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The Journal is international in scope and includes work by scholars in a wide range of academic fields and disciplines. Contributions from researchers and professionals in fields like sociology, psychology, higher education, philosophy, education, and cultural studies are welcome in the Journal.

The Journal's audience includes scholars and researchers in social sciences who work on the issues of ethnicity and race, caste and class, religion and spirituality, gender and sexual orientation, power and privilege, wealth and income, health and well-being, beliefs and value systems, and the intersections of these issues.



For questions –

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# Addressing Gender Disparity Through International Higher Education: Use of Contextually Appropriate Global Policy Framework

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## ABSTRACT

*This article examines the globally important topic of gender disparity in higher education and how to, contextually address it by formulating and implementing an appropriate globally-recognized policy framework. Although gender equality is one of the seven Sustainable Development Goals of the United Nations, it is a known fact that globally, there is gender disparity that systemically limits or curtails the progress of the girl-child or women either in terms of their educational attainments or professional development. Several countries and international agencies continue to commit to eradicating gender disparity in their countries in particular and in the world in general. In spite of the efforts of the United Nations and international agencies, there is still a long way to go in achieving gender parity. This paper looks at the attainment of gender parity through the use of higher education to bring about a contextually appropriate framework that is global in its operation and implementation in the effort to eliminate gender disparity. This is an attempt to unleash the potential of marginalized people, particularly women, who have been curtailed for several decades because of their gender for the overall good of our global world.*

**Keywords:** gender disparity, higher education, international policy, United Nations

## INTRODUCTION

While there is a common saying that "Education is a human right and not a privilege," (UNESCO, 2015), that quote may not be fully realized and may not apply to everyone in today's world unless and until issues of gender disparity are fully addressed at national and international levels. There is abundant evidence to show that gender disparity exists, and this is not restricted to only the field of higher education regarding opportunities that are made available to people, access to education, retention, program completion, and graduation but also in employment after graduation in terms of career interests, career choices, career pursuits, and career progression UN Women (n.d.). This discrimination and gender stereotyping have further seeped into subjects and courses that are generally known to be gender biased, especially in the Science, Technology, Engineering, and math (STEM) fields where females are often victims of bias and discrimination (Kiamba, 2008; McCullough, 2020; Pechtelidis et al, 2015).

The UNESCO (2015) report revealed that gender continues to manifest in many aspects of human behavior and activities all over the world, including education access, retention, and success and in employment, such as career choices and opportunities. The report further stated that females often experience the worst form of discrimination all over the world. Therefore, our aim in this study is to examine the gap in gender equity globally, in spite of global policies and programs that have been formulated and implemented, and make an argument for gender parity through the formulation and implementation of contextually appropriate global policies and programs that ensure that everybody regardless of gender and/or sexual orientation is both fairly and equally treated and continues to have access to life-long learning opportunities. By ensuring greater gender parity in the provision of and access to education and employment globally, all people should be able to maximize their potential when they are empowered and be able to make meaningful contributions to the challenging task of attaining socio-cultural, educational, political, and economic equality across genders which should make the world a better place than it is today. In this study, the authors will examine the topic of gender disparity from the binary version and/or definition of men and women. This does not imply that the authors subscribe to this binary version as the only definition of gender disparity.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### *State of Gender Disparity in the World*

Discrimination against women is widespread in many professions. For example, data from the 2010 UNESCO Institute of Statistics (UIS) showed that there were more female teachers (62%) than male teachers (38%) at the elementary education level globally. However, the percentage of female teachers at the elementary level did not extend beyond that level. Although more women are increasingly getting access to education, globally, they are less likely to work in higher education and research areas.

In spite of the fact that more women are increasingly getting access to education, women still remain in the minority in STEM disciplines all over the world (Pechtelidis et al., 2015). Wood (2012) averred that there were still more female teachers than their male counterparts in the elementary school system while the UIS (2020) report showed that unfortunately about a decade later, there have not been significant changes made in the efforts to address gender disparity based on the fact that there are still more female teachers than their male counterparts at the elementary level of education. This may have been cultural based on society's influence and impact in assigning gender roles to certain professions and disciplines (UNESCO, 2015).

The 2015 UNESCO report therefore advocated for the introduction and implementation of gender-responsive policies ranging from school programs that encourage girls to pursue their studies in the STEM fields to professional arrangements that enable women to be able to manage their home and family care responsibilities while also pursuing their educational and professional interests and goals. The enforcement of such policies, the report averred, would help to overcome the bias that still exist and persist against girls and women not only in the field of education but also in workplaces all over the world.

### *Evolving Changes to Gender Equality*

The concept of gender equality has evolved with different goals, approaches, and strategies that transcends cultural and advocacy groups to addressing country and global needs (UNESCO, 2015). According to the report, although the Charter of the United Nations (1945) and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) have both historically recognized women's equality and non-discrimination on the basis of sex, the periods of the late 1960s involved an increased attention that was paid to achieving equality based on women's access to health care, adequate nutrition, birth control and women's reproductive role.

From the 1970s to the 1980s, attention by gender advocacy groups shifted to the role of women in promoting economic development both nationally and internationally. This period also witnessed the promotion of Women in Development (WID) approach towards the achievement of gender parity in the world. The UNESCO (2015) report also revealed that in the time period from the 1970s to 1980s, notable and landmark events such as the first World Conference on Women took place in Mexico in 1975 and the declaration of the UN Decade for Women held from 1976 to 1985.

In spite of the global efforts that were paid to give women a voice and to pay adequate attention and proper recognition to women's achievements, the UNESCO (2015) report noted that it wasn't long before gender activists and development experts started their campaigns in the 1980s on the need to address the failure of the WID approach. The two main failures of the approach according to the report were:

1) Failure to improve the unequal treatments of women and men in terms of personal development opportunities and goals, and,
2) Failure to consider the multiple roles of women in the society.

The result of the campaigns by these gender activists and development experts on the need to address the shortcomings of the WID approach led to the adoption of the Gender and Development (GAD) approach in the attempt to address the complex issues of gender disparity in the 1980s. The main goal of the GAP approach according to the UNESCO (2015, p. 22) report was "to remove social, economic and political disparities between men and women in more holistic and pragmatic ways." According to the report, by the 1990s, issues that concern gender equality had been successfully included in the international development agenda including Education for All (EFA) and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). The EFA is a global commitment led by UNESCO by 164 countries in the year 2000 to address the learning needs of every child, youth, and adult in the world. The EFA was initiated to help in the attainment of the MDGs by 2015. The MDGs relate to the commitment that was made in the year 2000 by 187 countries to among other things ensure the achievement of universal primary education, provide gender equality, empower women, and eradicate extreme poverty and hunger in the world (Oxfam Canada, 2019). Commitments were made by countries especially by the developed ones to ensure that both the EFA and MDG initiatives are achieved to make the world a better place by 2015. Although progress have been made in achieving the MDGs, however, the inability of most countries to keep to

their commitments continue to make the achievement of the objectives that were set out in the MDG initiative a mirage (Oxfam Canada, 2019).

### *Women in Development (WID) vs. Gender and Development (GAD) Approaches*

Marchand and Parpart (1995) stated that in the 1970s and 1980s, the term "gender" became increasingly popular in describing the different roles and responsibilities that women have in the society. By the mid to late 1980s, the gender concept became more popular that it replaced in some circles the earlier Women in Development (WID) approach (Marchand & Parpart, 1995). The Gender and Development (GAD) approach extends beyond the definition to replace 'women' with the more neutral term 'gender' that was offered by the earlier WID approach which attempted to categorize women especially from developing countries into a category that were based on progressivist Western views of 'modernization' (Marchand & Parpart, 1995).

The Canadian Council for International Co-operation (CCIC) was established in Ottawa in 1968 with a mission of ending global poverty and promoting social justice and human dignity for everyone in the world. A 1991 report of the Canadian Council for International Co-operation (CCIC) revealed the differences between the WID approach of the 1970s and GAP approach of the 1980s in addressing issues and concerns regarding gender disparity and bias.

### *Contextually Appropriate Global Policies to Address Gender Disparity*

Commitment by national governments and international bodies, including the UN, to formulate and implement "contextually appropriate" global policies and programs to ensure that girls and women are not discriminated in their educational, professional and career pursuits is an important step forward in the urgent and cogent need to better address the problems of gender bias in today's world. Pal (2002, p. 2) defined policy as "a course of action or inaction chosen by public authorities to address a given problem or interrelated set of problems." Also, Jallade et al. (2001, p. 42) stated that policy is important because "it can help to guide future decisions and actions in educational development including those by international agencies in a coherent way." They further stated that policy "represents the government's public commitment to the future orientation of the sector." According to the UNESCO (2015) report, a policy is made up of three basic components: 1) problem definition, goals, and instruments, 2) goals and its relation to problem definition, and, 3) the policy instruments

that are used to solve an identified problem in order to achieve an intended goal.

**Table 1**

*Differences between WID and GAP* approaches

| | WID Approach | GAD Approach |
|---|---|---|
| Approach | Attempts to integrate women into the development process | Attempts to empower women and change the unequal relations between women and men |
| Focus | Women | Relations between women and men |
| Problem | Exclusion of women from the development process | Disparity in power relations that prevent equitable development and women's full participation |
| Goal | More efficient and effective development | -Equitable and sustainable development<br>-Women and men having equal and shared decision-making power |
| Strategies | -Implement women's projects, women's components, and integrated projects<br>-Increase women's productivity and income<br>-Improve women's ability to manage their households | -Identify and address short-term needs that are determined by both women and men to improve their conditions<br>-Identify and address women's and men's longer-term interests |

Source: Canadian Council for International Co-operation

In order to address the lingering concerns and problems regarding gender disparity in the world today, global policies must have these three basic components identified above and also be contextually appropriate

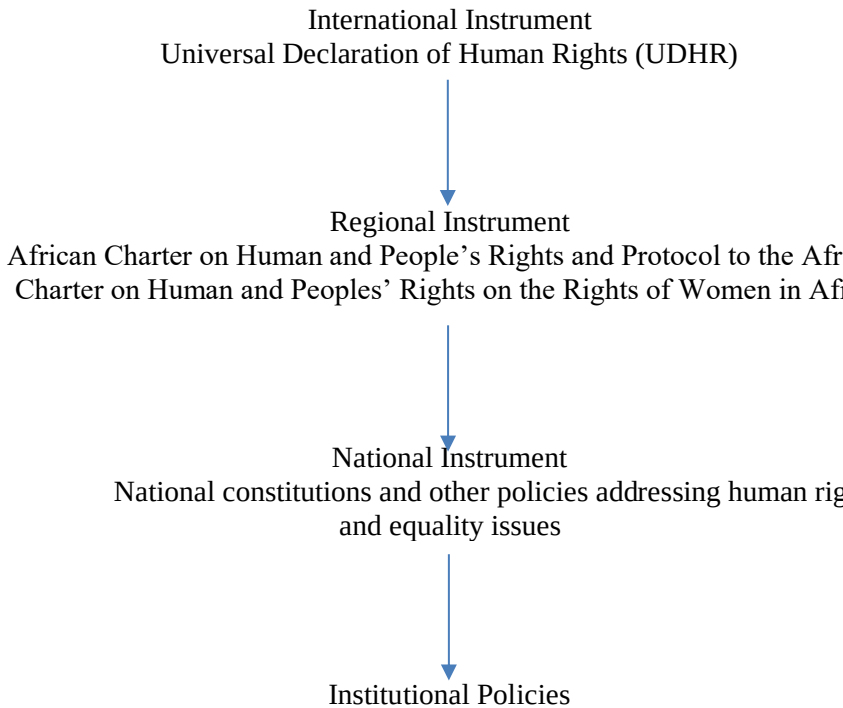
(UNESCO, 2015). Policy instruments that are contextually appropriate and take into cognizance these components identified above will also help in addressing uneven distribution of learning opportunities and resources that tend to favor men over women in different regions and different cultures of the world and thus deprive girls and women access to learning and empowerment opportunities and programs (UNESCO, 2015).

***International and Regional Policy Process***

The UNESCO (2015) report suggested that national governments and international bodies can commit to policy instruments designed in the format below to ensure that the challenges of gender disparity from a global scale to a local scale in a consistent and uniform strategic process are comprehensively addressed. This is one example:

**Figure 1**

*Example Format Illustrating Commitment Across Policy Instrument Design*




Source: UNESCO (2015).

***Arguments for a Globally Contextually Appropriate Policy Framework***

Every problem that exists should be treated within a given context of its existence and that context should inform the solution in terms of policies and programs that may be introduced, formulated, or implemented to address the problem. For example, UNESCO (2015) reported that appropriate policies that are aimed at addressing gender bias may be formulated at a global level, such as the UN, and member countries that are signatories to such policy agreements will be able to make commitments to abide by such policy agreements, which will compel these national governments, to implement such policies in their individual countries in a contextually appropriate way given the differences in the socio-cultural, political, and economic levels of development of the member countries.

The context of policy formulation and implementation in different countries is very important and may be different from one country to another given the differences in gender disparity across the world due to differences in culture, norms, beliefs, and practices. For example, Eshete (2003) stated that in Ethiopia, women make up only 2.3% of the total number of professors (including lecturers and instructors) in all the post-secondary educational institutions in the country. However, the case is different in other countries where gender disparity also exists. For example, Samble (2008) stated that in the United States, only 23% of full professors were women while Doherty & Manfredi (2010) stated that only 13% of full professors in England were women. In Latin America, in spite of the increasing enrolment of women in universities representing 55%, only 46% of women occupy teaching positions while 18% occupy leadership positions as rectors of universities (UNESCO, 2021). The differences in gender disparity in different countries in the world today therefore makes the need for a contextually appropriate formulation and implementation of global policies and programs to be both imperative and germane in the efforts to address the problems of gender disparity, globally.

In order to address gender disparity between women and men in higher educational institutions and workplaces across the world today, it is necessary to evolve a contextually appropriate policy framework that recognizes the contextual and cultural disposition and inclination of the people of a particular country. This recognition must be pursued in a unique and peculiar manner rather than a generic framework that may not take into cognizance the contextual and cultural challenges of individual countries in the world.

However, regardless of the differences that exist between and amongst the different countries of the world, any policy framework that is

introduced and pursued for implementation must appropriately and adequately address salient and vital issues that relate to gender, class, race, and ethnicity in order to ensure justice, equity and fair play in any efforts deployed to address the very important issue of gender disparity not only in the field of higher education, and in workplaces, but also in every sphere of human interactions and activities across the world.

**Gender-responsive policy.** UNESCO (2015) stated that any policy that is gender-responsive takes into cognizance the awareness and knowledge of the different situations and circumstances that women and men find themselves in society, including differences in access to learning opportunities and resources (UNESCO, 2015). The essence of any gender-responsive policy is to address the challenges of gender disparity in the world by ensuring that countries implement such a policy in a way that contextually recognizes gender differences. True (2003) argued that a gender-responsive policy must consider the diverse needs, interests, and values of men and women in different positions in society.

**Curriculum, curriculum language, gender equality, and gender assessment.** The importance of curriculum design and development in any higher education system cannot be overemphasized because of its importance in the process of selecting and presenting knowledge and its role in shaping character and developing behavioral expectations and patterns in the learner (UNESCO, 2015). Given the importance of curriculum in training learners who include future teachers and leaders, UNESCO (2015) averred that it is important to ensure that the curriculum design and development process recognizes and addresses any gender bias that may be inherent in any higher education or training curriculum.

Given the impact of social and cultural norms and practices in particular societies and countries regarding curriculum design and development, it is important to ensure the formulation and implementation of contextually appropriate policies as a way of addressing the gender disparity that is often noticed in certain courses at both the secondary and higher education level. For example, UNESCO (2015, p. 59) reported that "Physical Education (PE) is one case in point where gender equality issues arise from preconceived stereotyping of boys and girls." The report argued that all over the world, it is generally believed that physical and outside activities are boys' domain while girls are better suited to in-house and home activities, such as cooking. The UNESCO (2015, p. 59) further

reported that this practice is “prevalent in many cultures around the world and is not specific to one culture alone.”

UNESCO (2015) reported that the objectives of a course and learning outcomes form an important foundation for any curriculum. The report further stated that the samples of curriculum objectives and learning outcomes in certain countries show that there is gender bias in the language used. For example, Norton & Toohey (2004) stated that in Japan, girls are made to see English language as a language of empowerment. They also stated that the use of pronouns in the English language permits students to express themselves as independent individuals as opposed to what obtains in the Japanese language. This is an example of how language, an important part of culture, makes for gender disparity in curriculum design and development in Japan. To address this particular problem in Japan, for example, a contextual and appropriate policy and program strategy could be adopted in the context of the problem rather than a generic policy framework that may not adequately and appropriately address the problem of gender disparity in the curriculum language that is presently being used.

UNESCO (2015, p. 61) reported that “assessment involves many variables that affect the outcome over and above the stated learning outcomes under assessment.” Also, Feingold (1992) stated that certain types of assessment favor boys over girls. For example, he argued that boys do better on multiple-choice questions and girls do better on essay type questions. While more research is needed to verify his findings, it is still important to take note of the possibility of gender bias in students’ assessment and such should be given the needed and necessary attention that it deserves in a contextually appropriate manner.

**Teacher attitudes and gender issues.** Teacher bias deserves needed attention in the efforts being made by both national governments and international bodies to address the issue of gender disparity. This is because teachers are in a position to influence and mold the perspectives and position of their students on gender matters and issues. For example, Bloom (1976) stated that attitudes play a significant role in students’ success in their subjects while the Association for the Development of Education in Africa (2006, p. 6) stated that “the sensitization of academic staff to the gender dimensions of teaching and learning is an important first step towards the transformation of the curriculum, including content, methodologies and processes.” Therefore, it is important that teachers provide a gender-bias free environment in their classes, and they should also be aware of gender sensitive instructional styles in order to be able to

provide a solid and quality education to their students. Regarding the importance of teachers' attitudes to gender issues, Scott & McCollum (1993, pp. 175) stated that "teachers must learn how to address the multiple needs arising because of gender, class, ethnicity, language and location" while UNESCO (2015, pp. 68) also reported that "teachers need to be aware of their own beliefs and behavior towards male and female learners" including the "need to reject their held belief that boys excel in mathematics and that girls should catch up with boys."

## RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND PURPOSE

The research questions are based on gender disparity in both the developed and developing world. These questions are:

1) What is the state of gender disparity in the world today?
2) How can higher education help in addressing gender disparity?
3) What policies and practices can help address gender disparity at the international level?

In this study, we examine the need for a global contextually appropriate policy framework within the higher education sector to address issues of gender disparity, globally, rather than a generic framework or approach. This is because higher education plays a significant role in addressing the problems of gender disparity. If concerns regarding gender disparity can be successfully addressed by higher education, this can be used as a model to be replicated in other sectors. Also, students who are positively impacted can go into their different workplaces upon graduation from their programs in their colleges and universities as ambassadors who will be able to advocate for gender parity and challenge the status quo in their various and diverse workplaces all over the world.

## RESEARCH METHOD

Given the purpose of this research, we conducted a retrospective review of policies examining global gender disparity using data generated from the United Nations. A substantial amount of time and focus was used to conducting a literature review and understanding global gender disparity and how the United Nations worked collectively to combat the issue. After the literature review was conducted, we evaluated the policies and developed an understanding of how the policies played a role in addressing gender disparity. Thereafter, we proposed a contextual appropriate policy framework as an approach to consider. This allowed us to have a perspective of the current and future implications through this approach.

## RESULTS

### *Policies and programs to address gender disparity at the UN level*

From examining gender disparity through a contextually appropriate global policy framework, it is important to understand the wide range of international policies. Some policies and programs aimed at eliminating gender disparity or reducing it by UN member states include the following.

- Affirmative Action: Efforts at the international and national levels that are intended to increase access to higher education opportunities to marginalized groups (Nguyen & Ward, 2017). This policy takes into consideration the responsibilities and activities of women, which go beyond their academic studies and extends to their home and family care and responsibilities, by giving them a consideration that allows them access to learning opportunities in male dominated disciplines even when they are a few points less than the required grade. This policy, according to Eshete (2003) has helped to increase access to learning opportunities for girls in countries like Ethiopia and Zimbabwe where girls and women are disadvantaged compared to boys and men by housework and chores. Nyoni et al (2017) also stated that affirmative action policies are meant to provide more opportunities for women engagement in learning opportunities, leadership positions, politics, higher administrative responsibilities, and economic development.
- Equal Opportunity: Nyoni et al (2017) stated that these are policies that were formed and developed to address issues of gender disparity like the gender mainstreaming policy that was promoted in the Treaty of Amsterdam (1997) and the Beijing Platform for Action (1995).
- Millennium Development Goals (MDGs): Was a resolution by 189 countries and 22 international bodies at the United Nations Millennium Declaration in 2000 to achieve eight goals including the reduction of child mortality, improvement of maternal health, achievement of universal primary education, women empowerment and gender equality by 2015.
- Education for All (EFA): Is a global commitment led by UNESCO to provide quality basic education for all children, youth and adults. The commitment was made by 164 countries at the World Education Forum that held in Dakar, Senegal in 2000 and it was meant to support the attainment of the MDGs by 2015. The EFA also aims to reduce barriers to education such as poverty and undernutrition that is prevalent in developing countries (Soetan, 2019; Soetan, 2020).
- Gender Sensitization Campaigns: These are programs in which certain days are set aside in the year. These days are internationally recognized

by UN member states to both recognize and acknowledge the huge and important contributions that women make in the world today. Examples include the International Women's Day that takes place every year on March 8, and the International Day of the Girl Child that holds on October 11 of every year.

- Gender Mainstreaming: Is a globally accepted strategy for promoting gender equality. Gender mainstreaming ensures that gender perspectives and attention to the goal of gender equality are crucial to all activities involving girls and boys and women and men all over the world.
- Focal Point for Women: This was mandated according to the UN Women (n.d.) to monitor the status of women in UN member states and measure the level of compliance of member states to policies and programs that they made commitments to implement in the efforts to address gender disparity in the world. Progress reports on findings regarding the status of women in all UN countries are reported to the Secretary-General of the UN.
- IANWGE: The Inter-Agency Network on Women and Gender Equality is a network within the UN system that monitors, supervises, and ensures the mainstreaming of gender perspectives in the programmatic, normative, and operational work of the UN System (UN Women, n.d.).
- Women, Peace and Security: Is concerned with the adoption of the Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) on women, peace and security. The resolution according to the UN Women (n.d.) marked an important act in the efforts aimed at increasing women participation and providing increased publicity to gender perspectives in all UN activities and efforts that involve peacemaking, peacekeeping, peacebuilding, and reconstruction all over the world.
- UNITE Campaign: This was an initiative of the erstwhile UN Secretary-General, Mr. Ban Ki-Moon, aimed at ending violence against women, globally.

## DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

Today, all over the world, women are increasingly breaking their ceilings and limits (albeit at a slow pace) by taking up leadership positions in higher education institutions and in various workplaces through the different policies and programs that have been formulated at the UN level. These programs and policies compel member countries to commit to adopt and implement these policies and programs in their respective countries. Some of these policies and programs are the results of some global meetings and conferences that were convened by the UN General Assembly. For example,

in 1998, UNESCO convened a world conference on higher education in which participants at the conference stated that higher education has an important role to play in bringing about gender parity, globally.

Regarding the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), a resolution that was agreed to by 189 countries during the historic millennium declaration of the United Nations Millennium Summit in 2010, Nyoni et al (2017) stated that the attainment of the MDGs will go a long way in addressing the ills of gender disparity in the world today. They further stated that 189 countries made a commitment to both adopt and enforce the MDGs in their countries and that the MDGs is "concerned with promoting gender equality and the empowerment of women," based on the recognition of "the importance of gender equality and women's empowerment in effecting social change and transformation" (pp. 44). While it is true that 189 of the 193 countries that make up the UN made a commitment toward the enforcement of the MDGs, the reality is that several countries have been slow and non-challant in the implementation of their commitment to that cause i.e., the enforcement of the MDGs in their countries.

In India, Jha (2022) argued that the country has come a long way in addressing the issue of gender disparity with the literacy rate for females increasing from 8.9 percent during the country's first census in 1951 to 65.8 percent in 2008; however, India, still has a long way to go in ensuring gender equality by ensuring systemic shifts regarding the role of women in the society (Jha, 2022), including in higher education. This systemic shift in the role of women in the society could be appropriately addressed in our view through the use of contextually appropriate global policy framework. In Ethiopia, evidence suggests that access and quality should not be viewed as an "either-or" issue but as an integral part of the same whole (Semela, 2007). This is connected to the issue of gender disparity, which is evidenced by the dearth of female university graduates in the country which has resulted in few academic positions for women in higher education in the country (Asfaw, 2012). Sadly, today, in many countries, the issue of gender equality is still a common topic of concern as evidenced by the recent statement made by the United Nations at the World Economic Forum in Davos in January that the world is not on track to achieve gender equality by 2023 (UN Women, 2023).

Blackmore & Sachs (2001) and Segania (2007) stated that even in developed countries, gender disparity still exists as there is still a deficiency of women in high leadership positions. Gender disparity is, however, worse in developing according to Dunne & Sayed (2007); Kiamba (2008); Prah

(2002); Ohene (2010); Onsongo (2004); Adadevoh (2001), Odejide (2007); Pereira (2007); and Morley (2013).

Through the approach of using a contextually appropriate policy framework, we hope that the goals of the United Nations to combat gender disparities will be more targeted and impactful to respond to the needs of the member nations and local contexts and communities. Limitations of this approach and research are that there are multiple factors that influence the ability to utilize this framework. Policymaking and policy implementation does not operate in a vacuum and are influenced by a variety of factors, such as politics, economics, health and welfare, conflicts, etc.

## CONCLUSIONS

In spite of the improvements recorded in increasing learning opportunities and access to minority and discriminated groups especially girls and women through the formulation and implementation of policies and programs at both national and international levels, gender disparity still remains a serious issue that deserves great concern and urgent attention at both national and international levels. The formulation and implementation of contextually appropriate and effective global policies and programs, in our opinion will bring about greater improvements to the attainment of gender parity compared to what we are witnessing today. Also, the earlier the ills from gender disparity are appropriately and adequately addressed through the adoption and implementation and/or enforcement of contextually appropriate global policies, programs and resolutions, the faster and better the potential of millions of people particularly girls and women will be realized and the better and easier the world will be for us all.

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# The Voice of Success: An Exploration of the Lived Experience of Kumeyaay College Graduates

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## ABSTRACT

*This phenomenological study ethnography aims to examine the lived experience of Kumeyaay Nation college graduates in higher education. Specifically, the study investigated factors that twelve Kumeyaay graduates perceived as contributors to their persistence in academic attainment within six years of enrollment for a baccalaureate degree at a four-year institution. Four themes emerged from the data analysis and were labeled as follows: cultural and identity revitalization (learning about tribal history and language), discovering the leader within (student leadership participation), a support network paradox (family values in contrast to community values), and what is the alternative? (limited opportunities as motivation). The research findings unveiled implications for practice in higher education, such as empowering students with knowledge of cultural traditions and the Kumeyaay language, fostering opportunities for leadership development, establishing Native American community-center support networks, and fostering mentorship and opportunities to give back among college graduates from the Kumeyaay Nation.*

**Keywords:** Kumeyaay Nation, Native American, persistence

## INTRODUCTION/BACKGROUND

From time immemorial, the territory of the Kumeyaay Land has bordered Mexico – California, representing a diverse southwestern heritage of Spanish and Native cultures. The Kumeyaay Nation represents a unique Native American population that occupies the largest and most diverse territory of any Native American population in what is now known as the state of California. Prior to the first European settlement in Kumeyaay territory in 1769, Kumeyaay familial and/or territorial groups, also known as Sh'mulqs (Miskwish, 2007), resided, and thrived in arid deserts, expansive coast lands, and alpine mountains from what is now known as San Diego California to northern Baja California, Mexico (Miskwish, 2007). While the Kumeyaay Nation resiliently overcame many challenges of colonization and continues to thrive within twelve reservations in California and seven communities in Mexico, higher education enrollment and degree attainment remains low.

This situation is especially dire when only 4.6% (n=111) of the Kumeyaay Nation population who enrolled in higher education in 2013 graduated with a bachelor's degree within four years, compared to 20.1% (n=5.14 million) bachelor's degree attainment for all other ethnic groups in the state of California during the same four-year period (U.S. Census Bureau, 2019). These ethnic studies require an ethnic formation within the Kumeyaay networks to support learners in transitioning from K-12 to higher education. Increasing the rates of Kumeyaay higher education degree attainment is critical for the continued development of steadfast leadership, research, and the political revitalization of the Nation.

Institutions of higher education continue to face challenges in meeting the unique needs of Native American students and to foster a culturally responsive learning environment that is suitable for successful degree attainment. Native American students face barriers with limited admission and financial aid information due to geographical isolation to resources and limited K-12 institutional support (Andrade, 2014). When Native American students are admitted to predominately white institutions, those with strong cultural identities reported perceiving and experiencing significant racial harassment and isolation (Andelman et al., 2013; Mosholder et al., 2013). Moreover, Native American students in higher education experience cultural incongruence when faced with a Eurocentric curriculum that is not culturally responsive and support services that do not account for socio-cultural factors like potential financial challenges, collectivist values, and other cultural norms that manifest in students not seeking help or speaking up (Mosholder et al., 2013).

In 2017, Native American students enrolled in postsecondary education at a rate of 20% compared to the 40% total average postsecondary enrollment rate; where White students represented 41%, African American students represented 36%, Hispanic/Latino students represented 36%, and Asian students represented 65% (McFarland et al., 2018). Moreover, while all other racial and ethnic groups experienced no significant change in postsecondary enrollment between 2000 and 2017, Native American postsecondary enrollment rates increased from 35% to 41% between 2000 and 2010 before decreasing by 21% between 2010 and 2017 (McFarland et al., 2018). Efforts to identify effective strategies to support Native American students for college success and improvement should continue beyond the enrollment period.

Researchers agree that higher education administrators and student success staff need to understand the issues that obstruct the pursuit and attainment of postsecondary education for Native American students (Akee & Yazzie-Mintz, 2011; Demmert et al., 2006; Guillory, 2009; Lopez, 2018; Proudfit & Myers-Lim, 2017; Tierney, 1992). While a great amount is known about the disproportionate lack of K-12 academic preparation for higher education, higher rates of health disparities, high rates of criminal victimization, and cultural misrepresentation (Proudfit & Myers-Lim, 2017), little is known about the factors that supported the success of Native American college students who obtained a baccalaureate degree within six years of enrollment. Scholars suggest that a focus on programs that embrace and respect cultural traditions and establishing mutually supportive relationships with institutions and Native American communities may promote a greater understanding and support of student's needs (Lopez, 2018; Mosholder et al., 2013; Proudfit & Myers-Lim, 2017).

This study was crucial to understanding the lived experience of Native American students because it went beyond mere enrollment rates and delved into the factors that contributed to positive educational experiences, areas of support, and influences that led to degree attainment. By isolating the factors that participants unveiled as supportive and essential to their persistence and graduation, educators and administrators can tailor their efforts to address the specific needs of Native American students and enhance the degree attaining potential for this historically underrepresented community in higher education (Akee & Yazzie-Mintz, 2011; Guillory & Wolverton, 2008).

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Traditional Persistence Theories

Over the years, researchers developed various theoretical explanations for student persistence in higher education (Astin, 1999; Guillory, 2009; HeavyRunner & DeCelles, 2002; Tinto, 1975,1993). However, prevailing persistence paradigms that emphasize student integration further perpetuate the role of student assimilation and cultural dissonance that is detrimental to the college experience of Native American students (Goforth et al., 2016; Henderson et al., 2015; McMahon et al., 2019; Minthorn, 2014). Theories focusing on integration necessitate an understanding of multigenerational relationships to ancestors, nature, and the land. Native scholars recommend for higher education environments to value family and cultural inclusion that were disrupted during various periods of relocation, assimilation, and continued systems of oppression (Henderon et al., 2015; Marroquin & McCoach, 2014; Minthorn, 2014).

In contrast to traditional persistence theories that value integration and assimilation, the Family Education Model focuses on maintaining family and tribal community connections by proposing higher education institutions act as advocates for social services to students and to engage with family members to sustain support networks for their students (HeavyRunner & DeCelles, 2002). Guillory's (2009) American Indian/Alaskan Native college student retention strategies model recommends culturally sensitive career counseling, peer mentoring, and community connections. In addition to the support networks, Windchief and Joseph (2015) theorized that policies and curriculum must be claimed as Native American spaces that incorporate Native culture, values, and history to predict persistence among Native American students.

### Family Dynamics

Guillory and Wolverton (2008) compared the perceptions of persistence factors among Native American students at three large state universities and those held by policymakers at the respective institutions. While financial factors and academic preparation were among the perceived hindrances to persistence for policymakers, Native American students revealed that family was the most influential persistence factor along their educational journey. Native American students explained how their role of caretaker of their parents and grandparents often presented challenges to academic success and campus engagement (Guillory & Wolverton, 2008). Nonetheless, the connection to their family was a significant factor to their willingness to overcome the lack of preparation, financial deficiencies, and

unwelcoming environments in education (Guillory & Wolverton, 2008). Similarly, Minthorn (2014) suggested that family support was significant for educational success and development. For example, the idea of bringing honor to the family and the career prospects of education motivated students, while the pressure to meet family expectations and the fear of failure were sometimes a barrier to persistence (Minthorn, 2014). This is consistent with the Family Education Model which postulates that retention programs are most effective when they affirm and strengthen the student's family identity and empower students by extending the family structure to the institutional environment (HeavyRunner & DeCelles, 2002). As such, policies similar to the Every Student Succeeds Act of 2015 that requires outreach to all parents and family members to foster involvement in programs and activities in primary and secondary education has the potential to establish norms of family support into retention programing as students transition into higher education.

**Cultural and Community Engagement**

Studies revealed that making contributions to the community and the desire to serve as a role model for family and community members are significant persistence protective factors among Native American students (Guillory & Wolverton, 2008; Henderson et al., 2015; Minthorn, 2014; Thompson et al., 2013).

***Home Going***

Contrary to traditional first-year programing and practices in higher education that seek to integrate students into the campus culture and community, Native American students benefit significantly from consistent home visitation and community engagement which validates a student's sense of belonging and identity (Bass & Harrington, 2014; Waterman, 2012; Schmidtke, 2016). As demonstrated by increased grade point averages, the support from families and Native communities by way of advice, cultural responsibility to set a good example for future generations, and identity reinforcement were positive protective factors derived from frequent home going (Bass and Harrington, 2014; Marroquin & McCoach, 2014; Schmidtke, 2016; Waterman, 2012). Even when institutions of higher education fail to provide the necessary inclusion and support, researchers found that family support and involvement was the most frequently identified source of encouragement, motivation, and empowerment that contributed to positive academic outcomes (Guillory & Wolverton, 2008; Jackson et al., 2003; HeavyRunner & DeCelles, 2002; Marroquin & McCoach, 2014).

### *Cultural Identity*

Jackson et al. (2003) unveiled that a greater understanding of ethnic identity led to increased academic performance. Similarly, Henderson et al., (2015) qualitative study examined the impact of cultural identity and found that tribal affiliation strongly impacts the identity of native language abilities. These protective factors support anti-discriminatory practices for positive navigation amid a Eurocentric educational environment.

### *Tribal Sovereignty*

Central to Native American cultural preservation and identity is the concept of tribal sovereignty or self-governance (Brayboy, 2006; Goforth et. al., 2016; Kalt & Singer, 2004). Evidence from Brayboy (2006) indicated that community-based expressions of sovereignty were helpful for exploring the uniqueness of Native American experiences. Self-determination, self-governance, self-identification, and self-education are four articulations of sovereignty that explicitly reject models of assimilation in educational environments and acknowledge the tribal history and contemporary issues experienced by Native American communities (Bates, 2016; Brayboy, 2006; Kalt & Singer, 2004).

### *Institutional Support*

Faculty relationships are the foundation of academic resources for facilitating the intricacy of course interchanges for the complexities of degree attainment (Bass & Harrington, 2014; Jackson et al., 2003; Schmidtke, 2016). Effective faculty-student relationships that provide consistent availability and informal interactions fostered motivation and self-confidence among students (Hoffman, 2014). These relationships also provide mentoring opportunities and increase access to opportunities (Bass & Harrington, 2014). Researchers examining ethnic organizations and multicultural centers for underrepresented students provide cultural responsiveness to the support network, increasing identity awareness as an inclusionary sense of belonging (Bowman et al., 2015; McShay, 2017; Park, 2014; Simmons, 2013). Perhaps the greatest benefit to ethnic organizations on campus involves the peer navigation for students to identify staff and faculty of similar backgrounds who can serve as mentors, advocates, and resources for navigating the higher education environment (McShay, 2017; Simmons, 2013). However, academic support services for undergraduate and first-year students indicate that persistence factors for success are most significant when methods of support include financial contributions for an increased rate of student matriculation (Nguyen et al., 2019; Olbrecht et al., 2016; Pratt et al., 2019). Findings from

a study of the relationship between family finances, merit-based aid, and retention suggest that when students are offered merit-based financial aid, retention increased significantly even with small amounts of aid awarded (Olbrecht et al., 2016). In the case of supporting Native American student persistence, there is an opportunity for institutions of higher education to improve their support of this community through holistic services that leverage the cultural strengths and relational opportunities.

***Present Study***

The study of the Kumeyaay Nation and college graduates aims to examine the lived experiences of students participating in academic studies. Specifically, the research study investigates factors of support that graduates perceived contributed to their educational attainments of a baccalaureate degree within six years of enrollment at a four-year institution of higher education.

## RESEARCH METHOD

Merriam (2016) defined a qualitative researcher as one who is concerned with "understanding how people interpret their experiences, how they construct their worlds, and what meaning they attribute to their experiences" (p.6). In qualitative research, the researcher engages as the primary instrument to inductively analyze and understand a phenomenon from the perspective of the participants in the study (Merriam, 2016). As such, when designing the approach to study the lived experiences of Kumeyaay Nation graduates, a qualitative methodology was used to better understand the intricacies and perceptions of study participants.

Creswell & Creswell (2018) posited that a phenomenological approach is best suited when a research problem demands a deeper understanding of the human experience shared by a homogeneous group of people. As such, the researcher learned the Kumeyaay language from a trusted leader in the Kumeyaay Nation and engaged in observations of cultural events and activities during the study. The researcher attended a summer cultural nights event where youth were celebrated for their educational pursuits, traditional games were played by men from various reservations of the Kumeyaay Nation, and a meal was shared. Lastly, the researcher was invited by a member of the Kumeyaay community to attend the burial service for a loved one. This provided first-hand experience of the depth of family connections and support networks. In alignment with the focus of exploring the factors which influenced persistence and degree attainment, a phenomenological study with elements of ethnography allowed the researcher

to thoroughly explore the lived experiences among this historically underrepresented community in higher education that persisted and attained their degree (Manen, 2016; Padilla-Diaz, 2015).

**Research Questions**

The following questions were used to frame the study:

1. What were the lived experiences of Kumeyaay Nation students during enrollment in a four-year institution of higher education?
2. What are the perceived factors, if any, that influenced persistence at a four-year institution of higher education for Kumeyaay Nation college graduates?
3. What are the perceived factors, if any, that influenced attainment of a baccalaureate degree within six years from enrollment at a four-year institution of higher education for Kumeyaay Nation college graduates?

**Participants**

Since the number of college graduates in the Kumeyaay Nation was small and consisted of an interconnected community or tribal and non-tribal demographics, the sampling included criteria for small populations that protected the confidentiality of participants. The sampling methodology is appropriate when studying sensitive issues where accessing data for protected populations is difficult (Kirchherr & Charles, 2018; Waters, 2015). The purposeful sampling represented various reservations of the Kumeyaay Nation. The twelve total participants in the study included:

- One member who graduated within one year of the start of the study,
- One member who lived on the reservation but worked off the reservation, and
- One member who served in a leadership capacity within the Kumeyaay Nation.

Participants ranged from recent graduates with one-year post-graduation to over twenty years post-graduation from a four-year institution of higher education.

**Data Collection**

The researchers used multiple semi-structured methods to gather data for this study, including interviewing, facilitating focus groups, taking field notes, and observing participants. The collected data included twelve interviews and one focus group over seven months, from November 2020 to

May 2021. To ensure the accuracy of these findings, data triangulation, supported comparisons, and multiple sources for internal validity and reliability among the participants. Before participating in the study, participants were given written informed consent and privacy consent forms for data collation and assigned pseudonyms associated with the information. The participant's collected data remains confidential and protected for individual and community privacy and will not be distributed to other participants, community members, or researchers external to this study.

**Data Analysis**

All interviews and the focus group were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim using MAXQDA software to develop codes and themes that emerged from the data collected. Following the interview and the focus group, the researchers confirmed accuracy by providing each participant with a copy of the transcript and the opportunity to submit any corrections or additions. Henceforth, data coding was completed independently by the first and third researchers to confirm the codes' reliability through consensus. After a second and third rounds of coding, the researchers selected four emerging themes for significant findings within the study. These four themes were labeled as follows: cultural and identity revitalization, discovering the leader within, a support network paradox, and what is the alternative? These themes, supported by statements and observations in the data, revealed the unique lived experience of Kumeyaay college graduates who participated in the study. The final steps of data analysis involved synthesizing themes to conclude factors for participants' perceptions of support in baccalaureate attainment in higher education.

## RESULTS

A total of thirty-seven different codes emerged from the data analysis. The following four themes emerged from the codes as perceived factors that contributed to the persistence and degree attainment of a baccalaureate degree within six years of enrollment at a four-year institution of higher education: (1) Cultural & Identity Revitalization, (2) Discovering the Leader Within, (3) A Support Network Paradox, and (4) What is the Alternative?

**Persistence of Kumeyaay Students**

***Theme 1: Cultural & Identity Revitalization***

The theme of cultural and identity revitalization appeared in all twelve participant interviews when participants were asked about the factors that they believed supported their ability to continue their college journey year

after year. When participants discussed the challenges they experienced in college, and the factors that provided the support to return and continue their education, they often started with their Native American identity and how they navigated the new environment. The focus group revealed that participants often learned about their own culture and language for the first time in college because there was very limited, if any, academic resources about Kumeyaay culture or language growing up. Field observations and the process of the researcher learning the Kumeyaay language revealed that there was very limited scholarly work published about this community and that the language was spoken fluently by less than fifty people at the time of the study. Participant 3 stated,

> College for me, I finally was able to engage with academics who taught about where I came from. In one of my classes in Grossmont College, you know, he was teaching, and he included the local tribes and it was just really weird to hear somebody talking like that. I'd never heard anybody talk about us in that respect.

Seven of the twelve participants self-identified as first-generation college students for whom experiencing their Native American history and culture being taught in a formal educational setting was new. However, not all participants experienced positive education about Native American history or culture during their college experience, and some experienced negative or false teachings pertaining to Native American history and culture. Participant 9 shared the opposite experience from Participant 3 and stated,

> There is no general understanding, it's complete ignorance because of how the public education system teaches or really doesn't teach about Tribal Nations sovereignty. Treaties like these things that actually when you look at you know United States law, if you look at the Constitution, which says that these treaties once ratified become the supreme law of the land like, you know, it's not taught about like people don't even realize you know, the importance of treaties.

Nonetheless, all participants shared a variation of the responsibility of developing an intersectional identity that could navigate both worlds for the purpose of benefiting their community as explained by participant 9 who stated, "a sense of like responsibility and wanting to learn so that I can come back home and contribute." Participant 9, like many of the participants in this study, used the word "responsibility" when describing the motive for learning or explaining the internal emotions keeping them from early departure when in college. Apart from identity development in a formal sense within the classroom, participants in the focus group also indicated that their identity developed in community, through the various groups and student centers on

campus. Participant 3 specifically referenced the help that was received from the Indian studies department and the Native clubs on campus was a supportive network to navigating the higher education systems and the development of Native American identity. Participant 9 explained the connection between Native identity development and persistence when he stated,

> There was Native community and like a strong like Native, you know, there's just a strong Native unity at UCLA, and once I found that and tapped into that; that became like the, that, that's that's what kept me there. That's what kept me there. That's what helped me succeed.

Participant 9, like many others interviewed, emphasized the impact that Native community had on their educational success. Participant 11 added that Native community support on campus also served as "emotional support" to "help each other through." Participants often used communal language when describing the impact of Native community. Participants 5 and 12 explained how the negativity and the challenges faced served as fuel to persevere in their college education. According to the interviews and the focus group conducted, all participants shared an ongoing development of identity during their college experience that centered on their Native identity, learning how to navigate the system of higher education, and using education to benefit their Native communities.

***Theme 2: Discovering the Leader Within***

Seven participants in this study were involved in Native American organizations or clubs on campus, five were employed or participated in an internship with a Native American organization, and four were involved in activism during their college experience. These seven participants found that their active participation in university life led to better outcomes in their personal leadership development and opportunities they were extended during their academic experience. Participant 10 chose to emphasize the accountability to be present and engaged in college. She also equated this commitment in leadership to a responsibility to people she cared about and who depended on the activities put on by the Native American organizations. She stated the following when sharing about her leadership involvement:

> You can't wing it. You can't wing it and you know on a lot of people depended on that for income and they were planning on it, you know coming from states away and it mattered to the community and so yeah, it was important. You know, I couldn't just stay in bed five days straight because I was having a rough week, you know, and those are the kinds of things that I think really get students.

The experiences of support, commitment, and responsibility were common among participants and some, like Participant 5, were personally driven by the desire to bring about change through the leadership engagement both on and off campus. The urgency and commitment to continue and attain her degree was evident throughout the interview with Participant 5 as observed by the repetition of the importance of obtaining the degree to accomplish the needs in the community and for herself to be a leading member in the change she wanted to see. The focus group discussion of leadership development and opportunities seldom focused on the participant themselves, but rather on the Native American community that these leadership opportunities served. Nonetheless, these leadership opportunities were perceived as supportive factors contributing to persistence.

**Degree Attainment of Kumeyaay Students**

***Theme 3: A Support Network Paradox***

The lived experience of Kumeyaay college graduates represented in this study indicated that support networks in the form of parental support, tribal leadership support, mentors, cultural centers, and Native American representation on campus were apparent factors facilitating degree attainment despite the financial challenges, racial discrimination, and isolation from community engagement. However, a paradox emerged between the support networks that were part of the lived experience of participants in this study and the historically negative views of educational institutions within the Kumeyaay community. Participant 12 shared that their grandparent had a negative and abusive experience in a government sanctioned boarding school as a child, but that this same grandparent encouraged their parent to pursue higher education for the social mobility it could provide today. The focus group discussion also revealed that several participants grew up in a unique family culture that valued education and encouraged them to pursue a degree even when they themselves had not attended college.

**College Going Culture of the Family.** All twelve participants indicated that there was a college going culture in their family or within their specific reservation leadership. Participant 9 emphasized that he did not understand how a college culture was developed without his parents having attained a degree but mentioned that it was understood that going to college after high school was an expectation. Participant 11 described the essence of her family's college going culture as a cultural norm where there was no other option than going and graduating. Participant 10 was specific when talking about her college going culture experienced at home and the benefits of

obtaining a degree that were explained to her from her parents who did not earn a college degree:

> It was kind of like about how it's an opportunity, how it can provide security and just they emphasized that it was important to do and I knew that, you know, both of my parents felt limited like in their options a little bit.

Participant 10 used words like "opportunity" and "options" to describe the benefits underlying the college going culture in her family. Participant 12 reflected on his relatives and his father who did not graduate from high school but who encouraged college pursuit.

**Tribal Leadership.** In addition to financial support provided by programs and initiatives supported by Tribal leadership in the Kumeyaay Nation, eleven of the twelve participants provided examples of Tribal leadership involvement as a support network. Participant 10 described the involvement of community members in leadership as follows:

> I think having community members who were willing to help remove barriers. You know, having those key people in your life who will help you problem-solve and will help you address the barriers that come, its huge.

In the focus group discussion, leaders in the community were described as helping "remove barriers" and helping "problem-solve." Participant 5 stated, "I am fortunate to come from a community" when speaking of her reservation where Tribal leadership promoted college at community events and developed a college going culture throughout the reservation. Participant 7 emphasized the messages that he received from his Tribal leaders when he stated:

> What's really ironic is that a lot of the old-timers who went through boarding schools and things, will tell you, you need education. You know a lot of people who are gone now would be the first people to tell you we're not going to get anywhere without education.

Participant 7 used the word "ironic" to describe the perception by people who had experienced the effects of boarding schools when it came to pursuing education. When asked about the irony behind the negative experiences associated with education and the belief that education is important, this participant explained that families and Tribal leaders who promote education understand that a college degree is the pathway to reforming the systems that perpetuate historical trauma and marginalization. Participants in this study expressed that a higher education degree was perceived as a tool and a doorway to opportunities, and this perspective of the benefit provided by obtaining a degree became a driving force to overcome

the challenges experienced in higher education or to cope with the generational trauma associated with educational institutions.

Participant 8 described the relationship between the support granted by leadership on the reservation and in the community with the desire to avoid letting them down. He stated, “it was you know; you don't want to let people down, you know, there's a lot of people that that would believe in you know that we're really proud of me.” Throughout the different experiences among participants Tribal leadership was described as a potential source of financial and cultural support. Having support networks, whether in the form of supportive family and community or by way of mentorship and representation, was a significant perception of why participants in this study were able to persist and attain their degree. Along with the social and emotional benefits that support networks provided to participants, these networks were perceived to have served as protective factors to overcome the challenges and barriers experienced in higher education. Every participant in this study referred to support networks and specifically the mentors who provided guidance to navigate the higher education landscape. Lastly, while the institutions of higher education were not identified as providing support, participants suggested that cultural centers and student leadership opportunities offered the necessary support to persist.

***Theme 4: What is the Alternative?***

Eleven of the twelve participants discussed the importance of attaining a college degree and described that they did not want the alternative. For participants in this study, the alternative ranged from being limited in their opportunities for career advancement or death if they remained in the environment they were in before pursuing higher education.

**Rez Life.** Participants in this study who grew up on a reservation affirmed that the alterative to finishing their college degree was not a desired option. Participants discussed specific aspects of their reservation life experience and the alternatives that awaited if they did not complete their degree. Two participants shared stories of overcoming substance abuse during their college years that began when they lived on the reservation. One of these participants also expressed sorrow over a loved one who passed away because of substance abuse. Several participants shared that the reservations were geographically distant and lacked many of the resources that were necessary for supplies, healthy recreation, and health care. Participant 2 affirmed that earning a college degree provided career opportunities that otherwise would not have been available. Several participants mentioned alternative employment at the casino. However, it was always in reference as a backup

that was not desired but was available. Similarly, Participant 5 described her experience with reservation life and the motivation to persist and attain her degree.

> We heard our parents go through. I didn't want to I don't want to be like everybody else. Which I almost ended up that way. I know I didn't just go from high school to college. There was a couple years and to be honest. Like I was in rehab when I was 18 as soon as I turned 18, like month later two months later. I was in rehab. So those, like that reality that, like I could I could have been somewhere different and I need to keep going because you know, I was getting sober at the beginning of my college career. I was probably like a year or two sober if that. Watching my little cousins grow up in the same way that I was growing up. I still see that now. Just those are motivators to keep going.

The participant used the word "motivators" to describe the impact of her reservation life experiences. In similar vein, participant 7 stated, "education is the way up and it's the way out." Participant 2 also discussed similar experiences with overdosing on drugs and vehicle accidents and he stated, "it's a miracle I made it where I am at" and affirmed that he explains to his current students that "college saved [him], it saved [his] life." Participants 9 and 10 equated going to college to opening doors of opportunity.

**Giving Back to the Community.** Kumeyaay college graduates value giving back to their Native community and being a role model for others on their reservation, as evidenced by their interviews and the active discussion during the focus group. Participant 1 described Kumeyaay culture as being "big on family. We take care of our family everyone all the older people on the reservation like their family loves them so much." Similarly, Participant 4 explained how the experiences of reservation life and the alternatives to obtaining a college education helped her understand that she needed a degree to help her people navigate through the challenges and barriers experienced. Participant 4 also affirmed that in Kumeyaay culture, they are taught that if they go to school, they must return to "give back to your community" because "this is where you came from." She shared that the value is reciprocal, and they serve the generations that served them during their education.

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Cultural and identity revitalization emerged as an essential concept in supporting the persistence of Kumeyaay college graduates in this research. The results of this study highlighted the vibrant and active lived experiences

that Kumeyaay college graduates has as they continued to develop their identity and engaged in internal and external leadership opportunities to leverage various support networks for contributions to their community. Participants in this study discussed the significance of learning their Kumeyaay history and the value of growing in both academic and cultural knowledge. While the literature on the impact of student peer support and cultural centers suggested that these resources increased sense of belonging and persistence (Bowman et al., 2015; McShay, 2017; Park, 2014; Simmons, 2013), Kumeyaay students in this study engaged in a more active role on campus through leadership of organizations and starting support systems when they were not available at their institution. Findings in this study suggest that participation in the leadership of Native American student organizations was perceived to support persistence of Kumeyaay students.

Consistent with relevant literature, even when institutions of higher education did not have support systems in place, participants indicated that their Kumeyaay community and their family networks were critical to their degree attainment (Guillory & Wolverton, 2018; HeavyRunner & DeCelles, 2002; Jackson et al., 2003; Lopez, 2018; Marroquin & McCoach, 2014). A concept that emerged in this study revealed that despite being first-generation college students, participants had a strong college going culture that was fostered by parents and/or their tribal leadership. The college going culture was a distinct characteristic about the participants in this study as compared to other community members part of the Kumeyaay Nation. Participants in this study shared the unique experience of having family or tribal leadership in their respective reservations that fostered a college going culture. When this paradox examined experiences with the participant's perceptions, they perceived a lack of family support or the presence of a college going culture among Kumeyaay college students who dropped out or delayed degree attainment. Kumeyaay college graduates in this study perceived the challenges of growing up on reservations as motivating factors to persist and attain their degree as an alternative that could open the door of opportunity. Unlike research that focuses on the negative factors found in Native American communities, this study revealed a Native community that is resilient and driven by education to bring about transformation that is culturally centered and equipped for the future. Participant 12 suggested that earning a college degree can change the narrative and that he continues to witness the benefit of his education in himself, his family, and his community. The significance that serving as a role model and giving back to the community played on participants persistence and degree attainment aligns with other studies (Guillory & Wolverton, 2008, HeavyRunner & DeCelles, 2002; Henderson et

al., 2015; Minthorn, 2014; Thompson et al., 2013). Finally, the motivation to improve or to give back to their community that supported and sustained them during their college experience was likewise positively associated with increased persistence and degree attainment.

**Limitations**

The phenomenological nature of this study presents limitations to the subjectivity of the potential participant's reluctance to disclose the whole lived experience of the phenomenon under study. Familiar with qualitative research, findings are generalized and may be relatable to other Native American community experiences in higher education. Additionally, increased sampling presented research limitations with control study samples and dependent variables of participants in the initial data collection. However, the final sample represented members interviewed from various Kumeyaay Nation reservations and a broad graduation period.

**Implications**

In the United States economy, projections indicate that 65% of jobs require a college degree (Carnevale et al., 2014). Evidence of the socioecological challenges experienced by Indigenous communities (Martin & Danner, 2017; O'Keefe et al., 2018; Sitter & Hautala, 2016; Turanovic & Pratt, 2017), highlights that institutions of higher education and the Kumeyaay Nation have a vested interest in improving persistence and graduate rates among Kumeyaay college students. Findings in this study contribute to the understanding of the lived experience of Kumeyaay college graduates and the perceived supportive factors to persistence and graduation.

The research findings revealed the need for institutions of higher education to develop culturally responsive and sustainable collaborations with local Native American Nations support Native students better. Suppose higher education do not invest in collaborations that support college-going Native students. In that case, they may perpetuate the current low rates of degree attainment among this population, and this may result in greater rates of unemployment that can become a burden the larger socioeconomic landscape (Martin & Danner, 2017; O'Keefe et al., 2018; Sitter & Hautala, 2016; Turanovic & Pratt, 2017).

The findings in this study affirm previous research that suggests family and community support is critical to the success of Native American students in higher education (Bass & Harrington, 2014; Guillory & Wolverton, 2008; Jackson et al., 2003; Lopez, 2018; Schmidtk, 2016). Leveraging existing mentors, increasing faculty representation, and

supporting student peer support networks, tribal leadership in collaboration with institutions of higher education can enhance Native American student's college experience, which may result in increased retention and graduation rates. The intentional collaboration between institutions of higher education and Native American communities may also help develop a greater college going culture across communities by including the voices of the community in the development of programing and support services.

**Recommendations for Future Research**

This study aligns with previous research in Native American student persistence. Future research could explore the impact of degree field selection on the persistence and graduation rates among Native American students and would provide insight into the potential need for education regarding career opportunities. Given that the present study revealed that reservation life was both a perceived motivator to degree attainment for those who grew up on a reservation and perceived barrier by those who did not grow up on a reservation, research on the difference between growing up on a reservation and growing up outside of a reservation would also be beneficial.

## CONCLUSION

The process of cultural and identity revitalization, active engagement in leadership opportunities for a diverse network of support, and resilience dedicated to serving the Native community were all perceived factors that empowered participants to persist and attain their degrees. Given that the growing demand for earning a college education remains competitive in America's economic and workforce environment, it is critical to provide a safe and supportive learning environment where Kumeyaay and other Native American students have equitable opportunities to attain a baccalaureate degree.

The results of this study suggest that while the Kumeyaay lived experiences included social and financial support structures, challenges with attending college impacted the Kumeyaay student's cultural identity and the perceived supportive factors that helped participants overcome these academic barriers. However, the Kumeyaay culture and the college graduates' self-efficacy and resilience provide hope for continued improvement with higher education institutions and inspire others in the Kumeyaay Nation to pursue higher education. For graduates completing baccalaureate education, the post-degree achievement supports Kumeyaay leadership through family and community support that actively acknowledges the importance of

mentorship to give back through services that passionately benefit learners for current and future graduates in the community.

The research findings of this study may be instrumental to developing policies and programming that will leverage the resiliency and strengths of Kumeyaay students who are overcoming generational barriers and systemic challenges during their higher education journey.

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# The Pedagogy of Carter G. Woodson as a Humanizing Approach to Maximizing Possibilities for Black Boys and Black Young Men

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## ABSTRACT

*Many teachers struggle to meet the needs of Black boys. While much of the discourse regarding potential solutions include recruiting Black teachers, specifically Black men, very little discourse centers on the pedagogical practices Black teachers employ inside and outside of the classroom. The Woodsonian Conceptual Framework for Humanizing Pedagogy advanced in this essay emphasizes critical self-reflection to challenge dominant narratives about students who experience oppression and attempts to humanize teachers' thinking and the pedagogical practices they enact inside and outside of classrooms. This essay concludes with a discussion and recommendations regarding how teachers can use this framework to foster spaces that equip all students with knowledge and skills they can use to disrupt oppressive societal structures.*

**Keywords:** Black Education, Humanizing Pedagogy, Black Boys, Carter Godwin Woodson

# INTRODUCTION

## A Personal Charge

In 1933, Carter Godwin Woodson wrote one of his more notable and commonly quoted books, *The Mis-Education of the Negro*. He referred to this book as a reflection of his professional practices, observations, and experiences working with Black students in secondary and postsecondary spaces. In the preface, Woodson acknowledged having also, to an extent, been involved in the *miseducation* of Black students and, therefore, sought to use the book as a space for imagining and road mapping future educational possibilities for Black students, Black people, and American society. For example, he pointed out and critiqued how Black identity and the contributions of Black people were excluded from the curriculum within American schools. He also critiqued how American schools indoctrinated students rather than taught them how to think critically, a reality he believed subjected Black people to inferior positions within American society. In response, Woodson advocated for the inclusion of African history and Black history, and he believed the addition of such history was critical to the American curriculum and the education of all students, especially those who were Black.

However, Woodson knew and understood that this task, especially within the context of schooling, was not possible without teachers. Therefore, he suggested and encouraged teachers to understand, acknowledge, and believe that segregation and other restrictive societal conditions negatively impacted the everyday and educational experiences of Black students. Woodson deemed this approach and thinking toward education as a "common sense" one and an approach that benefited all students, specifically Black students (Woodson, 2017/1933, p. 2). His ideas inspired and reached many Black teachers during the 1920s through the 1940s, to the point where most Black primary and secondary schools eventually celebrated Negro History Week,[1] a week established to document, highlight, and celebrate the achievements of Black people (Dabney, 1934). In addition, Woodson wrote textbooks (Thomas et al., 2023), established the *Negro History Bulletin*, and created other curricular materials to support the work of Black teachers (Givens, 2021).

That being said, many of the educational shortcomings explained by Woodson in *The Mis-Education of the Negro* remain a reality within current American educational spaces for many Black students and other students who experience oppression (Dixon, 2021). As a result of this harm, Black students and other students who experience oppression achieve at rates lower than white students, which directly reflect the "gulf-sized race-based gaps", mentioned by

[1] Black History Month, which originated in 1976, began as Negro History Week in 1926 by Cater G. Woodson (Givens, 2019).

United States Supreme Court Justice Ketanji Jackson, existing within the American education system and society alike (Students for Fair Admissions, Inc. v. President and Fellows of Harvard College, 2023). However, the rate of educational achievement is lower for Black boys[2] across all educational contexts (Schott Foundation for Public Education, 2015). As a Black man who was once a Black boy who grew up in the American "Dirty South,"[3] I had racialized societal and educational experiences that I believe contribute to the lower rate of achievement for Black boys. To add to that, serving as a public-school teacher, I witnessed firsthand how educational spaces inadequately or fail to respond to the needs and complexities of Black boys.

Because of my experiences as a Black boy, and now a Black man, I agree with Lindsay (2018) that the experiences of Black boys within American society are largely racialized and those experiences have a profound impact on their educational experiences. No, I do not suggest or believe Black boys are inferior to any other demographic. No, I do not suggest or believe that teaching Black boys requires a pedagogy or approach exclusively for them. However, yes, I believe and suggest that Black boys have unique complexities and needs that many teachers lack the knowledge and skills to adequately address. Therefore, this is a personal charge, and the ideas shared here are imaginative and one of the major reasons why I pursue my work. As a result of my reflection, I began imagining, thinking, and pondering the following question:

> How might a Carter G. Woodson educational framework improve or humanize all students' educational experiences?

While I believe the work and ideas of Carter G. Woodson has implications leading to positive educational experiences for all children, a critical discussion of Black boys serves as the focal point of this article. Therefore, this essay serves three purposes. First, it reviews relevant literature regarding the educational experiences of Black boys. Second, it provides a brief biography of Woodson while acknowledging the work of scholars who have already conceptualized his thoughts and ideas. Finally, it advances and further explains what I call the Woodsonian Conceptual Framework for Humanizing Pedagogy (WCFHP), with recommendations for how teachers should use the framework to better guide their

[2] I agree with Wright (2018) in that I resist the urge to use the term "Black male" and chose to use the term "Black boy" as I am writing about children from birth to adolescence. The former term is often used to dehumanize, criminalize, and "adultify" children whose identities include being Black and boys (p. 4). Furthermore, I will also use the phrase "students to who experience oppression" to refer to Black men and boys. However, this phrase can and does apply to many demographics.

[3] "Dirty South" is a phrase often used to describe states that previously made up the Confederacy and was largely popularized by the hip-hop movement beginning in the early 1990s by southern hip-hop artists who used creative expressions to criticize oppressive structures (Hobson, 2017).

personal reflection and inform their classroom practice. Most importantly, this piece seeks to enter current conversations by highlighting the value of Carter G. Woodson's work and the implications it has for the field of education.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### A Cause for Concern

While the body of literature that speaks to the educational experiences of Black boys has increased within the last three decades, the pool of literature remains limited regarding potential solutions for teachers to consider to better respond to and meet their needs. Currently, much of the literature related Black boys across all educational contexts either speaks to their differences, disparities, dysfunctions, disadvantages, or deprivations, commonly referred to as 5D data (Walter, 2018). Therefore, this essay seeks to imagine possibilities by offering a practical framework that is believed to better humanize the educational experiences of all students, but most specifically, Black boys. With that, existing literature has raised urgent concerns regarding the educational experiences of Black boys within American schools and, therefore, created a more pressing demand for and implementation of the ideas offered in this essay.

A correlation exists between educational access and an individual's life chances, but the academic placements and educational achievement of Black boys rarely yield quality outcomes (Everett et al., 2011). For example, Black boys are more likely to be referred to special education classes than gifted and talented ones, even though scholars suggest access to gifted and talented classes plays a role in improving their educational achievement and outcomes (Ford, 2014; Grantham, 2013; National Center for Learning Disabilities, 2020). Furthermore, a correlation exists between literacy rate (Kern & Friedman, 2008) and the academic achievement of students, but the literacy rate of Black students is suggested to be lower than the literacy rate of white students, with the literacy rate of Black boys is suggested as the lowest among all students (Tatum et al., 2021). According to the National Assessment of Educational Progress (2013), only fourteen percent of Black boys in the fourth grade were identified as being at grade level for reading. These percentages appear to coincide with national discussions surrounding determined reading proficiency and its relationship to the school-to-prison nexus, which negatively affects Black boys (Dancy, 2014). To be clear, these outcomes are the results of inequitable access to quality educational opportunities and inequitable research instruments (Cunningham, 2019) due to race, not racial inferiority.

The literature related to Black boys and how schools respond to their behavioral differences yielded extremely similar results. Scholars (Grace & Nelson, 2019) suggested that typical child behavior is criminalized when displayed

by Black boys than when displayed by white students. In addition, scholars suggested that Black boys are suspended at rates much higher than other students when being referred for similar discipline infractions (Graves & Wang, 2022; Monroe, 2005; Skiba et al., 2011). Given this difference in suspension rates, parents (Reynolds, 2010; Shillingford et al., 2021) and families have expressed specific concerns with schools and their inability to adequately respond to and meet the needs of Black boys. These concerns and frustrations have also been echoed by Black boys themselves (Webster & Knaus, 2021). Even though scholars continually suggest suspensions as academically and emotionally ineffective (Cholewa et al., 2018; Powell & Coles, 2021), Black boys are continually subjected to such punishment, taking them away from the classroom, the most important space they need to be (Allen, 2017). Furthermore, a study suggested that socioeconomic status has very little bearing on improving the educational experience of Black boys, as Black boys of higher and those of lower socioeconomic status are subjected to similar racialized experiences in schools (Jett, 2019).

While the literature on Black boys' educational experiences is concerning, Black teachers (Duncan, 2020; Gershenson et al., 2022), particularly Black men teachers (Brown, 2009a; Lynn, 2006), play a critical role in improving Black students' educational experiences and their academic achievement. Given this success, calls have been made to diversify the teaching force, with hopes of increasing the number of Black men in classrooms (Sekou, 2021). However, reasons largely restricted to race and gender are often given behind that success and reasons to recruit more Black men into education (Bryan & Williams, 2017). Therefore, an emerging body of literature has nuanced the discourse surrounding those calls and suggested that they are rooted in racialized narratives related the Black family (Brown & Thomas, 2020; Thomas et al., 2022). To challenge those narratives, more empirical studies have explored the ideological discourses and pedagogical practices of Black men teachers to highlight and bring more attention to how their work as teachers contributes to the success they have with Black students and other students who experience oppression (Brockenbrough, 2008; Brown, 2009a; Brown, 2009b; Carey, 2020). To that end, the WCFHP I present in this essay emphasizes and attempts to make sense of the success many Black men teachers and other Black teachers have in improving the educational experiences and academic achievements of all their students, especially Black boys.

Using Woodson's ideas and *The Mis-Education of the Negro*, I advance King and Brown's (2014) Woodsonian Conceptual Framework for Teaching Black History by adding three additional components I believe teachers should enact to acknowledge and address many of the concerns related to the education of Black boys and other students who experience oppression. While I agree and have argued

elsewhere (Lewis, 2022) about the importance and value of teaching Black history in schools, the elements of the WCFHP I discuss here are primarily concerned with the science that comes before teaching, which I believe Carter G. Woodson offers to teachers when determining dynamic practices for improving and providing a more humanizing educational experience for all students.

**Carter G. Woodson: An Educational Theorist**

Carter G. Woodson was born in New Canton, Virginia, on December 19, 1875. While Woodson is most notably known as the "Father of Black History," little is known about his service as a grade-school educator, collegiate teacher-educator, and researcher. While working on his undergraduate degree at Berea College, Woodson served as a teacher at a rural school in West Virginia and later became the principal of Frederick Douglass High School, the school where he received his high school education. His educational career continued with a brief stint as an international teacher and service within Washington, D.C., public schools before becoming a professor and eventual dean of education at Howard University and West Virginia Collegiate Institute, which is now West Virginia State University. During his service as dean at both universities, his life and work were devoted to research and outreach that documented the achievements of Black people and to the expansion and incorporation of Black history curricula (Givens, 2021; Goggin, 1993).

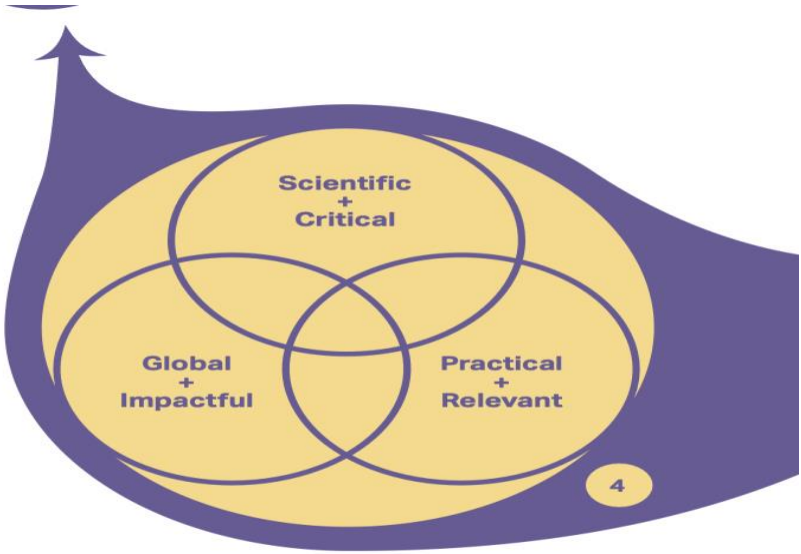
No other of the commonly quoted and discussed educational theorists came from the lineage of enslavement, carried the education credentials, had the educational experiences, or served the same or similar student demographic as Woodson. While I do not suggest their work or contributions to the field of education as unimportant, I do suggest and encourage the incorporation and investigation of other early Black educational trailblazers whose contributions were minimized, and in many cases excluded, because of race. Carter G. Woodson served as one of those trailblazers. Before adding my perspective to this topic, I will first acknowledge that scholars have already highlighted and given scholarly consideration to the importance of Woodson, the impact his work has within the field of education, and the impact it has on the greater society (Banks, 1992; Dilworth, 2004; Gordon, 1985; King et al., 2010; Ladson-Billings, 1995).

Furthermore, I believe it important to note the perspectives I have regarding this topic are not exclusive, as scholars have called for the inclusion of Carter G. Woodson and his work into teacher education programs and trainings for preservice and practicing teachers (King, 2014; King, 2018), in curricular discussions within social studies education (Brown et al., 2011; Grant et al., 2015; King & Brown, 2014), and most recently in athletic spaces informing the work of Black men teacher-coaches (Thomas, 2022). As a result, I argue and seek to push

for a more holistic approach in which Woodson's ideas are theorized, providing a framework that offers science and practice to better understand and inform the work of teachers and other practitioners that leads to more humanizing experiences for all students regardless of educational contexts.

**Figure 1**

*Woodsonian Conceptual Framework for Teaching Black History*




Note. The Woodsonian Conceptual Framework for Teaching Black History offered by King and Brown (2014). An overlap is provided in the center of the triple Venn Diagram to indicate and suggest that multiple pedagogies can accomplish the components proposed by King and Brown. Such an interpretation, however, is that of the author and may or may not correspond with the ideas of King and Brown (2014).

According to King and Brown (2014), "scant attention" had been given to the conceptual ideas of Woodson when seeking to explore and understand the art of teaching. Therefore, they proposed a Woodsonian Conceptual Framework for teaching Black history with three components. In the article, they first proposed that teachers perform scientific research on Black history and their students' backgrounds best to teach Black history concepts accurately and critically. Second, the authors explained that Woodson advocated for Black history education to be practical and relevant to students. In short, teachers' art should be engaging and not

simply for students to remember and recite facts. Finally, according to King and Brown (2014), Woodson believed that teaching Black history should have meaning outside of the classroom, which involves equipping students with the skills they need to challenge and disrupt societal structures they deem oppressive. The framework offered by King and Brown (2014) is indicated in Figure (1):

## RESEARCH METHOD

### Toward a Carter G. Woodson Conceptual Framework for Humanizing Pedagogy

Given my teaching experiences and interactions with Black boys and other students who experience oppression, I seek to advance discussions surrounding Woodson's work within education. Although scholars have documented and explained key components associated with humanizing pedagogy (Bartolomé, 1994; del Carmen Salazar, 2013; Friere, 1970), a WCFHP incorporates and centers Black intellectual thought, as mentioned by Grant, K.D. Brown, and A.L. Brown (2015), a perspective that was, for a very long time, excluded and still remains largely absent from research literature. The framework begins and is deeply rooted in critical self-reflection, in which the teacher must intentionally and explicitly question how students' race, ethnicity, culture, and gender influence their societal and educational experiences. This reflection accounts for and considers how teachers think about, teach, and interact with students who experience oppression. The WCFHP provides teachers with a visual and practical framework that demonstrates how they should account for and investigate their own subjectivities to best position themselves in ways that allow their students to create and foster educational spaces where students see and use education as a tool for liberation.

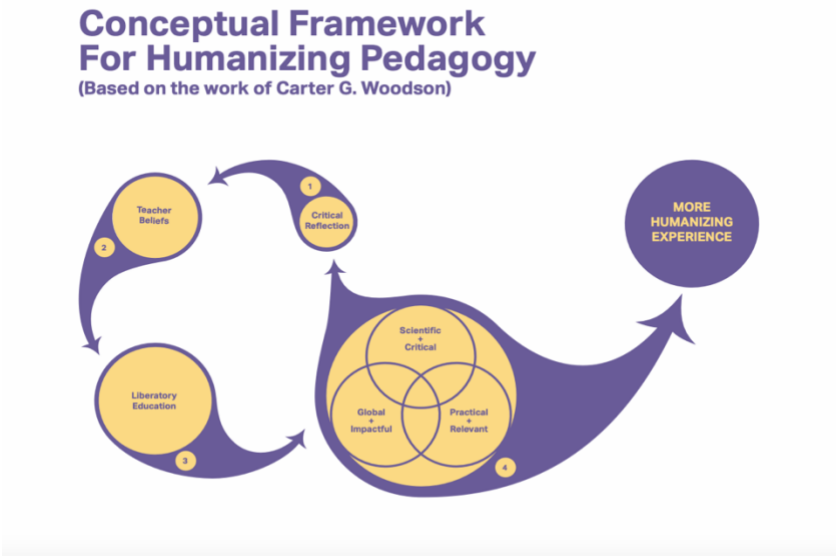
While I have exclusively and intentionally positioned the ideas listed below based on my understanding and interpretation of Woodson's work, the content of those ideas and the WCFHP I offer in this essay are research-based and supported. While I understand and acknowledge the limitations associated with offering a framework without including a substantial theoretical grounding, this essay speaks directly to educators, researchers, and other social science practitioners to offer support and generate discussion regarding ways to engage in humanizing practices. I imagine and expect the ideas shared in this essay to evolve and be critiqued as we, researchers and practitioners, continue to discuss and determine ways to respond to the needs of a continually increasing diverse society. Nevertheless, I contend that a Woodsonian approach to humanizing pedagogy considers, acknowledges, and responds, in all settings, to the ways dominant societal power structures have dehumanized students who experience oppression. A WCFHP begins with and includes the following key components:

1. Practitioners must engage in critical and intentional self-reflection where they question the relationship between a student's oppression, their experiences within society, and the extent to which their personal subjectivities influence how they think about the students they serve.
2. Next, practitioners must believe that dominant societal power structures play a direct role in the way they perceive, teach, and interact with all students, especially those who experience oppression. Furthermore, they must believe that dominant societal power structures play a role in causing negative educational experiences for students who experience oppression.
3. As a result of that reflection and belief, practitioners must account for, either overtly or secretly, diversity in their practice in ways that build positive self-identities for students who experience oppression while challenging the deficit frames of others. Also, they must engage in practices that help students who experience oppression view education, not schooling, as a tool for liberation.
4. Practitioners must include humanizing pedagogies such as emancipatory pedagogy, fugitive pedagogy, or social justice teaching to foster a space where all students can critically challenge societal structures they deem oppressive.

All teachers, including those whose identities might align with the historically oppressed students they serve, must engage in critical self-reflection, as shown in Figure 2. More specifically, while teachers might share similar experiences, perspectives, or oppression with some or all of their students, the position of educator is privileged and comes with privileges that must be acknowledged and reflected upon. By engaging in this self-reflection, teachers must genuinely believe that dominant societal power structures adversely affect students who experience oppression. This is similar but different from simply believing in the brilliance and capability of students who experience oppression. While I do not suggest that teachers reject that belief, I do suggest that believing dominant societal structures adversely affect students who experience requires more transparent and open self-reflection. Furthermore, I contend that it is impossible for a teacher to foster spaces where liberation is a possibility and an expectation if they do not believe students experience oppression and need such liberation. By believing that dominant societal structures adversely impact students who experience oppression, teachers become better positioned to challenge and shift their views about the purpose(s) of education and how those purpose are restricted by schooling. Lastly, it calls for more meaningful engagement and pedagogies that respond to and account for the needs of all students.

**Figure 2**

*Woodsonian Conceptual Framework for Humanizing Pedagogy*




*Note.* This conceptual framework advances the work of King and Brown (2014). The author does not consider this framework fixed or needed to occur from step 1.

The circles in the framework grow larger after each step to represent how each step builds upon the latter. The ultimate goal of a WCFHP is to challenge and shift educators' thoughts and perspectives about students who experience oppression so that teachers can easily engage in more humanizing pedagogies. However, it is my belief, as reflected in the WCFHP, that humanizing pedagogies cannot be adequately enacted without intentional and explicit critical self-reflection. Therefore, without engaging in the other three steps of the framework, practice is believed to be less meaningful and critical for all students, especially Black boys and other students who experience oppression. However, again, I do not suggest this to be a fixed model, as the ideas and work of Woodson serve as an area deserving more thoughtful yet timely scholarly investigation.

**Recommendations for Practice: Bettering the Experience of all Students.**

The recommendations listed below correlate with the components listed above. While these are only recommendations of what I believe practitioners, specifically classroom teachers, should employ when implementing practices informed by the WCFHP, they are consistent with the work of Carter G. Woodson and research conducted by education scholars. I also give examples of how

WCFHP-informed practices might look with these recommendations. I hope teachers will consider these examples to better meet the needs of all students, especially Black boys.

***Self-reflection***

The WCFHP begins with self-reflection regarding personal beliefs about society and how people experience society. I emphasize personal because teachers' personal beliefs are not separated from how they enact pedagogies that account for or do not account for culture within classroom settings (Cho, 2018). Because Woodson was born Black during the late 19th century, he was subjected throughout his entire life to racist power dynamics that existed and to still exist within American society. However, he was still able to achieve a significant degree of success and went on to obtain a PhD in history from Harvard University. Furthermore, he made international contributions to advance Black education and Black history within the confines of a racially restrictive American society. Even with his success, he never wanted his achievements to negatively impact his understanding and acknowledgement of how inequitable power structures adversely affected Black people. As a result, he engaged in constant and consistent reflection, as noted in the preface to *The Mis-Education of the Negro*. Therefore, the framework proposed in this essay begins with intentional and explicit reflection questions interrogating how teachers' racial experiences, perspectives, and understandings inform how they perceive and, therefore, teach students. This practice requires great intentionality and aligns with similar questions suggested by Howard (2003), which include but are not limited to:

1. Because of my race, what privileges am I afforded that are not afforded to the students I serve who experience oppression?
2. How does or could my social class or position as a teacher impact my understanding of students who experience oppression or with I do or do not share racial identities?
3. Do I discipline students who experience oppression more than students who do not?
4. How are my cultural expectations or norms in tension(s) with the cultural expectations or norms of students who experience oppression?

These are only a few examples of questions teachers can ask themselves when attempting to understand their privileges and the subjectivities they bring to the educational space that might or might not align with those of their students. More specifically, I suggest using the same or similar questions to directly account for practices and interactions related to Black boys.

***Dynamic Thinking***

After critical reflection, the framework assists in shifting teacher thinking from deficit to dynamic. Deficit thinking consists of negative beliefs regarding students who have been historically oppressed, "holding them responsible for the challenges and inequalities they face" (Davis & Museus, 2019). While gifted scholars have used and written about how dynamic thinking can improve outcomes for Black gifted students (Ford & Grantham, 2003), their ideas are consistent with the framework presented in this essay. When teachers begin to think dynamically, they question and consider how dominant societal power structures directly influence their pedagogical practices and students' educational experiences.

Furthermore, scholars have suggested deficit thinking as reasons for inequity in suspension rates for students who experience oppression (Gregory & Roberts, 2017), lowered academic expectations for students who experience oppression students (Baggett, 2018), and lower referrals to gifted education (Ford & Grantham, 2003). Woodson openly and constantly critiqued society and the American education system for not responding to the needs of Black students. Furthermore, he believed the educational achievement of Black students would continue to be negatively impacted until they saw themselves represented in the curriculum implemented within American schools. Therefore, a WCFHP addresses deficit thinking by challenging the beliefs of teachers using the presented or similar questions below:

1. Do I believe students who experience oppression are equitably served within current educational contexts?
2. Do I believe students who experience oppression are responsible for their existing societal conditions?

To be clear, I am not suggesting teachers cannot implement some of the strategies included within the WCFHP without having direct beliefs about society and the way it has and continues to underserve students who experience oppression. However, I do suggest that believing students who experience oppression have been underserved within society and within educational spaces makes the strategies presented in the framework more practical and easier to follow. Other recommendations for moving from deficit to dynamic thinking include:

1. Teachers should consider if their academic or behavioral policies are culturally and/or racially inclusive or exclusive. For example, are policies punitive or leave room for subjectivity when categorizing "disrespectful" actions? Do class policies allow for non-judgmental cultural expression in language or dress?
2. Teachers must believe that while the involvement of parents or guardians of students who experience oppression might look and be nontraditional,

they value the education of their students. Therefore, teachers must not solely include parents or guardians in students' behavioral concerns but in their holistic progress. Parents and students deserve to be celebrated for educational gains, especially considering the harmful educational experiences of students who experience oppression.

3. Teachers must believe that students who experience oppression can learn at high levels. Therefore, teachers must always stay abreast of research-supported instructional strategies and approaches that better improve the academic achievement of all students. Once those strategies and approaches are identified, teachers must implement them with fidelity.

While dynamic thinking is not limited to the recommendations included above, I believe these are the most pressing, playing a direct role in positively shifting the educational experiences, outcomes, and achievement of Black boys and other students who experience oppression.

***Racially Relevant Pedagogy***

Lastly, the WCFHP emphasizes, interrogates, and investigates race and the role it plays in the dehumanization of students. Schools and teachers serve as gatekeepers regarding how race is included and taught within the curriculum (Kaka & Hollstein, 2022). As it relates to race and school curriculum, scholars have suggested it as either nonexistent, misrepresented, noncritical, or a combination of each (An, 2022; K.D. Brown & A.L. Brown, 2010; Busey & Walker, 2017). Although students excel when racially responsive practices are included in the curricula and implemented accurately and appropriately in a teacher's pedagogical practices (Hooks & Miskovic, 2011), most teachers remain unprepared to engage students, especially those who experience oppression, in racially relevant work (Alvarez & Milner, 2018).

Carter G. Woodson advocated for including a racially relevant yearlong curriculum featuring the teaching of African history and Black history through lenses other than oppression. Even during the height of Jim Crow and strict segregation laws, Black teachers engaged in this work in both overt and mostly covert ways (Givens, 2021). Therefore, the framework presented in this essay seeks to encourage the incorporation and inclusion of racially relevant curriculum within and outside of classroom contexts. Recommendations for incorporating a more racially relevant curriculum include:

1. Teachers must incorporate readings and other instructional sources from diverse authors and maintain classroom libraries that include racially diverse books with characters representing all students in the classroom. It is completely permissible and encouraged for teachers to implement this

practice in collaboration with other teachers with diverse lived experiences to better inform their selections.

2. Teachers must teach or attempt to incorporate race in their curriculum year-long. Teachers can find connections to existing lessons or include mini-lessons covering race related concepts or celebrating racially diverse individuals.
3. Teachers can incorporate school-wide racial and ethnic celebrations such as a Black History Month, Native American Heritage Month, or National Hispanic Heritage Month to highlight the uniqueness and brilliance of racial and ethnic diversity.

While these approaches are also culturally relevant, an intentional emphasis is placed on race in the WCFHP, as race serves as one of, if not the most dominant, societal structures playing a role in how one experiences society. Furthermore, while it is possible to intentionally teach and account for culture without race, it is impossible to intentionally teach and account for race without culture. Therefore, I agree, and a WCFHP framework aligns with the ideas of Milner (2017) in that race must be explicitly accounted for within culturally responsive frameworks.

## CONCLUSION

### A Call for a Woodsonian Conceptual Framework for Humanizing Pedagogy

Many frameworks and theories exist in the field of education, and those frameworks account for many of the concerns currently prevalent within educational spaces across all contexts. Therefore, this is not a call to suggest a lack of knowledge or approaches regarding these concerns. This is, however, a call for including and incorporating the work of Carter G. Woodson within these conversations and practices. Many scholars have contributed to the knowledge base regarding the components I believe should be associated with a WCFHP. To that end, I believe the framework presented in this essay will help teachers and other practitioners understand how critical self-reflection challenges deficit beliefs and the way deficit and dynamic beliefs inform how they enact their pedagogical practices, which play a role in students' educational experiences.

Therefore, the ultimate goal of this framework is for teachers and other practitioners to examine themselves and their beliefs regarding the students and people they serve. Given how harm has caused dismal educational outcomes for many students who experience oppression, teachers must consider how they teach and respond to the needs of their students. Currently, within the context of American schooling and education, there is an urgent need for more inclusive and humane approaches to teaching to better meet the needs of Black boys. A Carter G. Woodson Conceptual Framework for Humanizing Pedagogy is I believes answers that call. In my imagination and with the framework advanced in this

essay, I thoroughly believe that when the educational experience of Black boys is approached with great intentionality, the educational experience of all students is maximized.

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# "There's Black People Here?" The Experiences of Black Alumnae in National Panhellenic Conference (NPC) Sororities

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## ABSTRACT

*Utilizing Critical Race Theory as the guiding framework, this study portrayed the essence of Black women's experiences and motivations in joining National Panhellenic Conference (NPC) sororities. The findings illustrated that participants chose to join an NPC sorority for the social aspect and due to a lack of knowledge of culturally based sororities. Additionally, upon reflecting on their experiences, participants shared they may not make the same decision again. Participants' experiences as Black women in NPC organizations were further characterized by them neglecting their racial identities while in these organizations and regaining them upon graduation. This study discussed implications from the obtained findings and offered suggestions to help create more equitable and inclusive experiences for Black women who join historically white sororities.*

**Keywords:** Black women, Critical Race Theory, sorority

## INTRODUCTION

The National Panhellenic Conference (NPC) is the worlds' largest sorority association consisting of 26 national and international women-only sororities. Their members are located on 670 campuses with nearly 370,000 undergraduate members in more than 3,350 college chapters (NPC, n.d.). However, NPC member organizations are not known for being highly diverse or representative of students with marginalized identities. Many of the NPC sororities were founded during a time of slavery or segregation, and many did not accept Black members until the mid-1900s, causing them to be designated as historically white organizations (Ross, 2015). Even though individual chapters would allow Black members to join, National Panhellenic Conference sororities were and still are very much segregated (Ross, 2015).

Previous research has established that, despite being represented by Black and other minority members, many sororities maintain a variety of ethnocentric, exclusionary, and prejudiced practices (Hughey, 2010; Torbenson & Parks, 2009). Through their structures and activities, many organizations, and particularly historically white ones, have been called out for sustaining heterogeneity and discouraging diversity and individual differences (Laird, 2005). Similarly, the experiences of minority students in these organizations, mainly Black women, remain underrepresented in the contemporary literature (Hughey, 2010), especially compared to the existing body of research on Black women experiences in culturally-based sororities (Greyerbiehl & Mitchell, 2014; Jennings, 2017; Mitchell et al., 2017).

At the same time, many students have started to call for abolishing historically white fraternities and sororities due to systemic racism, discrimination, and other issues, or demanding that they address their lack of diversity and history of racism and discrimination (Burke, 2020). In response, many sororities, including NPC sororities, have begun to implement programming and initiatives to promote diversity, equity, and inclusion. Specifically, NPC sororities have expressed commitment to "to creating a more welcoming, inclusive Panhellenic community, including addressing racism and racial injustice in our community" (NPC, n.d. para 1.). However, the outcomes of such initiatives and the experiences of members with marginalized identities have not been sufficiently investigated or documented.

The scarce research in this area suggests that Black students who join historically black fraternities and sororities are more engaged on campus and membership has a positive impact on their racial identity development (Mitchell et al., 2017). However, there is little evidence to

suggest the same for Black women who choose to join National Panhellenic Conference sororities. Further, as most research on Black sorority women is focused on members of historically black sororities, there is a lack of knowledge around the experiences of Black women in NPC sororities. Understanding their experiences is critical as many NPC sororities are implementing new initiatives and programs to create safer and more inclusive spaces for women of color, including Black women. As college and university campuses are engaging in efforts to increase student diversity in campus organizations, they must ensure that such initiatives are effective and grounded in research-proven practices.

**Theoretical Framework**

This research was theoretically grounded in the Critical Race Theory (CRT) which Delgado and Stefancic (2017) defined as the "collection of activists and scholars engaged in studying and transforming the relationship among race, racism, and power." (p. 3). The basic tenets of CRT assume that racism persists because it is not acknowledged and that color-blind conceptions of equality lead to continuous discrimination of minority and underrepresented groups. The theory also presumes the unique voice of people of color as they can "communicate to their white counterparts matters that the whites are unlikely to know. Minority status, in other words, brings with it a presumed competence to speak about race and racism." (p. 11).

Givens (2016) points out that CRT helps explain how Black and White students can co-exist on the same campus yet have entirely different experiences and relationships with the institution. He introduces the concept of *invisible tax* that Black students shoulder when attending predominantly white institutions and seeking campus engagement. The premise of this concept is that Black students feel as though they are not provided with adequate support to engage with the institution, and they are taxed to create their own campus spaces and means of engagement. In conjunction with the invisible tax, CRT shows how Black students are already at a disadvantage before they even come to campus because the institution and its engagement opportunities were created for the dominant culture – whiteness (Givens, 2016).

Regarding fraternity and sorority life, CRT challenges the notion that race does not matter when selecting whom to invite to join their organization. Many sororities claim to be color-blind, which views racism as something historical and not relevant in the present or in their organizations. CRT can help these organizations and their members recognize race and

dismantle the systems and policies in place that continue to oppress people of color in their organizations (Park, 2008).

This theory was critical for the context of this research as it served as a foundation for exploring Black women's experiences within a particular social system – NPC organizations. Due to the competence of people of color to "speak about race and racism" (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017), CRT allowed this research to account for this competence of participants and portray their unique experiences as Black members of NPC sororities. Particularly, this study explored and reflected on the role participants' race may have on their overall sorority experience and their motivation to join their organizations. This approach, ultimately, allowed to compare their experiences with those reported in prior research and among different organizational types, mainly culturally-based sororities.

This study sought to overcome the limitations of prior scholarship by portraying the experiences of women in NPC sororities whose identities often go unnoticed and unexplored. Specifically, the purpose of this study was to understand motivations of Black women for joining National Panhellenic Conference sororities as well as their experiences while in these organizations. In doing so, this research sought to educate these organizations, as well as their colleges and universities, on what being an NPC sorority member may look like from the perspectives of these Black women.

The following research questions guided this study:

1. What are the primary motivators for a Black woman to join a National Panhellenic Conference sorority?
2. What is the experience of being a Black alumna of a National Panhellenic Conference sorority?

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Following the widespread social justice movements during the summer of 2020, many fraternities and sororities began to examine their past and current practices to create more inclusive organizations. It is essential to understand Black women's experiences in NPC sororities during such a time. As research on the experiences of Black women in NPC organizations is limited, the presented synthesis of the literature discusses contemporary findings related to racism and discrimination in historically white organizations, Black women's sorority experience, their racial identity development, and the theoretical framework guiding this study.

**Racism and Discrimination in Historically White Organizations**

Most of the social sororities were founded during the 19th and early 20th century, a time when hardly any Black students were attending colleges and universities (Thelin, 2011). Some of the first sororities were established on campuses when societies and their educational institutions benefited from enslaved Black people by utilizing slave labor on college campuses and receiving funds from slave owners (Wilder, 2013). Once Black students were allowed to attend HWCUs, they could still not join the white social sororities. As Black students felt unwelcome and unsafe on these campuses and wanted space for their culture and people, they created their own social sororities beginning in 1906 (Ross, 2015). The racial exclusion within historically white sororities continued throughout the 1900s and is still prevalent today (Ross, 2015).

In more recent years, it has become clear that many sororities are still predominantly white and not as welcoming for students of color. For instance, evidence exists that Latinx students perceive historically white organizations as inclusive and visibly whiter (Garcia, 2019). On the other hand, Black women in historically black sororities at predominantly white colleges and universities felt their sororities provided a space that they could not find elsewhere on campus (Greyerbiehl & Mitchell, 2014). These Black students' experiences are not surprising, considering that the culture on these campuses and in these organizations primarily benefits White students.

Recent studies further suggest that minority students in historically white organizations reported feeling as if they were ignored by the university and the staff who were supposed to advise them (Beatty et al., 2019; Garcia, 2019). An advising practice among some sorority life professionals has been structured as colorblind advising, which disregards race and its effects on a person's life experience. This approach is harmful to students of color in their organizations as the professionals supporting them choose to ignore race and the way it impacts the student's experience (Beatty et al., 2019; Vaccaro, 2017). Overall, previous research has been built on the premises that, in cases of cross-racial membership, non-White students must assimilate to be fully accepted, their voices remain marginalized, and they navigate their experience as organizational insiders but racial outsiders (Hughey, 2010). This research aims to advance this line of inquiry by portraying the experiences of Black women in NPC sororities to examine the extent to which these premises hold true to the present day.

**Black Women Sorority Experience**

Despite the issues of racism and discrimination, research documents that sorority membership has provided valuable and positive experiences for their members. Overall, membership in sorority organizations has been indicative of higher graduation and persistence rates (Walker et al., 2015). Studies have also shown that sorority membership has positively influenced students' sense of belonging on campus (Long, 2012; Walker et al., 2015), and their intercultural competence (Martin et al., 2015).

Studies have shown that Black women in culturally-based organizations received the same benefits as members of HWSs in regard to a sense of belonging, friendship, and academic success (Greyerbiehl & Mitchell, 2014; Jennings, 2017). Regarding their motivation to join culturally-based organizations instead of HWSs, Black women have indicated that their primary motivator was to form friendships. They also shared that their decisions were mostly influenced by their family and friends (Greyerbiehl & Mitchell, 2014).

Membership in culturally-based organizations has provided Black women space to feel safe and included at their predominantly white college or university. Some Black women in culturally-black sororities have found that their sorority has provided support they had not been able to find elsewhere on campus and increased their sense of self (Jennings, 2017). Further, Black women in historically black sororities were more involved in student organizations and other educational practices, compared to their peers in other historically white organizations (Mitchell et al., 2017). However, there has been very little scholarly discussion regarding how these findings may compare to Black women experiences in historically white organizations and specifically NPC sororities.

**Black Woman Racial Identity Development**

Despite the limited research on sorority membership's impact on racial identity development, understanding the literature regarding Black women's undergraduate identity development and Black racial identity development is of critical importance for this study. Numerous theories and models have been developed to describe Black racial identity development. While some scholars, such as Cross (1971, 1991) or Sellers (1998), focused on the identity development of Black people, of particular importance to this study are theorists such as Porter (2013), Porter and Dean (2015), and Winkle-Wagner et al. (2019) who inquired specifically into Black women.

Porter (2013) developed a Model of Identity Development in Black Undergraduate Women arguing that conditions and influences they are

exposed to, such as media and role models, ultimately influence their college actions and choices. Such influences further shape students‘ racial development during their collegial years by causing Black women to reflect on and prioritize one or more of their intersecting identities in their predominantly white environments. Subsequent empirical evidence confirmed the premises of this model by documenting that, during their formative college years, Black women have noted that support systems on campus, their families, and other Black women influenced their racial identity (Porter & Dean, 2015). Still, while Black women can find campus spaces where they develop a sense of belonging, many of them are still disappointed in the lack of diversity on their campus, causing some of them to report a need to conform to the dominant culture of whiteness (Winkle-Wagner et al., 2019).

The central construct in most theories of racial identify development is intersectionality which Crenshaw (1989) defined as the merger of multiple identities that individuals have and a complex nature of how they intersect, creating moments of privilege and oppression. When developed in 1981, the theory sought to explain Black women's experiences with oppression and how their experiences differ from those of White women and Black men. Intersectionality theory is central to this research as Crenshaw emphasized that intersectionality could lead to membership in certain groups to make their minority and underrepresented members vulnerable to potential forms of bias.

Other theories, such as Black feminist thought (BFT) further examined the identity development of Black women through the lenses of intersectionality. BFT, created by Collins (2000), is a theory used to empower and pursue justice for Black women that have been historically oppressed. This theory differs from traditional feminist theories due to its intersectional lens and focus on the experiences of Black women in particular. BFT provides context to the experiences of Black women through four different domains of power: structural, disciplinary, hegemonic, and interpersonal.

Black feminist thought is essential when examining the development of Black undergraduate women. BFT provides an intersectional lens like Porter's (2013) model and Crenshaw's (1981) theory. When used together, these theories further explain how Black undergraduate women have had a plethora of experiences before they arrive on campus and that their experiences while on campus will continue to impact their identity development (Porter et al., 2020). BFT is used to understand Black women's

lives and experiences and provide context for the experiences of the Black women who participated in this study.

## RESEARCH METHOD

Given the gap in literature and theory on the experiences of Black women in historically white sororities, this study used a phenomenological qualitative research design to portray the essence of participants' shared experience (Fitzpatrick et al., 2011) and the meaning they ascribe to those experiences (Knaack, 1984).). Further, this study was designed as phenomenological research as it sought to investigate what all participants have in common as they experience a phenomenon (Creswell, 2013), which in this study was being a Black woman in an NPC organization. Specifically, phenomenology aims to describe *what* participants have experienced and *how* they experienced it (Moustakas, 1994).

Participants were recruited by contacting the sorority life offices of various institutions across the country. To maximize the number of potential participants, large institutions with enrollment greater than 10,000 were contacted first. Due to the low response rate, the recruitment was expanded to medium-sized universities as well. An email was sent asking the sorority life professionals to share it with alumnae of their organizations. Additionally, an invitation was posted for the survey on the NASPA Fraternity and Sorority Knowledge Community social media page. The email and social media post included a link to a screening questionnaire for potential participants to complete to help determine their eligibility by asking for the name of the sorority and initiation and graduation years. Then, 14 guiding questions were developed for each interview. The questions were open-ended and sought to discover motivations for joining an organization and participants' overall experiences in the sorority.

Given the scarcity of research on the topic of Black women experiences in historically white sororities, it was not possible to draw ideas from or replicate any qualitative interview guides from prior research. Instead, a set of interview questions was developed to answer the research questions guiding this study. Specifically, to inquire into participants' motivation for joining their respective sororities, we asked a series of questions pertaining to the ways in which they learned about their sorority, the ways in which they had been recruited (formally or informally), and factors that guided them in choosing a particular sorority. To inquire into participants' sorority experiences, a series of questions were developed focusing on their sense of belonging, personal development, and formation of social relationships while in the sorority. Throughout interviews, all

participants were encouraged to share additional thoughts and perspectives about their sorority experience that may not have been captured in our interview questions.

Due to the ongoing pandemic in fall 2021, all interviews were conducted via Zoom and audio recorded. Each participant was interviewed only once with each interview lasting between 45 minutes and one hour. Audio recordings were first transcribed and then coded for themes. Inductive coding was used to identify common themes in the transcripts and to develop codes using the terms, phrases, and narratives participants shared. Then, these codes were categorized into categories of themes. Specifically, Saldana's (2013) evaluation coding was used to assign judgments about the merit, worth, or significance of a particular phenomenon or participants' experiences. Evaluation coding allowed to categorize the responses based on the evaluative value participants ascribed to their experiences with the investigated phenomenon.

## RESULTS

As illustrated in Table 1, the eight participants in this study represented four sororities and seven colleges/universities. All participants graduated and/or earned alumna status between 2010-2020. To protect their identities, all interviewees were assigned pseudonyms.

**Table 1**

*Participants' Backgrounds*

| Participant | Sorority | University Location |
|---|---|---|
| Kiara | Delta Phi Epsilon | Northeast USA |
| Hailey | Alpha Gamma Delta | Southeast USA |
| Tiana | Alpha Gamma Delta | Western USA |
| Alyssa | Alpha Omicron Pi | Northeast USA |
| Thalia | Alpha Gamma Delta | Southeast USA |
| Amari | Alpha Gamma Delta | Southeast USA |
| Imani | Alpha Gamma Delta | Southeast USA |
| Alexis | Phi Mu | Midwest USA |

The findings of the interviews revealed the following three themes regarding the experiences of Black alumnae of National Panhellenic Conference sororities: (1) social belonging as motivation to join a sorority, (2) lack of knowledge regarding historically Black and culturally-based sororities, (3) and uncertainty if membership in an NPC sorority was the right choice.

**Social Belonging as Motivation to Join a Sorority**

A majority of participants joined their sorority through an informal recruitment process and did not have an interest in the formal recruitment period because they did not feel like they belonged in that setting. All eight participants spoke of an initial lack of desire to join a sorority when asked why they chose to join one. Most participants mentioned that they decided to participate in the recruitment process due to persuasion from their friends or other acquaintances on campus. As Hailey mentioned:

> *I heard about the open bid [process] from one of my freshman group leaders who was an Alpha Gamma Delta. She is the one that kind of invited me over to the house and then that's how I learned about it from there.*

In discussing their motivation to join, other participants mentioned being invited either by friends to come to recruitment events or being encouraged by their significant other to participate. Tiana mentioned that she had a lot of friends in Alpha Gamma Delta and during her sophomore year she was invited to participate in informal recruitment for the second time. She decided to participate so that "*they leave me alone."*

Each participant mentioned that their desire for friendship and social belonging was the primary reason they decided to join their sorority. Most of the participants discussed feeling "*connected*" to members and the values of the sorority. As evidenced in Imani's quote:

> *I feel like all the girls that I talked to were down to earth and real. Our conversations were not just like surface level "tell me about yourself". I felt like we really connected. And the values of the sorority, I felt like I aligned with. I felt like it would be a good experience and that I would make the friends I wanted to make, and also be connected to an organization that has values similar to mine.*

Most alumnae shared that the conversations they had with members made them feel a sense of belonging. The informal setting through which most participants met with members (by spending time together at the

sorority house, going to coffee shops or for lunch, etc.) aided in them seeing themselves as a member of the organization.

Participants further noted that what they knew about NPC sororities is what is often depicted in popular media – organizations that are extremely social and one of the best avenues on campus to meet people and have fun. Some interviewees referred to a desire to attend social events and meet new people. Alyssa believed that joining would be "*a free pass to have friends and social plans, since I didn't have a core group of friends*" at the university. Outside of their own organizations, some members were also connected to the larger sorority community on their campus. For some participants the connection with other organizations was a benefit. For instance, Alexis believed that it was her connection to the larger community that helped her win a Student Government Association position. For others, the feeling of belonging was limited to their own sorority and not the larger community.

As illustrated in the presented excerpts, the motivation of these Black women to join was grounded both in the values represented by the organization's members and the values of the sorority. Further, participants felt that these values represented their own, thus encouraging them to become members. Among the outside factors, friends and family served as a critical motivator for these Black women to choose a particular organization, as well as any prior contact that these Black women may have made with a sorority and its members. Finally, the participants believed that joining a particular sorority would help them establish social connections with a wider campus community and relied on their sororities to help them be seen and recognized by other campus constituencies. Overall, these Black women felt that being members of their sororities had positive outcomes for their college experience, ranging from sense of belonging, accomplishing social connections, and obtaining positions on campus.

**Lack of Knowledge of Historically Black and Culturally-Based Sororities**

The second theme that emerged from the interviews with Black alumnae of NPC sororities is that when they decided to join their sorority, most had a lack of knowledge and understanding of historically black and culturally-based sororities. Participants described a lack of education from their campus' fraternity and sorority life staff and council officers about the existence and purpose of historically black and culturally-based sororities. When most alumnae learned about the joining process for a sorority, they only learned about NPC sororities.

Most interviewees did not learn about culturally-based sororities until after they had joined their NPC organization. As Amari explained: "*I didn't know that they existed here. I was like 'there's Black people here?' I did not know until my second semester, and I was like 'Oh, I would have joined you guys.*" This lack of awareness was present among participants who joined through both formal and informal recruitment processes.

Some alumnae also described a lack of desire to join a historically black or culturally-based sorority because the chapters were too small on their campus or did not have the same social capital as NPCs. As Alyssa noted:

> *Black fraternities and sororities like aren't really respected, they're not big. People are like: 'What are those letters? I don't even know what that is.' It's like 'Oh my God, read a book.' We are not the only people who exist on this campus, but for a lot of people that I knew, it was like that was just a world that didn't exist to them. So, I knew that was not going to be a route for me… I just did not see a black sorority being a viable option for me.*

The recurring theme in the interviews was that alumnae seemed to not understand or acknowledge the history of culturally-based sororities, their significance, or the reasoning behind their smaller size when they were undergraduate students. Once interviewees joined their sororities, their interactions with organizations outside of their council were mainly limited to the Interfraternity Council, which is made up of historically white fraternities and sororities.

For Imani, the decision to join an NPC sorority instead of a culturally-based one was because she felt she was not in touch with her racial identity. As she stated:

> *At the time, I was not knowledgeable or in touch with my identity. I was like 'What does it matter? My organization is just as good.' I think if you interview more people from my chapter that were founding members, they would have similar thoughts about how they never saw an issue or any of the negative sides of being in a white sorority until we got out of it.*

Other interviewees mentioned that their initial friend group on campus was mainly White women going through the formal recruitment process. Similarly, participants further mentioned coming into their racial identity only after graduating.

Overall, the narratives of participants were characterized by a reflection on culturally-based organizations as a possible choice they wished they had explored prior to joining a white sorority. The sentiments of these

women echoed that, in choosing where to join, there were only presented with NPC organizations. Therefore, they were left to choose between NPC organizations only, rather than between an NPC and other sororities, such as culturally-based or black organizations. In their decision to join an NPC they felt they assimilated, rather than integrated, by neglecting their racial identity and regaining it only upon graduation.

**Uncertainty if Membership in a Historically White Sorority was the Best Choice**

When reflecting on their sorority membership experience, most participants stated they would have weighed all their options before choosing to join an NPC organization. As noted previously, the formal and informal recruitment processes at the participants' institutions only highlighted the NPC sorority experience. As undergraduates, some participants believed that NPC sororities were the only option, and many wished they had known that there were historically black and culturally-based sororities on their campus. As Kiara stated:

> *I wouldn't have joined. I think if I had given myself a year to explore everything, go to information meetings for Divine Nine [historically black fraternities and sororities], I probably would have gone Divine Nine if I'm being honest with myself.*

Others agreed that they may have not made the same choice to join an NPC sorority had they waited to see all their options, or if their institution did a better job at educating potential members.

Participants further mentioned that they could see a stark difference between the NPC alumnae experience and the black/culturally-based sorority alumnae experience. Some interviewees said they were envious of the lifetime connection and involvement among National Pan-Hellenic Council (NPHC) sororities, and that she would have joined an NPHC sorority upon reflection of her experience. Some revealed that their NPC membership was a fulfilling experience while they were in college but were unsure if they would have still made the same choice. As Alyssa noted:

> *I think, for the time that I was in college, it was beneficial because it did lead me to making friends and making connections. Do I feel like it's had this profound impact on my life? No… I think that I would still be exactly where I am today, with or without it, so I don't know that it would have made a difference.*

Three participants were still actively involved as alumnae by serving on national committees or serving as advisors for local chapters near their home. The rest were not involved or did not volunteer their time for

their sorority. For most interviewees, their sorority experience ended when they graduated from their institution or earned alumna status.

In talking about their experiences, some alumnae discussed instances of microaggressions and racism they experienced as sorority members, that now give them pause about their decision to join an NPC sorority. Although their sororities extended them invitations to join, these participants felt as though their sororities could have done a better job at educating members on diversity, equity, and inclusion issues or holding members accountable for being racist. As an illustration, one participant discussed how when her sorority would attend fraternity parties, the music played was explicit. During songs that had the n-word racial slur, some of her sorority sisters and fraternity members would sing the word. She was hesitant to discuss her concerns with her sisters for fear of being attacked or viewed as an "*angry Black woman*".

As illustrated, the overall sorority experience of these Black women was characterized by sentiments of self-reflection, questioning, doubt, and even regret. Their narratives strongly contrasted their experience in NPC organizations with the experience they could have had in a culturally-based or black sororities. Further, the constructs of racism and microaggressions characterized the reflections of these young women who overall felt that public commitments of their institutions to diversity, inclusion, and social justice were not represented in the actions of their members. They also admitted not voicing their concerns for the fear of not assimilating and giving up their racial identities in order to fit in.

## DISCUSSION

The findings of this study corroborated some of the prior research on Black women experiences in sorority organizations while offering new insights into the questions that have not yet been investigated. Regarding the first research question and Black women's decisions to join NPC organizations, participants reported being driven by social motivators, mainly friends and family. This finding is comparable to the general literature exploring the choice of female students to join NPC sororities (Long, 2012; Walker et al., 2015), as well as the research on Black women decisions to join culturally-based organizations (Greyerbiehl & Mitchell, 2014). The significance of this study lies in the finding that these Black women felt that choosing between a particular NPC sorority was the only choice they had. This finding can be connected to the prior research that documented that students at predominantly white institutions can feel as though historically white sororities do not wish to associate with culturally-

based organizations (Garcia, 2019). Specifically, Garcia (2019) documented lack of awareness among students at these institutions of the existence of multicultural organizations as well as a prevalent lack of interaction across councils. Similarly, most participants in this research mentioned that their connection to the larger sorority community was limited to other historically white sororities, with some adding how sorority community-wide events (e.g., Greek Week, Meet the Greeks, et.) were all tailored for historically white sororities. In her research, Garcia (2019) attributed these practices to the lack of information participants received as incoming students about multicultural organizations. She also documented participants' perspectives that multicultural organizations do not receive sufficient resources to adequately promote themselves, as compared to NPC organizations. Comparably, the findings of this study echo these notions as the experiences of most Black women in this research illustrated the practice of their universities to center historically white sororities in their orientation, recruitment, and social events, thus influencing participants to believe that joining these organizations is their only option.

This knowledge confirms and advances the previous research that established that even though sororities welcome Black and other non-White members, they still perpetuate ethnocentric and selective practices (Hughey, 2010; Torbenson & Parks, 2009), which in this case of this study were reflected in their promotional and recruitment activities. By being led to believe that that NPC sororities were their only choice, the experiences of Black women in this study confirmed the premises that structures and practices of many sororities sustain heterogeneity and discourage diversity and individual differences (Laird, 2005).

Regarding the second research question, and participants' experiences as Black women in NPC organizations, the alumnae in this study shared that they neglected their racial identities while in these organizations and only regained them upon graduation. This knowledge is critical for all sororities serving Black students given that for Black women at predominantly white institutions social support systems are vital to their personal and racial identity development (Porter & Dean, 2015). Further, the experiences of Black women in this study were marked by strong sentiments of assimilation, rather than integration, which echoed the existing knowledge that cross-racial sorority membership is characterized by assimilation and marginalization of non-White members, if they are to be fully accepted (Hughey, 2010). Similarly, many of the women in this study disclosed their decisions to not voice their concerns regarding their experiences with racism and microaggressions. Interpreted through the

lenses of the theoretical framework of this study – Critical Race Theory – these narratives confirm the color-blind modus operandi of NPC organizations through their practices that perpetuate the oppression of people of color (Park, 2008)

It is of particular importance to highlight the finding that, in reflecting on their sorority experience, Black women in this study felt that public commitments of their organizations to diversity, equity, and inclusion, were not represented in the actions of their members. These sentiments are consistent with those reported in the literature as Black women have already voiced disappointment with diversity efforts on their campuses and the pressure to conform to the dominant culture of whiteness (Winkle-Wagner et al., 2019). Most importantly, the narratives of Black women in this research were contrary to the public commitment of NPC organizations to creating an inclusive community and addressing racism and racial injustices (NPC, n.d.). Many participants had hoped their sorority would put more intention and action behind these statements. Although most of the interviewees were disappointed in their organization's response, they were not surprised as their sorority had, in their opinion, failed to support diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts appropriately over the years.

Ultimately, this study represents one of the very few inquiries focused on Black women in NPC organizations, which has been identified as under-investigated area that warrants increased scholarly focus and investigation. Before this research, the experiences of minority students in these organizations, mainly Black women, remained underrepresented in the contemporary literature, especially compared to the existing body of research on Black women experiences in culturally-based sororities (Greyerbiehl & Mitchell, 2014; Jennings, 2017; Mitchell et al., 2017). By portraying the experiences of Black alumna of NPC sororities, this research hopes to improve their experience and the experiences of the Black women who will join in the years to come. This research seeks to aid stakeholders, such as campus advisors, volunteer advisors, and organization's staff members, in becoming aware and informed of the experiences of Black women in NPC organizations. As many of these sororities are implementing new initiatives and programs to create safer and more inclusive spaces for Black women.

## IMPLICATIONS

The results of this study suggest that there needs to be more education on and promotion of culturally-based organizations prior and during formal recruitment processes. Participants spoke of having a lack of

knowledge regarding the culturally-based sororities on their campus, and most now wish they had known all of their options before deciding to join a sorority. To ensure equity for all fraternities and sororities on campuses, the organizations and their staff must examine that the education they provide to potential and active members is inclusive and equitable.

Next, majority of participants stated that even after joining their sororities, their interactions with the larger sorority community were limited to other historically white organizations. Some participants mentioned feeling out of place in such a community. Therefore, college and university staff should explore opportunities to build a stronger sense of community within *entire* sorority life on campus, so that the members of all chapters feel a sense of belonging and feel supported. This goal could be accomplished through a common office-sponsored new member education, educational opportunities for current members, roundtables with leaders from *a variety of* chapters, or informal team-building opportunities for members across *all* chapters.

Third, many participants discussed how their membership experience was limited to their four years of undergraduate education. Some participants are involved on a national level, but most said they do not feel a sense of belonging to their sorority on a national level as Black women. As such, it would be beneficial if organizations developed meaningful opportunities for Black members to connect and support one another. Another avenue to explore for the staff is to develop educational opportunities for undergraduate and alumnae members that increase cultural competency. Finally, sorority staff should explore the policies and practices they have in place that may be limiting the opportunity for Black women and other women of color to join a sorority. They could also develop new policies and practices that would enhance the experience for undergraduate and alumnae members. These practices could address the uncertainty participants had regarding their decision to join.

Additional implications emerge from the finding that sorority experience of participants was shaped by overt racial microaggressions. The racism that Black alumnae experienced calls for not only educating the members of NPC organizations and wider university community on diversity, equity, and inclusion, but for providing safe spaces for Black members to share these experiences and seek support in overcoming them. It is critical for university counseling centers and mental health professionals to not only be aware of the challenges these women encounter while in NPC organizations, but to also actively collaborate with sororities to ensure that all members experiencing racism and microaggressions receive adequate

psychological and mental health support. For this goal to be accomplished, NPC organizations must actively promote counseling centers on their campuses and ensure that all their members have safe spaces to discuss any experiences they are hesitant to share with their organizations.

Overall, all institutions and their organizations must ensure that their public commitments to diversity, equity, and inclusion are not just empty promises, but a set of coordinated and ongoing activities grounded in research-proven practices and developed upon reflecting on the actual experience of their non-White members. In order for this to happen, it is not enough that these organizations only welcome Black members, but they must provide venues for them to voice their concerns, such as those reported in this study. Only by continuously reflecting on their practices and ensuring that they are inclusive and representative of all members, can these organizations ensure that they live up to their public statements and promises.

## LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Limitations for this study include the number of participants and the fact that their experiences cannot speak to all other current and alumnae members. This study initially sought to recruit 10-15 active members at colleges and universities in the Northeast United States. Although over two dozen schools were contacted, we were only able to interview one participant who met the criteria. As it was difficult to recruit a substantial sample size from that population, the study expanded to young alumnae across the United States. The population of Black alumnae within NPC sororities is small, so future researchers should anticipate spending a significant amount of time recruiting participants for their studies. Additional limitation of this research is that each participant was interviewed only once using a standardized interview guide. Upon reflecting on the findings of this study, it became obvious that, despite the commonalities in their shared experience, each participant narrative was also quite unique. Thus, it would have been useful if interview guide included additional probing questions or if participants were interviewed twice to allow them to elaborate on the most significant aspects of their experiences.

Future studies should be conducted to further explore the experiences of Black women in NPC sororities. Ideally, future studies should also include quantitative inquiries so that the results can be more generalizable across this population. Further exploration into the Black

experience would hopefully benefit Black women who decide to join NPC organizations in the future.

## CONCLUSION

The experiences of Black alumnae in NPC sororities are unique to each woman. The study explored the motivation for each participant to join and their experience as Black members of their organizations. The most notable finding of this study is that Black women found their undergraduate sorority experience to be beneficial at that time, but upon further reflection on their experiences, they may not make the same decision again.

Colleges, universities, and sorority professionals should explore a variety of avenues to create a more diverse, inclusive, and equitable sorority experience, and seek opportunities to increase the cultural competency of their members. Further research into the experiences of Black women should increase awareness and scholarship on this subject. Black members of NPC sororities deserve to have an experience that is enjoyable and beneficial for more than their four years of their undergraduate education.

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# "Why Do They Hate Us?": Learning from the Racialized Experiences of Chinese International Students in the United States during COVID-19

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## ABSTRACT

*In this qualitative study, we explore Chinese international students' overall racialized experiences at the start of the COVID-19 pandemic at a predominantly white institution (PWI) in the United States. Using in-depth one-on-one interviews and a focus group, we shed light on the impacts of xenophobic incidents against Chinese international students and how institutions of higher learning could better serve all of their students. Three main themes emerged from our findings: (a) racial resiliency in the face of discrimination, (b) positive self-concept through group support, and (c) increased motivation to advocate for themselves. Implications from this study provide a basis for how institutions could design, shape, and engage in initiatives that improve success for Chinese international and other minoritized students.*

**Keywords:** Chinese international students; Diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging; Social justice; Student experience; Student success

## INTRODUCTION

The year before the COVID-19 pandemic struck, more than 1 million international students enrolled in U.S. colleges and universities, accounting for about 6 percent of all students in U.S. higher education (IIE, 2019). In 2019, 60% of international students in the United States were from China, representing an increase of 500% from 59,939 in 2001 to 372,532 in 2019 (IIE, 2022). At the same time, about 65 percent of students at U.S. universities and colleges are Asian and/or of Asian descent (IIE, 2022). However, the COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated U.S.-China geopolitical tensions and, in turn, affected how Chinese international students are (negatively) perceived and treated by some in the United States (Lee & Haupt, 2021).

Between March 2020 and March 2021—xenophobic incidents across the United States created fear in Chinese international students' academic and personal lives (Koo et al., 2021). According to the U.S. Centers for Disease and Control Prevention (2022), over a third of students in the United States experienced racism before or during the COVID-19 pandemic, with the highest levels reported by students of Asian heritage. Our study focused on the lived experiences of Chinese international students at a large, public (R1) university in the Midwestern region of the United States. We listened to the stories of Chinese students experiencing racial discrimination during the start of the COVID-19 pandemic. Our study aims to add to the scholarship on Chinese international students' experiences, anti-Chinese/anti-Asian racism in the United States, and the movement of Chinese international students (and others) towards increased self-advocacy.

Next, we continue with a brief review of the literature on Chinese international students' experiences in the United States. We describe our study design and methods before discussing our results. Three main themes emerged about the students confronting the increased anti-Chinese bias: racial resiliency when confronted by racism; group support of positive self-concept; and motivation to advocate for themselves. Likewise, the results support increased work on combating the adverse impacts of the model minority stereotype as well as on work supporting minoritized people (re)claiming their racial identities. We conclude by discussing some recommendations for supporting student success for Chinese international students, other minoritized students, and all students on higher education campuses.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Historical racism against Asians in the United States

Today's Chinese international students in the United States join a long, contentious history of caustic sentiment against people of Asian descent.

As Museus (2014b) highlighted, historical oppression against Chinese people in the United States goes back to the outright systemic racism of excluding them from various labor markets by the 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act. The stated purpose of the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 was to prevent/limit Chinese people from entering the United States (History, 2018). That period of systemic oppression against those of Chinese descent, particularly men and emigrants (including women and children) of Asian descent in the mid-1880s, found new arrivals of people of Chinese descent facing discrimination that worsened after they arrived in the United States. It is important to note that not just Asians and/or Chinese immigrants experienced this level of state-sponsored racism in the United States.

The histories of Asian immigrants and non-immigrants in the United States are full of examples of discriminatory harm against them. The Japanese internment camps during WWII stripped away the rights of ethically Japanese American citizens. The Los Angeles race riots of 1992 saw Koreatown looted and destroyed. The September 11, 2001, attacks unleashed a wave of racial/religious backlash against people of Middle Eastern heritage and other racial identities by individuals across the country.

In the 21st century, it appears that a new period of systematic oppression (e.g., neo-racism) against Chinese people was catalyzed by the COVID-19 pandemic. This period saw a rise in worldwide xenophobic incidents of Asian hate (Kalkın et al., 2021). Indeed, the COVID crisis laid bare ongoing anti-Asian racial discrimination, even for Asian Americans who are citizens of the United States, because the hatred and oppression did not differentiate between Asian non-U.S. citizens and U.S. citizens (Haft & Zhou, 2021; Kalkın et al., 2021; Lang, 2021; Tang, 2021). Associated Press (2023) reported on the challenge of being Asian in the United States pointing out the tragic stabbing in the head of an Asian college student while riding a bus.

**Enrollment Decline of Chinese International Students**

Despite international student enrollment enjoying large increases in U.S. universities during the last several decades, Chinese international student enrollment began declining during the Trump administration (Laws & Ammigan, 2020). The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated the decrease in international student enrollment, with projections of a continued decline in international student enrollment in the United States (IIE, 2021). U.S. enrollment of international students from China dropped in 2020 for the first time since 1970 (IIE, 2021). Despite Chinese international students contributing an estimated $15 billion in tuition to U.S. institutions of higher learning in 2019, 55% of the American public—with a noticeable partisan

majority (69%) being Republicans—voiced support for limiting Chinese students' ability to study in the United States (Silver, 2021). Currently, 290,086 Chinese international students are studying in universities and colleges across the 50 states of the United States (IIE, 2022).

## Racialized Experiences of Chinese International Students

Scholars have highlighted that Chinese international students with limited English language proficiency (or having an accent) in the United States are frequently subject to some form of discrimination (Sam, 2001; Xiong et al., 2021). Discrimination occurs in many forms (e.g., laughing at their accent or ignoring their existence) and often depends on the subjective perception of others (Schmitt et al., 2014; Ma, 2020). Perceived discrimination, which is not uncommon on U.S. campuses, has been known to negatively impact the cross-cultural adaptation and the mental and physical well-being of Chinese international students (Lee, 2005; Wei et al., 2008). A recent study of 192 Chinese international students across the United States found that about 33% of these students reported experiencing discrimination in their local campus communities; in contrast, 66% of the same respondents reported feeling discrimination from the media (Ma & Miller, 2021).

### *Impacts of Racial Discrimination*

The adverse impacts of discrimination and bias on Chinese international students in U.S. higher education are real. Shadowen et al. (2019) reported that perceived discrimination experienced by most Chinese international students was positively associated with anxiety, depressive symptoms, and acculturative stress—and negatively correlated with social support. These authors stress the importance and unmet need for institutions of higher learning to provide adequate social, networking, and wellness activities and resources for their international student communities.

A recent analysis highlighted alleviating the psychological adjustment of international students by (a) addressing culture shocks; (b) providing wellness programming; and (c) building institutional capacity to support students in counseling and advising (Ammigan et al., 2022). For example, Chinese international students will feel heard about their racial discriminatory experiences when campus professionals (e.g., faculty members or advisors) share similar experiences with them as well as provide strategies for self-care (Erkut & Mokros, 1984; Harris, 2019; Lockwood, 2006; Melnyk et al., 2021).

Interestingly, Iwamoto and Liu (2010) observed some Chinese international students beginning to cultivate racial resiliency skills in their

community of support when they faced discrimination incidents in the United States.

## Theoretical Framework

Our work in this study is grounded on Lee and Rice's (2007) theory of neo-racism (or a new type of racism) with the use of the 'Chinese virus' label against Chinese international students during the COVID-19 pandemic (e.g., Tang, 2021). Our work is situated within empirically- tested neo-racism theory (J. J. Lee & Rice, 2007). The theory of neo-racism—also called the 'new racism'—encompasses current white people's bias, prejudice, and discrimination against individuals and groups of people of color based on their language, culture, and ethnicity (J. J. Lee & Rice, 2007). At its core, neo-racism describes a framework in which white people seek to maintain cultural and national superiority by increasing marginalization against groups deemed subordinate to people who self-identify as part of white dominant groups (J. J. Lee & Rice, 2007). Neo-racism seemingly tries to justify points of view and policies of assimilating (or normalizing) the "unnaturalness" of subordinate groups/people of color to the so-called "natural" characteristics of the dominant group/whiteness.

The neo-racism theoretical framework provided the researchers with a "natural v. unnatural" framework to understand bias incidents and prejudice faced by Chinese international students at a PWI in the U.S. Midwest during COVID. That is, instead of being dismissed as isolated incidents, random attacks, or the work of a few 'bad actors,' the racial discrimination events experienced by Chinese international students, we believe, may be better understood as symptoms and evidence of neo-racism and that doing so may illuminate ways for educational institutions to better address such racism moving forward.

# METHODS

## Research Design

In this study, we employed a generic qualitative inductive approach (Kostere & Kostere, 2021) to better understand and discover racialized experiences of Chinese international students. This study's generic qualitative methodology is warranted because it frees the researcher to study the human experience. Kostere and Kostere (2021) explained that the generic qualitative approach does not follow strict philosophical assumptions in the traditionally established qualitative methodologies but rather seeks to discover and understand the perspectives as well as worldviews of the people involved. Generic qualitative research strives to understand how people make meaning of a phenomenon or situation based on what works best for them. This

approach also seeks to understand "how people construct meaning interrelated to themselves, others, social situations, and world occurrences" (Kostere & Kostere, 2021, p. 3). Most importantly, the fluidity of the research topic and doing research during a pandemic align with using a generic qualitative approach intended to be exploratory and generative (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Kostere & Kostere, 2021).

**Context and Participants**

We used in-depth, one-on-one interviews together with a focus group to learn from Chinese international students at a PWI in the Midwestern United States about their experiences with racism and bias during the start of the COVID-19 pandemic. Our university's Institutional Review Board approved the study, its data collection approach, and its informed consent process. All participants volunteered their time without any monetary incentives for their participation. All participants self-identified as Chinese, an international undergraduate student, and a first-generation college student. Undergraduate is a crucial inclusion criterion where many Chinese international graduate students are at the study site. Participants ranged in age from 18 to 25 years.

We recruited participants for this study using the snowball sampling method. Through email and social media channels (e.g., WeChat), we recruited campus (Chinese) undergraduate student leaders to participate in the study and asked them to invite their friends to participate. The recruitment efforts resulted in 40 university students completing an online survey to express interest in participating in the study. Only half (20) of the potential participants who expressed interest met all criteria to participate in the study. Of those 20 potential participants, only eight were available to participate in the in-depth interviews, and only five were willing to participate in the subsequent focus group discussion. The focus group discussion was used to help illuminate issues that Chinese international students raised individually by warranted being raised and discussed in a group context to reduce feelings of isolation and provide group support for each other.

The study's lead author conducted the in-depth interviews and the focus group, fluent in Mandarin and English. Participants were encouraged to speak freely in Mandarin and/or English of their choosing so they could use the most comfortable language to fully express their thoughts and feelings. We assigned Chinese pseudonyms for each to provide participants anonymity and honor their Chinese culture and racial identity.

**Table 1**

*Chinese International Students Study Participants*

| Pseudonym | Academic Level |
|---|---|
| Chuanyue* | Senior |
| Feng* | Junior |
| Lingxiao* | Senior |
| Yinglun | Junior |
| Yinyuntong* | Senior |
| Zelei | Senior |
| Zhejiao | Senior |
| Zheyi* | Senior |

*Note*. * Student participated in both individual interviews and focus group discussion. The rest only participated in individual interviews.

**Data Collection and Analytical Process**

Eight in-depth interviews were conducted between January 2022 to April 2022. Each in-depth interview lasted roughly 60 to 75 minutes. In March 2022, after most of the individual interviews had been done, we conducted a focus group. The focus group was designed to use group dynamics to generate additional insights and perspectives, shed new light on some things raised during the individual interviews, and examine whether more interviews or focus groups were needed. The focus group also helps us determine whether we reached data saturation from our participants (e.g., Guest et al., 2017). Because of the nature of the COVID-19 pandemic, the focus group was conducted 'virtually' using Zoom (a virtual video chat platform). Focus group participants were told that the session would be audio-recorded, translated, and transcribed into text.

All study participants were informed that complete confidentiality could not be guaranteed (especially for focus group participants). Therefore, we strongly encouraged focus group participants to respect other participants' confidentiality and urged them to abide by the notion that "what is said in the group stays in the group" (Kostere & Kostere, 2021, p. 45). All participants were informed that direct quotes from their interviews/focus group may be used in the study, analyses, and publications but that such quotations would

not be linked to an identifiable participant. While interview participants were reminded that there are no right or wrong answers to our questions before beginning the interviews, focus group participants were reminded of some ground rules for the discussion, including that we all should withhold our judgments when a participant was sharing their stories as and that we should try to avoid 1) interrupting, 2) talking over, 3) arguing, or 4) monopolizing time. Doing so, we believe, helped participants feel that their input and stories would be respected and that they had sufficient time and space to share their experiences and viewpoints.

***Data Analysis Process***

It was important to us that our research approach helped our research participants maintain and even develop positive self-concepts about themselves and their identities. Furthermore, we worked to help our participants move beyond immersion within their Chinese racial communities on campus towards being able to "successfully connect with other populations…without abandoning their newly redefined racial identity" (Patton et al., 2016, p. 110).

**Table 2**

*Data Analysis Process*

| | Data Analysis | Analytical Process |
|---|---|---|
| Step 1 | Coding | Translate and transcribe individual interviews and one focus group discussion into a Microsoft Word document. |
| Step 2 | Develop Themes | Upload Microsoft Word documents into Dedoose to highlight text segments and similar patterns throughout the transcripts. |
| Step 3 | Identify Categories | Categorizing themes and parsing out phrases—in both individual interviews and a focus group discussion—that were shared by the participants. |
| Step 4 | Researcher reflexivity | Thicken the thematic analysis with the researcher's field notes. |
| Step 5 | Validity | Conduct member checks and consult with a community of scholars. |

*Note*. Adapted the coding process for qualitative research (Saldaña, 2021)

The semi-structured interview guide, as well as our focus group discussion guide, was designed to allow flexibility for exploring relevant themes as well as diving deep into topics, issues, and experiences raised by

the participants. For example, we asked participants directly about their racialized experiences on campus, typically by asking a salient open-ended question (e.g., What does being a Chinese person mean to you?) with subsequent follow-up questions and prompts (e.g., How does being Chinese impact you as a student here?).

Our iterative analytical approach encompassed four key elements of qualitative research coding (Saldaña, 2021) (see Table 2 above). Our steps one to four were circular and repeated multiple times with each transcript to develop salient categorized themes and representative quotations. This iterative process helped ensure high-quality analyses.

**Trustworthiness and Triangulation**

Participant checking of analytical memos, transcripts, translations, and coding categories can help confirm and validate study results (Kostere & Kostere, 2021; Rossman & Rallis, 2017). Therefore, to enhance the trustworthiness of our findings, we asked each participant to check the translations and transcriptions from their individual interviews. Later, we also asked them to reflect on the themes identified in their interview and asked them to help us correct any errors, big or small, to confirm the accuracy of our data. We also provided the focus group participants with our written notes and observations to help ensure that we did not mishear or misinterpret their stories, The focus group participants were also given an opportunity to edit or expand their stories. In the end, all the translations, transcriptions, and themes were reviewed and approved by the participants without any major modifications—only some small typos of names and locations in the transcription need to be corrected.

***Triangulation***

We also used triangulation to corroborate, confirm, and cross-validate this study's findings or derived themes. Namely, we used member-checking of transcripts/notes/analytical memos based on their interview and/or focus group (Kostere & Kostere, 2021; Rossman & Rallis, 2017; Saldaña, 2021). We also sought counsel from scholars in the field who have conducted similar research with empirical research on Chinese international students to ensure that our process was sound (i.e., to negate and address any confirmation bias).

## FINDINGS

This study of Chinese international students' racialized experiences (e.g., racial discrimination) during the COVID-19 pandemic revealed three major themes: 1) racial resiliency, 2) positive self-concept, and 3) motivation

to advocate for themselves against racial discrimination (see Appendix for a mapping of key quotations (exemplars) on the revealed thematic categories). The first two themes were drawn from individual interviews, while the third theme was drawn from individual interviews and the focus group discussion.

**Building Racial Resiliency**

One key theme emerging from the data was that the Chinese international students reported ultimately feeling more resilient and empowered by their racial identity when facing discrimination. Instead of giving in to unfair/untrue stereotypes about who they are, the Chinese international student participants reported developing better (deeper) self-understanding of their racial identity because external forces push them to think harder. This affirmation of racial resiliency (Harris, 2019; Iwamoto & Liu, 2010) was evident when we asked participants what being a Chinese person means to you? We found that our research participants reflected on the racial resiliency of their experiences in the United States. As Yinglun, a junior student, put it:

> When I saw this question, I thought about it for 10 mins because I am afraid of my racial identity because of the current US-China political tensions affect how Americans may treat me more hostile than with another Asian person.

Feng, a junior psychology major, and Zelei, an undergraduate senior, shared that Chinese international student felt more aware of their racial identity in the United States than back in China. As he stated:

> I am more aware of my Chinese racial identity because everyone is Chinese back home, but when I am here [in the U.S.], I am the minority….

Feng also shared that because of his awareness of his racial identity, he is keener on the racial issues in the United States and has authentic conversations with his peers about race in America.

On the other hand, Zelei shared that he felt a sense of racial affirmation both in China and in the U.S. Zelei attributes this sense of mutual affirmation due to his experience of growing up as well as during the COVID-19 pandemic in a metropolitan city in China where he observed diverse groups of people who speak different languages hang out with one another, embracing each other's ethnic and racial differences. As Zelei observed,

> During the [COVID-19] pandemic, I see Chinese people hang out with Latino people, and they play well together. I believe people identify with their race when they are outside their racial identity group.

Especially during the COVID-19 pandemic, Zheyi, Zhejiao, Feng, and Yingyuntong reported feeling most validated about their Chinese racial identity when they are with their peers from the same/similar backgrounds. In the most recent 2022 Lunar New Year celebration, Chinese international students were able to celebrate this significant cultural tradition instead of partaking in one of America's most favorite pastimes, the Superbowl. Superbowl LVI fell on the same weekend as the Lunar New Year. So, Chinese international students spent time video chatting with their families back home as opposed to watching the Superbowl on television with their American friends. Here, the participants vocalized that coming together to celebrate their cultural tradition (i.e., Lunar New Year) affirmed their racial heritage with their families back home, as well as strengthened their racial resilience in the U.S. Furthermore, this finding highlighted the interconnectedness of Chinese international students' racialized identity and their ethnic identity; because, in the U.S., regardless of ethnicity, Chinese students are racialized as Asians (J. Kim, 2012).

The most explicit examples of participants' racialized experiences as Chinese international students were shared by participants reflecting on how they felt their Chinese racial identity being a part of who they are, where they came from, and how they identify with their country as home. All participants shared and reminisced about their racial identity, how they experienced life as a Chinese person back home, and how their Chinese peers affirmed their group identities while living and studying abroad in the United States, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic.

**Fostering Positive Self-Concept**

Having some academic success during the COVID-19 pandemic, students also mentioned that continuous positive self-concept and group identity of their race (Chinese) help them feel that they are not alone in surviving the pandemic. Specifically, student participants attributed their positive self-identity development to their involvement in ethnic and cultural student organizations while others attributed a positive attribution to their Chinese group identity when they were able to celebrate their cultural history and traditions.

Zhejiao, an undergraduate senior, noted that her community of support stems from her cultural identity group (Chinese Undergraduate Student Association or CUSA).

> CUSA gave me a voice to be who I am and how I feel like a Chinese person living outside of my home country… I feel comfortable sharing my true feelings with my people.

Similarly, Lingxiao, an undergraduate senior, and Yinglun, a junior standing, felt grateful to be Chinese.

In summary, they explained that being Chinese made them feel a stronger sense of racial and ethnic identity because the university celebrates diverse major holidays despite it being mostly White/Eurocentric (e.g., Thanksgiving or Christmas). Phrased another way, they have become more aware of their racial identity (Asian) because the university celebrates their cultural heritage once a year in a secluded microscopic area of the campus—for example, the Lunar New Year celebration is hosted in a basement of a campus residential hall—that traditionally would be weeklong celebratory events throughout campus as well as greater community in their home country. Still, during the COVID-19 pandemic away from home, they felt very much cared for when the students themselves mustered their will (i.e., through student organizations) to host Lunar New Year celebrations on campus, in person. This finding suggests that COVID-19 exacerbated the Chinese international students' homesickness and disconnect from others. Hence, these cultural celebrations became more significant in fostering a sense of belonging/community for them.

**Motivation to Advocacy**

Two male students talked about their pandemic experience, where they had great support in improving their English proficiency, Zheyi, an undergraduate senior, reflected:

> During the COVID-19 pandemic, I used the writing center to help convey my racialized experiences for class assignments. I felt empowered to use exact words to share my innermost feelings.

Additionally, Zelei, another undergraduate, said:

> I entered the university under the English Language Program because I needed more help learning the language. Especially during the COVID-19 pandemic, I need more help figuring out how to advocate for myself in case of racial discrimination.

In summary, both Zheyi and Zelei mentioned that the true reason behind enhancing their command of the English language is to know how to advocate for themselves against racial discrimination. This finding implies that COVID-19 gave them a sense of resiliency to seek extra help, and receiving campus resources (i.e., the writing center) increased their motivation to learn even when English was not their primary language.

### *Advocacy Against Racial Discrimination*

The focus group dynamics (Guest et al., 2017; Kaplowitz & Hoehn, 2001) led to our further learning of different information about Chinese international students wanting to advocate for their racial discrimination incidents. Participants Lingxiao and Yingyuntong, after the group discussion of COVID-19 racial discrimination, both reported:

> Why do they hate us? They hated us because we are Chinese. We are more targeted because the news is spreading information that all Chinese people carry the Coronavirus, and it is all my fault because of my race!

At the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, Yingyuntong felt targeted because of her race and went on to say,

> I have been studying in the U.S. since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic and have not returned to China. What makes people think I am China Virus?

Similarly, both Zelei and Yinglun shared racial discrimination in or around March 2020—when classes at the university were shifted to remote learning and when COVID-19 cases began to increase in the cities surrounding the university. Zelei and Yinglun recounted their shock and disbelief when they were told to go back to China. They both highlighted their racial discrimination incident with their instructors and their peers. This is an important finding that Chinese students in the surrounding community outside their university campus racial discrimination was targeted at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, albeit not in the national spotlight at this study site.

## Synthesis of Findings

The findings suggest that Chinese international students have become more aware of their racial minoritized status at a PWI in the Midwest. Interestingly, we noticed that the female Chinese international students in this study were more likely to participate during the focus group discussion around topics of perceived (neo)racism against them during the COVID-19 pandemic as compared to their male counterparts. For example, the female participants shared their racialized experiences, saying they felt belittled, threatened, and hated during the COVID-19 pandemic because of their race. At the same time, the male Chinese international students were relatively silent on that topic. In contrast, our male Chinese international student focus group participants contributed vibrantly to the discussion on the topic of racial alienation/exclusion outside the campus environment—namely, the feeling of exclusion/alienation of their racial identity as Chinese people. Our focus group participants used their own lived experiences as starting points to share

their feelings and explore their racialized experiences, resulting in all participants coming away from the focus groups with a sense of having shared and significant experiences.

## DISCUSSION

The three themes that emerged from the data suggest ways to improve addressing racialized experiences and support Chinese international students and other students with marginalized identities. Our discussion aligns with the literature on the marginalization faced by historically underrepresented student populations and their racial experiences on college campuses (J. J. Lee & Rice, 2007; Ma & Miller, 2021; Museus, 2014b; Xiong et al., 2021).

### Racial Stereotypes

Previous work has made clear that racial stereotypes such as the model minority myth can have negative impacts and result in harmful stereotypes, discrimination, and violence against Asians/Asian Americans (Schmitt et al., 2014; Shadowen et al., 2019; Tang, 2021; U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2022). The COVID-19 pandemic laid bare anti-Asian sentiment that exacerbates how people of Asian heritage are stereotyped in the United States (Haft & Zhou, 2021; Kalkın et al., 2021; Lang, 2021; Tang, 2021). In this study, most of the participants shared how being treated based on a racial stereotype resulted in them facing more aggression and microaggressions (i.e., neo-racism theory cited in J. J. Lee & Rice, 2007). The bias incidents shared by participants in this study so that Chinese international students assumed the burden themselves to explain that they are not carriers of coronavirus while developing a sense of racial resiliency against stereotyping and marginalizing them.

### Validation of Positive Self-Concept

Validation of Chinese international students' positive self-concept is important to grow from their racialized experiences (Ma, 2020). Validation is contextualized in this study as a process of confirmation and empowerment (e.g., Rendón, 2009). Like so many others, Chinese international students would rather speak for themselves than have others speak for them (e.g., French et al., 2020). Our results highlight the power of validation through group and individualized settings (e.g., focus group and one-on-one interviews) and that the sharing of rich "personal and social experiences" helped the Chinese international student participants feel better, listened to, and supported (Rossman & Rallis, 2017, p. 86).

Not only was the collective validation of stories of Chinese international students a step towards raising awareness of Asian hate crimes on campus, but the focus group discussion lifted and amplified their voices as they shed light on their true (real) racialized experiences. Validation and positive self-concept are important post-COVID-19 for Chinese international students (and other Asian and Asian American students) because of the specific targeting, hate speech, and bias they faced during the pandemic (Haft & Zhou, 2021; Kalkın et al., 2021).

**Institutional Support for Social Justice Actions**

This study's results align with the literature on Chinese international students experiencing discrimination at U.S. higher education institutions suffering increased stress, anxiety, and depression (Ma & Miller, 2021; Shadowen et al., 2019). The COVID-19 pandemic increased discrimination against these students. Our findings reveal that students' mindsets—noncognitive factors of self-efficacy—affect their sense of belonging to the campus community. Academic mindsets are amenable to change across race and ethnicity for college students with intervention programs (Farruggia et al., 2018). For Chinese international students, the findings suggested that institutions such as ours should design effective program interventions, including diversity and inclusion, belonging, self-efficacy, self-advocacy, and academic motivation. People-centered success programming, especially for minoritized students, can lead to higher persistence rates and academic performance (Ammigan & Drexler, 2021; Zhu et al., 2016). We believe that doing so can help create humanized educational environments for these students centered on "meaningful relationships with faculty and staff members who care about and are committed to student [*sic*] success" (Quaye et al., 2020, p. 23).

## IMPLICATIONS

To counter the adverse impacts of COVID-19 and other negative stereotypes on Chinese international students, we support institutions taking steps that support minoritized people (re)claiming their racial identity and (re)defining their full sense of personhood (Haft & Zhou, 2021; Kalkın et al., 2021; Lang, 2021). The institutions should validate and honor the racialized experiences of Chinese international students (e.g., embrace their racial looks, language, and culture) in ways that support students' dignity and personhood (Sam, 2001; Xiong et al., 2021). We do not pretend to offer an exhaustive list of undertakings for U.S. higher educational institutions to support Chinese

international students and other minoritized student populations who are confronted with racialized experiences.

## Equitable and Effective Student Success Support

The study results made clear the importance of equitable and effective student support for student success. Two suggestions for helping to improve student success work for Chinese international students, and all students for that matter, center on increased listening to students and targeted programming.

### *More Listening and Student Engagement*

The results make clear the vital role that faculty and staff engagement with underrepresented and minoritized students can play in supporting these students' success (Ma & Miller, 2021; Museus, 2014b). Such efforts by faculty and staff do not necessarily require highly specialized skills (Ammigan et al., 2022; Zhu et al., 2016). Establishing listening sessions for minoritized students can create spaces for sharing and benefitting from intra- and inter-cultural perspectives, helping students feel comfortable, safe, and, simultaneously, valued because their voices are being heard (Malcom-Piqueux & Bensimon, 2017).

### *Support Programs*

While listening to and learning with diverse students is important, institutions must make changes to advance equity and inclusion (J. J. Lee & Rice, 2007; Koo et al., 2021; Museus, 2021). This may be achieved by improving linkages to existing campus resources (e.g., financial aid office, dean of students' office, counseling center, and international student office) as well as by offering dedicated support services to minoritized students (Ammigan et al., 2022; Liu & Ammigan, 2022).

## Support Students' Sense of Self

Another takeaway from the results centers on the importance of supporting international students' sense of self (Koo et al., 2021; Museus, 2021). Our work shows the value of staff and faculty validating the Chinese international students' stories, creating opportunities for connection, and providing role models.

### *Validate each Student's Stories and Situation(s)*

Our work shows the positive impact of students' advisors who affirmed students' various and intersecting identities. Providing Chinese

international students with a judgment-free space to discuss such matters as their sexuality, socioeconomic status, (dis)ability, legal status, and technological abilities instead of immediately focusing on their academic performance humanized the advising experiences. It supported these students' development of a positive sense of self. For instance, when a Chinese international student appears at their first advising appointment looking disheveled or confused, simply asking how they are doing and listening to them can humanize the advising experience and demonstrate much-needed care and compassion for the student (Ladson-Billings, 1995; J. A. Lee, 2018; Liu & Ammigan, 2021; NACADA: The Global Community for Academic Advising, 2017).

### *Cultivate Dialogues to Social Justice Actions*

The participants saw University faculty and staff as essential for helping them feel comfortable and connected to their university communities. Furthermore, the participants reported the value of cultivating community spaces (e.g., intergroup dialogues) for them and others to share feelings, identities, and experiences (Gurin et al., 2011; Iverson, 2007; Noble & Renn, 2021). Such dialogue across differences may build deeper relationships and connections leading to social justice actions among students in the institutional setting (Montgomery, 2020; Museus et al., 2017).

### *Role Models for Minoritized Students*

The importance of role models for college students, particularly women, has been recognized and studied for some time (e.g., Erkut & Mokros, 1984; Lockwood, 2006). Our results suggest that Chinese international students and other minoritized students could also benefit from having role models. Doing so would create cohorts of student role models for other students who could, in turn, call in other students to engage in learning about themselves and others.

## CONCLUSION

In this study, we found that Chinese international students' racialized experiences were negatively impacted at the start of the COVID-19 global health crisis. We also found that Chinese international students confronting increased racialized experiences developed: (a) racial resiliency in the face of racial discrimination, (b) positive self-concept through group support, and (c) motivation to advocate against racial discrimination is salient for Chinese international students.

Participants' voices in this research shed light on not just the racialized experiences of Chinese international students but, perhaps, more importantly, how institutions of higher education can better implement directed resources (e.g., intergroup dialogues) for Chinese international students as well as all their students to share their racialized experiences in ways to grow a more sustainable, interconnected humanity.

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# Othermothering in a Community-Led Afterschool Program

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## ABSTRACT

*We examine a community-led afterschool program designed by Black women for Black youth from a low-income community through the lens of othermothering. Through interviews and focus groups exploring a multi-year community–university partnership in a large northeastern city, we find that the Black women staff-centered community needs to drive programming activities, provided wraparound supports for families, and created a familial environment within the program. We argue that these practices fostered a culturally relevant afterschool program that was driven by the knowledge and practices of Black women in the community. Supporting minoritized communities to enact their own culturally relevant afterschool programs may lead to the establishment of unique programs that view communities as assets instead of sites of domination.*

**Keywords:** Afterschool Program, Culturally Relevant Pedagogy, Community University Partnership, Othermothering, Theory of Change

## INTRODUCTION

Afterschool programs have become cornerstones in K–12 education, providing structured extracurricular activities, enhanced learning, and safe spaces for students during the void of supervision between the end of school and the workday (Woodland, 2016). In filling this gap, afterschool programs commonly offer social development opportunities and academic support. For Black students from underserved urban environments, afterschool programs are designed to address the negative outcomes associated with inadequate schooling including reducing adolescent crime participation and teen pregnancy (e.g., Sturgill et al., 2021; Woodland, 2016). For Black and other racially minoritized students, the benefits of afterschool programs are maximized when paired with culturally relevant practices that view culture as an asset and are implemented by members of students' communities (Hunter et al., 2022; Woodland, 2016).

Afterschool programs designed and implemented by cultural outsiders—practitioners who are not part of the community where a program is situated (Waters, 2016)—do not always consider a community's needs. Cultural insiders, however, can implement culturally relevant pedagogies by demonstrating cultural competence, challenging educational inequality, and striving for academic success (Ladson-Billings, 1995). These same principles, when applied to afterschool programs, yield positive outcomes by increasing students' cultural knowledge (Hunter et al., 2022), building leadership skills (Buschlen et al., 2018), and fostering a sense of family within a program (Lane & Id-Deen, 2020). Though often under-resourced, these culturally relevant programs are commonly of high quality and have a commitment to empowerment (Haggler, 2021; Smith et al., 2021). Unlike physical and material resources, culturally relevant empowerment is an intangible resource that the dominant society cannot destroy (Haggler, 2021). This evidence suggests that developing and implementing culturally relevant afterschool programs may have additional positive effects for students within marginalized communities.

Culturally relevant pedagogy instilled by women community leaders reflects the lived experiences and needs of the community's children and families. Black women, in particular, engage in holistic approaches to education that educate and prepare Black children to live high-quality lives in a society built upon their violent marginalization and oppression (Waters, 2016). For instance, the pedagogical approach of freedom lessons establishes expectations that Black youth are fully capable (Waters, 2016), a missing element of programs led by outsiders. Program leaders create expectations of

achievement greater than the predetermined outcome set by the dominant society, a principle of culturally relevant pedagogy (Ladson-Billings, 1995). This paper explores one community-led afterschool program facilitated by Black women to address the unique needs of Black elementary school students in a low-income housing community.

Using an inductive, qualitative case-study approach (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015), we examined the following research question: How did the staff of an afterschool program respond to the needs of students and the community through culturally relevant pedagogy? Through the theoretical framework of othermothering (Collins, 2000; James, 1993), we find that the Black women staff members fostered a culturally relevant program that centered the community's needs and offered holistic care to students and their families. The program staff operated as fictive kin to students, creating a program built on the community's desires and assets. We argue that community members understand their community best and therefore should drive afterschool programming and community development. Through our analysis, we advance a theory of change (Connolly & Seymour, 2015; Kezar et al., 2015) that illustrates how othermothering can inform programmatic efforts and uplift a predominantly Black and low-income community. This theory of change may be valuable to practitioners seeking to foster culturally relevant, holistic supports within predominantly Black communities. This study highlights the experiences of othermothers who use culturally relevant pedagogy in a community-led afterschool program and become living solutions in their community.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Othermothers, a manifestation of mothering articulated in Black feminist thought, are women who assist biological mothers in sharing childcare responsibilities in formal and informal ways (Collins, 2000; James, 1993). During the era of chattel slavery in the U.S., when separating enslaved families was prevalent, othermothering became a common, necessary practice (James, 1993). Post-slavery, othermothering shifted to emphasize developing and imparting culturally empowering knowledge to the community's children (Collins, 2000). That knowledge, then and now, serves as a tool of resistance against oppression, because othermothers work to replace stereotypes perpetuated by the dominant society with positive self-definitions.

Othermothers use the language of family to describe children. The extension of family, referred to as fictive kin (Collins, 2000), has roots in the belief that every child should be sheltered, fed, clothed, and educated. Black women othermothers can extend beyond the immediate family to include

community members, functioning as fictive kin (Collins, 2000; A. L. Edwards, 2022; Stack, 1974). These community othermothers engage in political motherwork and design programs or volunteer to address local needs (A. E. Edwards, 2000; A. L. Edwards, 2022; Jackson et al., 2021). Othermothers critique systems that affect the community, working toward positive change (James, 1993). This conceptualization of othermothering as embedded in the community is a central component of culturally relevant pedagogy (Ladson-Billings, 1995).

Othermothering often extends beyond the neighborhood community into the classroom. Black women educators engage in othermothering in K–12 (Jackson et al., 2021; Dixson, 2003) and higher education settings (Bernard et al., 2012; Mawhinney, 2012), especially at Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs; Njoku et al., 2017). Jackson et al. (2021) described the experiences of elementary school educators who incorporate othermothering into their practice. Othermothers possess the personal histories necessary to foster keen understandings of community traditions (Jackson et al., 2021). When community traditions are integrated into pedagogies, the learning environment takes on a culturally relevant purpose, which initiates a cognitive restructuring that serves to disrupt stereotypes placed on Black students (Anderson et al., 2018). Once negative stereotypes are broken, Black students can develop positive senses of self (Collins, 2000). By addressing the psycho-emotional needs of Black students from an early age, educator othermothers help students break down limiting beliefs caused by negative labels so that they can focus on their academic development. The overlapping field of experience between othermother educators and their students produces an awareness that promotes the ongoing practice of othermothering by encouraging students to support the youth in their communities as adults. The generational tradition of othermothering fosters collective identity uplift and moral support for Black people.

Othermothering protects and guides Black youth during developmental phases of life. It is an intentional, multi-layered practice that ensures the necessary level of cultural competency and self-assuredness for Black children to become successful Black adults in a society dominated by whiteness (Collins, 2000). Existing in neighborhood and school communities, othermothering is a generational system of care that helps to elevate Black children, allowing them to reach their full potential. This case study examines how a community-led afterschool program utilized othermothering to address local needs.

## RESEARCH METHOD

This study examines a community–university partnership centered on improving afterschool programming opportunities for students by implementing a community-led, culturally relevant model.

Residents of Evergreen (pseudonym), a public housing complex, are predominantly low-income and Black. Urban State University (USU, pseudonym) is a public historically and predominantly white institution neighboring Evergreen that enrolls over 37,000 students. There is a history of mistrust between USU and Evergreen, as residents often feel that USU's interests are prioritized without meaningful input from community members, which has negatively impacted the lives of community members to benefit the white institution.

Evergreen's residents founded the afterschool program in 2013 for local elementary school students because previous programs were not culturally relevant. As Evergreen's program grew, they sought a potential partner who could facilitate their growth. USU's invitation to partner with Evergreen was accepted because our research team explicitly viewed the community from an asset-based lens and supported the novel approaches to afterschool experiences developed by the community (Winfield et al., 2022).

To understand how the afterschool program was embedded and functioned in the local community, we adopted a qualitative case-study approach (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015), collecting data from 2016 to 2018 after approval from USU's institutional review board. We used a case study method because the context and program were inseparable and the study was bounded by examining one community's afterschool program, key components of case study research (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). We conducted five focus groups with the program's entire staff and three semi-structured interviews with the program director, Ms. Brown (pseudonym). All the program staff identified as Black/African American and lived in the community, and four of the seven staff members identified as Black women, including the program director, Ms. Brown. Ms. Brown, as the director and a community leader, served as a community-based boundary-spanner (Weerts & Sandmann, 2010) between USU and the afterschool program and provided access to the program for the study.

In focus groups with staff and interviews with Ms. Brown, we sought participants' perspectives on the development, implementation, and benefits of their culturally relevant afterschool program. We used these data collection methods because the staff members preferred them, allowing us to build trust (Denner et al., 2019). Focus groups allowed staff members to build off each other's responses and discuss the complexities of the program that other

methods may not have elicited (Parker & Tritter, 2006; Powell & Single, 1996). The audio from each focus group and interview was recorded and transcribed.

After transcription, we used an inductive process of line-by-line descriptive coding (Saldaña, 2013), coding instances of activities, rationale, and desired outcomes to understand the program's structure and develop a theory of change (Weiss, 1995). After meeting, we identified key elements of the program by examining commonalities among these descriptive codes. We then engaged in focused coding, coding examples into the key program elements (Saldaña, 2013). At least two authors coded each transcript during this phase to increase reliability. Finally, we shared preliminary findings with members of the partnership who were not involved in theory development as a form of member-checking (Birt et al., 2016). To triangulate our findings, we also consulted program evaluations, field notes, and news articles.

During the analysis process, we identified a theory of change that helped to organize our findings and explain how othermothering influenced the program's structure. Theories of change like the one we present seek to understand how and why a program works (Connolly & Seymour, 2015; Weiss, 1995). This understanding of a program's purpose, activities, and outcomes can inform future programs. We examined the implicit theory of change in the program (Connolly & Seymour, 2015; Kezar et al., 2015) to make it explicit for outsiders. We believe that our emphasis on the experiences of the Black women staff and a theoretical framework developed by Black feminist scholars is important, as one's background can inform one's implicit theories of change (Kezar et al., 2015). Our privileging of these experiences and perspectives of Black women advances the field's understanding of how to support low-income Black youth that other perspectives may not illuminate – especially because the knowledge of Black women is often devalued by society (Collins, 2000; Cottom, 2019).

Our positionality informs our perspective and analysis, particularly as we are outsiders of the community and program (Bourke, 2014). Jake, Catherine, and Sara are white graduate students who joined after the conclusion of the grant-funded partnership to analyze data previously collected by a Black man and graduate student. In our work on this project, we explicitly looked for assets shared by the Evergreen community, intentionally resisting dominant deficit narratives about low-income, under-resourced Black communities in public housing. Dominique, a Black woman and graduate student, similarly came to this project after the grant-funded partnership. Through her participation in Black-led co-curricular programs as a child, she brought her experiential knowledge of othermothering to the

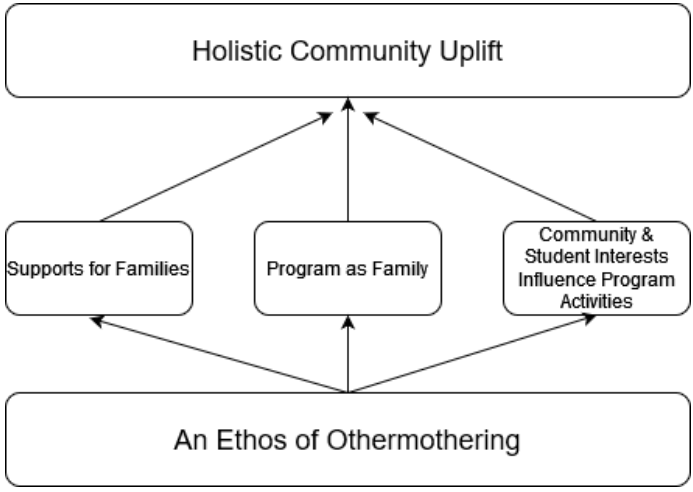
research. James, a Black man and professor at USU, was the principal investigator of the grant and was central to initiating and managing the partnership. He worked as a boundary spanner (Weerts & Sandmann, 2010) during the partnership and, in the completion of the current study, served to provide additional context to the findings developed by the other authors, which increased the validity of our findings as a secondary form of member checking.

## RESULTS

Evergreen's community afterschool program was a manifestation of an ethic of care grounded in principles of othermothering. All aspects of the program prioritized full community participation and were responsive to the needs and interests of the community and students. Furthermore, program activities supported families in multiple ways while cultivating a program family (Lane & Id-Deen, 2020). These actions helped facilitate the desired goal of the program—holistic community uplift. We show our theory of change for Evergreen's program in Figure 1.

**Figure 1**

*Theory of change for Evergreen's afterschool program*




The community's needs inspired the program's structure and activities. Staff described a pragmatic approach to recognizing the needs of the community and adapting the program's activities and structure to address these needs.

As Ms. Brown observed, this community-centered approach allowed relationships to grow organically:

> When I got into it, [I was] just trying to find out what did the community need, what did they want…? When they start telling us what they need and we start producing what they needed…a lot of them start trusting us.

These close, trusting relationships enabled the program to directly address concerns within the community, for example, by talking about gun violence and safety or by collectively processing trauma after a death in the neighborhood. This devotion to giving back reflects culturally relevant pedagogy (Ladson-Billings, 1995).

These community needs also influenced program activities. To resist violence in the community, staff developed art and video projects and invited police officers to speak to and build trust with the children. Staff also understood the challenges many local families faced and used this knowledge to develop the program to counteract common concerns. For instance, staff members understood that many students' parents worked night shifts that prevented them from supporting their children's learning outside of school; thus, the program intentionally provided students with time for homework; otherwise, "their homework wouldn't get done." The program's ability to respond to community needs was likely enhanced by the presence of community members on staff. As some staff observed, "we know what our kids need more than anybody."

Furthermore, staff remained attuned to students' needs and interests to ensure they were reaping academic, social, and emotional benefits of the afterschool program. As staff observed:

> We are therapists. We are referees… [The students are] bullied, we hear so much about it, and we stop everything we're doing immediately because we know that kids will kill another child for being bullied, or sometimes take their own lives. When we hear somebody is being bullied, and if we're doing homework, it stops. We don't want them to forget through the day, that they take care and talk about that.

As this example illustrates, staff understood that the afterschool program served a function beyond academics. They strove to emphasize educational takeaways while also recognizing that "you got to let a kid be a kid" and that students would not respond identically to enrichment opportunities and academic challenges. Staff offered incentives and designed activities to encourage students to complete learning tasks. Through these various approaches, staff supported students' needs and created a culturally

relevant, caring environment that could reinforce students' self-worth and promote student success (Palmer et al., 2018).

These efforts to center the community's needs and students' interests helped drive the program's success. According to Ms. Brown, it was, in part, "what makes the program work," and was a manifestation of othermothering, as othermothers volunteer and design programs to address community needs (A. E. Edwards, 2000). By taking on some of the responsibilities for community children and by actively working to address problems in ways that would foster positive change (Collins, 2000; James, 1993), Evergreen staff helped to foster a trusting environment grounded in their holistic care for students' wellbeing (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2002).

**Supports for Families**

Evergreen's program also supported families because the program staff believed that caring for the entire family was crucial to the program's success. Two common ways that the program staff served students' families were through providing resources and acting as intermediaries between schools and families.

Program staff provided resources to families to ensure students were taken care of at home. For example, the program staff streamlined support for families by providing them with food beyond the traditional afterschool program snacks. This community support became so well known that Ms. Brown noted, "Even when we walk through the streets right now the people see us and say 'Ms. Brown, I'm hungry, and my child, I can't send them to school because they're hungry.'" In such instances, the program staff provided access to their food pantry and promised ongoing support, thus performing the othermothering role of serving local needs (A. E. Edwards, 2000).

Program staff also acted as intermediaries between the child's school and home, becoming so involved in parent–teacher communications that "teachers call [the program staff] for like 30% of the kids in here. The teachers call my phone." One staff member reflected that "[teachers] call me the other parent." By acting as liaisons between home and school, program staff helped ensure that students' needs were not overlooked or forgotten.

As community members, staff understood the experiences of families and consequently provided culturally relevant supports. One staff member observed, "we learned how to believe in each other when nobody else would believe in us…when other people come to that door, we already know their pain." Staff acknowledged that this commitment to family sometimes presented challenges. For example, one staff member received phone calls

from parents at nighttime, including when they were sick. She concluded: “I need to take care of myself at one point.” This blending of personal time and professional responsibilities burdened the staff, which may have been amplified because of the program’s familial culture. Nevertheless, staff described supporting families as imperative to the program’s success and hoped to expand resources available to families.

The supports Evergreen provided to families are akin to how academic othermothers care for the whole child, not just their educational needs (Beauboeuf-Lafontant,2002). By recognizing the need for and providing holistic support, these staff members expanded the scope of the program in ways that were attuned to the safety and care of students.

**Program as Family**

The program staff often used language of love and family to describe their work, which they felt distinguished their program. As Ms. Brown explained: “You think it’s just a homework club, but we are everything from a mentor to a friend, to a mother, to a sister, to an aunt.” Program staff suggested that students were able to discern genuine feelings of care and love and that this was crucial to helping students flourish. One staff member commented that “it's about getting to know the child better, also helping them develop into a better person.” This familial attitude extended to volunteers who “know they’re part of the family.”

Staff described how this commitment to program as family was central to the ethos of the program and was collectively embraced by program members in everyday practices. For example, they prioritized learning about each child and his or her name—treating the children as family to validate students’ self-worth and potential. For example, one student’s academic performance improved after he joined the program and staff began to identify and celebrate his interests: “we just got him into photography and he went down and took some beautiful football pictures...We found out something that this kid is actually good and likes doing.” Staff then displayed the student’s photography in the office. By celebrating the student’s talent, staff rejected negative social stereotypes and reinforced his self-concept, creating better opportunities for him to focus on his academic development (Collins, 2000). This example highlighted how the staff affirmed their kinship with students, suggesting that a program-as-family approach may have a lasting influence on a child’s development and achievements.

The desire to support students as family and fictive kin is a function of othermothering and is reflected in the staff’s use of family language such as aunt, sister, and mother (Collins, 2000). Additionally, focusing on students’

dreams is related to a holistic approach to programming like that taken by academic othermothers (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2002). This deep commitment to treating program members as family may be taxing for staff members (Bernard et al., 2012; Mawhinney, 2012), but may also be a rewarding approach that helps to sustain the program and promotes positive outcomes for participants. Culturally relevant programming that situates the program as an extension of family may enable program leaders to address social inequities, build students' identities, and foster student success (Lane & Id-Deen, 2020).

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The effectiveness of this afterschool program illustrates the benefit of grounding such initiatives in the knowledge and experiences of cultural insiders (Ladson-Billings, 1995). Embedded in the community and familiar with its norms and concerns, the Black women staff members were uniquely situated to offer culturally relevant afterschool programming to local children. The cultural insider status of program staff was especially beneficial to Black children, as their needs and interests are unlikely to be addressed by cultural outsiders (Waters, 2016). Program staff were uniquely situated to enact freedom lessons (Waters, 2016) because of their familiarity with outsider's deficit perspectives of the community's children. These lessons supported the youth's positive self-concepts and affirmed them as being fully capable. In addition, program staff's knowledge of community needs allowed them to understand that to best serve the children in their program, they must also extend support to the children's families. This is consistent with Beauboeuf-Lafontant's (2002) description of Black women's ability to provide Black children with holistic education, extending beyond academic preparation. Program staff regarded the children under their care as family, often using words denoting a sense of love and care—embodying the concept of othermothering (Collins, 2000).

This study makes a noteworthy contribution by suggesting that othermothering may make afterschool programs implemented by cultural insiders more effective for Black youth. Historically, othermothering functioned to educate Black children in ways that would uplift the Black community and resist white domination (Foster, 1993; Perkins, 1989). Othermothering functioned similarly in Evergreen's afterschool program, as it aided the children's development and cultural identity affirmation while forging solidarity between the children's families and program staff. This sense of shared responsibility for the education and cultural identity of Black children has previously been found in other contexts including education

(Bernard et al., 2012; Dixson, 2003; Njoku et al., 2017). Prior research has found similar conceptualizations of family in educational youth programs (e.g., Lane & Id-Deen, 2020) but has not explicitly connected this to othermothering. This study therefore contributes to the research on afterschool programing by highlighting how othermothering benefits Black children in an afterschool educational context.

As suggested by our theory of change, this study's primary implication indicates that when a community's culture and programmatic initiatives are aligned and grounded in the expertise of cultural insiders, the benefits can extend beyond the program participants to the whole community. Such programming may empower youth in culturally relevant ways that the dominant society cannot destroy (Haggler, 2021). Furthermore, tapping into community knowledge, relationships, and resources, may enhance programs like Evergreen's at little to no additional cost. Nevertheless, it is important for boundary spanners and external partners to ensure that undue burden—financial or otherwise—is not placed upon the community-based program leaders.

Additionally, our findings offer insight into how a deep understanding of a community's culture can inform support and change, but also offer a reminder that culturally grounded approaches must authentically align with a community's unique identity. The afterschool program at Evergreen suggests that principles of othermothering may shape or reflect how leaders and staff work within predominantly Black communities. However, implementing principles of othermothering without a meaningful grounding in local culture may engage in anti-Black and colonial logics of extraction (Dancy et al., 2018; Tuck & Yang, 2012). Leadership by cultural insiders offers one way to ensure programmatic choices are truly rooted in a community's needs and experiences.

Because each community's culture is distinct, this study's findings are not likely replicable in other community-led programs, as the principles of othermothering were grounded in Evergreen's ethos. As such, another implication is that the knowledge and expertise of community members should be prioritized when developing and implementing afterschool programming, as this expertise is best suited to bring about positive change within the community. Afterschool programs managed by outsiders may consider hiring cultural insiders into positions of power to customize curricula. Programs may also work to articulate their own theories of change to prioritize culturally relevant approaches in service of the community (Connolly & Seymour, 2015).

The current study does have several limitations. Because the study focuses on a single case, the extent to which findings can be generalized to other afterschool programs in other contexts is limited; future research should examine benefits of other community values in other afterschool contexts as these findings about othermothering are likely not replicable in non-Black minoritized communities. Additionally, the data collected in this study only represent the experience of othermothering as it is carried out, not as it is received. Future research on the practice of othermothering in the context of afterschool programs should explore the perspectives of children and families involved with the programs to understand how they experience this practice.

## CONCLUSION

As illustrated through our theory of change, this program, as a manifestation of othermothering, helped to foster a culturally relevant program that supported students holistically. The creation and growth of the program helped uplift the entire community through greater community pride and student self-worth. The women afterschool leaders supported a greater expectation of achievement when they provided their students and families with the resources and care that the dominant society did not, further solidifying their culturally relevant pedagogy (Ladson-Billings, 1995) by setting powerful examples and challenging controlling images of Black women (Collins, 2000). The program's foundation in othermothering supported the entire family, not just students, by building trusting relationships that facilitated increased parental involvement and a broader support network for blood relatives. The creation of this support network also helped to cultivate senses of autonomy and agency within the community, which are key factors in the socio-economic mobility for marginalized peoples (Parker-Morrison, 2018). We advance community-led youth programs like Evergreen's as tools for liberation, as outsiders cannot fully envision the true needs, desires, and capabilities of community members. By relinquishing control to community members, culturally relevant pedagogies grounded in frames like othermothering will likely flourish as they did in Evergreen.

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# Colony within the State and the State as a de facto Colony: The Colonial Question in Gabriel Garcia Marquez's One *Hundred Years of Solitude*

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## ABSTRACT

*One Hundred Years of Solitude, within the perimeter of magically real fiction, raises certain questions which are more historiographical than fictional, suggesting a strong fluidity in the terms like colony, state etc., more so, in the traditionally compartmentalized spaces: colonial, postcolonial and neocolonial with the result of dangerous floor-crossings of history. This paper will examine how the first settler Jose Arcadio Buendia, at the end of a typical diaspora, goes for founding Macondo, a prototype colony, and continues ruling it until the so far non-existent state intervenes to extend its territorial grip and unilateral power over Macondo through its civil and military outposts in the modus operandi a colonial center usually employs against its extended territory. The paper will further examine how the same state, presumably postcolonial, eventually turns into a de facto colony of a neocolonial center, thus thoroughly dismantling the fine myth of decolonization with the colonial question still unanswered and unburdened of.*

**Keywords:** Colony, de facto colony, Soledad, postcolonial, neocolonial

**T**hough the parchments of Melquiades flamboyantly zero in on the diaspora, growth and demise of the six generations of the Buendias and their accompanying 'soledad', they in fact outstrip the coded saga to chronicle spaces beyond the mythographic Macondo, people beyond the Buendia variety and times beyond the horoscoped century. Under the rubric of an elastic magic(al) realism, *One Hundred Years of Solitude* quite comfortably reverts to real and nonfictional issues related to Latin American colonial, postcolonial, neo-colonial history and historiographical exercises. In this novel Garcia Marquez moves beyond the watertight compartments of fiction and history in locating the fluidity of the notions like colony, state, sovereignty, dependency etc. to show how colonialism and its pastness (post) and futurity (new) can stage dangerous floor-crossings. Melquiades's parchments that coded the passage of Macondo from pre-colonial to postcolonial through the pseudo colonial/ colonial and sovereign stages only offer a fictional praxis to engage the nebulous colonial question lost in what Jean Paul Sartre (2001) called "the infernal cycle" (p. 44). The enigmatic saga of the Burndias, once deciphered, retrospectively suggests a perpetuity of the ancient colonial reality, a concept that corroborates Sartre's theorization in *Colonialism and Neocolonialism*: "The system exists, it functions; the infernal cycle of colonialism is a reality. But this reality is embodied in a million colonists, children and grandchildren of colonists, who have been shaped by colonialism and who think, speak and act according to the very principles of the colonial system"(p.44). Rather than treating the 'isms' as historians do, Garcia Marquez intersects and proliferates them in the space of this novel leaving around enough clues for the counter narrative he intends to invoke.

Postulated against the reminiscences of the Biblical Diaspora (Higgins, 2002, p. 38) or those of Columbus (Zabala, 2002, p.110) or of the historically silhouetted Spaniards (GM 1996, p.12), Jose Arcadio Buendia's exodus from the old center Riohacha to the new center Macondo has all the airs and graces of an early explorer's search for a would-be colony. The first Buendia couple – Jose Arcadio Buendia and Ursula Iguaran and their entourage of young adventurous friends "with their wives and children, animals and all kinds of domestic implements" (p. 10) launch into a twenty-month-long perilous expedition "toward the land that no one had promised them" (p. 23). At the end of "almost two years of crossing" the most difficult mountains and "several months of lost wandering through the swamps" an exasperated Jose Arcadio Buendia camps "on the banks of a stony river" with waters like "a torrent of frozen glass" (p. 24). That night, he dreams of "a noisy city with houses having mirror walls"—a city with a supernatural name: Macondo. He convinces, then orders his followers "to cut down the trees to make a clearing beside the river, at the coolest spot on the bank, and there he founded the village" (pp. 24-25).

Unlike his distant conquistadors, he conquers none and usurps none, only occupies an uninhabited space, a pseudo-utopia, and starts building and fathering it in the manner of a "youthful patriarch" (p. 9) which, in colonial discourse, may well approximate the role of a benevolent colonizer. He gives "instructions for planting and advice for the raising of children and animals" (p. 9) and joins hands in the physical work of community development in a "spirit of social initiative" (p. 10). In order to give his dream a down- to- earth reality he re-moulds the topography of Macondo and supplants it with a version borrowed from the inherited colonial experience. Imbued with an inspiration of equality, he goes to "set up the placement of the houses in such a way that from all of them one could reach the river and draw water with the same effort" (p. 9). But subconsciously, like a typical colonizer with ingrained class awareness, he builds his house first which "from the very first" has been "the best in the village", and more importantly, the others have been built "in its image and likeness" (p. 9).

The sense of being one with the others but not exactly their equal is essentially a colonial syndrome that divides the non-Buendias from the Buendias and makes Macondo a transplanted colony where the Buendias alone are privileged to rule and the non-Buendias to grow as peripheral citizens. The exodus from a geographically real Riohacha to its fictional prototype Macondo entails a typical colonial pattern of exploration, discovery, settlement, segregation, empowerment of a particular class and 'othering' of the rest (in absence of the natives). Thus much against his anti-center mindset Jose Arcadio Buendia goes to found a place of dream in subconscious imitation of a colony retrieved from the memories of a not-too-distant Spanish rule. His militant generations reinforce this notion intermittently at least until the days of the Banana Massacre.

The transition of Macondo from "a solitary colony" (Zavala, 2002, p. 118) to a "center colonized by pilgrims" (Zavala, 2002, p. 116), that is, to a state of de facto sovereignty is characterized by a fluidity of identity and notions. The transition takes place in such a swift spontaneity that the moment Macondo is born as a colony, the same moment it begins to exercise a full-scale autonomy a colony can hardly think of possessing and exercising. Such autonomy, which can be safely passed for sovereignty, has been safeguarded by Macondo's out-of-the-planet location and also by its being outside of the grip of a so far non-existent government. Moreover, it has been galvanized by the conquistador-like temperament of the unyielding Macondians when their facade of sovereignty is threatened. In the postulated century of solitude, Macondo happens to enjoy uninterrupted sovereignty for at least a span of twenty-five years until Aureliano Buendia, born in Macondo, grows big enough to marry the magistrate's daughter, Remedios. Quite beyond "the proofs of the notaries" (p. 28), as Carlos Fuentes (2002) remarked, the formulation made above shows a diminutive Spanish

America's fictional passage from the status of "colony" to "sovereignty", whatever temporary the transition might eventually prove.

The sovereignty of Jose Arcadio Buendia's young colony suffers a terrible jolt with the arrival of the magistrate Don Apolinar Moscote. He, by claiming to be "an authority sent by the government" (p. 33) , officially puts the state's claim of territorial rights over Macondo and the consequent right to rule over her people. The extension of the centre's rule over a forgotten periphery dispels the notion of a free, sovereign Macondo –a notion that has been allowed to grow in the long uninterrupted years since its foundation, unclaimed by the state and the government. The notion has been reinforced by Macondo's being "a place on the map", and "more a direction than a location" with its "prehistoric atmosphere" reminiscent of the Genesis (Senna, 1984, p. 26). So when the magistrate arrives at Macondo and dispatches his first order to Jose Arcadio Buendia to paint his house (and all houses for that matter) in blue (the color of the conservative party) " in celebration of the anniversary of national independence" (p. 57), Jose Arcadio Buendia erupts like a volcano. He meets him, challenges the newcomer's right, informing him how they have founded Macondo, distributed the land and introduced improvements "without having bothered the government and without anyone having bothered them" (p. 58), and finally tells him pointblank that he either stays there "like any ordinary citizen" (p. 58) or quits with his junk.

Jose Arcadio Buendia thus strongly confirms the birth and functionality of a pro-people colony, his role being that of a principal colonizer and his companions as co-colonizers. The narrative of colonization then unfolds a sudden twist with the appearance of Don Apolinar—the representative of a new claimant of the colony—the state itself. It is suggestive of the typical conflict between the early settlers and new usurper on the question of ownership for reasons not unearthed so long. While Jose Arcadio Buendia grabs the magistrate by the lapels and lifts him up in reply to the latter's threat: "I am armed" (p.58), the other founders appear more intimidating. They dub the magistrate and his ragged soldiers as "invaders", resolve to expel them and put themselves once again along with their elder sons at the disposal of the patriarch for a fight back. It might be a piece of irony that beneath this spectacular show of anger and jingoism, Jose Arcadio Buendia tacitly acknowledges the existence of a distant government (by not "having bothered" it). Eventually, he allows its titular head Don Apolinar to operate on from Macondo thereby subverting the very notion of sovereignty he has so long attached to his founded colony.

Jose Arcadio Buendia's encounter with the magistrate and the temporary truce reached by both can be interpreted as an implicit recognition of the new reality: Macondo cannot maintain its status quo as a sovereign or autonomous town in the fashion of the past nor can the magistrate impose outright the distant

government's rule on the Macondians without initially conceding to some of their apolitical demands. The novel gradually unveils how Don Apolinar shrewdly steers towards a smooth transition of power from the founders to the government, thus transfiguring him from an ornamental "figurehead" (p. 63) to a deceitful administrator. The text adequately addresses how the magistrate brings politics and the national Liberal-Conservative divide in Macondo. He switches ballots and works as a mastermind in rigging elections in favor of the conservative government (p. 99). He invents a perverse logic to scandalize the Liberals calling them: "Freemasons, bad people, wanting to hang priests, to institute civil marriage and divorce, to recognize the rights of illegitimate children as equal to those of legitimate ones,..."(p.98). To Aureliano, this political polemic sounds new and puzzling, a hint on the part of Garcia Marquez, to initiate Macondo's political baptism.

Employing an equally irrational logic the magistrate eulogizes the Conservatives as ones "who had received their power directly from God, proposed the establishment of public order and family morality. They were the defenders of the faith of Christ, of the principle of authority, and were not prepared to permit the country to be broken down into autonomous entities" (p. 98). He brings forth the Manichean divide, an old colonial syndrome and a 19th century practice (accentuated by the civil wars), to an apolitical Macondo. The shift can well be called a preamble to a neo-political dynamic to be initiated and then proliferated in Macondo. Basak (2014) observes in this context , "The magistrate, in his paradigmatic loyalty to the conservatives in power, and in his equally paradigmatic hatred for the Liberals, re-employs the colonial doctrine of division in Macondo" (p.17). Through Don Apolinar's political rhetoric Garcia Marquez reminds us that politics is an ideological construct made by politicians and their administrative machinery, which requires to be validated by people either in obeisance or invalidated by defiance. In Macondo's case, it turns out to be a symbiosis of obeisance and defiance—obeisance, on the part of Jose Arcadio Buendia and his fellow Macondians, in agreeing to accommodate the state machinery to operate from its soil, that is, to accept both the reality of a government and the magistrate Don Apolinar as its representative, and – defiance by disagreeing to surrender all the prerogatives of the early colonizers that they enjoyed so far. The latter is a last-ditch effort to cling to a façade of past glory. The complexity of the shifting positions from (ex/neo) colonizer to (ex/neo) colonized and vice versa undergoes a Fanonian twist; Macondo witnesses a change in mask, not essentially in skin.

Against the diminishing status of Macondo as a Buendian sovereign colony, the incognito state now engages itself to make its presence felt. But its role beyond mere representation is yet to be seen. Garcia Marquez meticulously registers the state's infiltration into Macondo as a disguised colonial force. The subsequent

polarization of bipartisan politics, elections, and election rigging, manipulated victory of the conservatives, popular discontent and preparation for armed resistances by forces antagonistic to the government provide ample clues regarding the colonialist nature of the state. What is more shocking is the later role of the state when it assumes the new role of a colonialist aide to the neo-colonialist United Fruit Company of America. The company's arrival at Macondo and its saga of deceit and exploitation in connivance with the government at center offer a swift change of status of Macondo, state, and UFC. Macondo has already lost its primordial status of a sovereign colony. The state has also consolidated its power over Macondo in a stereotype colonizer-colonized and center-periphery fashion. The United Fruit Company, as the novel poignantly suggests, is historically placed in a new role America wants it to play in Colombia or Latin American countries as a whole – role of an envoy of American neocolonial aspirations. Their triangular presence makes Macondo a colonial / postcolonial test case. Macondo is poised to combat the old colonial and recently surfaced neocolonial trajectories like occupation, representation, repression, exploitation, "thingification" (Cesaire, 2001, p. 42), resistance and massacre. The arrival of the United Fruit Company and its apparatus of exploitation of land, resources and labor, and collaboration of the state machinery with UFO and its distant mentors -- all bring about a process of recolonization, reducing the Macondians to what Aime Cesaire calls a 'thing' , a mere commodity, the whole process being what he termed as 'thingification'. That prepares the stage for the subsequent episodes of resistance, protest and massacre of the Macedonians.

Now that once-upon-a-time center of the novel Macondo is turned into a periphery of the state, and the center, on its own turn, turns into a periphery of a distant neocolonial center (USA), there develops a subversive myth of sovereignty and the rise of a de facto colony under the official nomenclature of a postcolonial state. That is to say, prior to the state's swooping claim over it, Macondo had all the airs of an innocent-looking primordial human colony in a utopia-like uninhabited, nameless swampy land. The founders of Macondo had no perceptible colonial agenda like usurpation, subjugation, deracination, exploitation, religious-cultural-linguistic domination etc. except reliving certain outmoded Spanish colonial vestiges. In the stretch of one hundred years Macondo, more so the Buendians, swayed between feudalism and uncluttered democracy, between apolitical elegance and anti-neo-imperialistic entanglements.

It is interesting to observe the transformation of Macondo. The place which was a mere human colony in its founding days without a colony's textbook insignia, took a classic connotation with the arrival of Magistrate Don Apolinar (p. 57). With him, appeared the state, the ruling apparatus, notion of parties, and divides. Then there arrived the instruments of neocolonial mercantilism -- the

gringos and the Banana Company. It was followed by episodes of ruthless exploitation, labor discontent, strike (p. 302), martial law (p. 103), deployment of the army to contain discontent and to act in favor of the American company against the re-colonized (UFC itself being a colonizers' miniature citadel) Macondian plantation workers. It ended in the historical-fictional Banana Massacre (pp. 308-11). The unholy alliance between the state and over-privileged multinational UFC as well as the subsequent chain of events, strongly suggests two prominent developments: firstly, it strips Macondo of its all-too-modest epithet "colony" transforming it into neo-colony of the state and foreign mercantile enterprises; secondly, more significantly, the state itself gets transformed into a banana republic, a de facto postcolonial colony. The political underpinning of the novel obliquely refers to the conservative government of Miguel Abadia Mendez's collaboration with the US government and UFC against its own people that, beyond the magically real realm of Macondo, helped it earn the notoriety of a banana republic.

In his 'Nobel Lecture 1982' Gabriel Garcia Marquez (1990) stressed on the Latin Americans' need to engage in historiographical exercises, to un-write and rewrite the Western construct of Latin American history:

> […] it is not yet too late to engage in the creation of the opposite utopia. A new and sweeping utopia of life, where no one will be able to decide for others how they die, where love will prove true and happiness be possible, and where the races condemned to one hundred years of solitude will have, at last and forever, a second opportunity on earth. (pp. 90-91)

This is an act of recasting and re-viewing history through a kind of fiction which is simultaneously utopian and dystopian, therefore, subversive in intent. By subverting the assumed utopian Macondian model with the contemporary dystopian one, Garcia Marquez creates an "ironic apogee" (Palencia-Roth, 1990, p. 41) and points out the extent of a dysfunctional state. On a broader base, the novel critiques the de facto syndrome not only of Macondo or of Colombia alone but also that of all Latin American countries. Robin Fiddian (1995) in his 'Introduction' to Garcia Marquez endorses this conceptualization:

> Notwithstanding the numerical exactitude of the novel's title, the broad historical coordinates of the story of Macondo extend over some four and a half centuries, and synthesize the experience of Latin American nations, generally, through almost 300 years of colonial rule, down to the formal proclamation of independence in the second and third decades of the nineteenth century, and the nations' subsequent relapse into neo-colonial dependence in the first half of the twentieth. (p. 14)

We can, therefore, deduce, the Banana Massacre is not a fiction with any magic about it but a bleak chapter of Colombia's postcolonial, more precisely

neocolonial history—a kind of history that the conservative government tried to mute, erase, and then to replace with an innocent-looking diminutive version.

Bell-Villada (2002) observes, “The historical record of the United fruit Company’s operation in Colombia furnishes a textbook case of overseas imperialism and colonialism” (133). Migual Urrutia (1967) goes deeper into the truth: “United’s dominions in the northern coastal portions of Colombia expanded rapidly to become a state-within-a-state and the de facto power in that region” (p. 99). Textually, the first American to arrive at Macondo was Herbert (p. 231), then Jack Brown and the solemn lawyers in black (231-32). Within years the Banana plantation started functioning with the local labor force. The old colonial system of appropriation, exploitation, draining out of resources and overall “thingification” of the populace ( Cesaire, 2001, p. 42) led to a massive labor discontent, useless dialogues and the great strike of 32,000 workers on 5 and 6 December1928. The United Fruit Company in league with the US government managed the Colombian civilian and military authority to deploy an army to “re-establish public order.” (p. 307)

Martial law was promulgated; the workers stopped working: “the soldiers put aside their rifles and cut and loaded the bananas and started the trains running” (p. 308). The army took over the town; fake dialogues failed, and the stage for massacre was thus made ready. The novel reveals the underlying intent of the call for gathering, “The authorities called upon the workers to gather in Macondo " (p. 309). Machine guns were stationed on the rooftops for a planned mass slaughter. “[T]here thousand people, workers, women and children gathered” (p. 309). Garcia Marquez articulates the scene with the ease of a historiographer: Decree No. 4 was read out; the crowd was given five minutes to disperse with the warning that the civil and military leader of the province General Carlos Cortes Vargas “authorized the army to shoot to kill” (p. 310). We have from Garcia Marquez (1996) a Guernica painting on the Banana Massacre: “They were penned in, swirling about in a gigantic whirlwind that little by little was being reduced to its epicenter as the edges were systematically being cut off all around like an onion peeled by the insatiable and methodical shears of the machine guns” (p. 311). Fourteen machine guns roared in a chorus. What followed was a sinister scene of death and horror, “[…] a cry of death tore upon the enchantment: ‘Aaaagh, Mother.’ A seismic voice, a volcanic breath, the roar of a cataclysm broke out in the center of the crowd with a great potential of expansion” (p. 311).

Garcia Marquez leaves no doubt that nothing could be more gruesome and ironical than this planned massacre of an unimaginable magnitude. This remains true despite the concern that mythification, by its own strategy, may falsify history, which again by dint of an altogether different strategy may revise and reconstruct a misconstructed history. The massacre is thus posited as a colonial syndrome

which symptomatically manifests itself at a certain juncture of colonization and /or neocolonialism.

The Banana Massacre inadvertently puts history and fiction in a confrontational mode with the charge of adulteration of facts by the government, UFC and US. There are multiple versions of casualties, each validated or invalidated by the other, putting to question the veracity of recorded facts. According to Jose Arcadio Segundo, the death toll might be three thousand, that is, "all of the people who were at the station" (p. 313). The official version claimed: "there were no dead" (p. 315). The commander of the troops, General Cortes Vargas "took the responsibility for 47 casualties" (Posada-Carbo, 1998, pp. 395-414). US Embassy's telegrams to the Secretary of State on December 7, 1928, reported fifty dead and wounded (note:2). On the other hand, Colombia's conservative and Liberal newspapers reported contradictory figures of casualties. So, if the fictional version of history as presented in *One Hundred Years of Solitude* is anything nearer hyperbole, the government's version of the massacre and its casualties is a bleak dismissal of truth. It seems to act on behalf of UFC and indirectly, the US against its own people. The question, therefore, unavoidably presents itself: what is the true nature of Colombia's sovereignty under the factual government of Miguel Abadia Mendez? Is it a postcolonial and/or neocolonial country? The colonial question still dangles without an answer. As we see in *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, the state of affairs hardly dispels the notion of a de facto colony under the rubric of an independent country which, by extension, indicates a trajectory of US neo-imperial proliferation in the region. Macondo stands for a colony within a larger colony with the old level 'colony' historically gone.

Through a process of demystification and aestheticization of Latin American history, specifically Colombia, Garcia Marquez posits the colonial modalities in a postcolonial conundrum threatened by dictatorship, hegemony, and neo-imperialism. *One Hundred Years of Solitude* categorically asserts the question of colonialism and the de facto colonial status of a state under a larger umbrella of global politics, with no less contribution from the homemade paracolonialists.

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# Models of Success: How Historically Black Colleges and Universities Survive the Economic Recession

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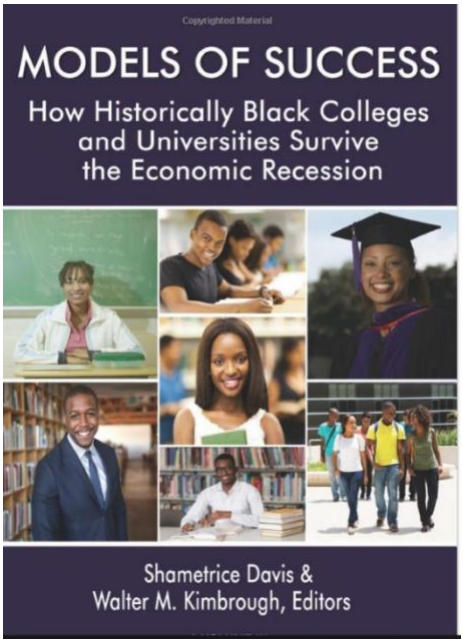


In the book, "Models of Success- How Historically Black Colleges and Universities Survive the Economic Recession," edited by Shametrice Davis and Walter M. Kimbrough, the authors discussed how HBCUs survived in difficult times.

This book is a collection of essays written by various scholars and practitioners who share their thoughts on the strategies, innovations, and best practices that HBCUs adopt to ensure their survival and success. Shametrice Davis, an expert in U.S. education and diversity from California State University, Long Beach, and Walter M. Kimbrough, the seventh president of Dillard University, has compiled seven chapters related to management and leadership approaches at HBCUs during the economic recession.

Davis and Kimbrough's book offers insights that are not very common in current literature or theories. Each chapter demonstrates successful strategies adopted by HBCU leadership during economic hardship. The book emphasizes the challenges faced by HBCUs, their responses to these challenges, and the factors that contribute to their success.

Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) in the United States were established with the primary goal of educating Black Americans founded at the time of segregation when most postsecondary institutions were not open to Black Americans. Although the Morrill Land-Grant Act of 1862 enabled colleges and universities to provide education to people from various social strata, only one institution, Alcorn State University in Mississippi, accepted Black students. In 1890, the second Land-Grant Act mandated that states either open their land-grant institutions to Black students or allocate funds to Black institutions. Consequently, 16 exclusively Black institutions were established, and additional HBCUs were founded by the Freedmen's Bureau, Black churches, and the American Missionary Association. Despite financial challenges, HBCUs received federal designation and support under the Higher Education Act in 1965, and today they are funded under Title III, Parts B and D, and Title VII of the Higher Education Act.

In his forward, Charlie Nelms, Chancellor of North Carolina Central University, discussed the impressive list of African American leaders who graduated from HBCUs and emphasized these institutions' significant role in educating students who are either first-generation or come from low-wealth backgrounds. Nelms also highlighted the crucial factors of fiscal solvency and debt in determining the success of higher education institutions and the importance of alumni support in maintaining financial stability.

Higher education has never been as crucial for economic well-being as it is today. Unfortunately, it is low-income students who are least likely to graduate. Therefore, the success of higher education institutions would be defined as effectively serving a greater number of students in diverse ways. In many ways, HBCUs have a distinctive institutional diversity and reputation for providing access and opportunities to students who may not have had such opportunities otherwise. Contributing factors to inclusivity at HBCUs include successful leadership approaches, operational tactics, and environmental variables.

Chapter 1, *The Fundraising Success of Mary McLeod Bethune*, delves into Mary McLeod Bethune's leadership in higher education. The chapter specifically examines her effectiveness as an educator, political

activist, and fundraiser. Through the lens of Bethune-Cookman University, the opening chapter demonstrates how modern HBCU leaders, who often face financial limitations, can benefit from Bethune's journey. By highlighting Bethune's political visibility, engagement, astuteness, and strategic cultivation of relationships, the chapter provides insights into how contemporary HBCU leaders can create a funding pipeline for their institutions.

Chapter 2, *Telling a Story of Student Success at HBCUs,* introduces the definition of student success at HBCUs and explores how the definition is realized. The privileged group believes that their definition, called "master narrative," is the most accurate. Although this definition narrowly defines graduation rate and other yield metrics as indicators of student success, it fails to include the narrative of student success from the viewpoint of HBCUs. In this chapter, the authors introduce Critical Race Theory (CRT) to clearly define success at HBCUs. The authors argue that over-reliance on the master narrative about student success systematically creates barriers for Black students to gain entry or achieve academic success within higher education. The restricted definition of success fails to acknowledge the existence of systemic inequality and the unique experiences of Students of Color. As part of the historically unequal higher education system, HBCUs are expected to conform to predefined notions of success that do not necessarily align with the needs of the communities they cater to.

Chapter 3, titled *Interdisciplinary Collaboration as an Innovative Approach to Developmental Education at Morgan State University*, describes the initiatives taken at Morgan State University (MSU) for developmental education. Financially challenged students are often not as prepared for college and often spend a great deal of money on developmental courses. Students enrolled in developmental courses are less likely to graduate and many identify as women, first-generation, and People of Color. Most efforts focus on enhancing developmental education concentrated in the community college domain, yielding outcomes of varying success. As such, The Southern Education Foundation (SEF), which keeps track of the developmental education program, identified Morgan State University's (MSU) developmental education program is a comprehensive one to enhance student learning outcomes. The collaborative approach adopted by the MSU Developmental Humanities Initiative involves integrating developmental English and reading courses with other reading-intensive freshman courses such as History and English. This cross-disciplinary reinforcement of skills is essential to creating an effective developmental education program. Though descriptions of the outcomes for

students who participate in innovative programs exist, causal assumptions cannot be made, and the findings are difficult to generalize.

Lastly, this chapter highlights five key points for developing successful developmental education programs at HBCUs. The first point stresses the importance of gaining support from senior leaders to coordinate various departments and overcome obstacles. The second point emphasizes the use of existing research on student learning to develop effective innovations. The third point highlights the significance of planning program assessments beforehand, as current research may not fully consider HBCU or Black student experiences. The fourth point recommends using both qualitative and quantitative research methods to better understand program impact. Finally, the fifth point emphasizes the long-term benefits of a curricular redesign for students and institutions, including increased revenue from improved retention rates.

Chapter 4, *Successful Financial Models at HBCUs*, discusses developing a financial model for HBCUs. Distinct approaches are needed to address the financial challenges faced by three categories of American colleges and universities: *Elite-endowed Institutions* have financial reserves to address their current and future needs. These institutions typically focus on widening the admission opportunities for highly capable students who require financial aid. However, compared to their wealthier peers, a greater percentage of students at these institutions do not require financial aid. *Nimble Colleges and Universities* rely on developing programs and research to attract government support. They lower their tuition fees by implementing a work college model and enhanced academic programs to meet the job demand. This strategy diversifies income streams by combining enrollment strategy, endowment funds, and philanthropic support to meet short-term and long-term financial goals. Finally, *At-Risk Colleges and Universities* rely on only a few revenue streams and do not develop a specific academic niche. They are endowment dependent, and a significant portion of their endowment is restricted, meaning withdrawals are limited to the amount of interest accrued only. Authors suggest that institutions adopt a strategy that diversifies their revenue sources. Since there is no one-size-fits-all approach, they should carefully consider strategies for increasing enrollment, engaging in sponsored research, and attracting philanthropic support.

Chapter 5, *We Don't Have to Look Very Far,* examines how a pseudo-HBCU thrived during an economic recession by using organizational identity in strategic planning. This involved preserving its historical significance while establishing a renewed identity to navigate the financially challenging climate. The success of this college was due to the

focus on internally driven institutional identity, which included creating a new mission and attracting high-achieving students and administrators. The chapter's takeaway is that HBCU affiliates should understand their institutional identity from a historical perspective and consider returning to their mission before the Brown v. Board decision. While researchers suggest expanding student populations and merging with nearby institutions, understanding the unique identity and strengths of HBCUs is crucial for success.

Chapter 6, *We Over Me*, discusses the impact of leadership styles, specifically servant and transformative leadership, on the success of HBCUs. The authors use John Adams College as an example of how servant leadership can create a community that prioritizes collective success over individual achievement. By promoting shared governance and empowering students, the college fosters a culture invested in the success of all members. The chapter challenges the taboo of poor leadership in HBCUs and demonstrates how a shift towards servant and transformative leadership can lead to institutional success.

In Chapter 7, *Practical Strategies: Leading HBCU During Challenging Economies*, the author provides novel concepts to effectively manage HBCUs during uncertain times. This chapter presents practical recommendations and guidance to HBCU leaders. The author suggests three main approaches to tackle challenging times: building the brand, strengthening, and growing the base, and learning the new language of donors. The author's main argument is that personal images of presidents can be a useful branding tool for smaller and less-resourced institutions. Specifically, the author emphasizes the power of social media and positive news stories to create a favorable impression that can attract donors. To strengthen funding, the author offers strategies that involve using social media to reach a broader audience for fundraising purposes. History and HBCU platitudes are no longer enough to appeal to donors. Instead, colleges must make compelling arguments and take a data-driven approach to convince donors to fund their institutions. It is important to tell stories about admission, retention, and graduation rates, using data to support the argument for increased funding. In addition, the author suggests that colleges should work to build relationships with potential donors and community members, engaging them in the college's mission and vision. By doing so, colleges can increase their visibility and gain the support necessary to thrive in today's competitive funding environment.

In conclusion, the book provides a detailed analysis of how HBCUs successfully navigated the economic recession. The authors offer a

comprehensive overview of the unique challenges faced by HBCUs and highlight the strategies and models that enabled these institutions to remain sustainable and effective. The book is well-researched and well-organized, with clear and concise writing that is accessible to both academic and general readers. The authors draw on a wealth of data and case studies to provide a comprehensive and nuanced understanding of the various factors that influenced the success of HBCUs during the economic downturn. One of the book's key strengths is its focus on practical solutions and actionable recommendations. The authors provide a range of best practices and strategies that can be implemented by HBCUs and other institutions facing similar challenges. This makes the book an essential resource for higher education leaders, policymakers, and researchers.

While the book provides insights into the journeys of HBCUs during economic difficulties, it cannot be applied to other institutions, thereby reducing its generalizability. Moreover, the book did not provide any survival strategies adopted by Predominantly White Institutions (PWIs) which could also be applicable to HBCUs and fails to explore any potential collaborations between these two types of institutions. Additionally, the book's focus on the successful HBCU leaders did not consider the perspectives of other stakeholders such as faculty, staff, and students. Lastly, the book solely focuses on the economic recession's impact on HBCUs and avoids addressing other challenges and issues affecting student outcomes during this period.

Overall, "Models of Success" is a valuable contribution to the literature on HBCUs and higher education more broadly. The book is informative, engaging, and thought-provoking, and it provides important insights into the strategies and models that can help institutions survive and thrive in challenging economic times.

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