time limit had affected negatively the number of correct responses on the metacognitive test for both groups of students.

A point biserial correlation was conducted to find whether or not there were significant associations between the following study variables: The students' attire (i.e., with and without niqab), metacognitive test score, reaction time, metacognitive test score obtained based on the mean reaction time, monthly income, and the number of family members. Table 2 shows a significant negative association between the variables of the students' attire and the number of family members.

**Table 2**

*A Point Biserial Correlation Result of the Students' Attire, Metacognitive Scores (MT), Reaction Time (RT), Metacognitive Scores based on Mean Reaction Time (MSRT), Monthly Income (MI), and Number of Family Members (NFM)*

| Variables | Attire | MT | RT | MSRT | MI | NFM |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Attire – Niqab or No Niqab (N =112) | 1.00 | | | | | |
| 2. Metacognitive scores (N=112) | .14 | 1.00 | | | | |
| 3. Reaction time (N=112) | .12 | .11 | 1.00 | | | |
| 4. Metacognitive scores based on mean reaction time (N=112) | -.04 | .47** | -.72** | 1.00 | | |
| 5. Monthly income (N=98) | .21* | -.05 | -.20 | .16 | 1.00 | |
| 6. Number of family members (N= 112) | -.24** | .02 | -.01 | -.01 | .09 | 1.00 |

*Note:  * = $p < .05$, ** = $p < .01$*

Students who wore niqab had significantly more family members compared to students without niqab. The table also shows monthly income to be positively significant, an indication that students without niqab had more monthly income compared to students with niqab. Finally, the table shows that the metacognitive test score based on the mean reaction time to be significantly and positively associated with the metacognitive test score and significantly but negatively associated with reaction time. This result reveals that the more time the students took to respond to the test items, the lower their overall scores would be on the test regardless of their attire.

The author performed ANOVA analysis to find significant differences in age, metacognitive test scores, reaction time, and metacognitive test scores divided by the mean reaction time between the two

groups of participants. Results showed no significant differences between the two groups based on age, $F (1, 110) = .326$, $p =.569$ (Partial $\eta 2 = .003$), metacognitive test, $F (1, 111) = 2.214$, $p = .140$ (partial $\eta 2 = .001$), reaction time, , $F (1, 111) = 1.745$, $p =.189$ (partial $\eta 2 = .015$), or metacognitive test scores based on the mean reaction time, $F (1, 111) = 2.975$, $p =.699$ (partial $\eta 2 = .001$).

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The author conducted this brief exploratory study to examine whether there were significant associations among demographic and metacognitive variables based on the type of students' attire (i.e., niqab and no niqab) in the Arabian Gulf. The author also intended to find if there were significant differences in metacognition as related to real-life situations between the two groups of participants. Results supported the first hypothesis that females who wore niqab had more family members compared to females without niqab. Results showed that monthly income was significantly associated with the type of students' attire. Students without niqab had more monthly income compared with the students with niqab. It appeared that the significant associations of the two demographic variables (i.e., the number of family members and monthly income) with the type of students' attire revealed a distinction between the two groups of participants. Furthermore, this study showed that the more time the students took to respond to the test items, the lower their overall scores would be on the test regardless of their attire. Overall, the results indicated that a demographic variable is more likely to be associated with another demographic variable in a way better than being associated with metacognition. Further work is needed to support and shed more light on this finding.

This study showed that the metacognitive test score based on the mean reaction time was significantly and positively associated with the metacognitive test score and significantly but negatively associated with reaction time. This result revealed the influence of imposing a mean reaction time on the students' correct responses in a way that when setting a time limit to respond to stimuli, it would affect negatively the performances of both groups on the metacognitive instrument. This trend was observed in other studies with similar groups of university students (Al-Hilawani, 2016) as well as with younger individuals (e.g., Al-Hilawani et al., 2008; Al-Hilawani & Abdullah, 2010).

The result of this study supported the hypothesis that the two female groups were comparable in their performances in metacognition, reaction time to the presented stimuli, and metacognitive scores divided by the mean reaction time. It appears that wearing the niqab is not significantly related to students' metacognitive performances. One plausible explanation is that both groups had a comparable cognitive ability which is deduced from the

positive relationship between IQ and metacognition. Al-Hilawani (2018a) reported a significant association between IQ and metacognition, as viewed in this study, which could be a viable explanation for the lack of a significant difference in metacognition between the two groups of students. Finally, due to the nature of this brief research, results should be replicated with a larger sample of participants selected to represent various study areas and populations. The participants involved in this study were a small number of students who willingly volunteered.

## IMPLICATIONS

This study showed that metacognition is not significantly associated with the type of students' attire (i.e., niqab and no niqab). However, it revealed a significant association between the type of students' attire and two demographic variables; these variables were the number of family members and monthly income. No significant association was found between the demographic variables and metacognition in real-life situations. It appeared that the social custom of wearing niqab had more influence on the variables of monthly income and the number of members in the family compared with the variables related to metacognition. Overall, there are group variations and that the significant associations between the variables related to these variations are more likely to appear when examined within their designated domains (e.g., social compared to metacognitive) but not necessarily cross domains. In general, further work is needed to examine the cross domains influences because, as a rule, everything affects everything to a certain degree. The issue is how much effect there is. Finally, it appeared that the students who were wearing and not wearing niqab not only differed in their perception of beauty, body appearance, and attractiveness, as mentioned in the literature, but also in income and the number of their family members, as found in this study. Conducting future studies in this regard may validate and shed more light on this tentative conclusion.

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Peer-Reviewed Article

# Exploring Perceptions of Effective Leadership Practices of Presidents of Historically Black Colleges and Universities

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## ABSTRACT

*Anchored in the anti-deficit approach, this manuscript investigated perceptions of effective leadership practices of presidents at historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs). This manuscript provides a unique contribution to the literature by utilizing a general qualitative research approach to learn from a diverse set of voices of leaders and scholars within this sector that serve in various roles (e.g., Deans, Vice Presidents, and scholars) or who study leadership at these institutions. The study found that effective leaders at HBCUs generally have success across two categories — experiential skills and professional knowledge. This study adds to the paucity of literature in this area by expanding and complicating our understanding of effective leadership practices of presidents at HBCUs.*

**Keywords:** College & University Presidents, Effective Leadership, HBCU.

# INTRODUCTION

**H**istorically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) have been controversial institutions from their founding (Gasman & Hilton, 2012). These institutions established for the specific purpose of educating Black students have been and continue to be under attack. They historically have been under resourced and received less support from philanthropist, non-governmental agencies, and foundations (ACE/UNCF, 2019). Presidents of these institutions have had to navigate a quagmire of issues such as negative and racist commentary from press (Freeman & Gasman, 2014), lagging infrastructures, lack of degree offerings, challenges with student completion rates, unstable finances, dearth of students' ability to pay tuition, and unfavorable federal and state policies, such as performance-based funding and attempts to dismantle the Parent Plus Loan (AGB, 2014).

In general, while many higher education institutions today face some of the challenges identified above, HBCUs have the added pressure of constantly receiving criticism for poor leadership practices (Gasman, 2012; Schexnider, 2017; Stuart, 2016, 2017; Watson, 2013). Specifically, the media, which view HBCUs as monolithic, frequently discuss the leadership struggles and challenges of HBCU presidents (Harris, 2017; Stuart, 2016, 2017; Watson, 2013). Similarly, scholars may have unintentionally perpetuated this narrative of poor leadership among HBCU presidents. While the literature is saturated with discussions of poor leadership practices among HBCU presidents, using an anti-deficit approach, this article seeks to shed light on contemporary and effective leadership practices for presidents of HBCUs.

Harper (2010) asserts that the anti-deficit framework "is mostly about the questions researchers ask. Implicit in an important overarching assumption: those who endeavor to improve success . . . would learn much by inviting whose who have been successful to offer explanatory insights into their success" (p. 72). Given the historically negative narrative surrounding the role of the HBCU presidency, we sought to examine effective and contemporary leadership practices of HBCU presidents.

Others agree with the premise of this article rooted in the anti-deficit approach in order to help change the narrative about HBCU leadership. For example, the Center of Minority Serving Institutions at Rutgers University produced a report contextualizing the skills effective leaders of HBCUs need in the 21st Century (Esters et al., 2016). Moreover, other researchers have discussed successful leadership practices for HBCUs presidents (Freeman et al., 2016). However, most of this work is anecdotal (e.g., Esters et al., 2016; Lomotey & Covington, 2018). As such, there is a limited amount of empirical

research documenting successful leadership practices of HBCU presidents (Freeman et al., 2016; Freeman & Gasman, 2014). As the authors of this study, we recognize as Maxwell (2019) states, "everything rises and falls on leadership" (para. 1). In the context of this manuscript that means that the success of HBCUs are often most determined by the quality of leaders at the helm of these institutions. This study seeks to explore the practices perceived to be important for HBCU presidential success.

With this in mind, the purpose of this study was to discuss contemporary and effective leadership practices for HBCU presidents. Data from this current study emerged from a larger study on contemporary leadership practices at HBCUs. The central question that guided this study was: What are effective and contemporary leadership practices employed by leaders of historically Black colleges and universities? This study is important because past studies have examined unsuccessful leadership for HBCU presidents. For example, Palmer and Freeman (2019) found that unsuccessful HBCU presidential leadership was based on a lack of technical skills (including having a vision or mission, innovating, possessing business skills, and demonstrating financial skills) and negative dispositions (evidenced by authoritarian leadership, negative character traits, or failure to understand institutional culture) (p. 4). In this context, successful leadership would therefore be the opposite. While a number of themes emerged from this larger study, in this current article, we discuss one of those themes, that is, perceptions of effective leadership practices of HBCU presidents. Engaging in this discussion and documenting these practices are critical to helping to change the narrative regarding HBCU leadership.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

HBCUs were established after the Civil War to educate the newly freed Africans forcibly brought to America. Unlike other Minority-Serving Institutions (MSIs), HBCUs were not borne out of shifting demographic trends (Preston & Freeman, 2019). MSIs such as, Hispanic Serving Institutions and Asian American and Native American Pacific Islander-Serving Institution (AANAPISI) are colleges that were initially established to serve White students. These institutions have gained recognition as MSI based on growing populations of students of color. HBCUs are different as they were initially established with the express purpose of educating Black students. The Higher Education Act of 1965 defines, these institutions, "as any historically black college or university that was established prior to 1964, whose principal mission was, and is, the education of black Americans" (U.S. Department of Education, 2020, para. 1). Thus , once a HBCU is closed, a new one cannot be established. While this is the case, since their founding, in the mid to late 1880s, scholars assert some HBCUs have been besieged by

leadership challenges, which has resulted in their closure (Schexnider, 2017). To date, close to 20 HBCUs have closed their doors (Suggs, 2019).

Indeed, scholars have expressed that while there are a variety of contributors to the closure of a HBCU, one of the most salient is poor leadership, which is linked to issues, such as financial mismanagement, loss of accreditation, attrition of students and faculty, and turnover of presidents (Lomotey & Covington, 2018; Schexnider, 2017). In an interview with *Diverse Issues of Higher Education*, Walter Kimbrough, president of Dillard University, lamented the fact that 38 HBCUs have appointed a new president since 2011, and as of 2014, nine of those were no longer in office (Transforming Leadership, 2015). Moreover, in 2016 at least four HBCU presidents were fired or resigned because of concerns from their governing boards about the efficacy of their leadership. Scott and Hines (2014) explained, "Over the past twenty years, across most HBCUs, there have been multiple cases detailing the failure of leadership" (p. 1133), which contributed to the fiscal management that resulted in the closure of Morris Brown. They also asserted, "Dysfunctional leadership and institutional traditions dominate at the majority of HBCUs, impeding the process and demanding specific strategies that address certain elements of academic culture (i.e., shared governance)" (p. 1133).

The instability of leadership among HBCU presidents has provoked concerns among HBCU stakeholders (Kimbrough, 2016). In response, there is a paucity, but burgeoning amount of literature on the college presidency at HBCUs. Some of this scholarship has focused on shared governance (Lomotey & Covington, 2018), grooming the next generation of presidents (Freeman & Gasman, 2014), and the board of trustees (Commodore, 2017). Nevertheless, as noted, there is a scarcity of scholarship on effective leadership practices for HBCU presidents (Esters et al., 2016). For example, the report discussed earlier by the Center for Minority Serving Institutions, provided a contemporary view on effective leadership practices for presidents at HBCUs (Esters et al., 2016).

Specifically, some of the practices discussed in this report included the importance of HBCU presidents understanding policy, particularly around funding, using data to inform decision-making, and being familiar with the accreditation process and ways to promote student engagement. This report also underscored other important qualities, such as the willingness of HBCU presidents to develop collaborative partnerships with other MSIs and predominantly White institutions and having an expertise in fundraising and institutional finance (Esters et al., 2016). Another important skill HBCU presidents should possess, according to Esters and colleagues (2016), is the ability to engage a variety of stakeholders and developing positive relationships with the board of trustees.

Furthermore, Freeman et al. (2016) added to the conversation on characteristics for successful HBCU presidents. Specifically, by conducting qualitative interviews with HBCU presidents, board of trustees, and presidential consultant firms, they developed a list of essential skills for HBCU presidents. Many of their findings echoed those of Esters et al. (2016). Moreover, in a chapter that criticized HBCUs for lacking culturally relevant education in their curricula, Lomotey and Covington (2018) discussed not only the challenges to successful leadership for HBCU presidents, but they also provided a litany of strategies HBCU presidents should implement to be effective in their roles. Some of these included focusing on fundraising, hiring the right people, and avoiding an autocratic leadership style.

## RESEARCH METHOD

We utilized a general qualitative approach to understand the patterns of effective leadership for HBCUs. This approach allowed us to gain insight into experiences and perspectives of participants related to effective leadership at HBCUs. By focusing on the phenomena of effective leadership practices, we gained a greater understanding of how participants viewed effective leadership from various levels of the HBCU sector. To this end, the study's epistemological approach was anchored in the social constructivist tradition to construct knowledge, understanding, and meaning through human interactions (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

### *Population and Sample*

Using a maximum variation sampling approach, which is about understanding how a phenomenon is understood from a diverse set of individuals (Creswell & Poth, 2018), participants of this study were college and university leaders, those who hold or previously held formal academic leadership titles (e.g., Deans, Vice Presidents, former Presidents, and a student government president) at HBCUs and scholars who research HBCU leadership. In total, 19 participants were interviewed for this study. Overall, the participants have over 65 years of experience studying or serving as HBCU leaders and some of the HBCU presidents included in this study have been successful during their tenure of leadership at their institutions. We elicited the perspectives of a variety of types of interviewees because we felt it important to gain various insights from a diversity of voices that viewed the HBCU presidency differently based on their positionality. For instance, we were particularly interested in the inclusion of student leadership in higher education. We felt it important to include the voice of a leader who had demonstrated significant impact regarding institutional change and governance of their institution.

We recruited participants through the use of a variety of resources (e.g. professional networks, university websites, and academic and

professional conferences). Announcements about the study were distributed through e-mail Listservs. Additionally, some participants were selected using snowball sampling (i.e., asking those who joined the study to recommend others who might meet our criteria). When potential participants replied to the invitation to participate in the study, we sent them an in-depth explanation of the study, including recruitment materials, and an informed consent form. Participants were asked to provide their insights into issues pertaining to the HBCU presidency based on their experiences with presidents at their institutions, their research, anecdotal evidence based on what they have learned while being affiliated with HBCUs, and first-hand knowledge of past and current presidents in which they had interactions.

## Data collection

Qualitative research underscores that dependability, transferability, credibility, and confirmability are important criteria for trustworthiness (Creswell & Poth, 2018). To this end, multiple methods of data collection were used including curriculum vitas, biographical sketches of participants, and online and print media accounts of stories related to HBCUs to verify stories mentioned by participants. Each of the data sources apart from the interviews, were used to verify the backgrounds of each participant. Online and print media accounts were utilized to confirm the claims and stories of participants. Although, many of the stories are a matter of public record, we chose to not identify specific accounts, as not to further sensationalize these experiences.

All participants were interviewed over the phone. Both of us participated in most of the interviews. Less than five of those interviews were conducted by just one of us, however, both of us utilized the same interview protocol, reviewed each audio recording of each interview, and participated in the analysis process. These open-ended interviews lasted between 45 minutes to one hour. Audio equipment was used for the purpose of data collection. An interview script was used throughout the interview process. Copious and detailed notes were taken along with an audio recording of each interview. Summary notes were recorded in a journal directly following each interview.

## Data analysis

To gain a better understanding of the phenomenon, we employed a thematic analysis and constant comparative method. Following each interview, we reviewed the transcripts and recording to conduct initial analysis using the constant comparative method to compare findings across the data collection phase of the research study (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Using this method from an inductive approach, through open and axial coding, followed by thematic analysis, allowed us to interpret participants' reflections

on their respective views of effective leadership at HBCUs. Further, this ensured reliability and trustworthiness of the findings. Words or phrases that were identified three times or more by interviewees were identified as codes. Once the codes were identified they were grouped into sections by overarching themes.

To respect the confidentiality of the participants, names were excluded from the final draft of this study. Strategies of member checking (returned transcribed interviews to participants to confirm that they accurately reflected their perceptions), peer-debriefing (provided a colleague with data from the study to share feedback regarding the soundness of our research process), and clarification of the researchers' positionality (described in the next section of this paper) to ensure the trustworthiness, validity, and reliability of the data (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The findings have been presented using "thick," "rich," and descriptive data (Creswell & Poth, 2018) to demonstrate the rigor and robustness of the findings.

### Positionality

Demonstrating the reliability of the findings is a key aspect of the data collection and analysis process. The researchers in this study are aware of their own biases, values, and perspectives influence. The researchers noted their positionality as a form of reliability (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Both authors identify as U.S. – born Black Americans. The first author attended and graduated from both a historically Black high school/ boarding academy and a HBCU. His future aspiration, which includes serving as a university president, makes this project relevant to his current and future professional goals. The second author is a faculty member at a HBCU. Among other topics related to HBCUs, he has written on college student success, Black male retention and persistence, and college and university leadership. He also is a higher education instructor and teaches in a program that prepares students for leadership and faculty roles at postsecondary education institutions.

Our identities and experiences in higher education, who attended, were affiliated with, and/or conducted research on HBCUs, created a unique lens and position to understand the contextual environment of HBCUs. Nevertheless, we allowed the findings to emerge independent of our biases. Member checking and peer debriefers also helped to make certain that the findings were accurately reflective of the participants' voices.

### Limitations

Qualitative research often provides rich narratives that include the experiences, knowledge, and feelings of its participants. Despite these attributes, there are limitations surrounding qualitative research. One limitation is that the sample size of this study may not reflect the thoughts of all leaders and scholars affiliated with HBCUs. Moreover, we were not able

to secure a large enough sample size to interview an equal distribution of participants based on their backgrounds (i.e. presidents, researchers, student leaders, etc.). Nevertheless, we have provided "rich," "thick" description so the reader may decide the extent to which this study is transferable to their institutional context. Finally, given that HBCUs are not monolithic in size, scope, and stature, while they face many of the same problems and challenges, the findings of this study may not be applicable to all HBCUs.

## RESULTS

Participants identified multiple unique manifestations of effective leadership at HBCUs. Though participants mentioned a variety of factors germane to effective leadership of HBCUs, this study analyzes primarily responses that can be considered thematic. These responses fell into two categories: experiential skills (including managing finances and fundraising, academic community building, having business skills, having good communication skills, managing multiple constituencies, seeking input and teamwork, and innovative), professional knowledge (understanding institutional mission, cultural/institutional understanding, and professional experience).

**Experiential Skills**
*Managing Finances and Fundraising*
One of the most widely cited skills that participants felt that effective HBCU leaders needed to have was generating and managing financial resources. One scholarly expert, Imani summarized this sentiment when she stated:

> HBCUs because they tend to have lower endowments and smaller endowments than their predominantly White counterparts . . . I think a president that is able to ensure that not only is this institution financially strong, but is also finding avenues and ways to grow their endowment . . . And to bring in resources into the institution and constantly, and seeing those resources grow. I think that, that is a president that's successful.

A dean, Ebony, expressed that HBCUs tend to be resourced challenged. Therefore, leaders should be able to provide a vision that would compel external and internal constituents to support the institution financially:

> HBCUs tend to be "resourced-challenged" so we need individuals that have linkages beyond their university's walls. I think the presidents that fumble, don't have those linkages. They don't have "external legitimacy" and they don't have "internal legitimacy." . . . What I mean by external legitimacy is the ability to communicate a vision and attract funding.

Willie, a scholarly expert and former HBCU president, stated it succinctly, "One needs to understand something about business and good fund-raising skills." Darryl, an executive leader, shared that financial leadership not only rest on the shoulders of presidents, but other leaders within these institutions have a responsibility to ethical fiduciary management of resources: "There are things like fiduciary responsibility. Successful institutions, successful leadership are presidents or leadership management teams that are able to manage the fiscal responsibility [of their institutions] …Fiduciary responsibility is the core."

Although each participant described the need for presidents to have strong financial management and fundraising skills in a different way, it was evident participants felt that managing finances and fundraising were core functions to effective leadership for an HBCU president.

### *Academic Community Building*

Another area of effective leadership for HBCU leaders that was identified was academic community building. Andre, a scholarly expert, shared:

> A president that is able to build a strong community across the board at that institution and really get them to align their mission together to build stronger connection and community with each other [should be considered successful] . . . And so that includes students, that includes alumni, that includes faculty that are there, staff that are there. People that help to fund the institution, so that means investors, and the community around you.

The above quote reveals that academic community building is not restricted to members of a HBCU that live and work on the campus. It also includes, alumni, friends of the institution, donors and the members of the local community. Each constituency plays an important role in the advancement of the academic community.

Another executive leader, Dominique said:

> I think of leadership generally as inspiring or encouraging or providing a pathway, a means to where people who are part of an institution or either employed directly/indirectly or who consider themselves to be a part of the environment of an institution, the family of an institution. If they generally feel like this is their institution that's worthy of their time, their resources, their money, then I start to think that this is a place, this is place where good leadership is occurring.

Academic community building has become a key part of the role of HBCU presidents. Many HBCU leaders understand that for their institutions to be successful they need to break down silos across various constituency groups

and develop more cooperative relationships between them for the overall advancement of their institutions.

## Business Skills

Several participants mentioned the importance of business skills as a necessity for HBCU leadership skills. Business skills were defined as those skills required to manage a large organization, involving hiring and personnel decisions, general management, delegation of tasks, and maintenance of key relationships. Although each participant discussed business skills differently, participants generally agreed that business skills involved a strategic mindset. This was different than financial management and fundraising as the focus was on human capital management and leadership.

Alexis, a scholarly expert, stressed that to be an effective leader, "One needs to understand how to assemble a leadership team." In a similar vein, another scholarly expert also advocated gathering input from other stakeholders across the university:

> I think some of the best leaders are those that acknowledge the situation and the use all of the kind of human resources that they have and their creativity to bring success to their institutions. So that would not only be presidents, but also anybody else working there.

Xavier, a current HBCU president, advocated for leaders to receive support from various constituencies related to their campuses so that they can do their jobs effectively:

> The ability to empower responsibility for his or her areas of leadership. I think also to be effective and to be successful, a campus leader has to do a good job in selecting competent team members who, understand the job to which they're being hired and can do that job effectively…people should be hired because of their mental competence and their understanding of the position for which they're being hired.

Darryl summed up well the theme of business skills needed for an effective leader by noting, "Certainly, management is the "hallmark" I think of great institutions. How well are they managed with regard to human resources – the operation of an institution." Participants described that effective leaders at HBCUs are those who have basic management skills, understand the core business of the institution, and focus on hiring the right people.

## Good Communication Skills

Communication skills were one of the most often mentioned characteristics of an effective leader, particularly because they have to engage multiple constituencies. Ebony stressed the importance of HBCU leadership communicating their goals:

"I think another [a] big piece is being able to communicate what is coming "around the curve" and really galvanize all of the different stake-holders whether it's alumni, students, faculty and being able to galvanize them around that goal."

Malik, a current HBCU president, mentioned specifically the importance of communicating well with students and faculty:

That means understanding the students that I serve and have the students understand me. Understanding the faculty that I work with, having the faculty understand me, and being in a position where I'm always speaking what I consider to be, what I consider to be the truth.

Reginald, an executive leader and scholarly expert, discussed the importance of communicating well with the board of trustees:

Making sure that people are on board, that communication is there, because a lot of times in HBCUs there is a "communication breakdown." And that's where the problems lie. So, rumors get started, the morale goes down and so it's more about a lot of times motivating and keeping people informed and being trustworthy, that the leaders are trusted. The leader that is not trusted by the employees it's going to filter down to the students to all of the other stakeholders as well. . . They must possess communication skills, as well as be a good communicator can go a long way. . . A lot of times, one hand doesn't know what the other hand is doing and so they're duplicating services or duplicating something that why reinvent the wheel when they don't have to? . . . Having open communication where they would have weekly meetings or even e-mails to go out to the keep people informed about what's going on in their areas creates less competition.

In summary, it is the job of the president to communicate effectively with all constituencies related to the institution. Participants stated that honesty and transparency was important in communicating the direction the institution was going in. Various constituencies do not like to be blindsided with negative news. Communicating clearly and effectively on a continuous basis helps with this goal.

### Managing Constituencies

Similar to effectively communicating to various constituencies, managing these groups is very important. Terrance, an executive leader, explained: "Well one thing that comes to mind is the understanding of higher education, meaning that higher education is very much an organization or an entity that focus on consensus for the most part."

Kathryn, a current HBCU dean, mentioned how important establishing good rapport with various constituencies were for effective leaders:

Good rapport, and I say that because I've seen, or I've been a part of organizations that the president didn't have a good rapport with staff, but have a good rapport with the community and I really think that's criminal to the organization to hire someone who does not have a good rapport with the community or with the employees. The next trait or next characteristic is being able to build relationships. I think that can also be a part of having a good rapport as well, but I think that a leader has to be a person that's able to build relationships. Because that's just what it's all about, building relationships to help push the vision on the institution.

An important part of HBCU presidents managing various constituencies is ensuring that they are cultivating positive relationships with them by keeping them informed but also establishing a positive rapport. Given the fiscal challenges that many of these institutions face, managing relationships becomes key. When challenging times impact a campus, a president that has already established good rapport with various constituencies may be extended the benefit of the doubt because trust has been earned and established.

### Seeking Input/Teamwork

Establishing an open environment where various constituencies feel heard and valued was consistently mentioned as important. Many felt that this would lead to a collegial atmosphere. Dominique shared her experience with facilitating this type of organizational leadership:

I think my philosophy has continued to evolve, but I've always been a "participatory leader." In that I like input, I seek input with the full understanding that [all voices should be respected] and I believe in the team approach and that's why I engage in participatory leadership… My role as a [previous president] was to be the team leader, which means I had the responsibility oftentimes in making final decision, but I did so with a presidential cabinet… Again, I am a participatory leader that believes in the team effort. My cliché on that is "I don't care how good the quarterback is, he cannot win the game, it takes the entire team members."

Cassandra, a former HBCU president, described it as a form of shared governance. She went on to say how important it is to hear a variety of voices and opinions through various strategies:

I believe very much that shared governance is necessary to move institutions forward. I think that it helps in terms of attracting scholars that are needed to advise and produce students for the global marketplace that we're in. . . I think that it's very much necessary to have leaders who use more of what I called a "grass-roots" method. . . Where they are listening to the stakeholders across [the campus

community] ... And trying to come to some shared consensus to make decisions.

Darryl summed this theme up by sharing how effective leaders build great teams: "I think really effective leaders now are the people who can build really successful teams of people to collaborate and be able to use technology in ways that can develop new solutions to old problems." Participants shared that seeking input from various members of the academic community at different levels within the community is key to the success of a HBCU presidency. Great ideas are not solely the purview of those a part of the institutions or sit on its cabinet. Therefore, seeking wise counsel and advice from a diverse array of informed individuals is important for HBCU leaders.

### Innovation

Participants felt innovation was another skill for an effective leader to possess. Willie explained:

I think that we live in a world of constant change, a lot of it driven by technology. If you're not re-inventing yourself – you're falling behind. So, we need leaders who understand that as number one and we need board of trustees who understand that also.

Alexis, a scholarly expert, underscored that assessment by saying:

It's focused on being really innovative rather than braving the status quo. . . I think that successful leadership is really creative and realizes that rather than complaining about the situation realizes that you have to be more creative when you don't have as many resources.

Shanice, an executive leader, shared that innovation is needed given the current financial pressures being felt across the higher education sector, "I think the person has to be innovative, particularly now in higher education in terms of the shifts in enrollment and the rapid shifts in general." Malik specifically talked about the importance of those in the presidency thinking in an innovative manner:

I think effective presidential leadership is closely akin to running a marathon. Where the runner grabs the baton from the previous runner, in this case the current president grabs the baton from the previous president. . . And that baton must be handed off in a very smooth manner, you can't drop it, (chuckled) you can't stumble. And when that former president handed the baton off, that person then exits the race and basically cheers for the person who is running his or her leg. And it is the responsibility of the person who has the baton who's running his or her leg. . . To run it swiftly, faster, more agility than what was run before him or her. So that when you get ready to pass the baton off to the next person, the institution is further along around the track.

Many participants discussed the notion of innovation. It was expected that an effective HBCU president would not see challenges as paralyzing but would find ways to innovate and address the issue head-on. However, participants suggested that innovation was not the sole responsibility of the president, but it was their responsibility to facilitate a culture of innovation among their various constituencies.

## Professional Knowledge
### Institutional Mission

As discussed, institutional mission is particularly important to HBCUs. Participants felt that effective leaders in this sector must have a strong understanding of the unique mission of these institutions. Laila, a HBCU scholarly expert, described how mission should drive decision-making and not leaders' personal agenda:

> It's more focused on students [more] than it is on self. . . I think that it's focused on doing the best with the students that you have and not trying to compete with institutions that have a different kind of students. . . But embracing your mission and focusing on those students.

Cassandra stressed the importance of humility and a collaborative nature:

> Successful leadership…needs to be mission-driven. So, if it's mission-focused and mission-driven, then presidents and all the stake-holders involved are able to know what they are there for. Which is to take hold of that mission again from the employees to every stakeholder, the students, the family all of that, and then to having a good leader who can communicate that mission.

The understanding of and commitment to the unique mission of HBCUs is important to the success of presidencies at these institutions. Given its unique niche and role within the American higher education landscape, it is important that those who lead within these institutions have a personal respect for the mission of these institutions and ensure that members of various constituencies that are affiliated with HBCUs do the same.

### Cultural/Institutional Understanding

Participants discussed a lot about the need for HBCU leaders to understand the unique HBCU culture along with the specific campus culture of their institution. Maurice, a scholarly expert and executive leader, shared it this way:

> You have to understand the culture, you have to understand the players…I think culture is very important part of understanding what you do at an institution and what you will be able to do at an institution.

Dominique provided examples of what was meant by the theme of cultural and institutional understanding, specifically outlining the context the modern HBCUs find themselves in:

> If you just look at where we are now in terms of the country's political, social and economic backdrop and you look at what HBCUs represent. Then it's a very challenging and maybe significant point in the institution's history, the institution's collective history. There are lots of folks out there who are critics of HBCUs who would like to see them closed, don't see their purpose and talking so forth. Yet there's a certain clear constituency that the institutions have served and can continue to serve. I think that effective leadership now recognizes that first element that I was talking about which is that you're operating in a larger particularly political and economic dynamic now. . . If you're dealing with a different population and a different reality, maybe what you want to do is establish your brand you know, find a common vernacular, in a way that distinguishes you from the other institutions. . . You know um, our institutions again are under such attack now…to do everything that other institutions do in the same way other institutions do them, doesn't give us what we need which is again that distinctiveness, that recognition point that the students that we want to enroll are going to have us as their first choice!

Laila acknowledged that a focus on mission and tradition can be positive:

> I think at HBCUs, one of the challenges and why there could be kind of a transactional model and perhaps has been so prevalent in some institutions is because in a positive sense there is such a great degree of respect for tradition. I mean these are historic institutions with incredible history, with incredible records of success, so meaningful to various communities. So, what worked in the past is tradition, this pride may in some ways be a wonderful thing that builds on that sense of honor and pride and respect.

HBCUs have a unique culture as one of the only sectors in American life outside of the Black church that is predominantly led and operated by African Americans. It is important that those who lead these institutions understand the challenges that these institutions have had to endure. Their success, despite these obstacles, has cultivated a unique culture at HBCUs. It is important for any HBCU president to acknowledge and respect that and build upon its legacy.

### Knowledge of Higher Education

The knowledge gained from working in various capacities in higher education was seen as important by participants in this study. Darius, a current president, expounded on this notion below:

I think an effective leader at a HBCU is one who has gained the benefit of their sense of going through the ranks in academia – Assistant Professor, Associate Professor, Full Professor, Department Chair, Dean, and Vice President. And I say that because I think in order to effectively lead individuals - you have to understand the nature of the work that they do, and there's no better way before a campus CEO to do that, they actually have to put himself or herself served in those roles.

Terrance also supported that sentiment when he shared:

Well first and foremost the person who understands higher education, and I think I might be a little traditional in terms of my thinking. But a lot of folks who assume these positions may not have a really complete, comprehensive and exhaustive type of education of the sector. And as a result, some of the decisions that are made could have more corporate ties and rooted in business which is a component of higher but not the full component. So as a result, I think, first and foremost that person should have a strong education on higher education.

Some of the participants had a healthy skepticism of those currently in presidential roles or are seeking such positions at HBCUs that did not have higher education experience. Although there was a general preference that HBCU graduates who had gone on to serve in various academic and leadership capacities serve as presidents, there was an openness to having higher education leaders with other experiences to serve as presidents. However, there was a general preference for leaders to train in higher education before serving as president at a HBCU.

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Data from this current study emerged from a larger study that examined contemporary leadership practices of HBCU presidents. One of the emerging themes focused on the participants' perceptions of effective leadership strategies of HBCU presidents. Participants identified two categories reflective of effective leadership practices for HBCU presidents. The first category denoted experiential skills, which includes managing finances and fundraising, business acumen, demonstrating good interpersonal skills, innovation, and working collaboratively across multiple constituencies. The second category focused on professional knowledge, which is comprised of having a keen understanding of the institution's mission and culture.

Esters and colleagues (2016) identified many of the same practices of effective leadership practices for HBCU presidents that emerged from this current study. For example, both this current study and Esters et al.'s (2016) report highlighted the importance of engaging in collaborative leadership approaches, being visionary, forward, and innovative thinking, knowledge on

fundraising and financial management, having some background knowledge on managing larger, complex organizations, working well and maintaining healthy relationship across a variety of constituencies (governing board, faculty, staff, students, and alumni), and hiring the right people.

Other studies have acknowledged the aforementioned leadership practices and their linchpin to the effectiveness of leadership for HBCU presidents (Freeman et al., 2016). For example, in their article, based on interviews with 21 participants, some of whom were HBCU presidents and board members, Freeman et al. (2016) explained that in order for HBCU presidents to be successful in the 21$^{st}$ Century, they need to be visionary, have the ability to communicate well and across diverse audiences, and maintain positive and healthy relationships with the governing board, and students. Freeman and colleagues also noted that HBCU presidents should use social media to tout the successes occurring at their institutions, adopt a collaborative leadership disposition, and engage in fundraising as well as using data to guide decision making.

Despite this, data from this current study revealed some differences in effective leadership practices of HBCU presidents that were not specifically discussed in Esters et al.'s (2016) report or in studies by other researchers (e.g., Freeman & Gasman, 2014; Freeman et al., 2016). For example, in Esters et al.'s report, they delineated HBCU presidents should not only possess knowledge about the local, state, and federal policy decision-making and funding process, but also engage in social media to control the narrative about their institution, pursue private and public grant opportunities, stay apprised of higher education issues and policies, and understand the salience of student engagement. While participants in this current study did not explain how the aforementioned factors would help to facilitate leadership success for HBCU presidents, they acknowledged HBCU presidents should not only understand the institutional mission and culture, but also engage in decision-making that reflects fidelity to those "professional knowledge" areas (i.e. institutional mission and culture) of the institution. Similarly, while more HBCU presidents are emerging from nontraditional paths (Willis & Arroyo, 2018), participants in this current study believed HBCU presidents should come from the traditional rank of the academy (i.e., serving as a professor and working their way up the ranks).

Moreover, participants of this current study believed HBCU presidents should adopt tenets of Servant or Transformational leadership. It is important to note that while Ester's et al.'s (2016) report does not specifically discuss Servant or Transformational leadership directly, they do discuss characteristics of these leadership styles, such as adopting a collaborative leadership approach, developing positive working relationship across institutional stakeholders, and using effective communication skills, and their centrality to the success of HBCU presidents. Nevertheless, other

scholarship—be it empirical or anecdotal—has posited that Servant or Transformational Leadership are ideal styles for HBCU presidents (Gasman, Lockett, & Esters, 2018; Myrick-Harris, 2014). In particular, Gasman et al. (2018) explained how Michael Sorrell, president of Paul Quinn, has adopted a Servant Leadership style, which has not only empowered faculty and students, but also helped the institution to soar. Similarly, in a study of presidents of private HBCUs conducted by the United Negro College Fund, participants explained they believed characteristics of Transformational Leadership are critical to success for HBCUs. However, many admitted using a combination of Transactional and Transformative styles when their institutions encountered challenging times in the late 2000s (Myrick-Harris, 2014).

The characteristics participants in this current study identified as contributors to effective leadership of HBCU presidents are salient factors that propel the success of institutions and organizations in general. Despite this, discussing these factors in the context of HBCUs is particularly critical for several reasons. First, consistent with the anti-deficit approach of this article, the findings focus on factors that promote the success of HBCU presidents as opposed to fueling the narrative about poor leadership practices at HBCUs. Second, the findings also provide important context for effective leadership practices of HBCUs, which might help to strengthen the capacity of HBCU leaders and contribute to the sustainability of these institutions. This, of course, is utterly important, as discussed previously, unlike other MSIs, once a HBCU is closed, another one cannot be established.

## IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This current study has found two categories are critical for effective leadership of HBCU presidents— Experiential Skills and Professional Knowledge. Embedded in each of these categories are critical strategies that improve the leadership of HBCU presidents. While many of these practices have been discussed in the extant literature, this study has provided further insight into effective leadership of HBCU presidents. In this regard, this current study expands and complicates our understanding of effective leadership of presidents at HBCUs.

With this being the case, this study provides several implications for research and practice. First, in terms of research, given the leadership challenge facing HBCUs, which has contributed greatly to the demise of some of these institutions, more research on effective leadership practices among HBCU presidents is needed. There are only a handful of articles/reports, many of which are anecdotal, that have examined effective leadership for presidents of HBCUs. Given the linchpin between successful leadership and the sustainability of HBCUs, this research needs to involve multiple approaches, such as qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods. Specifically, more

research is needed that involve case studies of successful HBCU presidents. With the understanding that HBCU are not monolithic, when it comes to leadership, these case studies might provide inspiration, guidance or a template for HBCU leaders seeking to improve their leadership practices. Along these same lines, there is a scant of literature on Servant and Transformational Leadership situated within the context of the HBCU presidency (Transforming Leadership, 2015). Since research from this current study and other sources (e.g., Gasman et al., 2018) has indicated that these leadership styles help to facilitate successful leadership outcomes for HBCU presidents, additional studies on these, and perhaps other leadership styles, should be conducted.

Given that HBCUs and their leadership structure are not a monolith, it may be important for future researchers to consider conducting future studies based on various institutional types within HBCUs, differences by gender of presidents, various leadership roles, etc. HBCUs are a treasure trove of opportunity for leadership exploration. The existing studies have only begun to provide insight into the complexity of leadership that has been, and continues to be, displayed at these venerable institutions.

In terms of practice, organizations and firms that prepare and groom future HBCU leadership in general and HBCU presidents specifically, should work in tandem with the research community, and HBCU themselves, to expose these aspiring leaders to the latest research on effective leadership practices for HBCU presidents. Specifically, given that research from this current study and others (e.g., Esters et al., 2016; Freeman & Gasman, 2014) has ostensibly indicated that visionary, "forward" thinking, and innovative leadership practices, along with knowledge on fundraising, collaboration, the ability to manage complex organization, and the ability to communication and maintain positive relations across a variety of constituents, contribute significantly to the leadership efficacy of HBCU presidents, HBCU leadership preparatory organizations should help participants cultivate and maximize these skills. It is hoped that this manuscript helps to inspire and inform those who prepare aspiring HBCU presidents and those interested in serving as a HBCU president with scholarship that will assist in developing the next generation of successful HBCU presidents.
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# Available but Not Approachable: Black Student Interactions with Business Faculty at a Historically White Institution

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## ABSTRACT

*Persistent racial inequities in educational attainment and employment negatively affect the economic mobility of the Black population in the United States. Among college graduates, Black people are underrepresented in most high-paying college majors, except for business. In this phenomenological study framed by Critical Race Theory, Black business students (n=10) at a Historically White Institution shared their perceptions of the climate and experiences of interactions with faculty. Students reported they often felt unwelcome and othered in the White-dominated space and received limited support from White faculty that were frequently "available but not approachable". Future research and practice should focus on institutional strategies to address racism by developing an equitable and welcoming business school culture and fostering cultural competence of faculty.*

# INTRODUCTION

**I**nequitable access to and successful completion of college continue to be defining factors in the American racial economic divide. The majority of jobs in the American economy require postsecondary education or training (Carnevale, Jayasunde, et al., 2016), thus a college degree is vital for participation in the labor market and economic mobility. While degree attainment in the population rose from 2010 to 2019 for all racial and ethnic groups, Black attainment remained 14% behind non-Hispanic Whites (U.S. Census Bureau, 2020). Unemployment gaps persist for the Black population. Since the Bureau of Labor Statistics began collecting data in the early 1970s, the unemployment rate for Black Americans has consistently been twice the White unemployment rate (Ajilore, 2020), and unemployment rates are even higher for the Black population in Black-majority cities (Perry, 2019).

While several factors contribute to the disproportionate unemployment levels for Black Americans, two of the most prevalent are lower degree attainment and concentration of degree majors (Carnevale, Fasules, et al., 2016). Among adult degree holders (21-59 years old), the Black population is highly concentrated in lower-paying college majors and underrepresented in most high-paying majors, including science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) and the highest paying business majors (accounting, finance, marketing) (Carnevale, Fasules, et al., 2016). When looking only at recent degree completers rather than the adult population at large, the picture changes slightly. In 2016-17, the proportion of business degrees awarded to Black students (10%) was near their proportion in the overall population (13%) (National Center for Education Statistics, 2018). Business, management, and marketing were among a limited number of higher-paying fields in which Black students were as likely as White students to receive a degree between 2013 and 2015 (Libassi, 2018). These recent numbers offer tentative evidence of more equitable participation of the Black population in business fields.

While there is a significant body of research on the experiences of Black and other minoritized students in STEM majors due to their significant underrepresentation, there has been limited research examining the perceptions and experiences of Black students in business majors. Earlier evidence suggested that Black students in business were more likely to persist than their counterparts in majors with lower immediate economic returns such as the social sciences (St. John et al., 2004). Studies on Black students' choice of higher-paying business majors suggests the importance of exposure to those careers and majors. Black students who considered accounting or

finance but ultimately chose other business majors indicated that their choice was based on career-centered factors: occupational growth, long-term salary prospects, and opportunities for ongoing professional development (Young et al., 2018). Further, they noted that the college website and the internet were their most important sources of information for major selection. Among Black accounting majors in another study, the introductory accounting course and knowing an accountant who served as a role model were important factors in their choice (Violette & Cain, 2017). When considering interaction with faculty, Parks-Yancy (2012) found that the few low-income first-generation Black business students who interacted with professors or approached the career office received direction that helped them identify career opportunities they had not previously considered.

Higher education scholars have called for more deliberate attention to how race and racism affect the experiences of Black college students (Patton, 2016) and more aggressive efforts to address equity agendas in higher education (Museus et al., 2015). There is a need for continued research to understand Black students' interactions and experiences with predominantly White faculty (Erskine-Meusa, 2017), to generate evidence to improve the college climate for Black students leading to greater participation in higher-paying fields. The purpose of our phenomenological study was to understand how persisting Black business students at a Historically White Institution (HWI) in the southeast perceive the climate of the business school and their interactions with faculty. The study design was based on an understanding of existing literature about Black students' college experiences and interactions, specifically related to perceived climate and interactions with faculty, and viewed through the lens of Critical Race Theory (CRT).

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Given the increasing participation of the Black population in business majors and the limited research on their experiences and interactions with faculty in those majors, we consulted a broader literature base to help contextualize our study. We reviewed the literature on Black student perceptions of institutional climate and interactions with faculty. These literature bases provide a background to understand the main concepts under exploration in our study and to relate to our findings to suggest implications for more equitable practice.

Positive campus climates (Hausmann et al., 2007; Museus et al., 2018) are associated with a greater sense of integration and student persistence (Tinto, 1993). Black students at HWIs often find themselves in negative racial climates characterized by stereotypes, prejudice, and

discrimination (Nora & Cabrera, 1996; Solórzano et al., 2000) which can lead to experiencing alienation, isolation, and reduced motivation (Charleston et al., 2014; Lancaster et al., 2017). Black students are not prepared for culture shock (Sinanan, 2012), and they may be singled out in the classroom, pressured to speak for all Black experiences, forced to prove their worthiness, exposed to insensitive attitudes, and be questioned about Black academic abilities (Davis et al., 2004).

Previous research has signaled the critical role of relationships with faculty in student enrollment and persistence (Li et al., 2009; Lundberg et al., 2018). Involvement with faculty leads to greater effort, enhanced learning, and academic success (Tinto, 2016). There is strong research support for the notion that student-faculty interactions are vital to enhancing student motivation and achievement (DeFreitas & Bravo, 2012; Engstrom & Tinto, 2008; Lundberg & Schreiner, 2004; Roksa & Whitley, 2017; Strayhorn, 2008). Positive interactions with faculty influence students' aspirations to achieve at a higher level, resulting in increased confidence in academic skills and enhancement of intellectual self-concept (Cole, 2007; DeFreitas & Bravo, 2012; Grantham et al., 2015; Komarraju et al., 2010). Also, positive interactions enhance students' sense of belonging in the academic environment to embrace the idea that they can have a successful academic career (DeFreitas & Bravo, 2012). In contrast, when students feel distant from faculty members, they experience a lack of motivation, discouragement, and a feeling of apathy (Komarraju et al., 2010).

For Black students, in particular, the perceived quality of the relationship and support from faculty have been linked to academic success (Anaya & Cole, 2001; Charleston, 2012; Cole, 2008; Cole & Espinoza, 2008; Roksa & Whitley, 2017). Positive interactions can serve to increase self-confidence and aspirations to achieve at higher levels (Komarraju et al., 2010; Roksa & Whitley, 2017). While students desire to interact with faculty, research suggests that faculty may need to take the first step and reach out to Black students who may find it difficult to approach them, particularly when the faculty member is of a different race (Museus et al., 2008). At HWIs, Black students may be particularly influenced by interactions with faculty. Black students want to feel that they belong, that they are cared about, and they have allies to support them through their learning process (Lundberg & Schreiner, 2004). They need faculty to be student-centered and culturally sensitive to their needs (Erskine-Meusa, 2017; Guiffrida, 2005; Miller & Mills, 2019).

Satisfying and frequent relationships with faculty encourage students to work harder and provide an important foundation for student effort toward

academic success (Cotton & Wilson, 2006; Roksa & Whitley, 2017). It is during these interactions, that faculty have "the opportunity to model the principles of equity, democracy, and respect" (Goodman, 2011, p. 179). Guiffrida (2005) noted that the African American tradition of "othermothering" was closely aligned with Black students' perceptions of valuable interactions with faculty: invest time and listen to the students; understand their career fears, dreams, and goals; provide academic and personal advising; support and advocate for the students; provide information and resources needed to navigate the institution; and most importantly, show that they care about students' success. In a recent study, Beasley (2020) found that a perceived caring attitude of faculty members was predictive of academic and social engagement for Black undergraduate students at a predominantly White institution. In a study of faculty attitudes and behaviors of thriving students of color, researchers found these faculty engaged learners where they are, connect personally with students in and out of class, embrace diverse learners, and see students as individuals (Vetter et al., 2019).

## CRITICAL RACE THEORY FRAMEWORK

Higher education systems in the United States are "constructed and unequal hierarchies" (p. xvii) in which Black students experience differential access to power and privilege (Adams et al., 1997). While education is touted as the great equalizer, the net worth of White households is more than three times that of Black households with the same degree attainment (Darity, Jr. et al., 2018). Despite the development of multiple theories that provide explanations for student academic success in higher education, the framework of the majoritarian remains the norm. Attention to the concepts of race and racism in higher education is rarely the focal point in the analysis of academic success and achievement of Black students (Yosso et al., 2004). The need to examine institutional racism is vital for the transformation of the inequities in the higher educational system (Banks et al., 2020; Closson, 2010). We used the lens of Critical Race Theory (CRT) to frame our study of the experiences of Black business students because it acknowledges the importance of their counter-stories while persisting in a Historically White Institution.

CRT was born in the 1970s out of the work of Bell and several other legal scholars, who were reexamining the persistence of racism in America and the lack of racial reform in traditional civil rights legislation. The movement spread into other areas, including education (Hiraldo, 2010; Taylor, 1998), where research put race and racism at the center of scholarship and analysis while trying to understand how the dominant culture and its

oppression of Black people had been established and perpetuated (Lynn & Adams, 2002).

While CRT is not a set of rules or ideas, its scholarship is marked by specific themes (Taylor, 1998). Education scholars (Ladson-Billings, 1999; McCoy & Rodricks, 2015; Yosso et al., 2004) have described six themes or tenets of CRT:

1) Racism is Permanent - CRT seeks to "unmask and expose" racism in America (Ladson-Billings, 1998). Racism is ingrained in American culture and appears to be normal and natural because American society expects everyone to conform to the norms of the White, Christian, middle-class, heterosexual dominant group.
2) Challenge to Dominant Ideology – CRT challenges White privilege and argues that concepts of objectivity, meritocracy, colorblindness, race neutrality, and equal opportunity act as a camouflage for the self-interest, power, and privilege of the dominant culture in America (McCoy & Rodricks, 2015).
3) Centrality of Experiential Knowledge – CRT uses the counter-stories of Blacks to understand their experiences, narratives, and histories and support the concept that their experience of oppression is legitimate, appropriate, and critical to understanding and analyzing their plight (Closson, 2010; Howard & Navarro, 2016; Ladson-Billings, 1998; Yosso & Solórzano, 2005).
4) Interest Convergence Theory – CRT posits that the interests of Blacks will only occur when there is a convergence with the interests of those in power and there is an elimination of racism, sexism, and the empowerment of Blacks (McCoy & Rodricks, 2015; Yosso & Solórzano, 2005).
5) Intersectionality – CRT contends that Blacks not only experience oppression because of their race but also because of other identities (gender, class, religion, ability/disability, sexual orientation, etc.) and forms of oppression (sexism, ableism, homophobia, etc.) (Ladson-Billings, 1999; McCoy & Rodricks, 2015; Patton, 2016).

In the field of education, CRT scholars "theorized, examined, and challenged how race and racism shape schooling structures, practices and discourses" (Yosso et al., 2005, p. 3). In higher education, it has been an important tool used to broaden and deepen the analysis of the racialized

barriers erected for people of color. Particularly, the use of CRT has informed educators in the effort to identify and challenge macro- and microaggressions experienced by Black students on campuses across the country (Solórzano et al., 2005). Centrality of Experiential Knowledge (Closson, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 1998; Yosso & Solórzano, 2005), focused on the counter-narratives of Black students, is the tenet most aligned with the purpose of our study, and further guided the choices of the study's methodology.

## RESEARCH METHODS

Our purpose for this study was to understand the educational experiences of Black business students at an HWI in the southeastern United States, related to their perceptions of the climate of the College of Business and their interactions with business faculty. Specifically, we sought to explore the phenomenon of persistence in an HWI business school through a CRT lens. We used phenomenological interviews as the primary data source, which allowed us to capture the experiential knowledge of the students (Merriam & Tisdale, 2016; Ravitch & Carl, 2016).

### Setting and Participants

The setting for this study was an urban research university located in a large southeastern U.S. city, where the population is 36% Black (U.S. Census Bureau, 2018), yet only 17% of all students, and 14% of business students identified as Black/African American. Participants in the study were junior or senior business students who self-identified as Black/African American, 18-24 years old, attending school full-time, and maintaining a C-average or higher in coursework. Students meeting these criteria were first identified by the Dean's office and affinity groups then were invited via email or in person by the first author. In total, 10 students agreed to participate and were interviewed. In Table 1, demographic details about each participant are shown, along with an identifying code for their quotes in the study findings. Participants (8 women, 2 men) were enrolled in varied business degree programs, the most common being management (n=4) and marketing (n=4). Four of the students identified as being first-generation students, and five were transfer students. While first-generation and transfer status are both related to persistence in higher education, they are included here for purposes of demographic description. Student experiences related to these statuses are not explicitly explored in this study.

**Table 1**

*Demographic Characteristics of Participants* (n=10)

| Identifier | Gender | Class | Major | Transfer | First-Generation |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| F1 | Female | Senior | Finance | X | |
| F2 | Female | Junior | Management | | X |
| M1 | Male | Senior | Marketing | | X |
| F3 | Female | Junior | Marketing | X | X |
| F4 | Female | Junior | Management | X | |
| F5 | Female | Senior | International Business | | |
| M2 | Male | Junior | Management | X | |
| F6 | Female | Senior | Management | X | |
| F7 | Female | Senior | Marketing | | X |
| F8 | Female | Senior | Marketing | | |

## Data Collection and Analysis

After providing consent online to participate, students completed a short online demographic survey and set up an appointment for an interview. The semi-structured interview protocol (Appendix A) included questions to elicit student perceptions of the climate and culture of the college, relationships and interactions with faculty, and their understanding of the role of their race in their experiences. Interviews conducted face-to-face by the first author (a Black woman), ranged between 60 to 90 minutes, and provided the students an opportunity to share the stories of their lived experiences (Merriam, 2009; Roulston, 2010; Strauss & Corbin, 1988). During the interviews, several of the participants became very emotional and overcome with tears. Interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed verbatim.

First, we listened to the interviews while reviewing the transcripts to become familiar with the data and with each participant. Then, the first author took the lead in the data analysis. Broad a priori categories combined with open descriptive coding (Saldaña, 2016) were used to code the transcripts. Memoing was used to note analytical thoughts about the significance of and the relationship between codes, noting the connections to the CRT tenet of Centrality of Experiential Knowledge. The use of reflexivity provided an opportunity to (a) address any problems that are not easily explained; (b) include descriptive and other relevant statements that would help others understand the study and its final report; (c) address the dependability and confirmability of the data. After reviewing the codes, we debriefed to

compare notes and group the codes into categories and cross-cutting themes (Appendix B). The final step included identifying key quotations.

**Author Positionality Statement**

The research team includes individuals with different levels of personal experience and research expertise related to the focus and purpose of this study. Allen identifies as a Black woman, and she has personal experience as both a business student and a faculty member (not at the study institution). She conducted interviews with students and had primary responsibility for data analysis. Dika identifies as a White woman, and she contributed expertise in educational research design and scholarly focus on students of color and other marginalized groups in higher education. We are committed to conducting research that leads to more inclusive and equitable policies and practices to promote the greater attainment of Black students and other minoritized groups, which guided the selection of the CRT lens and qualitative research methodology.

## FINDINGS

We identified two themes related to the experiences of Black business students at an HWI: (a) an unwelcoming climate; and (b) faculty as available, but not always approachable.

**An Unwelcoming Climate**

Institutions of higher education expect Black students to assimilate into the culture of the university. The students we interviewed did not find assimilation to be an easy feat. The competitive, challenging, professional, and rigorous climate of the college left the participants feeling overwhelmed, intimidated, and extremely stressed.

> I think the business college is very competitive… I'd say the climate is very different from other colleges on campus…when I walk into this building, I just feel like oh, somebody's watching me…it's very intimidating because you do see a lot of the majorities around more than the minorities. (M2)

They believed that the college's strict policies, procedures, and requirements reinforced a competitive environment aimed to weed out students. One female junior student spoke at length about this.

Accounting… that's the biggest weed out course for a lot of business students…a lot of people switch their major because they can't pass that.…my Econ teacher was basically like, 'hey, just to let you know, you all are not going to make it… you're going to be broke, and you're going to have 10 different jobs, so just get used to it right now'…it was almost very intimidating…I think because I feel like people would assume that, because I'm Black, that I would do like psychology or an easier major. (F2)

The students described the climate as one filled with microaggressions, stereotypes, and prejudice, which reminded the students that they were different due to their race. This resulted in the students questioning their academic abilities.

I just didn't feel like it is very inviting. I just didn't feel like it was very inclusive…. I kind of wish I did see more African American people in my program because it wouldn't be as uncomfortable. I think it's that whole psychological aspect of when you recognize or see other people of your race, it makes you a little bit more at ease. (F5)

Throughout my experiences, there were times when I just didn't understand the material. Even though I wanted to go to the professor for help, I was afraid. I felt he made pre-judgments about me. (M1)

I've had an interaction with a teacher who was just very demeaning. You could ask a question…he would chastise you for asking him a question. It really made it hard for me to want to go to that class and deal with that for an hour and 15 minutes. He just made me question my intelligence. I know I'm not dumb. (F1)

Constant reminders of being "other" or "outsider" made navigating the college and the university challenging. The students sometimes found it difficult to keep motivated and persist toward degree completion.

The unwelcoming climate in the business college manifested itself as being exclusive and White-centric. Students reported challenges to assimilation, the threat of being "weeded out" (eliminated), and feelings of being an imposter or outsider. The students referenced climate as policies and procedures, as well as perceptions about the classroom environment and

relationships with other students. Students' descriptions of interactions with faculty offered further insight into their experiences in the business college.

**Business Faculty Can Be Available, But Not Always Approachable**

Looking for guidance and knowledge, students interacted daily with faculty members. Although available during class and office hours, many faculty members did not seem approachable. Those deemed unapproachable were perceived as not being inviting or genuinely interested in assisting the students through both verbal and nonverbal cues.

Students looked for cues to determine if a faculty member was welcoming, open to engaging, and committed to helping the students succeed. They paid close attention to what was communicated, how it was communicated, body language, and responsiveness to questions. The interpretation of these cues had a direct impact on whether or not the students approached the faculty member.

> The way they walk into the classroom and present the material has influence on how well I can do in that class. Unfortunately, I feel like the majority of my interactions are the same…just because of their attitudes when they're in class…it makes me feel a little uncomfortable. (F4)

> I do go to office hours to get extra help…I don't get my hopes up. I go just to exhaust all my chances. I'm not really confident, when I go to office hours, that my question will be answered or my problem will get solved. (F5)

> I do feel comfortable going to get the extra help...I [just] don't get my hopes up...once [a professor] kept giving me signals that he was not interested in what I was asking. He continually checked his watch and asked 'So did you just want to look over your test? What did you need?" I wanted to look over the test to better prepare for the next test…he said 'I don't know what you don't get. It's simple, it's not rocket science'…at that point I didn't ask any more questions and left upset. (F8)

There was one Black faculty member in the college, a man, who students described as approachable and relatable, as more genuine and engaging. Interactions with this professor left the students feeling encouraged, confident, and focused on their success.

When one can't relate to the faculty, you don't know what to talk about. Some things become easier when you have someone who is relatable. You can just talk about anything with them. (M1)

I feel like I automatically let my guard down when I'm talking to [him]. It felt more comfortable…He loves to talk about his family and class…[he] will tell stories in class and connect everything back to what we are learning...[he] knows me…I have the best relationship with him. (F7)

Immediately, I had a level of comfort. When I was in class, the professor pushed us to do our best. Although I am no longer in that class, I sent the professor an email, earlier this semester…[he] responded 'feel free to stop by my hours. Anything you need, I'll help you.' The professor always made me feel encouraged. (F1)

I felt very comfortable just speaking with the professor about things that were going on in my personal life or with school. (F5)

Student participants expressed that they needed faculty to be welcoming, encouraging, open to approaching students, and willing to get to know the students. Further, they wanted faculty to be aware of the challenges Black students face, understand cultural differences, and support their academic needs.

The notion of faculty approachability was described by the students as both verbal and nonverbal cues they picked up on in the classroom and when they went to visit faculty during office hours. They felt academic support from the lone Black faculty member and the importance of his presence in the college was made apparent by all participants. Their expressed needs for faculty interaction and support were clearly in contrast to their overall experiences.

## DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

We designed this study to gain an understanding of how successful Black business students perceived their interactions with faculty related to their academic persistence. Using CRT as a framework, we gained insight as to the perceived pressures associated with being a Black student and the role faculty played in the learning experience. Supported by the CRT tenet of

Centrality of Experiential Knowledge, the counter-stories of the students provided an opportunity for us to recognize their experiences of oppression.

Within the field of higher education, researchers have increasingly used CRT as an important tool used to broaden and deepen the analysis of the racialized barriers for people of color (Solórzano et al., 2005). Scholars of CRT have concluded that the needed attention to the concepts of race and racism in higher education is rarely the focal point of the analysis of academic success and achievement of students of color. Although race has been mostly used as a demographic variable, there was a need for an explicit focus on racism to transform the inequities found in the U.S. higher educational system (Closson, 2010).

Our findings indicated that the students perceived a competitive and unwelcoming environment, which in turn caused them to feel overwhelmed, intimidated, isolated, and stressed (Keels et al., 2017). Although this may be common among business students, the racially charged climate had an even greater effect. The students described a culture riddled with stereotypes and prejudices that left them struggling to feel integrated and motivated to persist (Fries-Britt & Turner, 2002). Although they successfully continued through their studies, the students had many peers who decided to give up and left the college, and in some cases, the university (Fries-Britt & Turner, 2002). As a result of experiences of discrimination and microaggressions, the students suffered from increased stress and pressures that affected their academic performance (Cabrera et al., 1999).

Once on campus, the students in our study indicated that they were expected to break away from the cultural conditioning of home and assimilate into the culture of the university and the business college (Banks et al., 2020). They did not find it easy to assimilate into the dominant culture of the college, based on the constant reminder that they were different or an outsider (Cress, 2008). Their experiences resulted in dissatisfaction with the racial climate in the college (Banks et al., 2020; Banks & Landau, 2019; Solórzano et al., 2000). The students found themselves in an environment where the majority of the faculty and peers were White. Although faculty were valued as a resource needed to instill knowledge and provide support, these Black students felt that the faculty treated them differently than their White peers. Daily, the students had contact with faculty members in the classroom. They often did not approach faculty because of the perceptions of potential pre-judgments about Black students. Supporting these findings, previous research found that when faculty interactions appeared to be inviting and rewarding, there was a strong association with continued student academic success

(Anaya & Cole, 2001; Cole, 2008; Cole & Espinoza, 2008; Li et al., 2009; Tinto, 1987, 1993).

An important finding in this study was that students picked up on verbal and non-verbal cues from faculty to determine if the faculty member was welcoming, committed to student success, and willing to help the students succeed (Beasley, 2020). These cues were associated with how the faculty member talked to the students, their body language, and their responsiveness to questions. When the cues were positive, the students did not hesitate to approach the faculty member for assistance (Burrell et al., 2015). In contrast when the cues were negative (e.g., microaggressions), they were hesitant to approach. Not being able to take full advantage of the faculty member's guidance, some students experienced a negative impact on their academic experience. The students appreciated the positive cues they received from the lone Black faculty member in the college. They found him to be more relatable, showing a better understanding of their social, educational, and personal needs (Guiffrida, 2005). As a result, these interactions seemed more genuine, engaging, easier, and comfortable, which resulted in a positive impact.

## IMPLICATIONS FOR RESEARCH

Limitations and delimitations of the current study suggest directions for future research. During the interview process, we noted that students lacked clarity on the meaning of the word "culture". As a result, the students provided more insight into their perceptions of the climate versus the culture of the College of Business. In future studies, researchers could employ ethnographic methods including observation and document analysis to provide a more comprehensive understanding of program culture and student behaviors and experiences within that culture.

Students noted the business college's climate as being structured, challenging, professional, and rigorous. Therefore, different methodologies or other theoretical frameworks that explicitly examine culture could be employed to more deeply understand how Black students experience business programs at HWIs. Future studies could also include Black students in other competitive majors (health, engineering) to understand how perceptions and experiences are similar and different.

The perception of business faculty as unapproachable among students in the current study also suggests directions for future research. Future studies could include faculty perspectives as well as observation of student-faculty interaction in and out of class to develop a more nuanced understanding of the notion of approachability. Perspectives of White faculty and faculty of color about their interactions with Black business students would further

explore how faculty perceive and interact with students, and how those interactions are in turn perceived by the students.

Finally, the overarching theme of being perceived as the other among Black students in business majors and careers is certainly worthy of additional exploration, particularly related to CRT and other critical theories.

## IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE

The findings of this study reinforce that colleges of business must pay attention to creating positive and equitable experiences and environments for Black students. We offer two suggestions to improve climate and student-faculty relations for Black and other under-represented students. First, to play an active role in creating a positive college climate, faculty need to learn more about their biases, cultural worldviews, and attitudes towards cultural differences. Cultural competency training would allow faculty to develop awareness and identify ways to help Black students connect with various segments of the institution (Davis et al., 2004). Design and implementation of a training program, aligned with the institution's mission, could be a collaborative effort of institutional offices (equity and inclusion; teaching and learning) and address microaggressions, systemic oppression, implicit bias, and racial identity development. Second, students would benefit from partnerships with local professionals and alumni for career preparation as part of a mentorship program. Racial diversity among the mentors would provide added benefits for minoritized students and would help facilitate holistic mentoring that goes beyond academics to include the curiosity and concern for students' cultural backgrounds and other social identities (Reddick & Pritchett, 2015; Robnett et al., 2019). Relationships with successful professionals who look like them would provide Black students an opportunity to learn how to navigate in a business world full of race-neutral practices, policies, and patterns of racial inequalities.

## CONCLUSIONS

The findings of this study contribute to the research surrounding the academic persistence of Black students, by focusing on the perceptions of an understudied group (business majors) using a Critical Race Theory lens. Black degree attainment remains behind non-Hispanic Whites, with significant underrepresentation in most high-paying majors leading to occupational and income disparities. Supportive structures and relationships with faculty are vital for the persistence of Black students on historically White campuses in historically White-dominated majors. The Black business students in our study noted how their experiences and interactions left them

feeling unwelcome and othered, yet they persisted in an environment not designed for them. Rather than a deficit view of students, "...it is time to rethink higher education's approach to addressing racial inequities and adopt a more holistic and aggressive strategy to advance equity agendas" (Museus et al., 2015, p. 73). Interest Convergence Theory (McCoy & Rodricks, 2015; Yosso & Solórzano, 2005) suggests that if institutional agents are truly committed to achieving the outcomes they desire, they must embrace equity and inclusion more consciously and engage in intentional long-term efforts to achieve racial equity. Those efforts must include plans for hiring and retention of Black and other faculty of color in fields where they are underrepresented, along with cultural competency training for all faculty members to make an impact on institutional culture and climate.

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# Microfinance Services and Women Empowerment in Biratnagar Metropolitan, Nepal

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## ABSTRACT

*This article examines how far microfinancing services positively affect the empowerment of Nepali women living in the eastern part of Nepal. A purposive sampling method was used and responses of 97 women were collected through structured questionnaires. The women were using microfinance services on their own and at least from the last three years. Results indicate that the use of microfinance services (credit and saving) helps women to empower. Easy access to financial services and satisfaction with the loan payment period causes no difference in the improvement of women's empowerment. Saving service is significantly associated with women's household decision-making, major decision-making in the domestic context, and availability of basic household needs. Microfinance services contribute to women's socio-economic empowerment and their children's education.*

**INTRODUCTION**

The World Bank's report claims that the 32 percent population of Nepal is below the poverty line (World Bank Report [WB], 2019). Gender equality is one of the predominant conditions for poverty alleviation (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development [OECD], 1998). Nepal ranked 101$^{st}$ out of 153 countries in economic participation and opportunities on the Global Gender Gap Index Report 2020 (World Economic Forum [WOFUM], 2020). The prevailing disparity of income and resources, lack of good governance and economic opportunity, and stagnant industrialization impede the aim of the poverty abolishment of the country (Acharya, 2020). Therefore, economic involvement and engagement of the people come to staple for the Nepali government to realize the poverty alleviation goal. However, there are myriad options like big government projects or foreign direct investment to generate huge employment opportunities to sterilize poverty. But Nepal fails to avail of these choices due to the aforementioned reasons.

Microfinance can be a viable instrument that generates employment and self-employment to deal with the persistent predicament of poverty. Notably, microfinance services are not able to augment the economy (Saqfalhait, 2019). Yet, microfinance is a broad strategy uplifting social, economic, and political involvement and empowerment (Kessey, 2005).

The world's all endeavours are towards the realization of sustainable and protracted development in case women issues cannot be overlooked by the countries' policies, national and international agencies, and researchers too (Ali & Hatta, 2012). Women's empowerment, is power with, power within, power in, and power over (Kabeer, 2001), can be a robust yardstick to beat the severe challenge of the 21$^{st}$ century that is the unequal distribution of income and resources which results in poverty, degraded well-being, illiteracy, and poor health and sanitation (Acharya, 2020). Women are deprived in all sectors and communities, consequently, women are victims of poverty more than men (Khan & Noreen, 2012). Ironically, women empowerment is a global need but most of the countries as well Nepal are still chasing the goal.

Gender disparity is one of the most challenging setbacks for the development of a country (World Economic Forum, 2007). Therefore, mainstreaming and involvement of women in gainful economic activities come to be indispensable. Muhammad Yunus and Grameen Bank model (1976) have been trying to address the fierce problem of poverty in the form of microfinance. Microfinance can be an effective vehicle to empower women (Leach & Sitaram, 2010), although Mayoux (2005) claimed that poverty

alleviation is not an automatic result of MF, in some cases, the returns are comparatively nominal. Kabeer (2005) also warns that only financial intervention is not a panacea to empower women rather other interventions such as education, political quotas, and assurance are simultaneously imperative for apparent radical structural change.

Empowerment of women, as discussed by Mayoux (2005), is possible when women can control their resources and decide on themselves about their resources and life. Therefore, it is crucial to examine the contribution of microfinance services to uplift the socio-economic status of women. It becomes important in the Nepalese scenario where the youth female literacy rate is 87 percent whereas adults are 60 percent (The World Bank, 2018).

## Objective of the study

The study aims to examine the effects of microfinance credit and saving on women's socio-economic development.

## LITERATURE REVIEW
### Microfinance Institutions (MFIs) and Women

Economically poor women were relatively more victims of all kinds of disparity prevailing in any society. They were treated as property and dignity of a household hence always being the subject to be controlled mostly by a male guardian (Khan & Noreen, 2012). Microfinance is an important approach for poverty alleviation and toward sustainable development. MFIs have worked for financial inclusion for the overlooked sections of the society such as vegetable vendors, artisans, rikshaw pullers, farmers (KPMG, 2019). Literature sufficiently depicted that underprivileged groups are deprived of formal education hence they lack the necessary skills and competency for the formal employment sector. They failed to access financial services and were bound to rely on informal employment for their livelihood (United Nations Children's Fund [UNICEF], 1997). Microcredit summit (2000) claimed that only two percent of 500 million micro and small entrepreneurs of the world access other sources (government funding, banks, financial institutions, cooperative society) of financial services except for family and friends as money lenders. Substantial financial funding was 30% more likely to be tough for women entrepreneurs in comparison to their counterparts (Wyman, 2019). Access to financial services for women was still more challenging (Osa Ouma & Rambo, 2013).

On the other side, Haque and Yamao (2008) pointed out that microfinance services were not for the poor rather it facilitated wealthier

women with a certain level of income and some assets. MFIs provided various financial and non-financial services especially to women from rural and urban areas. In the case of financial services credit, savings, leasing, transfer, and insurance were availed by MFIs, and credit and saving microfinance services were mostly exercised by beneficiaries of MFIs.

The women mobilizing microfinance's services, irrespective of their ethnicity and wealth segment, had myriad positive effects on income, children education, family health, daughters' education, social networks, decision-making, participation, mobility, self-confidence, self-efficacy, activities outside the home, legal awareness, living standard, control of resource they earned (International Labour Organization [ILO], 1998). Concurrently, ILO (1999) claimed the affirmatory impact of microfinance on poverty alleviation, financial self-sustainability, and women empowerment.

Unexceptionally, the negative results of microfinance's services were also discussed by the scholars. Kato and Kratzer (2013) claimed that a higher interest rate of microfinance exploited women which led to social pressure and sometimes resulted in domestic violence. Ali and Hatta (2012) contested for deflation of the poverty rate, augmented living standard, and livings of women through microfinance. Similarly, Ejaz, Khan, and Noreen (2012) pointed out microfinance as a prominent instrument for empowering women but accompanied by education, family protection, and loan provided to them must be utilized by them.

**Women Empowerment: A Broad Phenomena**

Different scholars and bodies conceptualized empowerment differently depending on several factors such as geography, level of education, social construction, and ongoing culture, and so on. As women empowerment had no explicit definition to date, there was open space to describe and work on the particular phenomena (Batliwala, 1993). Some claimed empowerment as the process (Mayoux, 1995; Rowland, 1997), and some contested it as an outcome. Empowerment was a shift from a state of powerlessness towards strategic social, economic, and political participation at individual and social levels (Kabeer, 1994; Nelson &Wright, 1995; Friedmann, 1992). Akpan (2015) stated empowerment as a means to contribute optimum to wealth creation and economic growth and to pull disadvantaged women out of impoverishment and marginalization. Enhancing poor people's freedom of choice and action to shape their own lives was empowerment (Narayan, 2005).

Hashemi and Schuler (1993) identified six dimensions of empowerment based on activities identified by women as important for their

day-to-day functioning; a sense of self and vision of the future, mobility and visibility, economic security, decision-making power in the household, participation in non-family groups, and interact effectively in the public sphere. Tuladhar, Khanal, KC, Ghimire, and Onta (2013) figured out a woman empowerment index in the Nepalese context included women's involvement in household decision-making, membership in community groups, cash earnings, ownership of house/land, and education. There were very diverse opinions toward defining empowerment and its dimensions.

It is important to clarify what is implied by 'empowerment' in this article. Empowerment is the socio-economic development of women. More explicitly, empowerment is measured in terms of household decision-making, importance in the family purchases, involvement in the major economic decisions, fulfilling family needs, able to purchase fixed assets, and availing the basic needs of the household.

**Microfinance Uplifting Women's Living Standard**

Ali and Hatta (2012) expressed microfinance as an entry point for women's socio-economic development. Many countries had proven intervention of microfinance as a strong strategy against poverty alleviation (Leach & Sitaram, 2010). If entire poor women could be approached with MF services, such economic transformation would shape the world positively different by uplifting women economically and socially (Khandker, 2005; Muhammad et al., 2012; Paudel, 2013; Swain & Wallentin, 2014; Zohir & Matin, 2004). The economic strengthening of women augmented their internal and external power to deal with myriad situations. Women in economic activities resulted in a say on personal and household decisions, control over resources, greater self-confidence, and most importantly self-respect (Batliwala, 1994). Besides, Harriet and Sen (2003) had claimed political involvement, right of the heir, absence of domestic and sexual violence, abolition of exploitation, and any kind of gender-based discrimination were the fruits of microfinance services harnessed by women.

Interestingly, Kabeer (1999) posited that women were more reliable in case of loan repayment performance than men. Moreover, women's earnings were invested back to the well-being of their household, dependents, and children (Mayoux, 1995; Kabeer, 2001). Remarkably, women's handful of earnings had a positive reaction in their daughter's education too (Kireti & Sakwa, 2014).

However, the services provided to women were used by their male family members (Goetz & Gupta, 1996; Rahman, 1999) and it added the burden of loan repayment to women which enlarged their workloads

(Vengroff & Creevey, 1994). Remarkably, microfinance did not automatically contribute to drastic changes in women's socio-economic status but still with other interventions like education and governmental policies and quotas can transform the whole picture of women (Kabeer, 2005).

In the mirror of empirical studies, Mahmud (2003) had sampled poor and non-poor groups of Bangladeshi women and some were members of microfinance and some were not, to analyse their empowerment on household expenditure decision, time spent on domestic work, and health treatment. Mahmud (2003) resulted in women's significant effects on exercising agency while limited effects on choices of resources. Ch and Malyadri (2015) revealed that household decision-making, legal awareness, mobility, economic security, and family decision-making were effectively empowered women in (Andhra Pradesh) India. Economic status, decision-making power, knowledge, and self-worthiness of women were linked with participating microfinance (Aruna & Jyothirmayi, 2011). Patient, Mbabazize, and Charles (2016) had analysed socio-economic development in terms of own assets, income generation, and saving in Rwanda. On the other hand, Kireti and Sakwa (2014) revealed the socio-economic status of Kenyan women relied on access to microfinance services and the provision of non-financial services. Rahman et al. (2017) claimed that microfinance affected the participation of women's empowerment regarding children's education and marriage, household decision, freedom, secure and strong.

**Microfinance in Nepalese Context**

The agriculture development bank in Nepal initiated a systematic and formal microfinance program from 1973 to the small farmer development program. Other commercial banks also commenced different services like priority area loan, poverty-stricken loan, and loan without collateral but discernible achievements were not recorded. In 1992, specialized microfinance, in the form of the 'Grameen Bank model of Bangladesh', a rural development bank established. This bank contributed to economic mobilization by spreading financial access to rural people (Acharya, 2020).

Because of the mushroom growth of microfinance in 2003/04 by the private sector, the rural development bank failed to compete. Therefore, some portion of the share of the government-owned bank was sold to private. Currently, around 90 microfinances with 3750 branches are serving 4.3 million members and 2.7 million borrowers to the different parts of the country (Nepal Rastra Bank [NRB], 2019).

**Justification for the Sampled Area and MFIs**

Nepal is divided into seven states and Biratnagar metropolitan is the capital city of state1. According to the 2011 census, the city ranked fourth in population and ranked second in population density after Kathmandu (Central Bureau of Statistics [CBS], 2011). It lies 6 km north to Indian Border, Jogbani, Bihar. It is an industrial and commercial market hub for the eastern region of Nepal. The city has direct linkage with Calcutta (India) port and Indian railways for many parts of India. The open border fascinates the natives of the city towards involvement in economic activities.

A total of 63 MFIs is operating in Nepal (NRB, 2019) and dozens of MFIs serve the sampled city. The study has selected only three microfinances namely Nerude MFI, Chhimek MFI, and Forward MFI, working in the sampled city. Nerude is the only MFI that has a central office in Biratnagar while rest two (Chhimek and Forward) MFIs cover a very large number (more than two hundred thousand) of members across the country.
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## RESEARCH METHODS

The study examines the services of microfinance rendered by women and the effects of using these services on their socio-economic empowerment. Thus, the research design of this paper was descriptive and explanatory. The scope of this paper was confined to women who a) were connected with any of the selected three MFIs (Chhimek MFI, Forward MFI, and Nerude MFI) from Biratnagar Metropolitan, and b) were using microfinance services for at least the last three years. Further, the paper tried to collect primary data for only those women who were managing microfinance services on their own because measuring women empowerment was supposed to be meaningful when the women used microfinance services on self. It was very challenging to identify such women hence the purposive sampling method used for the selection of sample women, the five moderators (who were current and ex-students of the researcher) working in these MFIs helped to identify the genuine users of the microfinance services. A total of 105 women were identified for the research purpose including all delimitations. They were interviewed after they consented to participate. Respondents were informed about the objectives of the study, the promise of confidentiality of their information, and their right to withdraw from the survey at any time.

The research was based on primary data and data was collected with structured questionnaires. The questionnaire extracted from the work of Patient, Mbabazize, and Charles (2016) and further four experts from Nepal contextualized the instrument. There were three portions in the questionnaire: the first section was about the 'personal information', the second set of

questions related to 'microcredit' and its effects on their empowerment, and the last section had queries about 'micro saving' and the effects of saving on their empowerment. Closed-ended questions with multiple options were formulated to acquire personal information, second and third sections of the questionnaire followed closed-ended questions with dichotomous options 'yes' and 'no'.

It was very difficult to identify the exact population of women using microfinance services, as around 10 percent of the total loan disbursed from MFIs were utilized by women on own, stated by an officer of MFI. The restricted random sampling method was applied to get the respondents to meet all the assumptions made for a reliable result. The researcher administered the questionnaire, to 105 women who were using microfinance services three years back and on their own, from 2nd July 2019 to 17th September 2019. Out of total administered questionnaires, 97 were useful for further processing because of missing and inappropriate information.

Methods of data analysis were percentage, multiple response analysis, binomial test, and Fisher's exact test. The binomial test was used because items were nominal and dichotomous ('yes' and 'no'), and the sample size was independent and significantly small, yet representative of the population. Fisher's exact test was exercised as the nature of the table is 2 by 2 of the nominal variables and the expected number of frequencies in the Chi-square test is fewer than five (Miller, 2014, p.88). SPSS-20 was used for data tabulation and analysis.

## EMPIRICAL RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Socio-Demographic Profile of Sampled Microfinance Services User Women

Table 1 depicts that middle-aged (31 to 40) women are using more services. Similar results were drawn by Kato and Kratzer (2013) in Tanzania. According to the Demographic and Health Survey (2016), Nepali women were less than the age of 20 years at first birth, and the number of living children was 2. Hence, generally, middle-aged (31-40) women in Nepal accomplish their major domestic responsibilities (upbringing children) by this age and have free time to invest in the self. As the age increased (after 40) the tendency to use microfinance services gradually fell. The majority of microfinance service users are married women similar to the results found in studies by Kato and Kratzer (2013), Limbu (2014), and Modi, Patel, and Patel (2014).

**Table 1**

*Socio-demographic profile of the sampled women*

| Variables | Categories | Frequency | Percent |
|---|---|---|---|
| Age | Up to 30 | 24 | 25 |
| | 31 to 40 | 34 | 35 |
| | 41 to 50 | 25 | 26 |
| | 50 & above | 14 | 14 |
| Marital status | Unmarried | 05 | 05 |
| | Married | 86 | 89 |
| | Widow | 06 | 06 |
| Education | Illiterate | 50 | 51 |
| | Below 10$^{th}$ (SLC) | 30 | 31 |
| | 10$^{th}$ (SLC) and above | 17 | 18 |
| Monthly Income (in Nepalese Currency) | 15000 & below | 23 | 24 |
| | 15001- 25000 | 28 | 28 |
| | 25001- 35000 | 19 | 20 |
| | 35001 & above | 27 | 28 |
| Source of income | Business | 59 | 61 |
| | Employment | 37 | 38 |
| | Farming | 16 | 17 |
| Services rendered | Microcredit | 95 | 98 |
| | Saving | 94 | 97 |
| Name of microfinance | Chhimek | 45 | 46 |
| | Forward | 25 | 26 |
| | Nerude | 27 | 28 |

In every two respondents, one is illiterate (without any formal education). Notably, women expending the MF services are more likely to be less educated. More than one-third of the respondents were illiterate in the study of Modi et al (2014). In Tanzania less than five percent were illiterate and three out of four microfinance services user women were lashed with primary education (Kato & Kratzer, 2013). In other words, women with an increased level of educational attainment have a lower attraction towards microfinance services due to the knowledge of different sources of financial services.

Two third of the sampled women's family monthly income was more than rupees 15 thousand that is more than the per capita income (US Dollar 1047 nearly Rupees 10000 per month) of Nepal (National Planning Commission, 2020, p.5). Almost all the respondents are using microcredit services and similarly saving services of MFIs. Rahman et al. (2017) got 93

percent of women who borrowed loans from MFI. Limbu (2014) and Modi et al. (2014) found no women without saving after joining MFIs.

**Microcredit Services and Its Effects on Women's Empowerment**
The hypothesis for all items on the second portion of the questionnaire was set accordingly as
$H_{01}$: p=0.5, no difference between the number of women who have access to microcredit and who do not have access to microcredit (Table-2).
$H_{02}$: p=0.5, no difference between the satisfaction on varied loan-period of women who have credit (Table-2).
$H_{03}$: There is no significant impact of microcredit on women's empowerment (Table-3).

**Table 2**
*Distribution of microcredit women user and its effects on their socio-economic development with Binomial test (n=97)*

| S. No. | Statements | Frequency | Percent | Sig. |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Credit services | Women easily access microcredit. | 89 | 91 | 0.000 |
| | The loan payment period is satisfactory. | 85 | 88 | 0.000 |
| Effects of credit on women's empowerment | Microcredit has increased your involvement in household decision making. | 91 | 94 | 0.000 |
| | Your decisions regarding family purchases get importance. | 88 | 91 | 0.000 |
| | Your role has been enhanced in major economic decisions. | 91 | 94 | 0.000 |
| | Microcredit has supported fulfilling your family needs. | 76 | 78 | 0.000 |
| | You have purchased any fixed assets. | 60 | 62 | 0.025 |

[*Note.* sig. stands for significance level]

Table-2 depicts that women can easily access credit from microfinance. This paper shows that four out of five respondents have access

to microcredit alike in Patient, et al. (2016) whereas Ablorh (2011) found access to half of the sampled women. In this study, only one-tenth of service users are not satisfied with the loan period. Credit mobilization enhances involvement in household decision-making, major economic decision, and importance for their say in the family decision of a huge mass of credit user women and the same as the results of Patient et al. (2016). Ablorh (2011) marked 100 percent results for augmented household decision-making whereas around half of respondents agreed on the family purchase decisions.

In this study, three out of four women state that because of microcredit they can support their family needs. Whereas, cent percent of women involved in MFI support their family needs were the result of Ablorh (2011) and the result was 70 percent on Kireti and Sakwa (2014). Aruna and Jyothirmayi (2011) showed a significant change in assets, income, loan availability, loan repayment, bank accounts. This study delineates that 40 percent of women have not the potential to add fixed assets with their involvement in microfinance programs while Patient et al. (2016) had 64 percent for the same. All the items of women empowerment and microcredit are statistically significant at 50 percent by using the binomial test.

**Table 3**

*Association between access to credit, and satisfactory loan period and their effects on the empowerment of credit user women (n=97)*

| Effects of microcredit on women's empowerment | Easy access to microcredit (Freq. and sig.) | Satisfactory loan period (Freq. and sig.) |
|---|---|---|
| Credit has increased your involvement in household decision-making. | (83) 0.588 | (81) 0.159 |
| Your decisions regarding family purchases get importance. | (81) 0.555 | (78) 0.308 |
| Your role has been enhanced in major economic decisions. | (84) 0.412 | (80) 0.557 |
| Microcredit has supported fulfilling your family needs. | (69) 0.448 | (66) 0.493 |
| You have purchased any fixed assets. | (53) 0.117 | (56) 0.033* |

[*Note*. sig. stands for a significance level, freq. for frequency and * for 5% level of significance]

Table-3, The 'ease access to microcredit' or not, and 'satisfactory loan period' or not, respectively do not differ the 'effects on women's empowerment' with Fisher's exact test. Kato and Kratzer (2013) reported an association between credit users and non-users with decision making regarding the general domestic purchase, family, and even major decisions of the household. Likewise, Modi et al. (2014) extracted a positive correlation between women empowerment through microfinance and financial freedom.

In this study, only a single item 'you have purchased any fixed assets' have a significant dependence on a satisfactory loan period. Satisfaction on loan period to women borrowers affected the purchase decision of fixed assets. Rahman et al. (2017), and Kato and Kratzer (2013) also came with a difference in the purchasing capacity of fixed assets before and after borrowing loans. One-fifth of respondents (who are using microfinance services) had ownership of land on their names (Limbu, 2014). In the same way, Patient, Mbabazize, and Charles (2016) delineated that women empowerment was associated and correlated with the credit and saving services of microfinance concerning their decision-making, adding fixed assets, loan payment.

**Micro Saving, Reasons to Save, and Its Effects on Women's Empowerment**

'Reasons for saving' of women involved in microfinance services were a multiple-choice question with six choices as given below in table-4. Hence, the multiple-response analysis had been done to get the genuine percentage for specific responses.

**Table 4**

*Reason for saving of women rendering microfinance services (n=97)*

| Reasons for saving | Frequency | Percent |
|---|---|---|
| Entrepreneurial activities | 35 | 16.59 |
| Access loan | 14 | 6.64 |
| Household expenses | 40 | 18.96 |
| Children's education | 58 | 27.49 |
| Future security | 59 | 27.96 |
| No specific reason | 05 | 2.37 |
| Total | 211 | 100 |

Table-4 depicts that five specific reasons were prescribed to respondents following 'if any other' in case of their different reasons for their saving. Children's education and future security come to be the most

prevailing reason to save by three out of five women. Household expenses stand the second important reason for saving. Generally, poor women involved in microfinance programs usually encounter the problem of running their regular household expenses therefore, they save to support themselves in such tough times. One-third of respondents are saving to execute their business activities smoothly. Access loan in the time of need was another reason to save.

**Table 5**
*Distribution of reason for saving and its effects on women's empowerment with Binomial test (n=97)*

| S. No. | Statements | Frequency | Percent | Sig. |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Reasons for saving | Entrepreneurial activities | 35 | 36 | 0.000 |
| | Access loan | 14 | 14 | 0.000 |
| | Household expenses | 40 | 41 | 0.000 |
| | Children's education | 58 | 60 | 0.000 |
| | Future security | 59 | 61 | 0.000 |
| | No specific reason | 05 | 05 | 0.375 |
| Effects of saving on women's empowerment | It socially empowers women. | 91 | 94 | 0.000 |
| | It economically empowers women. | 92 | 95 | 0.000 |
| | It empowers in household decision making. | 79 | 81 | 0.000 |
| | It empowers family major decision making. | 81 | 84 | 0.000 |
| | It avails the basic needs of the household. | 79 | 81 | 0.000 |

[*Note.* sig. stands for significance level]

Similarly, the result of Paudel (2013) also stated that the first reason for the saving of a household was future needs, a second important reason is children's education, and next in line of reason to save was entrepreneurial activities. Unlike, being able to access loans was the first reason for saving then entrepreneurial activities, meeting household expenses and no specific reason stood respectively (Patient, Mbabazize & Charles, 2016). Almost all microfinance services users saved in the study of Limbu (2014). Kireti and

Sakwa (2014) saving enhanced health services, children's education, payment of loans, consumption needs, and income.

The hypothesis for all items; reason for saving and effects of saving on women's empowerment, on the third portion of the questionnaire was set accordingly as

[H04]: p=0.5, no difference between the reason for saving for entrepreneurial activity (Table-5).

[H05]: p=0.5, no difference between the effects of saving on women's empowerment (Table-5).

[H06]: Saving is not significantly associated with women's empowerment (Table-6).

Table-5, According to the fourth hypothesis (H04), all the items on reasons for saving, except 'no specific reason' of saving, are statistically significant with the probability of 50 percent in the binomial test. Similarly, items of saving effects on women's empowerment (H05) have a statistically significant result with a probability of 50 percent.

Almost all respondents realize that saving has socially and economically empowered and enabled them to arrange the fundamental needs of their household. Saving empowers four out of five women respondents to decide on household decisions and more importantly in major household decisions. Essential household needs are being availed by 80 percent of credit user respondents. In line with, Kato and Kratzer (2013) also reported an association between credit and decision-making regarding saving and income utilization.

**Table 6**
*Association between the effects of saving on women's empowerment and women who save (n=97)*

| Effects of saving on women's empowerment | Who saves (Freq. and sig.) |
|---|---|
| It socially empowers women. | (77) 0.646 |
| It economically empowers women. | (78) 0.577 |
| It empowers in household decision making. | (72) 0.001** |
| It empowers family major decision making. | (73) 0.003** |
| It avails the basic needs of the household. | (70) 0.031* |

[*Note.* freq. stands for frequency, sig. for significance level where ** 1% and *5% level of significance]

Table-6, Fisher's exact test states that women empowerment, in case of household decision-making, major family decision-making, and availing fundamental household needs, (H06) is statistically associated with women who save. It meant that saving has enhanced women's influence on the decisions related to household or major purchases. Identically, the saving of women ensures the basic needs of the household.

The results of this paper suggest that credit utilization is associated with women's empowerment so basic household needs, household, and major decision-making are associated with women's saving. Mahmud (2003) argued that poor and non-poor households had a significant difference to non-participants of microfinance. Women's empowerment through microfinance was correlated with socioeconomic status, autonomy, the position of women in their family and society, and financial freedom (Modi, et al., 2014). Women empowerment statistically relied on the services of microfinance (Patient, Mbabazize, & Charles, 2016).

Ch and Malyadri (2015) argued that decision-making relating to home, household expenses, and large purchases improved after using MF services. Similarly, Rahman et al. (2017) drew that there was a significant difference between before and after using MF services in case of children's education and marriage, buying personal and household items, assets, medical treatment, the decision regarding borrowing, and control over income.

The objective of the study, was to analyse the effects of microfinance services credit and saving on women's empowerment, was achieved. The study revealed that microfinance services (credit and saving) were effective to empower women economically and socially.

## CONCLUSION

MFIs remain one of the robust means to combat the problem of poverty by creating employment and self-employment opportunities. Since the problem of unemployment is severe in Nepal, microfinance services have a positive and increasing trend of financial access to women. Although MFIs are working for uplifting poor and deprived women, only a nominal number of such women are enjoying the facility of utilizing their credits and savings on their own. Until and unless a significant number of women use financial services themselves, microfinance cannot change the status of bargaining power for minor and major domestic decisions as well as other outdoor decisions.

The microfinance services build the nation in two ways. Firstly, access and use of microfinance services empower women economically and socially by their involvement in productive activities. Secondly, MFIs

encourage borrowers to save and the portion of their saving forms capital for the protracted advancement of the country as mostly, women save for the education of their children and future security. Subsequently, the involvement of women in microfinance, directly and indirectly, uplift the present and future of the nation. Hence, microfinance services can be a rigorous weapon to cope with poverty, and gender inequality when associated with other substantial economic and social apparatus.

## LIMITATIONS AND FURTHER RESEARCH

The study naturally suffered from the inherent limitations of the primary data as the study was based on primary sources. There were some introvert respondents which may influence the results.

This study has focused on the decision-making dimension of empowerment, other parameters of women's empowerment like autonomy, mobility, ownership of land, or house can be further studied to examine the effect of microfinance services. This study covers the socio-economic development of women by using microfinance services but whether the microfinance uplifts the education of children of beneficiaries of microfinance can be further analyzed.

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# A Call to Action: Lessons Learned from a Book Club about Supporting and Mentoring Underrepresented STEM Students

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## ABSTRACT

*The participation rates of historically underserved students in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) remains an important concern, as inequitable access in the form of treatment and opportunities within the education system is a constant struggle. To unpack this issue, a book club was organized as an intervention at a university in the southeastern part of the United States. Findings from the book club intervention suggest that university faculty should (a) understand the importance of continuous early exposure to STEM, (b) nurture underrepresented students' STEM identities, (c) form collaborations and partnerships with STEM professionals from underrepresented groups, and (d) commit to mentoring STEM underrepresented students. In this article, we argue that these objectives can be accomplished through the exposure to STEM professionals from underrepresented groups and the integration of STEM research in undergraduate coursework. Finally, we share the lessons we learned with respect to how the book served as our call to action in our professorial duties.*

**Keywords:** Book Club, Mentoring, STEM

# INTRODUCTION

**T**he underrepresentation of culturally diverse students and perspectives in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) fields remains a national challenge as evidenced in the continued underrepresentation of Blacks and Hispanics across STEM job clusters (Alvarado & Muniz, 2018). This lack of diversity within STEM suggests that there are racial and ethnic groups sitting with untapped STEM talent. As a result, these diverse perspectives are a critical omission from STEM fields. In the literature, however, mentoring is championed as an evidence-based practice that results in an increase of underrepresented students in STEM fields. Packard's (2016) text, *Successful STEM Mentoring Initiatives for Underrepresented Students: A Research-Based Guide for Faculty and Administrators*, unpacked some of these promising practices, and we participated in a faculty book club to dissect this text and personalize these strategies within our institutional context.

This article is organized as follows. First, we explore the relevant literature regarding the dynamic factors influencing the STEM experiences of underrepresented students, followed by a brief discussion on why mentoring matters. Afterward, we discuss the benefits of STEM mentoring, as well as the effective approaches for mentoring underrepresented students in STEM. Then, we describe the intervention—a book club to initiate discussions and outline effective measures surrounding STEM mentoring practices at our higher education institution. Lastly, to capture the urgency in the call to action in mentoring and supporting underrepresented students in STEM, we conclude the article with recommendations to redress the lack of diversity in STEM.

# RELEVANT LITERATURE

## STEM Experiences of Underrepresented Students

Unfortunately, many institutions serving historically underrepresented populations of students lack critical mentorship programs that could successfully motivate, encourage, support, and retain students in STEM. As a result, many historically underserved students struggle to overcome a variety of systemic challenges that negatively impact their access, opportunity, and ability to pursue STEM studies, thereby maintaining current racial and gender-based gaps in STEM education (Ramsay-Jordan, 2020; Stearns et al., 2016). These systemic hardships, most evident in PK-12 schools serving predominantly underrepresented students, often include inequitable school practices such as limited access to advanced mathematics and science courses.

Compared to other racial groups, Black children are among the most underserved who continue to have inequitable access to a high-quality STEM education (Collins, 2018). Enrollment in STEM courses for students attending predominantly Black PK-12 schools was significantly lower than that of students in predominantly White schools (Collins, 2018). Specifically, STEM courses primarily required for success in higher education such as calculus, chemistry, and physics had significantly lower enrollment rates for Black students. With limited access to STEM preparation courses in middle and high school, Black students have become less likely to pursue STEM studies at post-secondary institutions (Ramsay-Jordan, 2020).

Additionally, underserved students, particularly those from low socio-economic backgrounds, experienced subtractive schooling in forms of access to resources throughout their PK-12 education (Valenzuela, 1999). Consider, for example, access to and preparation for mathematics learning and understanding; researchers posited that since socio-economic status (SES) correlated to parents' accomplished level of education and the influence parents had on their children's prior knowledge of mathematical concepts, children from low-SES families entered elementary schools with lower mathematics skills than children from high-SES families (Basque & Bouchamma, 2016; Battey, 2013; Siegler, 2009). Their research tells us that differences in parents' SES have often resulted in differences in mathematical learning opportunities for students (Siegler, 2009), thereby making higher-SES parents more likely to engage their children in various mathematics activities as compared to lower-SES parents (Jordan et al., 2006). With inadequate preparation for challenging courses and minimal access to academically meaningful social activities, the noticeable absence of traditionally marginalized students from STEM studies is well-founded.

## STEM Mentoring Matters for Underrepresented Students

With the type of subtractive schooling experiences many historically underrepresented students face, it is not surprising, therefore, that research studies call for deliberate and intentional mentoring centered on how to effectively increase the overall participation of these students. Researchers have examined the systemic exclusion of historically underrepresented students from pursuing STEM-related fields (Collins, 2018; Packard, 2016). Much of that literature called for effective mentoring to counteract systemic practices of selective exclusion and to increase STEM participation of historically underrepresented students. Packard (2016) wrote that mentoring is an indispensable strategy for broadening participation in STEM, for with it comes high-impact educational practices that increase student engagement and retention. Mentoring underrepresented students in STEM brings diversity

in human capital and innovation. Moreover, society is negatively impacted when STEM fields ignore the complex insights that arise from interactions and perspectives across race, gender, and socio-economic status (Packard, 2016).

Recent studies have shown that providing mentoring programs for historically underrepresented students who typically do not have appropriate access to foundational courses in mathematics and sciences, especially those with a need for supportive networks, had a greater impact on STEM recruitment and retention (Lancaster & Xu, 2017; Lisberg & Woods, 2018; Salto et al., 2014). Packard (2016) suggested that when underrepresented students have positive STEM mentoring experiences, they are more apt to achieve better grades and persist in college. Thus, mentoring is a critical component for increasing the motivation, encouragement, support, and participation of historically underrepresented students in STEM.

## Benefits of STEM Mentoring for Underrepresented Students

Packard (2016) asserted that STEM mentoring of underrepresented students includes being intentional about developing students academically, increasing their capacity to learn, and encouraging persistence in STEM fields. STEM mentoring for underrepresented students can grow out of teaching, learning, and research that demonstrates a need for mentorship but goes beyond these functions. Other scholars made similar arguments. For instance, Carroll and Barnes (2015) suggested that effective mentoring establishes consistency, fosters mutual respect through the development of a safe space, and elicits positive mentoring experiences for underrepresented students in STEM. These scholars also stated that there is an active combination of professional (career) and psychosocial (supportive) functions that are developed through effective mentorship experiences.

Thomas (2001) asserted that five critical areas are achieved through effective mentoring of minoritized students: (1) gains in protégé professional competence; (2) positive reputations of high protégé performance, which leads to increased protégé confidence and credibility; (3) prevention of protégé derailment through focused career advice provided by the mentor; (4) powerful mentor sponsorship of the protégé; and (5) mentor protection of the protégé in unfair or unjust situations (which includes racial disparagement).

Because of the clear racial disparities in STEM, the benefits of STEM mentorship for broadening the participation of underrepresented groups remain crucially important. Societal changes in racial demographics show that a new collective majority-minority student population is on the horizon (Maxwell, 2014). However, the current state of affairs with a consistent predominantly White STEM teaching force (Stearns et al., 2016) and race-

based disparities in STEM fields (Lehming et al., 2013) make it essential for mentorship programs to seek integrative and diverse ways of supporting and designing STEM mentorship programs for underrepresented students.

A wealth of literature exists indicating that same race mentoring remains critical to the psychosocial development of minoritized students (Hall, 2015; Mondisa, 2018; Quigley & Mitchell, 2018; Sinanan, 2016). Same race mentorship interventions promote academic achievement, mitigate mental health issues from racial trauma (McGee & Stovall, 2015), and serve to ameliorate many of social and schooling challenges (Quigley & Mitchell, 2018). Its unmatched transformative and healing potential exists, particularly for Black students, in educational environments that are replete with positive role models, teachers, and mentors who care about them, understand them, and are committed to meeting their unique needs (Quigley & Mitchell, 2018). The psychological identification that same race mentoring provides is an important factor in the academic success, retention, and retainment of ethnic minority students (Mondisa, 2018; Sinanan, 2016).

Conversely, recent literature also points to the many benefits of integrated mentoring, thereby making effective mentoring unbounded by similar demographics between mentor and mentee and suggestive of advantages toward an integrative cultural approach to mentoring (Carroll & Barnes, 2015). Hernandez et al. (2017) found that similarity of values was the most important factor associated with integrated mentoring. They suggest that for integrated mentoring, protégé perceptions of high-quality mentorship was associated with a higher commitment to STEM careers. In their work, they reported that although some evidence indicates protégé gender and race may influence the quality of mentoring received, the amount of mentor-protégé contact and frequent interactions or long-lasting relationships were more impactful.

**Approaches to Mentoring Underrepresented STEM Students**

Higher education scholars have pointed to numerous strategies that emphasize mentoring as a central component that enhances identity development for Black students (Jones, 2000; Patton, 2009). In her research, Mondisa (2018) examined the mentoring approaches of 10 Black mentors who held at least one degree in a STEM field and had established experience mentoring underrepresented STEM students. The 10 Black mentors were solicited from academia, government, industry, and non-profit sectors who also had doctoral degrees and experiences across the educational continuum. In addition, the researcher selected 10 Black mentor participants who had national acclaim from their peers or national organizations for being exemplary mentors with underrepresented students. Mondisa (2018) found

that the mentors in her study used familial approaches to mentoring, an approach that involved sharing resources with students, and an empathic listening approach to connect and relate with their protégés. The approaches promoted the development of protégés' sense of community and STEM identities to support student persistence.

Packard (2016) suggested intentional and effective mentoring approaches start with knowing what the goals and intentions of the mentoring initiative are. She asserted that mentoring approaches such as events, programs, practices, and policies are complementary and collectively contributing factors of an institution's comprehensive strategy. Regarding events, Packard maintains that those are designed for specific purposes and are usually the beginning stages of intentional mentoring. Mentoring events often include one-time, intensive conferences, seminars, or career panels with featured speakers. Mentoring programs utilize an organized schedule of ongoing meetings to provide mentoring to its participants. As for practices, Packard described those as initiatives that embed mentoring into teaching and advising to improve mentoring that is already occurring. Lastly, policies centered on mentoring, according to Packard, are designed to increase student access, reallocate resources, assist with collaboration between departments, and could lead to commitments to diversity and inclusion as well as specific mentoring outcomes. Irrespective of the approach, intentional and effective mentoring of underrepresented students aims to validate and further cultivate student interest and persistence in STEM.

## ADVANCING THE CONVERSATION

Research has consistently demonstrated that supportive learning environments positively shape STEM experiences and outcomes of historically underrepresented students (Carroll & Barnes, 2015; Hernandez et al., 2017; Quigley & Mitchell, 2018). Specifically, mentoring programs with nurturing psychosocial environments, marked by supportive peer and faculty interactions improved academic outcomes of underrepresented students in STEM (Oates, 2004). To this point, we, the authors of this manuscript, posited that the effectiveness of any mentoring program will undoubtedly require faculty support. Therefore, to get faculty involved and to help them see the importance and value of STEM mentorship programs for historically underrepresented groups, a book club was designed in this institutional context.

Book clubs are common practice at many institutions of higher learning. Covering a variety of topics, participation in book clubs encompasses the sharing of ideas, encouragement, and support that could ignite positive changes for faculty, students, and ultimately institutions. For

the authors of this manuscript, these aspects of book clubs seemed a profound way to spark interest, support, and commitment to understanding and acting on the need to mentor underrepresented students in STEM. Even more, the value of sharing ideas, as associated with book clubs, could prove to be beneficial in improving the STEM experiences of underrepresented students. Consequently, as an intervention strategy for increasing the participation of underrepresented students in STEM, the authors of this manuscript utilized a book club to share knowledge with and solicit feedback from faculty at their institution of higher learning.

**The Book Club Intervention**

The book club intervention took place at a regional, comprehensive university in the southeastern United States. A call was sent out to all of the university faculty members to join the book club via the institutional all-faculty listserv. The goal was to attract at least 10 faculty members who had a shared interest in bolstering the STEM identities of underrepresented students to participate. Some faculty members wished to join the important discussion but expressed that they were unable to do so because of course conflicts or other prior commitments. Fortunately, 10 faculty members signed up for the book club with one faculty member eventually dropping due to additional workload. Therefore, in the end, nine faculty members participated in the book study, which included four faculty members from the College of Education (COE) and five faculty members from the College of Science and Mathematics (COSM). Collectively, the faculty members represented both STEM education and STEM faculty, which was not surprising given the book club's focus. This balance between the two colleges provided different disciplinary perspectives to enrich the conversations about mentoring underrepresented STEM students.

The book club met monthly to dissect the book's content, and the second author of this manuscript, led the meetings by generating opening activities and discussion questions for each meeting. The meetings occurred on Mondays for 1.5 hours. This day was chosen given the second author's participation in previous book club meetings at the institution. To add some context, a previous book club meeting occurred on a Friday afternoon, which resulted in many conflicts because of weekend travel, conferences, and other obligations. Another book club met on Wednesday, which resulted in numerous conflicts given the challenges that occur mid-week. The Monday meetings worked favorably in this scenario as care was taken to consider STEM (education) conferences, institutional events, and local STEM affairs. Additionally, Monday meetings allowed faculty members to read and reflect on the chapters during the prior weekend. Overall, the Monday meetings

worked well, as very few conflicts arose that prevented colleagues from attending the scheduled meetings.

## The Selected Book

Packard's (2016) text was chosen for several reasons. First, there are national discussions concerning the underrepresentation of women, minoritized groups, and students with disabilities in STEM, and it is well-documented that the STEM community does not reflect the country's diversity (Allen-Ramdial & Campbell, 2014; National Science Foundation, 2015). Also, our institution is one that has a large number of underrepresented students pursuing STEM degrees at a given time, yet a vast number who declare STEM majors but eventually switch to non-STEM majors. Therefore, the text was selected to explore and propose solutions to mitigate these issues for underrepresented students within this institutional context.

In addition, we, the authors of this manuscript, wanted to read and examine this book in community with other faculty members to augment our professional growth and development as mathematics educators. As mentioned, we are both African American, and we each have experience supporting underrepresented students in mathematics contexts. Our mathematics education scholarship indicates that this work is sorely needed in our disciplinary field (Jett, 2019; Ramsay-Jordan, 2020). The next section advances this conversation by extracting the lessons we learned.

## LESSONS LEARNED

### Embracing New Pathways: Natasha's Lessons Learned

My primary takeaways from the book club included: (a) nurturing STEM identities for underrepresented students; (b) understanding the importance of continuous early exposure to STEM; and (c) forming collaborations and partnerships with STEM professionals from underrepresented groups. Sinanan (2016) observed that it is common for underrepresented faculty members, particularly ones teaching at PWIs, to mentor underrepresented students without it being a formalized process. Previously, I worked as a secondary mathematics teacher where I deliberately cultivated and supported a healthy STEM identity among my students. In my mathematics courses, students' mathematics confidence was continuously nurtured and supported in hopes of emboldening students with the knowledge that they were capable of being anything, including a scientist, engineer, or mathematician. Hughes et al. (2013) argued that stimulating healthy STEM identities and abilities can increase representation in STEM. Thus, developing positive STEM dispositions in underrepresented students is a great start toward changing current STEM education demographics. The importance of

cultivating students' STEM identities was further explored in the book club as essential for improving the STEM education experiences for underrepresented students.

According to Packard (2016), continued support and nurturance of a STEM identity is critical for underrepresented students pursuing STEM. Since the book club, I have been more cognizant about continuing to enter classrooms, offices, and other campus spaces intentionally encouraging students, particularly the many impressionable underrepresented students, to persevere in their STEM pursuits. In doing so, I continue to steer students into becoming more effective communicators, problem solvers, and ethical agents for change through mathematics. I assist with transforming a student's classroom experience to one where they learn how to think not just about numbers, but also how to collaborate effectively to solve problems, how to acquire knowledge, and how to nurture their STEM ambition. Additionally, in my current capacity as a teacher educator, I mentor and advise teachers of their role as change agents using STEM to further social justice.

Another lesson learned from the book club is to have a clearer understanding of the importance for students in grades K-12 to have continuous early exposure to STEM. The importance of early introduction to STEM as a positive way to leverage current negative experiences of underrepresented students in STEM is supported in prior work (Leonard et al., 2016; Young et al., 2017). These scholars suggest, for example, that there is a need to work with young girls in K–12 settings and women to prepare, develop, and support their increased participation in STEM. Understandably, this work challenges preconceived ideas about who belongs in STEM and helps women to endure current experiences of gender disparities in STEM. Since the book club, I have collaborated with neighboring schools and organizations to expose students to STEM learning and careers. In particular, I have embedded STEM inclusion projects that require pre-service teachers to speak specifically about how they will address equity in STEM as well as require them to invite diverse representatives from STEM fields into their classroom.

Another key takeaway from the book club is the need and importance of collaboration or partnerships with STEM professionals and leaders from underrepresented groups. One-on-one contact with STEM leaders and professionals from underrepresented groups is significant for underrepresented students. In fact, researchers state that interacting, collaborating, and building relationships with diverse STEM leaders and professionals has the propensity to prime the STEM nexus for underrepresented groups (Hughes et al., 2013; Leonard et al., 2016; Young et al., 2017). Recognizing these important pathways to improve the STEM

experiences of underrepresented groups, I inculcate these practices and more into mathematics courses by requiring prospective and practicing teachers to identify ways in which their students will be exposed to STEM in both formal and informal ways.

## From Intervention to Action: Christopher's Lessons Learned

I draw from my collegiate mathematics teaching experiences and positionality as a Black male researcher to influence what I took away from the reading and book club discussion of Packard's (2016) text. Two primary takeaways that drive this discussion include: (a) the exposure of mathematics professionals from underrepresented groups and (b) the integration of research in undergraduate coursework for future mathematics practitioners.

**Table 1**
*Pre-Service Teachers' Selected Underrepresented Mathematician*

| Pre-service teacher | Mathematician | Underrepresented group | Reason for Selection |
|---|---|---|---|
| Amy | Alberto Pedro Calderon | Hispanic Man | Work in the Area of Partial Differential Equations |
| Beth | Anthony Bonato | Canadian Man | LGBT+ mathematician who is still alive |
| Carrie | Sofia Kovaleyskaya | Russian Woman | Father used old calculus notes as wallpaper in her room |
| Deborah | Evelyn Boyd Granville | African American Woman | Profiled in *Women Becoming Mathematicians* (Murray, 2000) |
| Elizabeth | Katherine Johnson | African American Woman | Profiled in *Hidden Figures* (Shetterly, 2016) |
| Frank | Ruth Gonzalez | Hispanic Woman | First Hispanic woman to receive a Ph.D. in mathematics |

Because I taught a mathematics course for future secondary mathematics teachers during the semester following the book club meeting, I was able to

move from intervention to action immediately. Notably, the course had six students enrolled as this course is only required for mathematics majors on the secondary education track.

**Exposure of Mathematics Professionals from Underrepresented Groups.**
One takeaway was to highlight mathematics professionals from underrepresented groups throughout the entire semester (Packard, 2016). Although I have done something similar in previous semesters, this text reminded me to be more strategic about doing so within the current semester. Pre-service secondary mathematics teachers selected an underrepresented professional, based on their interests, and conducted research on this individual. As such, students were charged with locating information, writing a paper, and giving a presentation about the selected underrepresented mathematician or mathematics educator. The presentations were given every few weeks, and each student was allotted approximately 10 minutes of class time to profile the underrepresented professional. Table 1 below includes their selections. In the accompanying tables, please note that pseudonyms are used instead of pre-service mathematics teachers' real first names.

**Table 2**
*Pre-Service Teachers' Research Topic*

| Pre-service teacher | Social justice research topic | Mathematics research topic |
|---|---|---|
| Amy | Abortion | Probability |
| Beth | Racial Profiling | Proportions |
| Carrie | Criminal Justice System & Racial Discrimination | Average Rate of Change |
| Deborah | Pollution | Pollution Standards Index |
| Elizabeth | Unequal Pay Gap | Financial Literacy |
| Frank | Unequal Distribution of Wealth | Average Concepts |

**Integration of Research in Undergraduate Coursework for Future Mathematics Teachers.**
Another lesson learned was to integrate a research component into my existing mathematics course (Packard, 2016). In doing so, I consulted the literature on Course-based Undergraduate Research Experiences (CUREs)

(Bangera & Brownell, 2014) and exposed students to relevant literature with social justice aims (Gutstein & Peterson, 2013; Wager & Stinson, 2012). In this secondary teacher preparation program, students learned about reform-based and project-based instruction, and the CURE brought to life what they were learning in their education coursework. Table 2 below lists pre-service mathematics teachers' social justice research topics and their related mathematics research topics. Interestingly, these social justice topics are ongoing issues affecting underrepresented groups at disproportionate rates.

## CONCLUSIVE THOUGHTS

As this article shows, participating in this book club caused us to be more deliberate and strategic about supporting and mentoring underrepresented students in STEM. Stated differently, the book club meeting and the resultant ideas caused us to take action. Examples included nurturing STEM identities, exposing students to mathematics professionals from underrepresented groups, and integrating research with social justice aims. Therefore, this book club exploration achieved our goal of bringing faculty members together to explicitly advance conversations about supporting and mentoring underrepresented students in STEM.

### Implications for Future Work

Regarding future work, the book club meetings generated fruitful implications derived from the contents of the book (Packard, 2016) as well as members of the book club. These suggestions included designating a portion of faculty office hours to mentoring, bolstering skills needed for the STEM workforce, and cultivating STEM talent (as opposed to merely seeking to identify it). Other suggestions that would require more heavy lifting included offering a first-year seminar course for underrepresented STEM students, designing faculty learning communities for sustained advancement of these conversations, and creating a "Diversity in STEM Day" event.

Since the book club, the first author of this manuscript has developed and taught a first-year seminar course to address issues of race and gender in STEM. The second author has planned a symposium to expose underrepresented groups to the career possibilities associated with a mathematics degree, with a targeted focus on Black male students, given his research agenda centered on this population of students. As it pertains to our future institutional work specifically, we are planning university-wide events to expose students to minoritized STEM professionals. We are also exploring funding opportunities such as the National Science Foundation's S-STEM program to support underrepresented students in STEM. In all, this future

work will allow us to act on the lessons learned from the book and the book club discussions.

**Limitations**

There are some limitations associated with this work. First, this book club was designed as a professional development opportunity for faculty to advance *conversations* about underrepresented students in STEM. Adding a research component to this book club could have provided additional insights to advance *scholarship* regarding efforts to support underrepresented students in STEM. While this article advances scholarship in some ways, a traditional research study would have done so in more substantive ways. Another limitation was that the book club only included faculty members from the COE and COSM—faculty who represent STEM education. Faculty from the arts, humanities, or social sciences could have offered diverse disciplinary perspectives to enrich the conversations. Finally, a limitation was that our book club did not include any institutional leaders or administrators (i.e., department chairs, deans, etc.). Although institutional leaders had some interests in this topic and were invited to join the book club, the demands of administrative roles prevented them from doing so. Nevertheless, including institutional leaders would have advanced the conversations further by including administrative points of view.

## CONCLUSION

In concluding this article, if we are committed to mentoring and supporting minoritized STEM students, then we must employ evidence-based practices that foster the attainment of STEM educational outcomes. As we have expressed, designing a faculty book club to synthesize, reform, and generate ideas with respect to different institutional contexts could be a first step in establishing efforts to effectively mentor underrepresented students in STEM. Next, our plan is to put these ideas into action. In addition, readers are encouraged to capitalize on our lessons learned to further include diverse perspectives in their STEM education work. Ultimately, our hope is for underrepresented STEM students to be provided with the necessary support and mentoring to achieve their goals, and we hope that what we learned from this book club serves as a call to action for faculty members and other institutional stakeholders to implement support and mentoring structures for the advancement of underrepresented students in STEM.

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Peer-Reviewed Article

# Fishing Community in Wetland Region of Bangladesh: Views from the Field Experiences of Hakaluki Haor

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## ABSTRACT

*This study is a part of doctoral dissertation which basically observes the socio-economic condition of the artisanal fishing community of Hakaluki Haor in Bangladesh. The original study is exploratory in nature, and both qualitative and quantitative approaches have been used to attain the goals and objectives of the study. The main objective of the current article is to identify the present socio-demographic background of Hoar fishing community in Bangladesh. Data analysis has focused on the actual situation of the household of fishing community from the Haor perspective. The findings of the study have been categorized on the basis of five capitals (i.e., social, human, physical, financial and natural resources) that structure the conceptual framework of the study. It is shown that most of the fishing community in the Haor basin are living under the most unpleasant and vulnerable conditions in terms of income, food security, housing patterns, health and sanitation conditions. Other issues center around child marriage, family planning, and social relations among the dwellers of the community. Also, among the observed problems are decision making, power practice, participation in development activities, socio-economic position in education and local institutions.*

**Keywords:** Artisanal; Bangladesh; Hakaluki Haor; Haor; Resources; Wetlands

## INTRODUCTION

    Hakaluki Haor is the largest eco-based water body in Bangladesh and has the largest wetland resources of Bangladesh and Asia, lying between the latitude 24° 35' N to 24° 45' N and longitude 92° 00' E to 92° 08' E (Uddin et al.,2013). The haor consists of Baralekha, Kulaura and Juri Upazilla under Moulvibazar District and Golapganj and Fenchuganj Upazilla under Sylhet District, which covers eleven Unions (Yeasmin,2012,21) Diversified land position, ecological variation and periodic atmospheres, delightful and delicious fish species are the beautiful resources of Hakaluki Haor. It is bordered by the Kulaura-Beanibazar road to the east, south and west side bounded by the Fenchuganj-Kulaura railway and Kushiara rivers to the north with a land area of 18,386 hectares (IUCN[1], 2006,1). Uniquely, lands of Hakaluki can be classified under three specified segments: agricultural land, *beel*[2] and *khanda*[3] (Islam et al., 2011, 948). Hakaluki Haor as an 'Ecologically Critical Area (ECA)'under the provision of Environmental Conservation Act, 1995 of Bangladesh (Banglapedia,2012).

    Most of the inhabitants are fully dependent on haor resources. Fishing community of haor areas in Bangladesh earn their livelihood from haor assets such as fishing, agriculture, fuel wood collection, reeds and aquatic fruits. Therefore, haor plays a significant role in the lives of haor fishing community by providing sustainable livelihood options. In fact, haor fishing community are more vulnerable and marginalized in comparison to people living in the plain land of Bangladesh. There are many factors that are associated with the present state of haor fishing community. Some of them include scarcity of fish, overfishing, political influence on water body, tyranny of middlemen, lack of proper knowledge about fishing, lack of free access to open water body, illegal fishing, insufficient fishing equipment, absence of ownership of boats, rapid decrease of aquatic fruits, use of chemicals in agriculture, landlessness, seasonal unemployment, temporary migration, natural calamities, village and homestead erosion, flash flood, prejudice, ritual and beliefs.

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[1] International Union for Conservation of Nature

[2] *Beel*: Beels are shallow lakes, which form the deepest parts of the haor.

[3] Each beel has surrounding land area and it is higher than the haor basin but lower than the homestead land known as *khanda*. This land is the government property, which people commonly use for the purpose of raising cattle and buffalo, duck and collecting firewood.

**Research Questions**

**The research** questions that guide the current study are:

1. What is the socio-demographic situation of haor fishing community?
2. What are the major difficulties that haor fishing community face continuously?
3. Can local resources help overcome their situation?

**Study Objective**

The current study aims to:

1. Portray the present socio-demographic background of haor fishing community,
2. Identify the major difficulties, faced by the haor fishing community and analyze their experiences.

## REVIEW OF LITERATURE

A comprehensive literature review has been conducted to have a total picture of the fishing community of Bangladesh. Only a few studies that directly address this topic have been found. The current study examines the socio-economic structure of fishing community and process of operating arrangement, to add onto the extant literature (e.g., Ali et al., 2014; Deb, 2009). Apart from focusing on the major difficulty in fish farming and fish marketing in the national and local level, the current study does not claim to significantly or directly contribute to the literature on the unavailability of fish and lack of technical training for the farmer and insufficient capital (Gill & Motahar, 1982). In addition, in terms of microcredit, it has a limited impact on their livelihood development (Sultana & Thompson, 2007). The undertaken studies are different from each other in terms of sample size, locations of haor, time of data collection, variables, and methodologies. In attempt to fill up this gap in knowledge, the current study explores the undiscovered areas of haor fishing community, by investigating the facts and analyzing their condition.

## CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Researchers view the Sustainable Livelihood Approach (SLA) as a comprehensive tool for reviewing livelihood options of marginalized groups of workers like fishing community, with a particular reference to the community in poverty. For this research, the SLA has been used as a tool for analyzing the situation of fishing community who are dependent on natural

resources. We think that it is timely to use this approach to know their socio-economic condition from a different perspective. In the theme of sustainable livelihood approach, the assets of fishing community can be categorized into five sections: natural, physical, human, financial and social capital. "Livelihood Platform" describes these assets in a snapshot of fishing communities.

For the purposes of creating our conceptual design, we refer to available natural resources in water bodies as *natural capital*. Fishing community in these areas are dependent on natural resources such as fish, vegetables, water, and land. In addition, *physical capital* includes physical structure of haor region like fishing equipment, embankment, communication, submerged road, boats, and nets that belong to haor people. As the central tenet of this framework, *human capital* is the most important assets. In haor region, the knowledge and skill of fishing community about fishing are the examined factors of this population. *Financial capital* also determines a phenomenon to analyze the livelihood of fishing community. In this context, assets, loan, cash, and ornaments are the basic resources. Lastly, *social capital* is a vital field to identify the socio-economic condition of people. For this reason, the present study has attempted to explore, identify and analyze the socio-economic condition of fishing community in the light of the SLA provided by the Department for International Development, which is directly related to lives of disadvantaged groups of people in haor basin of Bangladesh. Furthermore, it also analyzes the multi-dimensional nature and trends of poverty among the fishing community of this country. To this end, we see SLA as an appropriate lens to explore the real situation of fishing community of Hakaluki Haor of Bangladesh. Now it is under severe threats due to political and socio-economic perspective. From the above argument, the researchers have drawn a conceptual framework with the help of SLA in this study.

**Figure 1**

*Conceptual Framework (Developed by researcher)*
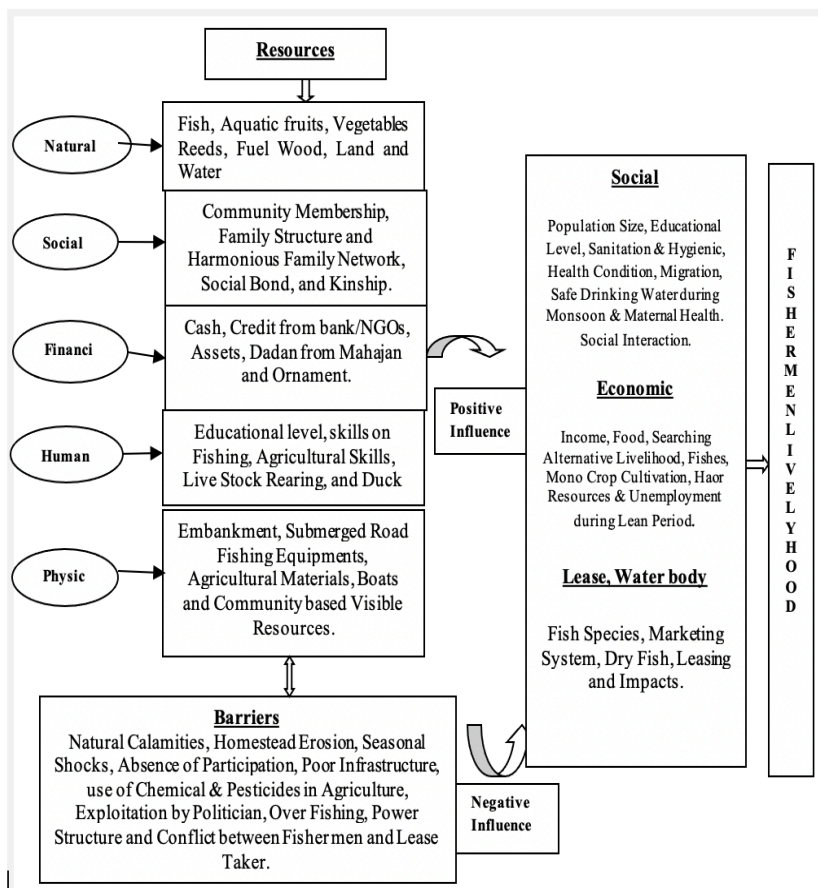


**RESEARCH METHODS**

We designed the study was to be exploratory in nature using qualitative and quantitative approaches to seek answers to the research questions. Hence, this is a mixed-methods study. Qualitative data has been collected from the participants using interview and observation. Open and close-ended questions in a survey format were used to collect quantitative data, which was analyzed by using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) by IBM. Descriptive statistics have been used to analyze the obtained data. The researcher has used required graphs and charts to

support the analysis of the data when necessary. Besides, researcher has collected field notes about the attitudes and perception of the respondents. Audio and video recorders have been used as tools for qualitative data collection after receiving the permission of the participants. Physical condition of respondents has also been observed as much as possible. The recorded interviews were transcribed for analysis. Data analyses have been done in an iterative process to attain a general understanding of the content.

**Table 1**
*Demographic Profile of the Respondents in the Study Area*

| Nature | Variables | Frequency | % | Total | Mean (when applicable) |
|--------|-----------|-----------|-----|-------|------------------------|
| Religion of the Respondents | Muslim | 240 | 83.6 | 100% | |
| | Hindu | 47 | 16.4 | | |
| | Others | 0 | 0.0 | | |
| Sex of the Respondents | Male | 279 | 97.2 | 100% | |
| | Female | 08 | 2.8 | | |
| Marital Status | Married | 269 | 93.7 | 100% | |
| | Unmarried | 5 | 1.7 | | |
| | Widow | 2 | 0.7 | | |
| | Widower | 11 | 3.8 | | |
| Education Level | Illiterate | 70 | 24.4 | 100% | |
| | Literate | 128 | 44.6 | | |
| | Primary | 78 | 27.2 | | |
| | SSC | 9 | 3.1 | | |
| | HSC | 2 | 0.7 | | |
| Size of Family | Small 0-5 | 114 | 39.7 | 100% | 5.57 |
| | Medium 6 - 8 | 121 | 42.2 | | |
| | Large 8-10 | 52 | 18.1 | | |
| Number of Children per Family | 1-3 | 121 | 42.16 | 100% | 4.06 |
| | 4-6 | 135 | 47.04 | | |
| | 7-9 | 31 | 10.80 | | |

(Source: Field Survey, July-December 2015)


**Participants**

Demographic profile is an important phenomenon to know the key features of the household respondents, as it clearly shows the status of social aspects of respective household. The demographic data indicates the respondents' identity on the basis of religious perspective, it reveals the marital status of the respondents in the study area. In this section, data also indicates educational level, size of the family, relationship patterns among the family members, association and festivals, number of children in family and social interaction among the societal people, health status, sanitation, housing and water.

## RESULTS

**Human Capital**

Education is an important factor in analyzing the socio-demographic features of human being. It indicates that 44.6 percent, 3.1 percent, and 0.7 percent of the respondents have educational level up to literacy, SSC and HSC programs respectively. At the same time, almost one fourth (24.4%) of the respondents are illiterate. The findings clearly show that the educational state of the haor locality is very low.

Size of family is an essential element to learn about the fishing community livelihood in the study area. It is found that 5.57 is the average number of the individuals in a household, which is higher than the national level. It also shows that the 42.2 percent of the households reside as a group that is under the medium size (6-8 persons) family structure. So, absence of family planning, improper education and lack of motivation are the major responsible factors behind the structure of family.

Marriage is a common social convention and celebration in Bangladesh. Almost 93.7 percent of the respondents are married in the study area. In addition, marital age is also a significant factor to determine the human capital of the fishing community household. Most of the respondents (64.1%) have stated that most of the male persons usually get married in the age of 20-24 while 69.7 percent of the females get married under the age of 15-19.

The nature of the family type indicates the demographic profile of the respondents' households. It has been found that almost 91.3 percent fishing community families are nuclear or single type of family while only 7.0 percent respondents live as joint families. So, data clearly focus the increasing trend of the nuclear type of family in this area of Bangladesh.

Status for decision-making is an important phenomenon to understand the nature of empowerment in the household family. It has been

exposed that most of the household head (58.2%) take decisions by themselves and only 15 percent respondents take decisions by consulting with their spouses. So, decision making process is absolutely regulated by the male members of the family.

Dependent members of the families regulate the homestead activities, one of which is collection of the drinking water. It has been observed that about half of the respondents (42.5%) have opined that water is collected by the aged female member of the family. At the same time, 33.8 percent of the interviewees have expressed that drinking water is collected by the children of the family. So, it can be said that the dependent portion of the family members are involved in activities related with water collection.

Family planning program is a vital way to control and minimize the growth of population in Bangladesh. In this study, the data speaks to the family planning related information in the haor region. It is evident that only 27.9 percent of the respondents received family planning method for population control while about one fifth (18.8%) of the total users have followed a permanent family planning method. It indicates the scenario of family planning status in the fishing community.

The fishing community who do fishing in Hakaluki Haor can be categorized under three groups based on their involvement in fishing and fish processing related activities: full time, part time and subsistence. More than half of the respondents (53.31%) are involved in full-time fishing and 17.42 percent of the households are involved in fish retailer. So, it can be said that the fishing and fish processing related activities are the bread and butter of the respondents' households.

As the basic need for human life, dwelling is the physical capital of the fishing community when the SLA is considered. Table 2 displays the dwelling scenario of haor household fishing community. Data indicates that 38.68 percent of the interviewees' dwelling status is flimsy and 32.75 percent has dwelling status in congestion and danger. 13.94 percent respondents have viewed that dwelling place related conditions is not secured because of the structural condition. At present, fishing community are facing huge problems regarding the dwelling place related matter. As a result, it has been considered as connected with social problems in the respective community. One of the key informants has expressed that the dwelling situations of the fishing community are not good because of their income level and source of income. He further informed that they live in

vulnerable, unhealthy, unsecured, and fragile structure of dwelling for this reason.

**Table 2**.

*Dwelling Place Related Problems*

| Nature | | Variables | Frequency | % | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Dwelling Problems | Related | Unhealthy | 17 | 5.92 | |
| | | Absence of Privacy | 25 | 8.71 | |
| | | Congestion | 94 | 32.75 | 100% |
| | | Flimsy | 111 | 38.68 | |
| | | Insecurity | 40 | 13.94 | |

(Source: Field Survey, July-December, 2015)

**Social Capital**

Interpersonal relationship among the family members of the household is not excellent but in average. Most of the respondents (50.2%) have stated that interpersonal relationship is good within the family and 37.3 percent of the respondents believe that the interpersonal relationship among the family members is neither good nor bad.

Trends of social relation depend on social values, customs, beliefs, rituals, prejudice, superstition, and culture. In this segment, data displays the trends of social relation within the fishing community. About half of the respondents (47.7%) have opined that the trends of social relation are gradually decreasing. On the other hand, 24.7% of the interviewees have viewed that social relationship is rapidly decreasing. Thus, we learn about their views on social value, customs, brotherhood, and mentality of cooperation among the family members.

Cooperation is an important tool that influences the social environment of the community. About half of the respondents (44.6%) believe that the state of cooperation among the community members is gradually declining, which demonstrates a negative sign for this area. Only 13.6 percent of the respondents have opined that the co-operational state of the haor region is stagnant.

In Hakaluki Haor, different types of social associations are in play. From the study, it was found that 72.1 percent of the social associations are

dominated by the fishing community. Only 2.1 percent of the associations have performed to address economy-related issues. They are dominated and retained by influential people.

**Physical Capital**

In the present study, it has been found that more than half of the toilets (51.2%) are made by ring slab and kutcha type toilets are found in 26.1 percent of the families. Few numbers of sanitary toilets are available in the study area. The data above clearly show the sanitation status of the fishing community in the haor region.

Place of birth is an essential phenomenon to realize the physical capital of the respondents' household in the study area. The researcher has closely surveyed and observed the situation of birthplace. Highest number of deliveries have happened in respondents' houses, which is 92 percent of the total interviewees. Only 4.9 percent of the deliveries have been done in government hospital.

The study elucidates the physical atmosphere of the dwelling condition. It has been observed that kutcha type of houses is more than half (64%) and pucca house is not commonly available in the haor region. Only 4 percent of the houses in fishing community have been found to be pucca houses. Hence, data clearly demonstrates the status of physical capitals among the respondents' household.

Most of the households have received health-related treatment from the village doctors. Only few respondents have experience at government health facilities. Lack of motivation, insufficient health personnel, distance of health centers, scarcity of health centers, as well as superstition, belief and stereotype are the major barriers to preferring to receive service from the health facilities in the haor region.

Based on land ownership, the household land is classified into three categories: homestead land, agricultural land, and low land. The highest numbers of respondents (51.9 %) have homestead land in between the ranges of 0-24 decimal. At the same time, 74.2 percent of the households have 0-49 decimal low land. Only 2.8 percent of the respondents have agricultural land under the range of 100-149 decimal.

Different types of fishing gears have been found in the haor water body. In this segment, the researcher has accumulated the opinions of the fishing community and took notes about his observation. It has been found that five types of fishing gears were used in Hakaluki Haor: Current jal,

Berjal, Thelajal, Jhankijal and Dharmajal. Almost all of them are very common and popular among the fishing community for fishing.

Marketing channel is an important component to analyze the physical capital of the fishing community. It has been found that half of the fishing community (50%) sell their fish to the mahajan, 29.55 percent of the respondents sell their fish to the retailer and only one fifth of the total respondents sell their fish to the local general consumer.

**Financial Capital**

Fishing community of Hakaluki Haor depend on fish resources because of their subsistence. Data show that 43.6 percent of the respondents have stated that fish resources are rapidly declining from the water body because of mismanagement. Only 16 percent of the respondents have opined that fish resources are stagnant. For this reason, the source of the income from the fishing sector is gradually declining and plays direct impact on fishing community livelihood. All the information implies that the fishermen are not the hard-core poor compared with income per household TK. 9,648 in rural area of Bangladesh. (BBS,2010:28)[4]

Monthly income of the fishing community is different because of their involvement. The average monthly income is only 8,021.34 Bangladeshi Taka (BDT). Most of the respondents' monthly income is between the ranges of BDT 4,001 and 8,000. In addition, 31.0 percent of the respondents earn under the range of BDT 8,001 to 1,2000.

From the study, it has been found that most of the fishing community borrowed money from non-government organizations and only 5.23 percent borrowed money from the bank. More than one fifth of the total respondents borrowed from their neighbors. Hence, it can be assumed that respondents are living in poverty.

Most of the fishing community in Hakaluki Haor region are directly involved in fishing for their income and subsistence. Fishing is the default profession. Seasonal variation, scarcity of fish species, food insecurity and present leasing procedure are not fully favorable to the fishing community. For this reason, some fishing community are involved in various activities

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[4] Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics

like agriculture, duck rearing, cattle, and buffalo rearing, daily labor and business. In this sub-section, it has been categorically displayed.

**Table 3**.
*Secondary Options of Income*

| Category | Variable | Frequency | % | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Secondary Options | Agriculture | 88 | 40.00 | 100% |
| | Duck Rearing | 28 | 12.73 | |
| | Cattle and Buffalo Rearing | 20 | 9.09 | |
| | Day Labor | 71 | 32.27 | |
| | Business | 5 | 2.27 | |
| | Remittance | 3 | 1.36 | |
| | Others | 5 | 2.27 | |

Source: Field Survey (July-December, 2015)

Data allows a comparison between two seasons in terms of fishing in the haor water body. It has been found that most of the fishing community have opined that fishing is easier in the rainy season than other seasons. On the other hand, the respondents have opined that fishing is difficult in winter due to the decrease of water level and faulty leasing.

**Natural Capital**

Water bodies of the haor region are full of natural resources. The researcher has accumulated the opinions of fishing community and noted down his own observation. From the study, it has been found that many types of resources in the haor basin are medicinal plants and aquatic trees. Most of the respondents believe that Bisakhathali and Kukra are antibacterial items and water lilies which are used as medication for heart diseases. Besides, Hijal, Karac and Barun are the aquatic trees of the study area.

Environmental change is an essential event to realize to understand the natural capital of the respondents' household in the study area. From the study, it has been found that 36.24 percent of the respondents have opined that flash flood is the severe natural disaster in the haor region. On the other hand, imbalanced temperature and scarcity of fish species also have negative impact on the fishing community.

Fuel is one of the key items of the natural capital. It has been found that more than one fifth of the total respondents use straw as fuel while 20.91 percent of the households use trees. Hence, it can be said that respondents face homestead fuel scarcity.

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Present status of the haor fishing community in Hakaluki is not satisfactory. The education level of the haor people is low in comparison with the national statistics. They are facing many challenges in terms of health facilities, housing patterns, sanitation, and state of family planning. However, astonishingly, the condition of drinking water is significantly good. In this section, the researcher points out that government and non-government initiatives should be taken for the fulfillment of their needs and expectation with special concentration, so that the situation in the haor basin would be developed gradually.

In this study, the researcher has found some key problems regarding the educational opportunities and facilities. A large number of the respondents (43.21%) believe that the absence of financial ability is the key problem to receive education. Lack of proper motivation, long distance and shortage of educational institutions are the major barriers to receiving proper education in the fishing community.

Data also sheds light on the problems with accessing health services. Folk medicine is the key factor that decreases the preference for health service programs provided by the government and non-governmental organizations in the haor region. Long distance of medical centers, lack of information, shortage of medical doctors as well as social beliefs, rituals and customs are the barriers to easy access to the health services.

From the study, it has been found that many fishing communities (34.49%) believe that overfishing is the major problem about growth and development of the fish species in the haor water body. It plays a negative role on the bread and butter of the fishing community. Indigenous fish fishing and hybrid fish culture are the significant components of the life and livelihood of the household respondents.

In this sub-section, the researcher has discussed the problems regarding the mismanagement of leasing systems in water body, which are creating obstacles of fishing community's livelihood. More than half of the respondents (56.79%) believe that mismanagement of the present leasing system has reduced the opportunities of free access to fishing in the water body. The value of labor and job insecurity are also associated with the leasing system.

Haor water body is the habitat for local fish species. Artisanal fishing community are fishing in the water body to earn their lives. However, their recent experiences are not good about the fishing ground. About 26.83 percent of the respondents think that fake fishing community associations play very important role on leasing in water body. For this

reason, fishing community have a bitter experience about leasing. It can be claimed that they are marginalized in the fishing ground due to their professional status.

In this segment, the researcher has discussed the impact of the present leasing system on artisanal fishing community and elite people of the society. 42.9 percent of the respondent believe that the artisanal fishing community are losing financially in the present leasing system. More than half of the interviewees (57.8%) think that the elite group in the respective area are benefited and have more power than the artisanal fishing community.

In respect to the experience about accessing to loans, the data demonstrates a comparison between governmental and non-governmental credit initiatives which are started for the progress of fishing community livelihood in the haor region. It has been exposed that 34.1 percent of the respondents have stated that loan access to government organization is very difficult. 55.7 percent of the interviewees think that access to loans through non-government organizations is easy. Hence, it can be said that respondents are experienced in accessing the loans from government and the non-government organizations.

## IMPLICATIONS

Numerous suggestions and recommendations are made based on the results of the study. Central recommendations are highlighted below.

➤ Artisanal fishing community should be included and emphasized in policy, plan, strategy paper and annual allocation, which could improve the socio-economic status of the fishing community.

➤ Motivational programs should be implemented for family planning, food habit, sanitation, and marital age of the households.

➤ Government and non-government initiatives should be taken for training and creating alternative employment opportunities for the fishing-based community in haor region of Bangladesh.

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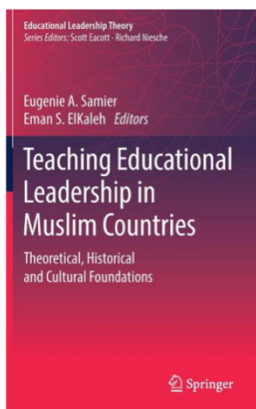
# Teaching Educational Leadership in Muslim Countries: Theoretical, Historical and Cultural Foundations

Samier, E. A., & ElKaleh, E. S. (Ed.). (2019c). Springer. ISBN: 978-981-13-6817-2

Reviewed By: Megan X. Schutte, *Community College of Baltimore County, USA*

Samier and ElKaleh's (2019c) edited book titled *Teaching Educational Leadership in Muslim Countries: Theoretical, Historical and Cultural Foundations* is part of the Educational Leadership Theory series, which aims to address works on educational leadership in an inventive and thought-provoking way. Samier and ElKaleh (2019c) fulfill this mandate of "dialogue and debate" (Eacott & Niesche, 2019, p. vi) in their presentation of various perspectives regarding teaching educational administration and leadership in Muslim countries.

As the authors state in the Preface, while higher education is expanding in the Middle East, many educational leaders in Islamic nations continue to use Western leadership ideals and methods of teaching, which often are not compatible with Islam (Samier & ElKaleh, 2019c). As such, the purpose of this book is to address the dearth of literature on educational leadership from a Muslim context, not simply a Westernized version of what is taught in Muslim countries. The book proposes "alternative approaches" as well as showing that Islamic traditions can work well in the field as long as appropriate modifications are considered (Samier & ElKaleh, 2019c, p. x).

While the audience for this book is not explicitly stated, the dichotomous backgrounds of the editors' hint at who they are attempting to

reach. One is a Western-based scholar with experience in international and comparative studies and the other is a Muslim-country-born-and-raised scholar with a background in Western management and leadership studies. The merging of these perspectives—with a focus on the work as "a human and humane pursuit" (Samier & ElKaleh, 2019c, p. ix)—works remarkably well. The authors walk the fine line between providing context and explanation without being condescending and overly simplistic. Much of the writing seems geared to a Western audience (e.g., *Education in the Islamic Traditions* and *Administration and Leadership in the Islamic Traditions*, two sections in the Editors' Introduction that help orient the reader), but they also provide an acknowledgment of the heterogeneity of Islamic tradition (i.e., "there are many differences among Muslim states and communities through political and cultural practices" [Samier & ElKaleh, 2019c, p. 3]). This follows their argument regarding the lack of research on educational leadership in Muslim countries. Still further, Part III focuses on case studies in three Middle Eastern nations which would appeal to individuals working in those countries. In this way, Samier and ElKaleh (2019c) manage to edit a text that appeals to both Westerners with an interest in academic leadership in Muslim countries and those actually living the experience.

The organization of the book is straight-forward and logical. Each chapter begins with an abstract, which is helpful for a reader who is looking for information on a specific subject or country. Chapter 1, written by the editors, helps to orient the reader to the subject matter and discusses the organizational structure of the book (Samier & ElKaleh, 2019a). This chapter—more than the others—has a universal appeal as it provides a list of sources the reader might be interested in, context of the Arab world's place in higher education today, and education's and leadership's roles in Islam.

Following the introductory chapter, Samier and ElKaleh's (2019c) text is divided into three sections, each containing three chapters. Part I, "Foundational Theories and Models," focuses on the development of ideas supporting educational leadership and leadership curriculum in Arab countries. After the orienting Chapter 1, Chapter 2, written by one of the editors, argues that basic humanistic values are culturally universal while comparing Islamic and Western humanism (Samier, 2019). Next, Chapter 3, written by the other editor, presents a critical theory model that attempts to balance Islamic cultural values with Western-focused scholarship (ElKaleh, 2019), as well as the author's real-life experience implementing the model. Part 1 ends with Chapter 4, which aims to re-center the leadership field to focus on pedagogy rather than management (Harold & Stephenson, 2019)

while allowing students in the United Arab Emirates to integrate Western viewpoints into their own, culturally-relevant leadership practices.

Part II delves into "Current Controversies and Challenges." The section begins with Chapter 5, a look at the balance between universal research challenges and local cultural sensitivities (Karami-Akkary & Hammad, 2019). Chapter 6 is a response to the argument that Islam and modernization are incompatible. Conversely, the authors argue that contradictions do not exist and that using Islamic principles and *Shura* (the concept of mutual consultation) can help Muslim countries modernize in their own way (Samier & ElKaleh, 2019b). Chapter 7 embodies the traditional structure of a research article, ultimately using the Qatar National Vision 2030 as a model for diversifying the economy in a manner that incorporates ethical and moral ideals into one's work (Tok & D'Alessandro, 2019).

Finally, Part III uses individual case studies from Turkey (Chapter 8), Iran (Chapter 9), and Saudi Arabia (Chapter 10). Each chapter begins with some background/context and then delves into more current relevance. These three chapters are very specific, and may only be interesting to those with experience in the particular countries.

Although the book is ostensibly centered on "Muslim" countries, the content has a decidedly Middle Eastern focus. "Arab" and "Muslim" are, at times, used interchangeably. This is, of course, problematic in that it ignores all south east Asian nations that are predominantly Muslim. This might alienate some readers. Part III—the country case studies—too might lack appeal for all readers, though in a less off-putting way than the aforementioned criticism. The information in these chapters is often very specific to the extent that a casual reader might not fully grasp the content.

Overall, though, this book provides excellent information for both a Western audience interested in educational leadership in the Middle East and Middle Eastern practitioners interested in specifics about their field, its challenges, and its future. Samier and ElKaleh provide general, foundational, as well as contextual information for any reader who picks up *Teaching Educational Leadership in Muslim Countries: Theoretical, Historical and Cultural Foundations.*

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Book Review

# Feather Boas, Black Hoodies, and John Deere Hats: Discussions of Diversity in K-12 and Higher Education

Jones, J. R. (Ed.). (2017). Sense Publishers. ISBN: 978-94-6351-215-2

*Reviewed By: Tamala Martin, Morgan State University, USA*
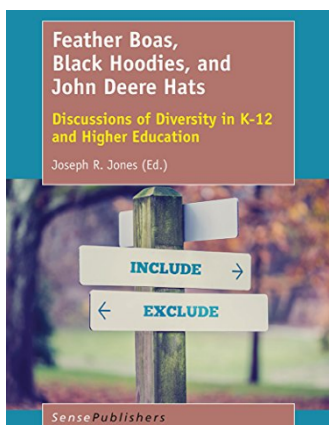
According to the 2010 Census, it is reported that White individuals made up 60.1% of the United States' population, yielding a population of nearly 40% of individuals from various other races. Given the diverse nature of the U.S., culturally responsive practices and learning modules are imperative to the health and growth of our nation. Joseph R. Jones' metaphorically titled book *Feather Boas, Black Hoodies, and John Deere Hats: Discussions of Diversity in K-12 and Higher Education* speaks to inequities experienced by those entrenched in the fate of "other-ism" by the lack of inclusivity in such a way that galvanizes the reader to relate and reflect on their own experience enough to want to have a conversation.

   *Feather Boas, Black Hoodies, and John Deere Hats* is comprised of 23 testimonial chapters written through the lens of educators from all walks of life and ethnicities providing a birds-eye view of their experiences navigating in a world of multiculturalism and some cases, their angst for assimilation. The authors' depictions of their experiences were profoundly written. They began to play out in your head as a series of movie shorts whereas you may need to pause in between just to ponder what you just experienced allowing your mind to digest and reflect properly before

moving on. If I had to pinpoint the main critique, that would be it. You may have to adjust the time frame allocated for the completion of the text.

In Chapter 1, Madison Riley recalls the details of how her first hands-on experiences with unconscious biases infiltrated the small-town homogenous bubble where her abilities and aspirations soared. As her futile attempt to be accepted backfired, she lost her voice. Her burgeoning expertise became minimalized, if not dismissed. It took studying abroad to find it again. Chapter 2 has author Alex Overby grappling with his namesake and the burdens that it created. Whilst his name had evolved through its spelling to dispel the true history of his ancestors, Overby chose to take ownership for the transgressions of his forefathers. Jones skillfully placed Alex Overby's story as a segue to Erin Bentley's story in Chapter 3. As an English teacher, Erin Bentley speaks of the relationships she has with her students stressing the importance of accountabilities and how essential it works both ways. She encouraged her students to embrace their names as opposed to allowing others to assign nicknames because it was easier and convenient. Instituting a "naming ritual" as an icebreaker gave students an increased sense of self-worth. "I do not teach English, I teach students" (p.15). In Chapter 4, Victor Salazar crafted metaphors to increase healthy dialogues between himself and his students. It quickly becomes evident that his approach stems from personal experiences with coping mechanisms incorporated due to the difficulties of his childhood growing up a Hispanic boy grappling with sexuality and poverty. Victor Salazar's story was candidly written as an inspiration for educators to hold students to high regard while valuing their presence.

"To be marginalized is to have a sense that one does not belong and, in doing so, to feel that one is neither a valued member of a community..." (Mowat, 2015, p. 457). Jones's use of Chapters 5 through Chapter 10 addresses the multifaceted depths associated with marginalization in our society. This could be crafted into a well-appointed Venn diagram often used in mathematics to display logical commonalities among different groups. In Chapter 5, a chance encounter with a homeless man forced Thomas Dailey to come face to face with his own implicant biases. Not short of empathy, Mr. Dailey graciously offered a meal to the man acutely aware of the social epithets that stigmatize homeless populations. Thomas Dailey's testimony brings to light the marginalization homeless individuals face even through outreach and other resources. In Chapter 6, Muslim educator Saoussan Maarouf addresses the probable effectiveness of teacher preparation training activities could be the next steps in the battle against Islamophobia without compromising beliefs regarding religion and

education. Learning about Muslims does not have to be considered religious education."Some cultures are loud in the way they speak…because invisible hurts" (p. 52).

In Chapter 7, Dr. Carmine Bersh utilizes her testament to invisibility during the recession of 2012 and her unprecedented experiences as an unemployed college professor by demonstrating what it means to regain your voice as a minority. Through the lens of a 20-year-old male, Chapter 8 depicts the turmoil of growing up gay in the deep south attempting to "pray the gay away" (p. 58). Jones demonstrated how this young man's journey is more evidence of how views of our young people are shaped by their community norms and creating a safe educational environment should move to a more ubiquitous space. In Chapter 9, Chamaree De Silva speaks of growing up educated by an all-female staff instilling the belief that succeeding in math and sciences was not an option but mandated. It wasn't until building her life as a biophysicist in the United States that she had to pummel through levels of microaggressions such as the shocking acknowledgment of her giftedness that her strong upbringing refused to allow her to feel marginalized. Acts of microaggressions are further depicted in Chapter 10 when presumed behaviors of Northerners are not as crass and rude as expected as it graced the college of the Southeast. Actions that are driven by a well-defined "social script and historical narrative" (p. 66). Well-appointed examples are everyday microaggressions that were also highlighted as described: "He's Black but well-spoken. She has a thick Southern accent, but she's very smart. She's a Yankee, but nice" (p. 69) Incorporating best practices through education while embracing the diversity of students was this chapter's catalyst in understanding acceptance and inspirations.

The proceeding chapters highlight teacher effectiveness in a multicultural classroom/setting. In Chapter 11, Justin Maki's take on identifying self-awareness with regards to diversity acknowledgement within pedagogical practices is aptly addressed. In Chapter 12, Vince Youngbauer and Michael Ridgeman delve into the objectification of teachers with noticeable displays of tattoos are subjected to notwithstanding the tendency that female teachers are even less respected or taken seriously. Homophobia is reintroduced in Chapter 13 highlighting the effects of the still prevalent hidden sexuality due to societal views as noted by the existence of heterosexual male to heterosexual male interactions. How educators address these issues and the ensuing bullying is significant to meet the needs of all students. In Chapters14 and 15, Michelle Herring and Jonai Sorrell articulately acknowledge the socio and racial divide ergo advantages

inherited between themselves and their students and what it's like to inevitably become the minority. In Chapter 16, Tracey Dumas Clark used an outside lens to critique the highly regarded works of Ruby Payne, a renowned educator & author best known for her strategies on educating the poor and impoverished. She argues that Payne's strategies moved educators to have an indirect correlation between their empathy and expectations of the students thus hindering their intellectual growth.

Chapter 17 addresses the benefits of implementing mandatory coursework to preservice teachers regarding culturally responsive teaching methods as it more specifically relates to international students. Michelle Vaughn aptly suggests that this could include but is not limited to social immersion activities as studying abroad. In Chapter 18, Heather McKeen addresses unconscious biases in the college classroom toward individuals most of whom do not fit the social and academic mold of a typical college student. She discussed activities that encouraged culturally sensitive conversations that would benefit beyond schooling. In Chapter 19, Sherika Derico and Amanda Hawkins seamlessly take the reader into the challenges of increasing diversity in the nursing profession while also highlighting the stigmas geared toward male nurses. "According to the American Association of Colleges of Nursing (2013), diverse males are not adequately represented because of feelings of inadequacy…and fear of gender stereotyping" (p. 150). In Chapter 20, Linda Hensel profoundly highlights the underrepresentation of minorities in STEM-related fields and the need to change the trajectory of those grappling with a defeatist outlook. Carol Raines, in Chapter 21, focused on the impact insensitivity to diversity has on bullying transcending beyond school-aged individuals. "Educators in today's multicultural classrooms need to constantly and consistently be aware of the backgrounds of their students as they plan their lessons" (p. 175); an excerpt from Elizabeth Dore is the trajectory of Chapter 22 and her examinations of methods to making a multicultural education environment successful. In the final chapter, Taylor Rye circled back to the trials of homophobia in the classrooms and preparedness of teachers with this dilemma.

This book touches on all levels of education and could adequately be used as a discussion tool for pre-service educators to a more seasoned professional during coursework and/or professional development. Each of the chapters highlights strategies for incorporating a learning neutral environment. Perspectives from the educator as well the educated allows for constructive conversations that could be had based on those scenarios from K-12 and beyond. Instituting authors from a broad spectrum of the

educational system were ingenious making content specificity a non-issue. It's narrative adequately aligns with an ever-evolving multicultural society.

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