Racial Microaggressions, Racial Battle Fatigue, and Racism-Related Stress in Higher Education

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS
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TABLE OF CONTENTS
Letter from the Editor, Dinah Smithey 8

Exploring the Intersection of Trauma and Self-Authorship in College Students
Tricia Shalka - The Ohio State University 9

Forward Looking Face-to-Face? Experiential Education in the Digital Environment
Dave Eng - St. Thomas Aquinas College 20

How Bullying & Campus Climate Affect Queer Students Of Color
Dan Erosa - New York University 33

Racial Microaggressions, Racial Battle Fatigue, and Racism-Related Stress in Higher Education
Jeremy Franklin - University of Utah 44

Serving the Sentence: Supporting Formerly Incarcerated Students in Higher Education
Annie Le - New York University 56

Strategies to Improve Retention at a Historically Afrikaans University
Arianna Deans and Rachel Sloane - New York University 67

Guidelines for Authors 77
Dear Colleagues, Academics, Students, and Friends:

On behalf of the 2015-2016 Executive Editorial Board, I am very proud to present the twelfth edition of the Journal of Student Affairs at New York University. Our team of authors, editors, and advisors have worked tirelessly over the past year to provide you a comprehensive, thought-provoking glimpse into the world of higher education and student affairs at this moment in time. We hope the following six articles will spark interest, inspire passion, and lead you to further investigate the topics at hand for yourself.

This edition of the Journal of Student Affairs truly represents the diversity, complexity, and richness that characterize our organizational mission. We explore marginalized student experiences, through the lenses of campus bullying, racial microaggressions, and formerly incarcerated students. We examine educational innovations, including experiential learning in the present technological age. We study student development as it relates to trauma during the college years. We analyze student retention beyond our borders by examining a South African university. In absorbing this research, we as readers are collectively exposed to, challenged by, and educated on new findings that will inform our perspectives and characterize our work.

The success of this journal would not have been possible without the unyielding commitment of the Executive Editorial Board: Matt Banks, Valory Price, Kristyne Merritt, and Alana Crosby. Their creativity, prudence, dedication, and enthusiasm is unmatched and I want to express my gratitude for their time and hard work. I would also like to thank our exceptional faculty advisors, Dr. Gregory Wolniak and Dr. Michael Funk, and our department chair, Teboho Moja, who have guided us with unparalleled support (and patience!) through the production process. I would also like to extend my thanks to both the Internal Review Board and External Review Board. Your insight has been pivotal in ensuring the quality of this journal-- we are so grateful for your time. Finally, I would like to express my gratitude to our outstanding authors-- your skill, talent, and passion has given our journal its heart and solidified the impact it will have on our field.

It it with great pleasure that I introduce the twelfth edition of New York University’s Journal of Student Affairs. Read, discuss, share, and enjoy!

Sincerely,

Dinah Smithey
Editor-in-Chief
JoSA Volume XII
Exploring the Intersection of Trauma and Self-Authorship in College Students

Tricia Shalka

The Ohio State University

Abstract

Research indicates many college students have experienced or will experience trauma during college – a critical time for developmental growth. However, there remains a dearth of research connecting college student development to trauma. Research that uniquely investigates trauma in early adulthood and its impact on lifespan development has been underexplored (Maercker, Solomon, & Schützwohl, 1999; Ogle, Rubin, & Siegler, 2013; Wilson, 2006). The purpose of this article is to explore the intersection of trauma and the development of self-authorship in college students as a mechanism towards increased understanding of how trauma impacts college student development. Literature about self-authorship and trauma is synthesized into a conceptual model that can be used in considering the aspects of traumatic experience and recovery that can activate various dimensions of self-authorship development in college students.

Theoretical Frameworks

Two broad frameworks will be utilized to conceptualize an intersection between college student development and traumatic experience and are outlined below. First, self-authorship serves as a framework through which to consider students’ holistic development. Second, trauma is theorized in terms of its psychological dimensions.

Self-Authorship

Self-authorship as an aspect of human development emerged from Robert Kegan’s (1982, 1994) theory of self-evolution. In this theory, Kegan proposed a developmental model in which growth into adulthood results in greater complexity of meaning-making structures (the mental processes by which an individual makes sense of experiences). Baxter Magolda’s (2004, 2009) longitudinal study regarding individuals’ meaning making during and after college has built on Kegan’s (1982, 1994) work and contributed to an elaborated
understanding of the developmental journey toward self-authorship.

Baxter Magolda (1998) defines self-authorship as “the ability to collect, interpret and analyze information and reflect on one’s own beliefs in order to form judgments” (p. 143). Ultimately, an individual moves along a continuum towards self-authorship as experiences of dissonance promote increased complexity in meaning-making capacity (Baxter Magolda, 2009). On one end of this spectrum, the individual relies dominantly on external formulas to make meaning of his or her world, while at the other end of the spectrum the individual has a solidified capacity for internally-driven meaning making.

In the progression from external to internal meaning-making structures, self-authorship draws on three integrated developmental dimensions including the cognitive, interpersonal, and intrapersonal (Baxter Magolda, 1998; Boes, Baxter Magolda, & Buckley, 2010). The cognitive dimension is related to mental processes that allow an individual to analyze and evaluate information he or she receives through experiences. This dimension addresses the question of “how do I know?” and captures an individual’s sense of the processes and mechanisms by which he or she is able to know what to believe (Baxter Magolda, 2004). At the interpersonal level, individuals are influenced in a variety of ways by the opinions of and interactions with those around them (Baxter Magolda, 1998). The question related to this aspect of development concerns “what relationships do I want with others?” and is characterized by an individual’s sense of how he or she builds interpersonal connections (Baxter Magolda, 2004). Finally, the intrapersonal dimension represents individuals’ internal worlds where belief systems are formed (Baxter Magolda, 1998). In the intrapersonal dimension, the fundamental question of “who am I?” drives development, which captures how an individual comes to view him or herself (Baxter Magolda, 2004).

**Understanding Trauma**

Trauma is a complex phenomenon and is understood in varied ways both by the individuals who endure it and the multidisciplinary fields investigating it (Levers, 2012). Thus, while it is difficult if not impossible to arrive at a singular definition of trauma, a frequently emerging theme is of trauma as an overwhelming experience that may induce feelings of vulnerability, betrayal, helplessness, fear, and being alone (e.g. Briere & Scott, 2015; Levers, 2012).

Trauma is often conceptualized as a particular event that is experienced as traumatic (e.g. Briere & Scott, 2015; Carlson & Dalenberg, 2000; Levers, 2012), and will be defined in this way for the purpose of this article. However, trauma can also be conceptualized in different ways. The emerging field of critical trauma studies, for example, has interrogated this notion and has drawn awareness to trauma that is pervasive and/or insidious and less confined to the parameters of a particular event (Stevens, 2011).

Though survivors may share some common experiences, reactions to trauma can vary from person to person (Bonanno & Mancini, 2012; Briere & Scott, 2015; Brown, 2008; Levers, 2012). Some may experience distressing emotions (Calhoun & Tedeschi, 2013), while others encounter disbelief or numbness (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004; van der Kolk, 2014). In some situations, trauma may induce intrusive thoughts in the forms of flashbacks or persistent unwelcome thoughts and memories (Calhoun & Tedeschi, 2013; Carlson & Dalenberg, 2000; van der Kolk, 2014). Other reactions may include a sense
of hyperarousal and persistent states of vigilance and alertness (Calhoun & Tedeschi, 2013; Carlson & Dalenberg, 2000; Herman, 1992/1997; Levers, 2012). Additionally, trauma can have physical manifestations even if the traumatic situation did not inflict physical injuries. From fatigue to aches to illness to over-activation of a variety of bodily systems, psychic trauma can manifest in very physical and tangible ways (Brown, 2008; Calhoun & Tedeschi, 2013; Levine, 2010; van der Kolk, 2014). Simultaneously, survivors may demonstrate resilience paired with their stress reactions (Bonanno & Mancini, 2012) and even experience positive outcomes including growth in terms of self, relationships, and deeper meaning or philosophies of life (Calhoun & Tedeschi, 2013).

**Trauma and Self-Authorship: Intersecting Constructs**

This author could find no literature explicitly connecting traumatic experience and self-authorship; however, some scholars have engaged in inquiry that may capture aspects of this intersection broadly. Research about self-authorship and high-risk students has contributed to nuanced understandings of how an individual may move from external meaning-making formulas to those that are internally derived. For example, Pizzolato (2003) noted that participants in her study demonstrated self-authored ways of making meaning of experiences earlier than anticipated based on other research. Pizzolato attributed this finding to her participants’ early struggles in having to define their own paths.

A critical concept across Pizzolato’s (2003, 2005) work investigating high-risk students is the provocative moment. As Pizzolato (2005) explained it, “This provocative moment represents an experience that resulted from jarring disequilibrium on the student’s part in terms of her or his ways of knowing” (p. 625). Conceptually, the provocative moment could certainly occur at the time of (or as a result of) a traumatic experience. Thus, in considering these concepts in parallel, a question that emerges is whether or not trauma can act in similar ways to a provocative moment in the self-authorship journey.

This question can be explored through a recent longitudinal qualitative study investigating the developmentally effective experiences of college students who demonstrated substantial shifts in self-authorship development during their first three years of college (Barber, King, & Baxter Magolda, 2013). One of the six themes explaining these rapid shifts in self-authorship development was that of students experiencing tragedy or significant personal challenge. While not explicitly referred to as trauma in that study, this theme is closely connected to traumatic experience. Many of the examples in the student narratives in this theme (e.g. death, illness, injury) could be experienced as traumatic.

**Trauma and Self-Authorship: Cognitive, Interpersonal, and Intrapersonal Tasks**

An examination of the literature about trauma and about self-authorship offers rich conceptual potential for intersection. For survivors of trauma, the process of recovery frequently draws on tasks and renegotiation in the interpersonal, intrapersonal, and cognitive domains that are illuminated in self-authorship. These intersections will be further explored below.

**Trauma and the Cognitive: Addressing Shattered Assumptions**

The cognitive dimension of self-authorship development is primarily concerned with how an individual evaluates and makes sense of information. For
survivors of trauma, questions of “how do I know?” are acutely activated in recovery as the aftermath of trauma is characterized by much cognitive activity. Following a traumatic experience, many survivors experience disturbing memories of the event, and for some this will persist and intensify, often re-experienced as intrusive thoughts, flashbacks, or nightmares (Brewin, 2014; McNally, 2005; van der Kolk, 2014). Additionally, some survivors may suffer from forgetfulness and a sense of memory deficit (Brewin, 2014; McNally, 2005). In other cases, survivors may grapple with elements of cognitive avoidance whereby they either actively try to forget what happened or in certain situations experience gaps or distortions in memory of traumatic events (Brewin, 2014; Carlson & Dalenberg, 2000).

A key component of traumatic recovery, then, is reintegration at a cognitive level. Rather than being organized in the brain as coherent and linear narratives, traumatic experiences are often initially stored in cognition as fragmented elements of thoughts, emotions, and sensations that ultimately need to be reintegrated into mental schemes (van der Kolk, 2014). The process of returning to the memory of the traumatic experience(s), by remembering what happened and recounting it to self or others, helps to facilitate a process of building a cohesive narrative.

Janoff-Bulman (1992) proposed the idea of trauma as an experience of shattered assumptions to cognitive schemas. Previous assumptions of a safe world, the ability to depend on others, and beliefs that one can cope in the world can be challenged or shattered by experiences of trauma. As shattered assumptions occur, the survivor must work to reintegrate and reconstruct his or her assumptive worlds (Janoff-Bulman, 2004). Processes of meaning making take on heightened importance in this work.

Ultimately, survivors move through general processes of reorganizing mental structures associated with traumatic experiences that inform future ways of understanding and knowing the world (van der Kolk, 2014).

**Trauma and the Intrapersonal: Renegotiating Self**

Experiences of trauma activate several identity-oriented questions for survivors (Brison, 2002; Brown, 2008; van der Kolk, 2014) that may induce similar explorations to those within the self-authorship dimension of intrapersonal experience. Although a survivor may enter a traumatic experience with a strong sense of self, identity can be challenged or altered as a result of trauma (Brison, 2002; van der Kolk, 2014). What trauma often does is jar an individual’s sense of stability and consistency of self over time (Brown, 2008), catalyzing issues of self-exploration and self-learning as survivors work through recovery and a process of meaning making and integration of their experiences (Janoff-Bulman, 2004).

In part, connections between trauma and identity may be explained through the concept of the centrality of the event (Berntsen & Rubin, 2007). The narrative individuals construct about their lives and what memories and events are salient is closely tied to self-concept. These salient markers play critical roles in how individuals interpret their lives moving forward. In the case of trauma, when the traumatic experience is vivid in memories and central to the life story, it takes on heightened importance in identity and self-definition for the survivor.

Additionally, emerging research in neuroscience is demonstrating that trauma can affect areas of the brain that account for self-awareness. Specifically, there is evidence to suggest that in response to dealing with the overwhelming nature of
trauma, brain areas connected with the associated traumatic feelings of dread and fear may deactivate (van der Kolk, 2014). However, the result is these same brain areas are responsible for emotions and sensations that contribute in significant ways to how an individual comes to understand him or herself and form a sense of self-awareness.

**Trauma and the Interpersonal: Renegotiating Relationships**

The interpersonal dimension of self-authorship prompts questions of “what relationships do I want with others?” (Baxter Magolda, 2004). In traumatic recovery, there is ample opportunity for survivors to actively engage with this question. Both clinical and empirical evidence support the critical role played by interpersonal relationships for survivors in the aftermath of traumatic experience (Calhoun & Tedeschi, 2013; Carlson & Dalenberg, 2000; Maercker & Horn, 2013; van der Kolk, 2014).

Regardless, survivors of trauma often grapple with a paradoxical nature to their interpersonal relationships. As Erikson (1995) characterized it, “trauma has both centripetal and centrifugal tendencies. It draws one away from the center of group space while at the same time drawing one back” (p. 186). Trauma can threaten the nature of existing and new relationships for a variety of reasons from survivors being ostracized or blamed (Maercker & Horn, 2013), to survivors experiencing difficulties with intimacy, trust, and self-awareness (Nietlisbach & Maercker, 2009). Meanwhile, trauma can also powerfully draw survivors nearer to others for support (Maercker & Horn, 2013; van der Kolk, 2014).

An immediate challenge placed on interpersonal connections in the aftermath of trauma is the difficulty of trauma. Stories of trauma often chronicle such upsetting experiences that even those closest to survivors may have difficulty hearing them (van der Kolk, 2014). However, while traumatic experiences can be among the most difficult for others to hear (or even for survivors to share), survivors ultimately need empathetic listeners as a mechanism of recovery (Brison, 2002; Carlson & Dalenberg, 2000; van der Kolk, 2014). The act of forming a cohesive narrative that can be shared with supportive others proves a critical aspect of healing and reintegration (Brison, 2002; McNally, 2005; van der Kolk, 2014).

**Presenting a Conceptual Model**

Conceptual frameworks and/or models are particularly useful when the interpretation and understanding of a specific phenomenon requires synthesis of multiple theoretical and empirical sources (Imenda, 2014). Considering the literature presented above about the nature of trauma and of self-authorship, there is potential for these two constructs to interact, particularly within the context of college student experiences. To more deeply explore this relationship, a conceptual model is presented below that represents preliminary work in explaining how experiences of trauma may intersect with the development of self-authorship for college students (see Figure 1).

**Individual Experiences of Trauma, Traumatic Recovery and Self-Authorship**

Individual experiences of trauma bring about disruption to a person’s world that the individual will make meaning of during traumatic recovery. As Brown (2008) articulated, “Trauma is the ultimate challenge to meaning making” (p. 228). The process of traumatic recovery draws on a number of dimensions similar to those needed in developing or strengthening the complex context of meaning making that
undergirds self-authorship. During recovery, college student survivors of trauma will wrestle with a variety of tasks and challenges at the level of the individual that incorporate the cognitive, interpersonal, and intrapersonal dimensions of experience. The tasks of recovery at this individual level are captured well in the words of Judith Herman (1992/1997):

Having come to terms with the traumatic past, the survivor faces the task of creating a future. She has mourned the old self….now she must develop a new self. Her relationships have been tested and forever changed…now she must develop new relationships. The old beliefs that gave meaning to her life have been challenged; now she must find anew a sustaining faith. (p. 196)

In the conceptual model, these cognitive, interpersonal, and intrapersonal tasks are represented as part of an individual’s traumatic experience along an inner orb around recovery. Though these dimensions have both internal and external components, it is ultimately the work of the survivor to make sense of these at a personal level.

Meanwhile, the survivor is not only navigating the individual level tasks but is also having to grapple with larger societal and group forces that inform his or her traumatic recovery. Levers (2012) noted that trauma impacts a person at individual levels as well as those operating at the levels of the social and cultural. Examples of these more macro forces appear in the conceptual model as the larger, outer orb around recovery extending beyond the cognitive, intrapersonal, and interpersonal tasks. Included in the model are three macro forces that impact the survivor, which include paradigms, context, and external validation.

The idea of paradigms impacting the survivor in his or her recovery is addressed in the literature on shattered assumptions, as survivors must grapple with dominant narratives about how the world is supposed to be, which may no longer fit their experiences after trauma (Janoff-Bulman, 1992). Additionally, depending on the nature of the trauma, survivors may also grapple with how their trauma “counts.” Brown (2008) noted that certain definitions of trauma (for example those associated with post-traumatic stress disorder) make some traumas obvious and others less visible. Thus, college student survivors must contend with these broader societal paradigms and messages about the nature of their experiences, which ultimately impacts how they will make sense of their traumatic experience.

Survivors must also contend with social and cultural contexts surrounding their traumatic experiences. The contexts and social settings in which a survivor is situated can change the ways in which he or she makes meaning of his or her traumatic experiences and identity (Brown, 2008; Levers, 2012; Maercker & Horn, 2013). As Brown (2008) explained, “…those social and contextual factors can make a wound deeper, extend suffering, become obstacles to healing, or allow even the worst of psychic wounds to heal quickly” (p. 4). In other words, the social and cultural contexts in which survivors are embedded can be supportive or harmful in recovery and impact the course of healing.

Additionally, survivors must grapple with macro forces around external validation. In the context of self-authorship, development towards self-authored ways of knowing occurs as an individual is increasingly less reliant on external voices to make meaning of his or her experiences. However, in the case of survivors of trauma, validation and acknowledgment from the external world about the traumatic event is something needed in the recovery process (Herman, 1992/1997; Maercker & Horn,
In fact, the survivor often needs the validation and affirmation of others as a mechanism of sense making around what happened.

The individual tasks of recovery that occur at the cognitive, interpersonal, and intrapersonal levels inevitably interact with the macro forces of paradigms, context, and external validation. In the model, arrows depict this pushing in and out between the macro forces and the cognitive-intrapersonal-interpersonal tasks of recovery. Arrows push from the individual tasks outward, while the macro forces are pushing inward on the individual tasks. How the survivor manages this pushing in and pushing outward will largely affect the meaning he or she makes of the traumatic experience and the world post-trauma. For example, some survivors may find ways to make internally defined meaning of their traumatic experiences while others may be more susceptible to the external forces that may dictate the meaning made of their trauma. Traumatic recovery in this sense can be thought of as a developmental task for college student survivors that could emerge from the realities of negotiating individual and macro aspects of recovery.

**Post-Trauma**

How a college student survivor navigates traumatic recovery will determine where he or she may be on the self-authorship continuum. Some survivors could conceivably have remained stagnant in their self-authorship development or even regress. Others may have experienced the trauma as a provocative moment. In other cases, those who already operate from an internal capacity to make meaning (i.e. self-authored ways of knowing) may experience trauma as an opportunity to solidify or deepen this capability. Regardless of the level of self-authored ways of knowing an individual achieves after a traumatic experience, it is evident through the literature that certain key elements surround any degree of self-authorship and influence its trajectory thereafter.

The conceptual model depicts two of these key elements, which include an evolving narrative and the traumatic experience as a new meaning-making filter embedded within the personal narrative. The formation of a cohesive narrative is a critical piece of recovery from trauma (Berntsen & Rubin, 2007; Brison, 2002; van der Kolk, 2014). This personal story evolves over time as survivors continue to make meaning of their experiences and re-integrate elements of the cognitive, interpersonal, and intrapersonal dimensions into their journey. The post-trauma experience, however, is not simply one of constructing a story of what happened. The experience of trauma also can prime individuals for how they will make sense of new information thereafter (van der Kolk, 2014). Many survivors begin to see the world and new experiences through the prism of their traumatic experience (Janoff-Bulman, 1992; van der Kolk, 2014). Trauma survivors frequently interpret, understand, and see their surroundings differently from those around them. In essence, a new meaning-making filter or lens that is informed by the experience of trauma emerges.

**Conclusion and Implications for Practice**

College campuses are not immune from the prevalence of trauma experienced in the broader population, with some studies suggesting about two-thirds of entering first-year students may have already experienced trauma in their lives (Read et al., 2011). However, what these numbers do not fully capture are the human dimensions and consequent individual stories of trauma embodied in the experiences of many college students. Brown (2008) captured
this reality by reminding readers that “trauma and its psychic aftereffects have a texture. The experience conveys meanings that derive from personal histories; cultural heritages; and the…contexts in which the painful event happens” (p. 3).

The work presented in this article is an effort to capture this multi-dimensionality in the experiences of college student survivors of trauma. In particular, this model offers insight into how traumatic encounters may shape the nature of holistic development of college students. Indeed, the literature and model offered here have direct implications for the work of student affairs practitioners working with survivors of trauma, especially those students who are embedded in the milestones of early adulthood.

As illustrated above, supportive social networks and empathetic listeners are important needs for many survivors of trauma (Calhoun & Tedeschi, 2013; Carlson & Dalenberg, 2000; Maercker & Horn, 2013; van der Kolk, 2014). On many campuses, student affairs practitioners are the very people who students turn to for this type of interpersonal support. Thus, it becomes that much more critical for student affairs educators to understand what survivors of trauma may be enduring. Understanding the intersection of trauma and development is an important progression in meaningfully supporting the many student survivors with whom student affairs educators will inevitably work. Student affairs practitioners are uniquely positioned to think about the possibilities of recovery and resilience in student survivors along with the particularly salient developmental tasks of this time of early adulthood. The model presented here offers a framework for understanding some of these intersections and fostering a synergy of recovery and development simultaneously in work with college student survivors.

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Figure 1. A conceptual model of the intersection of trauma and self-authorship.
Forward Looking Face-to-Face? Experiential Education in the Digital Environment

Dave Eng

St. Thomas Aquinas College

Abstract
Experiential learning is an educational pedagogy that engages learners in concrete experiences, personal reflections, abstract conceptualizations, and active experimentation. Distributed learning delivers educational content to students in a manner that blends different formats ranging from online to face-to-face communication. This literature review provides a background on the philosophy, delivery, and technology of experiential education in a digital environment. This is examined via traditional and emergent pedagogies, technology, and learner relationships. In addition, blended experiential education is discussed as well as its applications in both simulations and virtual worlds. Active student feedback and gamification practices are also included as characteristics of successful implementations. Finally, educational accountability via quality assessment is discussed, as well as applications for credentialing via digital badges. The literature review provides an analysis of the complex climate surrounding digital and distributed learning. It emphasizes higher education professionals, senior administrators, and faculty to strategically review and promote emerging pedagogies in line with both professional and institutional learning outcomes. The accomplishment of which reflects a greater degree of student engagement and active learning.

Keywords: experiential education, digital education, digital learning, blended learning, blended education, educational pedagogy, educational technology, educational delivery, simulations, virtual worlds, active feedback, gamification, quality interactions, digital badges

Introduction
Concrete experiences, personal reflections, conceptualization and active experimentation. These are all characteristics of experiential learning: a pedagogy that engages learners on multiple levels. Distributed learning delivers educational content to students in a manner that blends different formats together. These include face-to-face, online, and hybrid instruction. Experiential education has demonstrated significant learning gains in the past but how can this intensive pedagogy survive in an exponentially growing digital environment?

This literature review provides a background on the philosophy, delivery, and technology of experiential education in a digital environment. It was born out of a germane professional research interest in the area of distributed learning and experiential education. The author sought to reconcile the high impact nature of experiential education with the distributed learning environment of online and digital educational delivery methods. Therefore, this literature review examines both experiential educational pedagogy, as well as digital educational delivery methods in order to provide an overview of current practices.

The review will first examine current educational philosophies in both traditional and distributed learning environments,
changes in teaching and learning styles, and technology costs as it relates to educational advancements. It will also examine content delivery methods as well as its impacts on learner relationships. The reviewed literature provides background on blended learning and the role of experiential education via a digital delivery method. It explores simulations and virtual worlds as viable aspects of experiential digital education. The review will also examine the use of active learner feedback and gaming in a distributed environment. Finally, this literature review will provide an analysis of educational accountability via digital education's quality and assessment. This will include an examination of digital experiential education's strengths and weaknesses, as well as new credentialing methods.

The climate surrounding distributed digital learning is a complex and ever evolving one. Therefore, higher education professionals are encouraged to strategically review and promote emerging pedagogies according to their professional and institutional learning outcomes. Accomplishing this in concert with developing technology and student learning modalities engenders a greater degree of student engagement and active learning.

**Educational Philosophy**

While educational philosophy has evolved since the inception of learning, its application towards student empowerment and development has not. One of the more recent developments in philosophical changes is the primacy of experience in the learning process. Specifically, knowledge creation is part of contextual positionality and individuals' perceptions (Dickey, 2005). This philosophy relates to the constructivist foundation of educational development, where the student's process of reviewing, building, and revisiting experiences influences their lives outside of the classroom (Franks & Oliver, 2012). In this vein Green, Edwards, Wolodko, Stewart, Brooks, and Littledyke (2010), seek to impart the same kind of education onus onto faculty.

Lai, Yang, Chen, Ho, and Liang (2009) further support the learning cycle based on a process not necessarily centered on outcomes. Like Green et al., (2010); Lai et al., (2009) discusses the cyclical nature of learning based on experience, requiring conflict resolution, adaptation to change, and transactions between and within the student. It is this metacognitive process of experience, experimentation, reflection, and knowledge creation that Hadjileontiadou, Sakonidis, and Balafoutas (2003) describe in their application of experiential learning. Like face-to-face learning, digital experiential education benefits form a cyclical learning cycle including a "concrete" experience followed by a personalized reflection. Students then apply their conceptualization through active experimentation in another concrete experience. Therefore the experiential learning cycle can be described as "interact-understand-hypothesize-experiment-interact" etc…

However, traditional experiential education is at odds with the ever growing
development of online, digital, and distributed e-learning (Holley & Oliver, 2010). Despite the inability to ascertain a direct translation of traditional experiential learning opportunities like cooperatives, internships, and study abroad, there exists opportunities to implement the same learning gains through emerging technology. Lindgren & Johnson-Glendberg (2013) indicate that mixed reality (MR) can "...overlay representational supports onto real world experiences with visualizations and auditory feedback in real time" (p.449). This equates to the ability to augment individuals' view of reality and allow expanded learning to take place through "...embodied performances of knowledge" (Lue, 2014, p.184). This represents a technological application previously unheard of at the advent of experiential education.

While these advancements represent the vanguard of educational technology, Selwyn (2014) posits that detractors view them as opportunities for commercial enterprises that co-opt the learning process for capitalistic gain. These concerns are founded, however technology's ability to increase access to content, augment faculty and student roles, and promote student centered learning cannot be totally ignored (Meyer & McNeal, 2011). Developments in educational technology has gained traction in distributed and online learning, changing the role of the faculty from the "sage on the stage" to the content master and learning coach (Meyers & McNeal, 2011, p.44). This paradigm shift, indicated by Padilla-Melendez, Del Aguila-Obra, and Garrido-Moreno (2013) represents one of the most significant changes in educational philosophy. The shift from teacher-centered to learner-centered educational prioritization revolutionizes the learning process and places exponential personal development in the hands of the student.

**Change in Pedagogy**

Educational pedagogies have shifted due to emerging technologies. While traditional forms of education have continued to persist in a pre-digital environment, more applicable forms of learning such as experiential education (Beckem & Watkins, 2012) have become popularly implemented. This is a challenging change for a distributed learning environment - for a successful delivery of an experiential learning design online requires interactivity, learner empowerment, and self-direction (Bolan, 2003).

Feedback through interactivity is crucial for online experiential learning. This interactivity allows for both regular and high fidelity interactions between the student and material (Chandler, Park, Levin, and Morse, 2013). However, the most becoming application of this format via virtual worlds yields the highest learning curve for both students and instructors (de Freitas, Rebolledo-Mendez, Liaropkapis, Magoulas, and Poulovassilis, 2010). While there are other applications to apply experiential learning to an online format - institutional care must be taken regarding curricular implementation (Dias & Diniz, 2013). Not all academic endeavors may transfer well to emerging learning modalities due to lack of experience or peer reviewed evidence.

Applied experiential learning in online environments accompanies upgrades in recognition and credentialing. Gibson, Ostashewski, Flintoff, and Knight (2015) indicated that digital badges have become more prevalent in recognizing learned skill sets and competencies for students completing educational units. These badges serve multiple purposes: to credential students for learning gains, as well as to intrinsically motivate them to further purposeful learning. Mixed reality involves augmenting a user's view of the physical world utilizing a device (i.e. goggles and/or
smart phone) Lindgren & Johnson (2013) indicate that mixed reality environments also utilize intrinsic motivation to promote students’ intuition and understanding of the learning environment. Therefore mixed reality represents a new frontier for student interaction that was previously not possible with current digital learning technology.

While these changes in pedagogies are revolutionary and eye-opening, institutional strategic planners must note that learning remains an iterative process not based solely on outcomes (Lue, 2014). Part of the development for new educational technologies lies in the demand for greater productivity for the institution (Meyer & McNeal, 2011). However, informed university senior administrators will note that producing quality graduates trumps producing a quantity of graduates over the long run.

**Technology**

The development of emerging educational technology has not abandoned constructivist educational philosophy. Rather, Dickey (2005) posits that these new learning environments include concepts like collaborative tools, scaffolding, and modeling that allow learners to excel in these new mediums. Modeling and scaffolding are especially important for emerging diverse populations of undergraduate students as Lopez-Perez, Perez-Lopez and Rodriguez-Ariza (2011) indicate in comparing the diverse skill sets of different aged student populations. Specifically, Technology Assistant Modules (TAM) can be applied to help learners adapt to novel environments in a distributed learning format. These TAM's as indicated by Padilla-Melendez, Aguilia-Obra, and Garrido-Moreno (2013) were useful through their facilitation, cyclical development, and further personal referencing. Despite this learning advancement, higher education institutions remain reticent to adopt them (Psotka, 2013). Perhaps this is because of necessary strategic vetting. Perhaps this slow adoption is indicative of institutional digital resilience (Weller & Anderson, 2013), where traditional processes are either quickly adopted or vigorously replaced by new educational formats.

Strategic and systemic change for an institution should be mission based when considering institutional adaption of emerging educational technologies... Whether the change results in an overhaul of a learning system or a replacement of a pedagogy (Weller & Anderson, 2013), a holistic institutional analysis is necessary before making bold moves.

**Cost**

Philosophical desire address a changing and adaptive pedagogy for online learning. However, one of the largest barriers to entry is cost. Higher educational costs compared with often lackluster post graduate job demand have created an atmosphere of greater accountability (Beckem & Watkins, 2012). This can be addressed through a variety of means. The most prevalent of which is the reduction of educational overhead: a strategy that has found traction in the proliferation of distributed online learning.

Experiential learning in the realm of digital distributed education can take place in many forms from remote internships (Franks & Oliver 2012) to simulations (Bekem & Watkins, 2012), which encompass greater flexibility, lower overhead costs, and comparable learning outcomes. Chandler, Park, Levin, and Morse (2013) indicate that this online pedagogical format remains a popular and cost effective solution for improving learning outcomes. However, widespread adoption of more salient educational practices such as digital based experiential...
learning have yet to be developed by a majority of institutions.

**Educational Delivery**

While cost is a prevalent concern for the development of new educational technologies, faculty and instructional designers must envision outcomes before addressing limitations. Beckem & Watkins (2012) prioritize identifying course content and objectives as one of the most integral steps in developing a digitally distributed learning model. While this could be the case for any such course development, the inclusion of an active mechanism for instant feedback (Figa, 2007) utilizes an experiential learning pedagogy that prioritizes the student in the learning experience.

It is through the engagement with content, reflection, and assessment that students in digital and distributed learning environments can become more fully participative learners (Green, Edwards, Wolodko, Stewart, Brooks, and Littledyke, 2010). High customizability married with technology implementation is necessary to engender the greatest engagement in a purposeful learning activity (Holley & Oliver, 2010). This engagement can take place through traditional digital devices like laptops and desktop computers. Lai et al., (2009) indicated, students can further pursue educational engagement through the use of mobile devices like smart phones and tablets. Lindgren & Jonson-Glenberg (2013); Lue (2014); and Voss (2013) add that emerging fields like mixed reality (MR) and traditional social media engagement advance purposeful learning activities outside of the classroom.

Rather than think of educational technology delivery in terms of digital and non-digital, it should be viewed as a continuum of student engagement (Rikakis, Kelliher, and Lehrer, 2013). For there are face-to-face classroom environments without any student engagement and asynchronous online classrooms that excel at it. Purposeful experiential education in the digital environment will see a distributed model of education with intentional learning activities possessing a high degree of student feedback and engagement.

The Massively Open Online Course (MOOC) was supposed to realize that vision (Salmon, Gregory, Lokuge Dona, and Ross, 2015). However, its implementation has seen mixed results with varying degrees of student engagement that disqualifies it as a total replacement for all face-to-face education. For instance, MOOC’s have been successful in recruiting students to their large digital classrooms. However lack of individual engagement coupled with poor completion rates characterize this emergent pedagogy (Salmon et.al., 2015). A successful delivery system requires a more holistic approach that emphasizes experience and content, as well as purposefully engage the student in meaningful relationships between the instructor and environment.

**Learner Relationships**

The learner relationship in a distributed digital environment is important as the student may exist in two places simultaneously: physically and online (de Frietas et al., 2010). The duality of this existence is absent in face-to-face classroom environments. However, online students exists in multiple modalities that witness them learning in multiple formats. This "locality" in an online environment can be personalized and identified through digital badging (Gibson et al., 2015) in order to form relationships to other learners as well as recognize mastered content.

The social relationships held between learners is a powerful as it represents an opportunity for students to
relate to each other's experience (Figa, 2007; Lopez-Perez, Perez-Lopez and Rodriguez-Ariz, 2011) as well as expose them to interpersonal dialogue that fosters connection and motivation (Hadjileontiadou, Sakonidis, and Balafoutas, 2003). Instructors in this format replace the old role of the teacher-centered paradigm and move the faculty into the role of an advisor and guide (Holley & Oliver, 2010). In this format, the instructor can be most effective through punctual, relevant, and persistent communication with students to promote the active exchange of feedback (Meyer & McNeal, 2011).

The combined and mutual interaction of students in educationally purposeful activities is both pedagogically sound as well as relevant to a post graduate work environment. Meyer & McNeal (2011) indicate that group work in the field is a necessary component for professions and is representative of a general skill necessary for applied performance. Group work in a digital online environment contextualize experiences (Salmon, Gregory, Lokuge Dona, and Ross, 2015) for students in a manner representative of face-to-face learning. However, the emergence of digital learning alone does not mark it as the only option for future higher educational pursuits.

**Emergent Learning**

Traditional and emergent pedagogies have blended to address emergent learning. This new modality includes both face-to-face as well as online interactions in the form of blended learning. This stream of literature will examine experiential education's role and application in a blended learning environment, as well as its potential for use in both simulated and virtual worlds. In addition, both active student feedback is discussed as well as opportunities for gamification addressing students' intrinsic learning.

**Blended Learning**

While popularly known as an emerging educational pedagogy, Blended Learning (BL) has actually been in use for over twenty years (Sharma, 2010). Most recently it has gained prominence because of its ability to reduce the overhead costs as well as have a positive retention effect (Lopez-Perez, Perez-Lopez and Rodriguez-Ariz, 2011). Specifically, blended learning is implemented as a complement to face-to-face learning in a digital and distributed environment. The change in modality allows learners to become more involved in the educational process. However, strategic higher education administrators will note that blended learning environments cannot completely replace traditional face-to-face formats (Lopez-Perez, Perez-Lopez and Rodriguez-Ariz, 2011; Sharma, 2010).

Experiential learning has impacted the blended learning landscape through a combination of curricular and co-curricular activities that combine group work with active problem solving in a distributed environment (Lue, 2014). Pedaste, Jong, Sarapuu, Piksööt, von Joollingen, and Giemza (2013) further add that a combination of blended learning environments and experiential pedagogy allow learners to interact with material in ways that were inconceivable in a face-to-face environment.

The broad interpretation of a blended learning environment involves the use of different modalities of learner relationships between the instructor, content, and environment. This literature review focuses on the combination of face-to-face learning with application of technology (Sharma, 2010; Chandler, Park, Levin, and Morse, 2013) as the representative definition of a blended learning environment.

Blended learning offers students the ability to repeatedly test and interact with content in ways not wholly conducive to a
physical environment. This interaction as identified by Chandler, Park, Levin, and Morse (2013) allows students to essentially complete learning labs without the additional cost of instruction necessary for physically based ones. Higher education administrators will also benefit from the learning assessments of students given before and after course activity that evaluates learning progress; a necessity for an accountable institutional environment.

Blended learning environments are also poised to exceed their original intent by providing students with opportunities for blended problem solving in simulated environments (Lopez-Perez, Perez-Lopez and Rodriguez-Ariza, 2011). These simulated environments are capable of application in both traditional online formats as well as casual co-curricular and out of classroom venues, also known as "information learning settings" (de Freitas, et al., 2010, p.79). The inclusion of such simulations in blended learning environments provides the opportunity to extend the impact of experiential learning from its traditional face to face formats to a new realm: an immersive digital environment. One that is both contextually distinct from the physical classroom and is grounded in providing virtual reality focused learning experiences. Such implementation furthers the development and application of experiential education in a digital environment.

**Experiential Education**

Experiential education philosophers support social constructivist learning: where students must be actively involved in a socialized and personalized learning process (Beckem & Watkins, 2012). This philosophy has gained ground in traditional forms of experiential education like cooperatives, study abroad, service learning and internships. Virtual internships specifically bridge experiential education and blended learning. These non-location bound opportunities possess the model of experiential learning grounded in experience, reflection, conceptualization, and experimentation (Bolan, 2003; Hadjileontiadou, Sakonidis, and Balafoutas, 2003).

These experiences; delivered remotely and following constructivist philosophy (Chandlers, Park, Levin, and Morse, 2013), is one of the most emergent applications of experiential distributed learning. These online experiential learning formats focus on the necessity of learners to attain high levels of reasoning, embodiment of experience, and learned knowledge, thus aiding information retention (Lindgren & Johnson-Glenberg, 2013). In addition, experiential learning in a digital environment allows for active elements of reflection (Rikakis, Kelliher, and Lehrer, 2013); abstract conceptualization (Psotka, 2013); and active experimentation (Yin, Song, Tabata, Ogata, and Hwang, 2013).

Lastly, scaffolding is one of the most prominent forms of experiential education characteristics embodied in distributed learning environments. Yin et al., (2013); Zhan, Porter, and Morgan (2014); and Psotka (2013) all indicate that active scaffolding has helped the educational process of knowledge attainment and application. Such important implementation is necessary to address the individual learning required for emerging higher education populations and is a strategic move in the right direction for higher education professionals.

**Simulations & Virtual Worlds**

Simulations are one of the most innovative features of a digital blended learning environment which have gained prominence because of both their reusability and scalability for changing collegiate
populations (Beckem & Watkins, 2012). Simulations are also able to change learning environments to suit the challenges of individual learners, which is indicative of an experiential education model (Hadjileontiadou, Sakonidis, and Balafoutas, 2003). Lindgren and Johnson-Glenberg (2013) indicate that active reinforcement of learners in simulations require an interactive component capable of placing students in an immersive environment. Such practices lead to a medium where learners can apply new knowledge to adapt to changing applications (Yin et al., 2013).

Such simulations are able to extend to virtual worlds where live practical components of applied skill sets in marketing, communication, and social connection can be implemented in a self-persistent student feedback loop (de Freitas et al., 2010). These virtual worlds go beyond traditional simulations as the environment persists and changes according to user input, student engagement, and learned knowledge. Such venues exist in order to provide students and instructors with "...both concrete and abstract representation of data and ideas" (Dickey, 2005, p.449). Self-directed modeling indicated by Lue (2014) provides a venue ripe for the development of more creative applications of simulations and virtual worlds. Psotka (2013) posits that these mediums have the possibility of expanding into games in order to pair constructivist philosophy and experiential learning with the intrinsic motivation of game play.

Feedback

Simulations, virtual worlds, and experiential learning all embody educational pedagogies with different aspects of active feedback between students, content, instructor and environment. The constructivist learning environment supports this active feedback with the student (Dickey, 2005). de Freitas et al., (2010) indicates active feedback contributes to the effectiveness of the overall learning experience. This is further expanded upon by Figa (2007) in reflection of the active feedback loop provided between learners.

While feedback is not new as an educational structure, it is novel in its ability to amplify and refine student impact in digital learning environments. Whereas the traditional model emphasized a teacher centered pedagogy, the student centered pedagogy of experiential learning focuses on the need of the individual students. Those needs can be fulfilled via social relationships in the feedback mechanism between students (Hadjileontiadou, Sakonidis, and Balafoutas, 2003) and expanded via online delivery formats (Psotka, 2013).

Gaming

Gaming applications further combine virtual worlds, simulations, feedback, and blended digital learning environments (Voss, 2013). Johnston, Boyle, MacArthur and Manion (2013) indicate that this can further learning outcomes. Pervasive gaming environments can support blended learning initiatives as well as further the application of scaffolding to support student centered learning (Lindgren & Johnson, 2013).

Gaming applications have become a more appealing implementation of these digital pedagogies through its blended use of extrinsic and intrinsic motivation (Padilla-Melendez, del Aguila-Obra, and Garrido-Moreno, 2013). These motivational factors incentivized students to engage in purposeful learning activities outside of the traditional classroom environment and promoted a co-curricular learning philosophy that blends casual with formal learning (Psotka, 2013).

This engagement of learning in non-traditional contexts emphasizes the
development of flow states (Padilla-Melendez, del Aguila-Obra, and Garrido-Moreno, 2013) in which students become so engrossed in an activity, learning, or feedback cycle that the entire process becomes inherently stimulating and even addictive (Selwyn, 2014). This addictive aspect of educational gaming has become even more prevalent in a digital environment where delivery systems can augment content in a way that addresses each individual's learning needs (Rikakis, Kelliher, and Lehrer, 2013).

**Educational Accountability**

Blended and distributed learning environments have presented opportunities for experiential education application in multiple formats. However, new pedagogies also rely on both quality indicators and accountability to determine its future implementation. Therefore, this stream of literature will examine experiential education in a digital environment's relative quality, strengths, and weaknesses. In addition, a review of credentialing via digital badging is examined.

**Quality & Assessment**

One of the most divisive issues surrounding distributed digital learning is quality, especially as it compares to the more traditional face-to-face format. However, the traditional format does not always take into account quality learning experiences. Instead, it relies on a teacher-centered model that does not promote the same degree of interaction (Dias & Diniz, 2013) that digital learning can provide. Though lacking in synchronous face-to-face engagement, students in distributed online formats are offered more diverse opportunities to engage and interact with customized learning experiences (Green, Wolodkko, Stewart, Brooks, and Littledyke, 2010). This move towards participative interaction with the educational process nurtures both individual growth and knowledge development. This individual focus is communicated in a collaborative environment where the onus is no longer on the individual instructor for learning; rather it is placed on the student (Hadjileontiadou, Sakonidis, and Balafoutas, 2003).

Naturally, assessment is part of the quality control process of a digital learning environment. In a blended learning environment, this assessment takes place via applied technologies measuring engagement and learning outcomes - whereas the face-to-face portion can be used to determine learner efficacy (Chandler, Park, Levin, and Morse, 2013). Furthermore, the use of distributed learning environments also emphasizes the development of learning communities which serve as their own social check and balance. Fellow classmates evaluate, provide feedback, and collaborate with their peers in a way that develops holistic learning contexts (Green et al., 2010). Lastly, digital badging serves as a learning outcomes indicator for students by representing learned skill sets and mastered content. Instead of traditional credentials like certificates and degrees, digital badges are awarded to students for reaching micro levels of efficacy such as demonstrating understanding and mastery of core concepts that build to a larger discipline. For example, students can receive a digital badge for an educational unit covering double-entry bookkeeping for a course on accounting. A digital badge would provide electronic proof that a student has mastered this area and is ready to apply it to additional concepts. Such pushes towards micro-credentialing emphasizes the development of contextualized mastery that can better inform both instructors and peers of the student's past educational history (Gibson, Ostasheewski, Flintoff, and Knight, 2010).
Strengths & Weaknesses

Distributed learning in a digital environment possesses many strengths that were previously discussed. Most notably, these include the focus on a student centered pedagogy, utilizing active feedback, personalized interactions with students and multi-modal delivery systems that adapts to user preferences (Meyer & McNeal, 2011). In addition, both simulations and virtual worlds possess the unique aspect of engaging students in experiential learning (Lindgren & Johnson-Glenberg, 2013).

Conversely, Bolan (2003) highlights the frequent high attrition rates of students in distributed learning environments. Most notably these occur in MOOC's where the online environment engages hundreds and thousands of students at the same time. However, this can be negated by utilizing the active feedback mechanism of experiential education as well as recognizing student mastery through digital badging. In addition, a distributed learning environment that seeks to become all things to all students may place unwarranted demands on faculty, such as 24 hour accessibility, with little to no downtime (Meyers & McNeal, 2011). Lastly, experiential education in the digital environment also lacks the ability for students to focus on learning objectives in the context of the situation as some students may not yet possess the maturity necessary to understand the epistemology of abstract concepts (Yin et al., 2013).

Credentialing

Finally, Gibson, Ostashewski, Flintoff, and Knight (2015) discuss credentialing students in a digital distributed environment through the implementation of digital badges which represent mastered content and competencies. These digital badges can be used as gamified intrinsic motivators for students to engage with educational content in informal learning environments. They also serve as contextualized assessment aspects of learner knowledge development. These accomplishments are capable of recognition in different mediums where current transcripts cannot. Digital badges can also serve to aid students who have completed significant educational requirements and demonstrated efficacy but have not yet fulfilled a degree requirement. These badges represent mastery that can accepted as a professional credential for employment or applied as a pre-requisite for more advanced learning. In all, digital badges are poised to become unique signifiers of student "… motivation, recognition and credentialing, (and) evidence of achievement…" (Gibson, Ostashewski, Flintoff, and Knight, 2015, p.407).

Conclusion

Experiential education has been an actively used pedagogy for educators for a significant amount of time. However, advancements in distributed and digital learning have challenged its continued use in light of different educational delivery methods. The development of new technologies has facilitated the pedagogical shift in focus from the teacher to the student. This change is reflective in online course formats such as MOOC’s that reduce the cost and labor required for educational delivery. However, this change has prompted further study of experiential education's role in a digital learning environment. This literature review emphasized socialized learner relationships among their peers as well as with the instructor, implementation of simulations or virtual worlds to provide concrete experience for students, the application of active feedback, and finally gaming mechanisms to engender user engagement.
These characteristics can be implemented in either a blended or fully distributed learning environment for maximum effect. Lastly, this literature review provided accountability for experiential education in a digital environment through assessment and quality of interactions, modalities for credentialing, and overall strengths and weaknesses. Higher education professionals, senior administrators, and faculty are encouraged to strategically develop personalized practices in accordance with their institutional standards in order to best engage learners in these emerging environments.

References


How Bullying & Campus Climate Affect Queer Students Of Color

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For college applicants, choosing the right university can be quite a difficult process. Regarding these individuals, factors such as institutional characteristics, university type, financial cost, geographic location, advice from loved ones, all come to play as they decide on how to spend the next four years of their lives (Burleson, 2010; Taulke-Johnson, 2010). However, many students do not take into consideration how the campus climate will affect their time at the college or university they attend (Taulke-Johnson, 2010). Campus climate, as defined by Cress (2008), is a metaphorical gauge by which a community, such as an institution of higher education, can measure if a learning environment is a welcoming and receptive or cool and alienating. Kosciw, Palmer, Kull, & Greytak’s (2013) research notes that the climate of a school can influence a student’s well-being, as well as their academic achievement. This is especially true for populations typically marginalized by racism and heterosexism. Not only should students be mindful about institutional climate, but the institutions themselves should be cognizant of the way they are being perceived if they wish to retain students.

Student retention is one of the most heavily researched topics regarding college students (Sanlo, 2004). Even so, colleges and universities continue to struggle retaining their students (Squire & Norris, 2014). While some research exists on the experiences of both students of color and Queer students, there is limited data examining students of color that also identify as members of the Queer community (Dugan & Yurman, 2012). This is problematic as the intersectionality which occur in one’s social group can alienate the individual and affect their identity development (Eick & Ryan, 2014). Intersectionality, a term coined by Crenshaw (1989), refers to the idea that identities do not operate in mutually exclusive ways. Instead, sexuality, race, socioeconomic status, and other identities interact with their own subset of power dynamics when individuals within the community hold multiple marginalized identities (Crenshaw, 1991). For example, an individual who identifies as Queer or as a student of color faces oppression as a result of heterosexism or racism. A person of color may receive support from other persons of color as they are members of a shared community, but may be marginalized within their racial community if they identify as Queer. Conversely, a Queer student may be marginalized within the Queer community if they identify as a person of color. Thus, while individuals within marginalized identities can find support within their communities, marginalization within oppressed communities can also occurs. As such, students that identify as Queer and as students of color may face higher levels of harassment and discrimination than their peers (Squire & Norris, 2014). To support these students, research must investigate how to address the issues caused by the intersectionality of oppressed social identities.

The aim of this literature review is to examine how the bullying of queer students of color affects campus climate. To achieve this aim, this research will synthesize the literature on college bullying, campus
climate, as well as Black, Latino, Asian, and Queer student populations using Crenshaws description of intersectionality and Cress’s idea of campus climate as a framework. The research will then examine how the intersections of sexuality and race through, homophobic and racist bullying, influence campus climate. The articles used for the literature review all centered on at least one of three themes: experiences of Queer students of color, bullying, and campus climate. While other forms of oppression, such as ableism or classism, have an important impact on the student experience as a result of bullying and campus climate, those constructs lie beyond the scope of this research.

Literature Review
Racial Minority Representation and Experiences in Higher Education

A degree from an institution of higher education has been seen as a method to diminish barriers to employment and provide Black students with a tangible symbol of their success (Carter, 2013). Research has shown that there has been an increase in the number of Black students aged 18-24 attending college, from 20% in 1980 to 32% in 2004 (Henry, Fuerth, & Richards, 2011). As the number of minority identifying students continues to rise, so does the need to reach out and support these individuals. While more Black students are attending institutions of higher education, only 38% of African American students complete their degrees (Smith, 2004). These statistics are worse at primarily white institutions (PWIs), where Black students are underrepresented (Thomas et al., 2007). Black students at PWIs are less likely to reach out for help if their professor was not of the same race or gender (Henry, Fuerth, & Richards, 2011). An inability to connect with faculty and the campus community has been linked with high rates of attrition, as students need to develop a strong sense of community in order to remain engaged with campus life (O'Keeffe, 2013). Studies have shown that Black students that attend Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) tend to have higher educational attainment, academic self-image, and develop a stronger sense of cultural identity as the campus climate is generally more positive and inclusive (Rankin, 2006).

Latino students, especially males, face similar obstacles alongside their Black counterparts. Latino college students are not only underrepresented in higher education, but also subject to high rates of attrition as poor campus climate, or negative perceptions in campus climate, can contribute to low academic performance high dropout rates (Kiyama, 2010; Yosso, Smith, Ceja, & Solórzano, 2009). A study by Huerta & Fishman (2014) states that Latino males are not widely represented within institutions of higher education. In fact, only 26% of Latino males aged 18 to 24 are in institutions of higher education (Huerta & Fishman, 2014). While that number has been on the rise since 2009, these increases have been primarily at two-year institutions, which has resulted in only 11% of Latino students aged 25 to 34 receiving a bachelors’ degree in 2010 (Huerta & Fishman, 2014). These statistics should not be surprising as Latinos have been reported as being first generational, entering colleges with lower socioeconomic statuses, and having lower social capital, which are all ingredients for a lower retention rate (Clark & Kalionzes, 2008). While Asian American students have been reported as having the highest graduation rate, at 65%, among all racial groups in the nation, this statistic is not representative of a positive collegiate experience (Kotori & Malany, 2003). This may be due to the number of studies concerning racial discrimination, campus racial climate, and
racial experiences on campuses for Asian-Americans is small (Kotori & Malany, 2003; Johnston & Yeung, 2014). The fact that such limited research on this topic exists is troubling when, in a study done by Kotori & Malany (2003) 1 in 3 Asian Americans have experienced racial discrimination. In their study at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst, Kotori & Malany (2003) reported that only 43.2% of Asian-American students reported feeling "very safe" as opposed to 69.5% of white students when asked “how safe from racial and ethnic violence they felt on the UMass campus” which alludes to the need for additional research regarding these students. Wells & Horn (2015) found that while Asian Americans who have positive perception of campus climate felt a greater sense of belonging, dissatisfaction with campus climate, as well as experience with racial discrimination, can be associated with lower levels of institutional attachment and decreased retention.

Queer Student Representation and Experiences in Higher Education

1 in 6 students in higher education are estimated to be gay, lesbian, or bisexual, according to the American Psychological Association (APA) (Henry, Fuerth, & Richards, 2011). Queer students tend to find campuses unwelcoming and hostile as they are often targets of harassment and violence (Evans, 2002; Sanlo, 2004). There is little empirical research on the experiences of Queer students with disabilities, transgender students, and students of color (Rankin, 2006). The research that does exist points out high rates of victimization in the form of physical assaults, verbal harassment, and negative climate, which indicates the need for more research centered around the Queer student experience to support these students (Rankin, 2006).

Most research on gay, lesbian, and bisexual students is focused on white identifying students, which is not representative of the entire Queer community (Brockenbrough, 2015; Henry, Fuerth, & Richards, 2011; Rivera-Ramos, Oswald, & Buki, 2015; Washington & Wall, 2006). This is troublesome as students who identify as Queer, and also identify as a student of color, can face stigmatization based on the intersectionality of their identities. For example, students who identify as Black may be rejected from their Black peers for being Queer, while students that are Queer may experience racism within the gay community (Henry, Fuerth, & Richards, 2011).

Intersectionality

Both students of color and Queer students face a myriad of challenges as they navigate through college life. Students who are members of more than one oppressed identity face unique forms of discrimination (Friedman & Leaper, 2010). Each individual identity provides students with varying amounts of social capital which enable or hinder their ability navigate the university and fully engaging academic pursuits (Soria & Stebleton, 2012). While individuals that hold marginalized identities foster closer bonds with in-group members for protection, tension as a result of privileged and oppressed identities within an already marginalized group can occur (Crenshaw, 1991; Friedman & Leaper, 2010). Thus, students may struggle to acclimate to their campus communities due to less support than their heterosexual or white counterparts (Kirsch, Conley, & Riley, 2015). For example, Gastic (2012) notes that Black students have less positive attitudes towards Queer students, which can make things difficult for a Queer Black student to feel like they are a part of their community. In some communities of color, gayness is seen as a white trait, as the gay movements have generally catered to White, middle
class men (Barrett & Pollack, 2005; Sánchez, 2014). Carter (2013) notes not only that relevant literature excludes minority experiences but also notes that most of the relevant literature comes from PWIs. This is not representative of the experience of Queer students of color at HBCUs or other minority serving institutions (Carter, 2013). As such, students of color feel marginalized within their communities as they feel that participating in the gay community requires the sacrifice of cultural ideals to assimilate into White culture (Sánchez, 2014). Within higher education, Queer Latino men face difficulties in trying to acclimate to the culture on multiple levels. The homogeneous approach to education can be troublesome as they conflict with expectations and experiences that Queer Latino men experience through their various identity developments (Sánchez, 2014). It is well documented, regardless of gender identity, Queer students of color are consistently harassed verbally, physically, and mentally. For example, in an article written by Misawa (2010), a gay, Native Alaskan man noted “I have always felt that being gay was something to hide, and I always get gawked at when I tell people I am part Native Alaskan. I think those two things are kept hidden at the university in the classroom and in the advertising of the university”.

While Queer men of color are subjected to discrimination based on their race and sexuality, Queer women of color are also marginalized by sexism (Friedman & Leaper, 2010). In order to identify how these individuals are being discriminated against, Friedman & Leaper (2010) came up with the term gendered heterosexism, which expresses the dual discrimination that women face as members of the target groups they belong to. The identity development of Queer women of color suffers as a result of these oppressed identities, as those who strongly identify with one group may not receive the support they need when they fail to meet the other expectations of that group (Friedman & Leaper, 2010). For example, a student who identifies strongly as a Latina woman may not receive support from her Latina community because she identifies as Queer. As such, these students face even more issues when trying to acclimate to a campus climate that is heterosexist, racist, and sexist. Failure to acclimate may result in a student being unable to create support systems which will be critical to their success within higher education (O’Keeffe, 2013).

Effect of Queer & Racial Bullying on Campus Climate in Higher Education

Research states that bullying across the United States is being increasingly reported (Misawa, 2010) but very few target university students specifically (Myers & Cowie, 2013). Bullying is referred to as the occurrence that involves an individual intentionally harming another individual (Misawa, 2010). While 28% of students aged 12 – 18 experience bullying, there is a limited amount of research on experiences of bullying at institutions of higher education (Coleyshaw, 2010; Myers & Cowie, 2013; Misawa, 2010). The lack of research in this area is concerning as the Work Place Bullying Institute notes that 1 in 4 adults experience bullying in the workplace (Misawa, 2010). Thus, the issue of bullying is clearly prevalent outside of the primary and secondary school systems and carries into adulthood (Marraccini, Weyandt, & Rossi, 2015; Myers & Cowie, 2013).

The research that does exist on bullying in higher education highlights some disturbing trends. For example, one study noted that 60% of students reported witnessing a student being bullied by a group of individuals (Misawa, 2010).
Another study notes that 93% of high school and college students sampled reported being bullied by a teacher or instructor at least once over the course of their lifetime (Marraccini, Weyandt, & Rossi, 2015). Traditional bullying and cyber bullying carry long-term damage to academic achievement, well-being, and self-esteem, while also causing victims to score higher on tests of depression, anxiety, and paranoia (Myers & Cowie, 2013). Bullying within an educational setting can create a hostile environment resulting in a decrease in productivity that influences teaching and learning at the institutional level (Misawa, 2015). In an article written by Misawa (2010), a gay, African American identifying student named Sam reported “I was told by some younger students, I guess I heard of their whispering, ’he’s a f---in’ queer.’ Sometimes queer is used in a negative sense. ‘That queer’ means ’that’s not cool.’ Sometimes when I hear that, I don’t like it.” Misawa reported that this experience lead to Sam feeling as though his residence hall was a hostile place as those he lived with placed a negative value judgement on his queerness (2010). This situation could have not only impacted the student’s perception of his community, but also influenced his perception of the campus climate in regards to race and sexuality.

Research has revealed that there are a number of reasons why individuals choose to bully, such as when perpetrators reported relationship difficulties, break-ups, peer envy, intolerance around ethnicity, race, or sexual orientation. Bullying related to power dynamics within systems of oppression have led to the use of covering as a defense mechanism. Covering occurs as “people hide their true selves in order to be accepted in society” and “when they interact with other people” to prevent or deter discrimination (Misawa, 2010). By splitting their identity, individuals may attempt to manage two separate lives (Sanlo, 2004) in order to maintain some degree of Queer invisibility (Brockenbrough, 2015). The use of covering could have been a major factor in contributing to the subversion of racist-homophobic bullying, which has led to the issue of bullying being largely ignored (Misawa, 2010). While it can be implied that social friction can be caused by homophobia and racism, limited research currently exists on the intersections of these individual identities in regards to bullying, let alone both identities together (Misawa, 2010). Bullying can prove to be disastrous as campus climate can have significant effects on an individual’s identity development (Holley, Larson, Adelman, & Trevino, 2008). Research has shown that campus climate or perception of climate can be a strong indicator of student success (Vogel, Holt, Sligar, & Leake, 2008; Edman & Brazil, 2009). For example, students who feel that institutional employees, both academic and non-academic, who do not express value in the presence of Latino students or their efforts to persist in school, had difficulties succeeding (Huerta & Fishman, 2014). As another example, women who felt more included within the classroom participated at higher levels than those that did not (Rankin, 2006). Queer students of color who perceive universities as non-supportive, having various degrees of racial tension, or various degree of homophobic tension, can be attribute those perspectives to the effect bullying has on campus climate. As such, perception of climate is important across all spectrum identity, specifically for those within target groups. Students that are unable to engage with the community are not only less likely to succeed academically, but may also suffer from lower college completion rates (Astin, 1999). Thus, institutions of higher education need to make a commitment across all lines, be they faculty, student, or administrator, to...
recognize and combat homophobia, racism, and sexism in order to foster a more positive campus climate.

**Limitations**

The study has several limitations that must be addressed. While many of the studies examined touch on the topic of bullying, climate, racial minorities, sexual minorities, and intentionality, few provide insight on recommendations for higher education professionals on how to effectively address all of these factors. By assembling the presented research and synthesizing the information how bullying and campus climate are related, higher education professional can begin to examine potential deficits in how institutions interact with their students.

The largest limitation of this research lies in the fact that most of the research cited within this work discusses identities in isolation, not at points of intersection or interaction. The gathered research provides important insight on supporting individual identities. However, it may not provide holistic perspective when attempting to understand how the interaction of each identity effects a student’s ability to achieve, succeed, and persist. As Crenshaw (1991) notes, when a discourse is shaped to respond to the marginalization of one identity or another, individuals with multiple oppressed identities are still marginalized.

Another limitation to this research is the process of synthesis in itself. While utilizing the experience of Queer students of color, bullying, and campus climates as themes for article selection, comparing findings from studies that use different methods, designs, and measures is open to a host of different interpretations. By using Crenshaw’s (1989;1991) description of intersectionality and Cress’s idea of campus climate, this synthesis has created a framework which provides cohesion to the independent findings from previous studies. Thus, this research is able to provide recommendations and perspectives that may not have otherwise been available.

**Discussion & Recommendations**

This literature review sought to examine how the bullying of queer students of color affects campus climate by synthesizing literature on Black, Latino, Asian American, and Queer students. The information gathered suggests that while access to higher education has increased for some students of racial and sexual minorities, completion rates are still low. Individually, identities form powerful bonds between members of different social groups. Students from target groups look to their community members for support, which generally leads to positive trends in academic, social, and identity development. This is not the case when identities intersect, as members from one group may reject an individual for failing to meet all the criteria of said group. This rejection could lead to students disengaging with the community as they fail to create bonds with their peers.

Students that are members of multiple target groups tend to face unique challenges and harsher discrimination than those who have more agent identities. Individuals with intersecting target identities are bullied at a higher rate, which contributes to low self-esteem, higher depression, and a lower rate of persistence. These students are more likely to perceive their campus community as negative. In order to better support students, institutions of higher education should invest in creating a more positive climate for Queer students of color; this can be done by creating organizations on campus to provide peer support and help establish a sense of community (O’Keeffe, 2013). The establishment of Queer friendly organizations such as the Gay-Straight
Alliance (GSA), assists in fostering interactions between heterosexual and homosexual students (Gastic, 2010). These organizations would be more beneficial if institutions of higher education took steps to increase the visibility of other marginalized identities with the Queer community. By assigning advisors trained in cultural competency or providing training cultural competency training to the students in the organization, students of color may feel more inclined to participate which could increase racial contact within the Queer community. This increased contact can lead to more positive attitudes towards Queer students of color and a decrease in victimization (Gastic, 2010; Kosciw, Palmer, Kull, & Greytak, 2013). These organizations not only assist Queer students of color in establishing an identity on campus, but also provide them with a more legitimized sense of community which can also lead to improved academic achievement and sense of self-worth (O’Keeffe, 2013).

Chen, Ingram, & Davis (2014) noted that students who are comfortable, engaged, and satisfied with their campus communities have higher persistence rates that those who are not. Higher education professionals can do more to create positive campus perception by providing students with additional spaces and avenues to seek support. For example, in 2010 the University of Maryland, College Park’s staff in the Orientation office created a first-year experience program for queer students called “The One Project” to provide academic and social integration support through programming and academic activities (Squire & Norris, 2014). A student from the program commented “the connections I made with like-minded students and faculty became a network of resources and support”. Retention rates of the students who participated in the 2010-2011 cohort was 92%, while the retention rates of the 2011-2012 and 2012-2013 cohorts was 100% (Squire & Norris, 2014). Programs such as One Project should also include additional diversity seminars and trainings to incorporate intersectional identities such as race and sexuality. By only focusing on one marginalized identity, sexuality, the impact of the program may fail to holistically support the community at large and instead further marginalize the students it was meant to serve.

While bullying occurs not only in the K-12 system, but also in higher education and the work places. Administrators, faculty, students, and staff members should create, advertise, and advocate for both support and prevention mechanics and policies to address bullying and bullying prevention (Faucher, Cassidy, & Jackson, 2015). Creating an anonymous method of reporting bullying, for example, may increase the likelihood of students reporting these behaviors, as some students choose not to report traditional or cyber bullying (Celik, Atak, & Erguzen, 2012; Faucher, Cassidy, & Jackson, 2015). Another method of supporting Queer students of color would be to address the cultural nuances of their experience with bullying. As these students can feel isolated within their intersecting communities as a result of being bullied, providing access to counselors, support groups, and utilizing prevention techniques with a Multicultural Counseling Competency framework can be a powerful tool in supporting students (Weinhold, 2000).

Reaching out to specific marginalized identities or multiple marginalized identities, such as Queer students of color, may be difficult. Students who are struggling with their identities may not feel comfortable seeking out the help they need for fear of being outed, such as those who are utilizing covering as a coping
mechanism (Misawa, 2010; Salno 2004). Technology can provide means for support services to become more accessible. As universities are already using web-based chat rooms as a tool for recruitment (Burleson, 2010), institutions should consider creating similar chat rooms, forums, or other web-based mediums for students to engage in. The anonymity would allow closeted students an opportunity to connect and engage with others without having to out themselves.

**Future Research**

The importance of understanding and addressing intersections of identity has been clearly made known throughout this research. As students who experience multiple marginalized identities may find less support within their group, future scholarly attention should focus specifically on intersectional experiences. Qualitative research should look specifically at Queer students that span multiple racial identities to have a more holistic understanding of how to support members of each community. While this research focused on the intersections of sexuality and race, future research should work to incorporate ability, socioeconomic status, and a more critical look at gender. By expanding research on intersectional identities, student affairs professionals may be better equipped to support students, especially those that have a negative view of the campus climate as a result of bullying.

Finally, future research should also seek out these relationship-oriented organizations on their campuses and make note of their success and/or failures to better understand the needs of their students. Emphasis should be placed on increasing retention of Queer students of color and utilizing group dynamics to tackle the issue of traditional and cyberbullying. If administrators are able to utilize these groups to create a more inclusive environment, research shows that retention will increase and attrition will begin to dissipate (O’Keeffe, 2013). While these recommendations may provide support to at the collegiate level, it is important to note that bullying must be addressed through a joint effort between the K-12 system and post-secondary education if it is truly to be eradicated.

**References**


Racial Microaggressions, Racial Battle Fatigue, and Racism-Related Stress in Higher Education

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Abstract
The college experiences of students of color today are described as distinct from their White peers due to racial microaggressions. Recently, higher education research has begun to describe racial microaggressions, but scholars often do not take the next step to investigate the impact of racial microaggressions on health and academics. This literature review highlights the differences among racial microaggressions, racial battle fatigue, racism-related stress and racial trauma through theoretical and empirical studies. The paper argues that institutions, practitioners, researchers, and higher education leaders can address racial microaggressions and racial battle fatigue to make their campuses more equitable.

Introduction
Analyses of higher education have historically been concerned with access, retention, and graduation rates. Early studies and frameworks did not consider the experiences of students of color and did not include the possibility of an unhealthy campus racial climate (Astin, 1993; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991; Tinto, 1993). Many of the findings from these early frameworks were less relevant for students of color and do not reflect what scholars know today about campus racial climates, cultures, and racial microaggressions (Franklin, Smith, & Hung, 2014; Harper, 2012; Hurtado, 1992; Johnson, Wasserman, Yildirim, & Yonai, 2014; Museus & Jayakumar, 2012, Pérez Huber & Solórzano, 2015; Solórzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000). Institutionalized racism and the negative impacts on historically underrepresented groups are rarely mentioned in higher education literature (Harper, 2012). While access to higher education opportunities has increased for students of color since the 1960s and 1970s, admission to a university does not necessarily correspond with equitable social conditions (Allen, 1992; Feagin, 1992, Harper, 2012; Hurtado, 1992; Museus & Jayakumar, 2012). Recent events at University of Missouri with the resignation of the president and chancellor over longstanding racial incidents demonstrate that social conditions are still detrimental for students of color (Thomason, 2015). Strayhorn (2008) states that even though “college participation rates have increased for all groups over the past 30 years…significant gaps across racial/ethnic groups persist” (p. 301). William A. Smith (2009b) characterizes this discrepancy when he states, “White campus racial culture…promotes Plessy-like environments on post-Brown campuses” (p. 616). Simply put, greater access and opportunity for students of color did not eradicate racism or racist ideologies on college campuses. Instead, society witnessed a shift to a

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1 Students of color, historically underrepresented students, marginalized groups, and people of color are used to identify students who are not of European American/White descent (e.g., African American, Asian American, Indigenous, Latina/o, and Pacific Islander).
subtler, “color-blind” racism that is equally injurious to the everyday lives of people of color (Bonilla-Silva, 2006). Color-blind racism is the notion that racism today operates with the assumption that society is post-racial and that people do not see race (Bonilla-Silva, 2006). Color-blind racism does not take the form of overt Jim Crow laws, but rather subtle approaches that use meritocratic rationales for racist practices (Bobo, Klugel, & Smith, 1997; Bobo & Smith, 1998; Bonilla-Silva, 2006). Color-blind racism not only operates in larger society, but also within higher education settings (Harper, 2012). Color-blind racism within higher education settings can take the form of racial microaggressions or subtle indignities based on the race of a person (Smith, 2009a).

This paper reviews the literature on racial microaggressions, racial battle fatigue racism-related stress, and racial trauma. Additionally, it argues that higher education and student affairs research needs to better account for racism in the scholarship and address the health outcomes as a result of racial microaggressions. Finally, the paper proposes how institutions, practitioners, and higher education leaders can address racial microaggressions and racial battle fatigue to make their campuses more equitable.

Racial Microaggressions

Research on racial microaggressions is not new, as it has been discussed since the 1970s. Chester Pierce (1970) stated that the “most offensive actions are not gross and crippling,” but rather “they are subtle and stunning” (p. 265). Pierce later named these racialized offenses as racial microaggressions (Pierce, 1974, 1995). Sue et al. (2007) defined racial microaggressions as “brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioral, or environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative racial slights and insults to the target person or group” (p. 273). Solórzano, Allen, and Carroll (2002) added that racial microaggressions are “layered” in they attack “one’s race, gender, class, sexuality, language, immigration status, phenotype, accent or surname” (p. 17). Examples of racial microaggressions include being treated with less respect, receiving poor service, being assumed to not be smart, people acting as if they are afraid of you, and people thinking you are dishonest because of your racial and/or ethnic background (Perez Huber & Solórzano, 2015). As suggested, microaggressions can also interact across gender, racial, language and other identities (Solórzano et al., 2002). For example, a professor may assume a Latino student speaks Spanish or that a Chinese student can speak for all Asians. Similarly, African American males are frequently assumed to be athletes because of stereotypes (Smith et al., 2007). Microaggressions also work across racial and ethnic groups in the form of multiracial microaggressions. Examples of multiracial microaggressions include comments about the beauty of mixed-race phenotypes, accusations of acting White, being made to choose a single racial identity, and messages of inauthenticity (Johnston & Nadal, 2010). These instances of racial microaggressions put a burden on students of color to justify their identity and presence on college campuses.

Racial microaggressions, whether intended or not, present a specific message to historically underrepresented and marginalized groups that they are not welcome on college campuses. Racial microaggressions occur in all types of higher education institutions whether they are predominately White or institutions that mainly serve African American or Latino students (e.g., HBCU and HSIs) (Palmer & Dina, 2015). Therefore, racial
microaggressions still occur at Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU) and Hispanic Serving Institutions (HSI) because these institutions admit White students. Solórzano, Ceja, and Yosso (2000) found that many African American students stated they felt “invisible” in the classroom and professors appeared to be less interested in their concerns. Not only have African Americans reported invisibility, so have American Indians (Clark, Spanierman, Reed, Soble, & Cabana, 2011), Asian American students (Sue, Bucceri, Lin, Nadal, & Torino, 2007), and Latinos (Nadal, 2011; Yosso, Smith, Ceja, Solórzano, 2009). Additionally, racial microaggressions have been shown to make students feel “personally diminished” (Solórzano et al., 2000). As a result of their experiences, students of color feel unwanted, unwelcomed, and lack a sense of belonging (Hurtado & Carter, 1997). Yosso, Smith, Ceja, and Solórzano (2009) found that there were three types of racial microaggressions directed against Latinos: interpersonal microaggressions, racial jokes, and institutional microaggressions. Perez Huber and Solórzano (2015) concluded that there are verbal and non-verbal attacks on people of color and that the attacks are layered. Sue et al. (2007) have contributed greatly to the work on racial microaggressions by proposing they be classified into three forms: microassaults, microinsults, and microinvalidations. Sue et al. (2007) have investigated differences in racial microaggression in various racial/ethnic groups. Microassaults are explicit racial verbal slurs or more overt actions, while microinsults, and microinvalidations are more subvert, subtle actions such as insensitivity or taking for granted the experiential reality of a person (Sue et al., 2007). Finally, there is a cumulative effect of racial microaggressions that stress the psychological, physiological, and academic success of students of color (Smith, 2004). While the work of Sue et al. (2007) has focused more on counseling situations and settings, the work of Perez Huber and Solórzano (2015), and Smith (2004, 2009a, 2009b) has focused on systemic racial microaggressions in higher education.

Racial Battle Fatigue and Health

Building off the work of Chester Pierce and other health psychology literature (Carter, 2007; Clark, Anderson, Clark, & Williams, 1999; Utsey, Chae, Brown, & Kelly, 2002; Pierce, 1970, 1974, 1975a, 1975b, 1995), William A. Smith introduced the conceptual framework of racial battle fatigue in the area of higher education using literature from educational foundations, higher education, sociology, psychology, and health psychology (Smith, 2004). The racial battle fatigue framework operates from the standpoint that universities are operated from a historically dominant White perspective (Smith, 2004, 2009a, 2009b; Smith, Allen, & Danley, 2007). In such an environment, Whiteness and White privilege are embedded in the climate and culture resulting endless racial microaggressions that accumulate (Franklin, Smith, & Hung, 2014). People of color are physically and emotionally spent in response to preparing against everyday racial microaggressions (Smith, 2009a). Rather than focusing on academics, students of color may have to divert their energy to cope with the stress responses caused by racial microaggressions (Harrell, 2000; Smith, 2004; Smith et al., 2007).

Racial battle fatigue can be defined as the the psychological, physiological, and behavioral stress responses due to the cumulative impact of racial microaggressions (Smith 2004, 2009a, 2009b; Smith et al., 2007; Smith, Hung, & Franklin, 2011). Psychological stress responses may include frustration, anger,
resentment, or fear (Smith, 2004). Physiological stress responses may include headaches, a pounding heart, high blood pressure, or sleep disturbances (Smith, 2004). Finally, behavioral responses to racial battle fatigue may be stereotype threat, impatience, or poor school performance due to academic disidentification (Smith, 2004). Racial battle fatigue is unlike typical occupational or academic stress in that it is “a response to the distressing mental/emotional conditions that result from facing racism daily” (Smith, 2004, p. 180). Individuals are exposed to racial microaggressions throughout their lifetime, beginning from childhood. The cumulative effect of racial microaggressions is physically, psychologically, and emotionally detrimental as is evidenced in health psychology literature (Carter, 2007; Clark et al., 1999; Harrell, 2000).

In a 7-year-long longitudinal study of racial discrimination and physical health, Krieger and Sidney (1996) found evidence to support a relationship between racism-related stress and blood pressure changes. They found that working class African American adults who accepted unfair treatment had higher blood pressure than those who challenged unfair discriminatory practices. Furthermore, they found that African Americans had higher blood pressure on average, but it was attenuated by accounting for behavioral responses to discrimination such as countering the racist acts. In a study of 40 African American college students, perceived racism in the academic setting predicted an increased level of blood pressure (Hill, Kobayashi, & Hughes, 2007). Studies have also found an association between perceived discrimination and depressive symptoms among Chinese-Canadian students in Toronto (Dion, Dion, & Pak, 1992) and African American college students and adults (Sellers, Copeland-Linder, Martin, & Lewis, 2006). For African American students, racialized stress has been associated with low academic persistence (Neblett, Philip, Cogburn, & Sellers, 2006) and low graduation rates (Brown, Morning, & Watkins, 2005). Wei, Ku, and Liao (2011) found that the university environment was a significant mediator for the association between minority stress and persistence attitudes among Asian American, African American, and Latino students. The campus environment can significantly affect the levels of stress for many students of color, but stress can impact other facets of the life of a person or group. Ojeda, Navarro, Meza, and Arbona (2012) found that ethnicity-related stressors significantly predicted life satisfaction in college students. For instance, in interviews with 26 doctoral students of color, Truong and Museus (2012) illuminated that the participants experienced racial trauma or “severe cases of racism-related stress (p. 228)

The responses to racial battle fatigue make predominantly White settings, where racial microaggressions occur, particularly hostile and uncomfortable places for students and people of color (Smith, 2004, 2009a, 2009b). Though students of color have experienced racial microaggressions most of their lives, the added stress of a higher education institution with a negative racial/ethnic environment may be overwhelming for some individuals. There is a cumulative effect of the numerous racial microaggressions experienced by students of color and they have expressed this is research and in interviews (Smith et al., 2007). Qualitative research on racial battle fatigue has informed much of the recent quantitative work. For instance, one study investigated racial battle fatigue among Latinos (Franklin et al., 2014). Franklin, Smith, and Hung (2014) found that Latino students were the most affected by
psychological and physiological stress due to racial microaggressions. Some research has demonstrated that coping mechanisms employed by African American and Mexican American students can mediate the impact of racial microaggressions on racial battle fatigue related stressors (Franklin, 2015). Taken together, the research in health psychology and higher education demonstrates that racism can negatively impact students of color beyond the everyday academic stressors of college (Carter, 2007; Clark et al., 1999; Franklin et al., 2014; Harrell, 2000; Hill et al., 2007; Neblett et al., 2006; Smith, 2004, 2009a, 2009b; Smith et al., 2007; Utsey et al., 2002; Wei et al., 2011). Sometimes, higher education scholarship operates in a vacuum without considering that students live complex lives that are not only concerned with academics.

Racism-Related Stress and Racial Trauma

Research terms that are associated with racism and stress are used interchangeably. Terms such as racism-related stress and racial trauma are regularly used in research studies and are not clearly defined and/or differentiated. Although these terms may suggest similar notions, distinct differences exist between racism-related stress, racial trauma, and racial battle fatigue.

According to Harrell (2000), racism-related stress is defined as "the race-related transactions between individuals or groups and their environment that emerge from the dynamics of racism, and that tax or exceed existing individual and collective resources or threaten well-being" (p. 44). Harrell (2000) suggested that racism-related stress is characterized by situations that are described as overwhelming and where feelings of helplessness and hopelessness are direct consequences of these events. Although racism-related stress appears to be the same as racial battle fatigue, conceptually it is different. Racism-related stress refers to the actions as a result in the outcome of racial battle fatigue. As Harrell (2000) stated, “race related stress are the race-related transactions” or racial micro- and macroaggressions that manifest into racial battle fatigue. Therefore, racism-related stress is conceptualized as the individual racist actions, and racial battle fatigue is the health outcome for people of color.

Empirical research has found a wealth of evidence to suggest that racism-related stress negatively affects the psychological well-being of an individual. Racism-related stress research has historically been based on the African American experiences. More recently, examinations of racism-related stress and ethnic discrimination have been extended to other populations such as Asian Americans (Alvarez, Juang, & Liang, 2006; Liang, Alvarez, Juang, & Liang, 2007) and Latinas/os (Utsey et al., 2002).

While racism-related stress is the racialized transaction or the actions associated with racist events, the notion of racial trauma is less clear (Harrell, 2000; Truong & Museus, 2012). Truong and Museus (2012) found previous health psychology literature does not draw clear distinctions between racism-related stress and racial trauma. Sometimes racial trauma is described as a cause of severe cases of racism-related stress. In their study with doctoral students, Truong and Museus (2012) provide definitions for racism-related stress and racial trauma. They define racism-related stress as “the emotional, physical, and psychological discomfort and pain resulting from experience with racism” while racial trauma is “severe cases of racism-related stress” (Truong & Museus, 2012, p. 228). The definitions employed by Truong and Museus do not appear to indicate that racial trauma is caused by
racism-related stress, but is rather a greater
degree of racism-related stress. As a result,
racial trauma as defined would still be the
action related to racism and not necessarily
outcomes. Racial battle fatigue is an
encompassing framework that includes
racism-related stressors and racial trauma in
a larger theoretical conception that accounts
outcomes or stressors. Therefore, racism-
related stress and racial trauma are
conceptualized as racist actions, and racial
battle fatigue is the outcome as a result of
those actions.

Why Study Racial Battle Fatigue?
The racial battle fatigue framework
provides a more comprehensive perspective
of the impact of racial microaggressions by
accounting of the psychological,
physiological, and behavioral stress
responses of individuals. The framework
helps researchers and practitioners better
understand students’ holistic experience,
including how racial microaggressions
impact health and well-being. Contrary to
popular notions of a post-racial era, scholars
have demonstrated that experiences of
students of color on college campuses
profoundly contrast with those of White
individuals (Feagin, 1992; Feagin, Vera, &
Imani, 1996; Hurtado, 1992; Hurtado &
Carter, 1997; Smith, 2009). Research
demonstrates that students, faculty, staff,
and administrators commonly characterize
historically underrepresented students of
color as: academically inferior, lazy, illegal,
athletes, exotic, criminals/predators,
affirmative action beneficiaries, and
unwilling or unable to fit into the dominant
White college campus culture (Feagin, 1992;
Harper & Hurtado, 2007; Hurtado, 1992;
Smith et al., 2007).

In response to negative stereotypes,
students of color repeatedly express that
their experiences, cultural traditions, and
opinions are questioned and disputed in
academic and social settings on campus
(Picca & Feagin, 2007; Swim, Hyers,
Cohen, Fitzgerald, & Bylsma, 2003). These
exclusionary practices engender feelings of
not being welcomed into the academic and
social community (Hurtado & Carter, 1997).
Students of color express a general lack of
sense of belonging to the university
(Hurtado, 1992; Hurtado & Carter, 1997;
Strayhorn, 2012). Recent research points to
detrimental psychological, physiological,
and behavioral responses to the negative
racial climates experienced by historically
underrepresented student populations (Hill
et al., 2007; Smith, 2004, 2009a, 2009b).
Additionally, research has demonstrated
racialized stress can also negatively impact
academic outcomes such as GPA and
academic self-concept (Johnson et al., 2014;
Wei et al., 2011). As reviewed, there are a
multitude of various outcomes as a result of
racism and racial battle fatigue framework
provides researchers and practitioners a
framework to better understand of the
experiences and responses of students of
color on college campuses. Academic
performance is an important outcome to
consider, but educators also need to make
sure that the institutional environment is not
detrimental to the health and well-being of
students.

Addressing Racial Microaggressions and
Racial Battle Fatigue
Despite reported hostile campus
racial climates, students of color persist and
graduate from colleges and universities, but
their pathway is consistently interrupted
(Harper, 2012). Students of color are often
blamed for poor academic outcomes while
universities receive little to no scrutiny.
Instead, university administrators need to be
held accountable for not addressing hostile
and unhealthy environments that are rife
with racial microaggressions. Since colleges
and universities are admitting students and
asking them to spend valuable resources at the institutions, administrators need to provide healthy living and learning environments for all students. Unfortunately, there is not enough critical assessment of institutional values and the culture of universities that largely ignores racism.

The racial battle fatigue framework may help administrators implement programs and policies that help address racial microaggressions and the race-related health outcomes of students of color. Prior institutional policy interventions on campuses have generally ignored the effects of racism on students of color. Universities have been interested in getting students of color on campus, but have not focused as much on making sure students of color stay and feel welcome. Institutional policies and programs that address the health of students due to racism would not only attract students, but may improve the academic outcomes of students of color and perhaps their overall experience (Johnson et al., 2014). In the short term, such policies and programs may improve the everyday experiences of all students with long term outcomes addressing the perceived hostile culture of higher education institutions toward historically underrepresented students. A single program or institutional policy by itself will not address the climate and culture of higher education institutions, but a number of targeted policies that improve the postsecondary experience for students of color is needed. The racialized experiences of students of color on campuses are multifaceted. Health is only a single component of possible outcomes in college, but it is important because there can be lifetime impacts.

The systemic issue of racism on campus is so pervasive that, unless change occurs, will continue to be a problem for campus community members well into the future. Higher education practitioners can utilize research on racial microaggressions, racial battle fatigue, and campus racial climate to create race-conscious programs for White students, faculty, and administrators that help address and dispel prevailing negative stereotypes of students of color that lead to racial microaggressions and racial battle fatigue. University policy makers can also create opportunities for Whiteness to be disrupted through intergroup dialogue, cross-racial programming, and multicultural housing. White students need critically analyze Whiteness and White privilege. The self-inspection of Whiteness should occur not only in student affairs programming, but it should be part of the curriculum in university courses.

Universities need to conduct the long-term project of dismantling systemic Whiteness and White privilege on their campuses by confronting everyday racial microaggressions. Universities should have counselors that are trained to assist and help students, faculty, and staff who have been impacted by racism on campus. Race-conscious counselors and programs should address racial battle fatigue and racial microaggressions. Counselors should provide students with information about coping strategies. Counselors should be trained to identify situations in which racial stress may be amplified and how to proactively address such situations. In addition, faculty and staff should be trained so they can recognize when students may be impacted by racism on campus. This would remove the responsibility from the student to the institution.

Nevertheless, institutions are taking steps to educate students about racial microaggressions. For instance, the University of Utah has counselors who focus on racial microaggressions and racial battle fatigue, and Emory University’s Office of
Health Promotion has published information on racial microaggressions (Zesiger, 2013). In addition, colleges need to promote counseling and need to provide information that dispels the stigma associated with counseling so that students will be comfortable with seeking such services. These suggestions require a shift in the university culture that will not be easy, but is needed if universities care about the unique challenges and risks experienced by the increasingly diverse students matriculating and graduating from these institutions.

Finally, the structure, organization, and leadership positions in higher education are still predominantly White (Museus & Jayakumar, 2012). Structural diversity can play an important role in how students perceive the campus climate and their experiences with racism. To address hostile campus racial climates and resulting racial battle fatigue, it would be helpful for universities to focus on hiring and enrolling students, faculty, staff, and administrators from historically underrepresented groups. Universities can do a great deal to address racial microaggressions and racial battle fatigue experienced by students of color. Universities can implement race-conscious policies and programs, educate White students and faculty about racial microaggressions and racism, and finally hire and enroll more individuals from historically underrepresented groups.

Conclusion

The stressors that comprise racial battle fatigue have very real health consequences for students of color on college campuses. Post-secondary scholars do not focus on racial battle fatigue as a framework to incorporate diverse research literature on human behavior, social conditions, and health. Students of color experience the everyday stressors associated with being a university student, but their everyday lived experience is compounded by endless racism and discrimination that occurs daily on college campuses (Harper & Hurtado, 2007). The growing body of literature on racial microaggressions and racial battle fatigue on students of color provides a significant perspective for practitioners, researchers, administrators, and students.

The racial battle fatigue framework is an important and promising model to empirically study race-related stress for people of color in higher education and in society at large. The opportunity to attend postsecondary institutions is not enough to guarantee the success of students of color. Higher education administrators and practitioners need to create welcoming campus environments free of racial microaggressions. It can be helpful for individuals who experience racial microaggressions and racial battle fatigue to understand, assess, and name their experiences with racism. While it is important to understand consequences of racism such as racial battle fatigue, it is also crucial to adopt adaptive coping strategies to combat the pervasiveness of racism. Understanding the possible stress responses for students who live and work in racist environments can help higher education leaders better understand and address the structural racism that permeates higher education institutions.

References


Serving the Sentence: Supporting Formerly Incarcerated Students in Higher Education

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Abstract

The United States has the highest number of incarcerated people in the world. In 2013, there were 2.4 million Americans in jail or prison (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics [BLS], 2013). There has been a national push to expand postsecondary opportunities in prison, considering that people of color are disproportionately affected by the criminal justice system. In July 2015, the Obama Administration announced the Second Chance Pell Pilot Program, which allows incarcerated people to be eligible for college federal aid. This initiative is an incentive for formerly incarcerated students to pursue higher education after their release but there is limited focus on the support they would receive on campus. While there is a substantial amount of literature on the benefits of postsecondary education programs in prison, there is little research on the transition to college for formerly incarcerated students. This paper will provide context about the prison to college pipeline, unique issues students with a criminal history face, and recommendations for institutional support. Focusing mainly in New York State and New York City, this paper highlights policies and resources for formerly incarcerated students in colleges and universities. It concludes with suggestions for higher education and student affairs professionals to promote retention and engagement for formerly incarcerated students.

The United States has the highest number of people in jails and prisons than any other country. It makes up five percent of the world, but 25% of the entire prison population (Berman, 2015). Currently, there are 2.4 million incarcerated U.S. Americans (Weissman et al., n.d.). Despite this statistic, crime rates have actually remained stable (Alexander, 2010). Scholars like Alexander (2010) note the discrepancy between the racial representations of those incarcerated. For example, while black and white males use about the same amount of drugs, black men are ten times more likely to be incarcerated than white men for drug related crimes (Alexander, 2010). Black and Latino men make up roughly 25% of the U.S. population but approximately 60% in prisons and jails (Cooper & Ajinkya, 2015). These disturbing statistics reveal the racism that exists within the criminal justice system, and how it enforces racial hierarchy (Alexander, 2010). Incarcerated people, who are primarily people of color, are denied fundamental civil rights such as access to education, voting, and legal discrimination in the workplace even if they committed minor crimes. They are treated as second-class citizens and can be legally discriminated against. Mass incarceration then, is the result of a “well disguised” system of racial control, driven by systemic race issues as opposed to crime (Alexander, 2010). For these reasons it is crucial that the discourse on incarceration takes place in higher education.
The racial and socioeconomic disparities within the criminal justice system suggest that the experience of formerly incarcerated students reflect a larger diversity issue on campus. The characteristics of incarcerated people are strikingly similar to underrepresented students in higher education. Both populations tend to be people of color and low income. Out of the 2.4 million U.S. Americans incarcerated, nearly 1 million of them are black (Alexander, 2010). Additionally, people in jails or prisons make 41% less than the national average salary before incarceration (Cooper & Ajinkya, 2015). Thus, bias of the criminal justice system can inherently affect vulnerable student populations, making incarceration a relevant issue for student affairs professionals.

New York State is at the forefront of prison reform and is home to the largest number of prison education programs throughout the nation (Mukamal, Silbert, & Taylor, 2015). Likewise, the State University of New York is the largest higher education system in the U.S so the policies around incarceration will be relevant to other institutions. (Law, 2015). For these reasons, this paper will focus specifically on this location although policies are similar throughout the country.

**Higher Education in Prison**

Prison education programs are offered in various correctional facilities to provide incarcerated people with educational experiences and to help them re-enter society upon release (Lagemann, 2011). One of the largest and leading programs is the Bard Prison Initiative, operating in five prison campuses in New York State (Lagemann, 2011). Approximately 300 students have received liberal arts degrees from Bard and over 700 students have enrolled in courses (Lagemann, 2011).

Admission is competitive; applicants are required to take a written exam and interview in person. Similarly, the rigor is comparable to that of a college campus curriculum. Faculty members from Bard College teach the courses in person. The classes range from literature, mathematics, or the arts. The program covers tuition costs for admitted students from its private funding (Lagemann, 2011).

Unlike the Bard Prison Initiative, funding continues to be an issue for most prison education programs since they rely primarily on government aid. In 1994, the Higher Education Act was amended so that students convicted of a crime were no longer qualified for the Pell Grant (U.S. Department of Education, 2015). This amendment discouraged incarcerated students from pursuing higher education because the Pell Grant was the largest source of financial aid. The amendment also eliminated nearly all prison education programs: prior to 1994, there were over 350 programs and after the eligibility changed only eight remained (“Hudson Link,” n.d.). The revised Higher Education Act reflected negative public attitude towards educating incarcerated people (Sieben, 2013). Proponents felt strongly that “criminals” should not receive free education.

Opponents of this amendment, however, argue that depriving formerly incarcerated students of access to higher education is not only a civil rights violation but will negatively impact society. For example, incarceration and education are inextricably linked. People in jail or prison tend to be less educated than people in the rest of the country: only 64% of incarcerated people have earned their high school degree compared to 81% of U.S. Americans (Davis, Bozick, Steele, Saunders, & Miles, 2013). Additionally, a study produced by the RAND Corporation found that incarcerated people enrolled in a postsecondary
education program were 43% less likely to be re-incarcerated (Davis et al., 2013). For incarcerated people with a bachelor’s degree, the recidivism rate decreases to 5.6% (“Education from the Inside Out Coalition,” 2015). Similarly, the Hudson Link, another successful prison education program in New York State, has less than a two percent recidivism rate from over 300 graduates in five correctional facilities (Hudson Link, n.d.). In other words, education has proven to be a powerful tool against recidivism. If this can prevent people from committing another crime, then access to education needs to remain a priority for incarcerated people. Considering that 95 of every 100 incarcerated people are expected to rejoin society, Secretary of Education Arne Duncan reasons, “They’re either going to be released and go back to the streets and go back to a life of crime, and go back to being a menace to society, or they’re going to be released with some real skills and possibly even a college degree, or credit towards a college diploma…and as a parent, as a taxpayer, I know which one I would prefer” (Berman, 2015). To deny educational opportunities to incarcerated people would be a mistake. The correlation between education and incarceration strongly suggests that society will be safer if we educate more of our population.

Incarcerated people are not the only ones to benefit from prison education programs. The RAND study reveals that such programs are more cost effective than having someone return to jail or prison (Davis et al., 2013). Re-incarceration costs for those who receive education in prison is $0.87 to $0.97 million less than those who do not, saving $4 to $5 on three-year re-incarceration costs for every $1 that goes towards correctional education programs (Davis et al., 2013; Salaman, 2015). New York State spends $60,000 a year to incarcerate one person, when it costs $5,000 to pay for one person to receive their bachelor’s degree (“Hudson Link,” n.d.). The Hudson Link program, in particular, would save tax payers in New York State $10 million a year through their education and reentry services (“Hudson Link,” n.d.). By not funding education for formerly incarcerated students, the U.S. is spending more money keeping them in jails and prisons. The Obama Administration took a step in the right direction by launching the Second Chance Pell Pilot program in July 2015, allowing incarcerated individuals to be eligible for Pell Grants again (U.S. Department of Education, 2015). Investing in prison education programs will create both financial and social rewards for U.S. taxpayers, benefiting society as a whole.

**Student Experience in Higher Education**

**Admissions Process**

While most of the research on education and incarceration focuses on education programs in prison, the actual transition and experience of incarcerated students in higher education remain limited. Although they are strongly encouraged to continue pursuing their education after their release, the biggest obstacle formerly incarcerated students face is the college application process (Halkovic et al., 2013). Over 60% of colleges and universities include a question about a student’s criminal record, also known as “checking the box” (Law, 2015). Among these schools is the State University of New York, along with 500 other institutions across the nation that use the common application (Law, 2015). One student describes the problematic nature of asking students to disclose about their criminal history:

> The invitation to “check the box” sits in a long history of racialized policies that may appear to be race-neutral but have fundamentally shaded the U.S. criminal justice
system and, increasingly, the higher education system, severely redlining the educational options for those men and women of color who have been disproportionately targeted by mass incarceration. The “check the box” policy bleeds racialized criminal justice policies into the sphere of higher education. (Halkovic et al., 2013).

The “Checking the box” policy discriminates against academically qualified students based on misconceptions about their criminal background, potentially denying approximately 92 million people in the U.S. with a criminal history the chance to pursue higher education (Weissman et al., n.d.). With the large proportion of students of color involved in the criminal justice system, the implications are devastating. Andrew Corey Greene, a formerly incarcerated student and doctoral candidate at the CUNY Graduate Center in New York City, documents the inappropriate nature of asking for a criminal history record in his article, “Checking the box: Enduring the stigma of applying to graduate school post-incarceration” (2013). Greene argues that in fact, “the box” does not determine who will succeed in college or who will commit a crime. The Center for Community Alternatives, a criminal justice advocacy organization based in New York City, reports that “no link has been established between having a criminal record and posing a risk to campus safety. Although college campuses are not immune from crime, the data show that they are remarkably safe places compared to the community-at-large” (Weissman et al., n.d.). There has been no study to prove the correlation between criminal background screenings and campus safety. High profile crimes, such as school shootings, are rare and usually committed by first time offenders (Halkovic et al., 2013). Sexual assault is the most common crime on campus and is also typically committed by students with no prior criminal record (Halkovic et al., 2013). Recent studies actually conclude that the campus crime rate is not lower for schools that use “the box” as part of their admission process as opposed to schools that do not (Halkovic et al., 2013). Research also shows that, after four years, people with a criminal record are no more likely to re-offend than those who have never committed a crime are to commit one (Evans, 2013). In reality, requiring students to “check the box” does not increase safety or predict the likelihood of a student to commit a crime. Rather, this process is a form of discrimination against individuals with a criminal background and largely students of color. The real public safety issue is denying incarcerated people access to higher education. By not extending educational opportunities, the admission process is punishing individuals who have already paid for their mistake. Without education, these students could return back to jail or prison, which potentially yields greater repercussion than including them in the college environment could.

When students “check the box,” they experience a more tedious process that involves providing further documentation without advanced notice (Evans, 2013). Not only is this inconvenient, but it can also prolong the application process. Some schools require in-person interviews or invite the dean, campus safety, or other personnel to review their admission application (Halkovic et al., 2013). After being in prison for eight years, Greene attended LaGuardia Community College, where he graduated with honors, then transferred to New York University (Greene, 2013). He then applied to doctoral programs, some of which had peculiar follow up processes regarding his criminal history (Greene, 2013). For example, one institution requested additional information after he
submitted his application including his arrest and sentencing record, documents that he completed his sentence as well as more letters of recommendations (Greene, 2013). These requirements were not stated as part of the application process and as a result cost him money and time. Greene had to travel in and out of courtrooms and parole buildings to gather these documents. Ultimately, formerly incarcerated students’ access to higher education “rest in the hands of others who could be tainted by racism, classism, and preconceived judgments” (Greene, 2013). Sadly, the tedious admission process as well as the blanket rejection for those with a criminal history causes students to lose opportunities to advance their education or career. Considering the student populations that are likely to “check the box,” the consequences are dire because upholding this policy can unintentionally reinforce discrimination based on race.

**Student Life**

For students who are able to access higher education, they may face difficulty transitioning on campus. One student compares it to being an immigrant living in a new land, where they had to learn to navigate their surroundings (“College Initiative Mentors,” 2010). A few challenges are outlined by College Initiative, a New York City based organization dedicated to “creating pathways from criminal justice involvement to college and beyond” (“College Initiative Mentors,” 2010). In 2002, the organization created a peer mentoring program to support the needs of formerly incarcerated students (“College Initiative Mentors,” 2010). They noticed that these students face personal, academic, and financial barriers that make it unlikely for them to persist through college. The statistic is telling: 50% of students in the program dropped out during their first semester (“College Initiative Mentors,” 2010). In contrast, only 15% of students dropped out who stayed for two semesters. “If we can get the students through two semesters, their chances of getting a college degree is much higher,” observed former College Initiative Director Michael Carey. He adds, “We do a lot of back end work to get people through the door to college, but where we lack is offering support to students once they have started” (“College Initiative Mentors,” 2010). For some students, it could be their first time attending college. For others, it could be their first time returning back to school in ten years. Catering to diverse academic needs will ensure a smoother transition and increase retention for all students despite their background.

Students interested in extracurricular opportunities may face a few impediments due to school policies. Those with a criminal history are typically placed on special supervision or restricted from campus activities after they have been admitted. For example, Juan was a formerly incarcerated student accepted into a college in New York City (Weissman et al., n.d.). However, he was placed on disciplinary probation for two years despite not having any criminal involvement since being released (Weissman et al., n.d.). He was an active member of an honor society, but due to his criminal background he was prohibited from serving in a leadership role (Weissman et al., n.d.). Juan admits that he found the “university’s attitude towards him to be very discouraging and could understand how someone with less commitment and fortitude would be deterred from pursuing their higher education goals” (Weissman et al., n.d.). Nonetheless, like many formerly incarcerated students, he valued his experience because college provided him with opportunities to change his life (Weissman et al., n.d.). As student affairs professionals, we understand how beneficial involvement in extra-curricular
opportunities could have been. Research shows that extra-curricular activities are as important as academics and that student involvement increases retention by promoting a sense of community (Astin, 1984). Students involved with at least one club or organization are also more likely to have a positive experience (Astin, 1984). For these reasons, it is important that extra-curricular and student leadership possibilities are extended to students with a criminal history.

Re-entry can add another dynamic to the issues formerly incarcerated students face. For instance, they have to abide by a particular set of rules once they are released. One of these requirements is reporting regularly to their probation or parole officer. The role of the officer does not always align with their academic goals. Officers tend to prioritize job searching, attending mandated programs, and following curfews, as opposed to studying for class (Halkovic et al., 2013). Housing can also be a burden. Often, students’ living situations are not conducive to studying. Whether they live with family members or in public housing, it is either an unsafe environment, overcrowded, or just not ideal. As one student states:

I was in a three-quarter house. It still has prison life in it. If you leave something out you might [have it stolen]. If you have a quiz you might not be able to study that night. You have to go to welfare—they don’t care about your school schedule, you have to make your welfare appointment. That was what was going on my first two years of school. (Halkovic et al., 2013)

Their personal lives can seriously affect their academic progress. If they do not have a supportive mental and physical environment, formerly incarcerated students may experience more difficulty in their attempt to graduate. Being aware of their re-entry experience can better inform student affairs professionals to support students with a criminal history record.

Stigma is also a significant challenge for formerly incarcerated students. It can create hostile academic and social environments, where students fear the consequences of being “outed” by classmates or faculty as formerly incarcerated (Montross & Montross, 1997). One student asserts, “You know that there is this line out there and if you cross that line you are going to lose everything and you are back in [prison]” (Montross & Montross, 1997). Students can be hesitant to disclose any information about their criminal justice history, especially if they are unsure how it will be received. Not being able to share such information can lead to feelings of guilt, causing low self-esteem and social isolation (Montross & Montross, 1997). Most importantly, these students worry that after self-disclosure they will not be recognized for their transformation but instead stigmatized as “criminals.” What makes this experience more alienating is not being able to associate with other formerly incarcerated people. In order to comply with the condition of release, they may be prohibited from “fraternizing” with one another (Halkovic et al., 2013). This rule restricts students from developing helpful social and professional networks, a common resource that their non-incarcerated peers have access to. As one student expressed, “They think the only reason that we get together is to commit crimes—like we can’t get together to talk about anything else besides committing crimes” (Halkovic et al., 2013). A different participant mentions that, “Just knowing someone is there... I think that’s the most important part... is knowing that you’re not alone” (“College Initiative Mentors,” 2010). Having a network of people with similar experiences can be
beneficial to their transition. It can increase their motivation and help them foster a stronger sense of community. Furthermore, it is important for staff and faculty to create an environment where students can feel safe disclosing their criminal history.

From the admission process to the college transition, the unique issues formerly incarcerated students face severely impact their experience. While most are students of color and low income, the additional stigma of being formerly incarcerated adds a layer of complexity to their needs. Though there are rarely data of drop out rates for students with a criminal history, current literature reveals the urgency for greater support. Student affairs professionals should be knowledgeable about these issues to better advocate for their needs. In a society that stigmatizes incarcerated individuals, the support of university staff and faculty to promote a more positive environment for their emotional and academic growth is vital for these students. Advocating the needs of formerly incarcerated students will inherently serve the needs of other underserved students. Changing policies and practices to accommodate formerly incarcerated students will also benefit students of color and low income students since social justice is at the core of the issues they face in higher education. By challenging schools to be inclusive of diverse student experiences, all students will then be free of the unintended oppression that operates on the institutional level.

**Recommendations for Practice**

Support can be the difference between students succeeding and students re-entering prison (“College Initiative,” 2010). It starts with the admission process. To increase access to higher education, institutions should not ask about criminal background on college applications. They should model the City University of New York system, for example, which does not include a question about criminal history as part of the admission process (Law, 2015). The omission of that question is part of the “Ban the Box” campaign, which is working to eliminate criminal history screenings on college admission applications (Law, 2015). In New York State, the Fair Access to Education Bill will prohibit schools from using conviction histories as part of their screening process. Under this bill colleges and universities can still ask about a student’s criminal history, but only after accepting the student. If passed, New York will be the first state to exclude questions about criminal justice histories on college applications (Law, 2015). Alternatively, colleges and universities could ask for information such as documentation of rehabilitation or convictions for felonies from the last five years as opposed to misdemeanors (Weissman et al., n.d.). Additionally, schools should refrain from asking students to provide an official criminal history record. This document contains private information not meant for public knowledge such as sealed records, expungements, and mental health data (Halkovic et al., 2013). In order to be both consistent and fair in the admission process, students should be informed in writing of any policy for criminal history screenings (Halkovic et al., 2013). Access to higher education is vital to their re-entry into the community and society. Removing any barriers would allow them to reach their full potential as students and community leaders.

In order to support these students, student affairs professionals need to better understand their needs and experiences. Perhaps cultural humility training, as opposed to cultural competency training, can address how to best serve formerly incarcerated students. After all, understanding their perspective requires greater knowledge about diversity and social
justice. Cultural humility emphasizes lifelong learning, whereas cultural competency implies that the professional has mastered areas of culture (Tervalon & Murray-Garcia, 1998). The term humility in this sense means recognizing the limit of one’s knowledge and being open to learning more (Tervalon & Murray-Garcia, 1998). It increases self-awareness of biases and challenges perceptions. Through its reflective practice, cultural humility training can help ensure that we do not make formerly incarcerated students feel ashamed or unwelcomed (Mukamal, Silbert, & Taylor, 2015). Part of this comes from the language we are using to describe the students. Terms such as inmates, convicts, prisoners, or felons, are not only derogatory, but enforce negative public perception (Ellis, n.d.). Instead, we should use more humanizing language and refer to them as formerly incarcerated people, people on parole, or people with criminal convictions. Humanizing language, along with other important information about the experiences of formerly incarcerated students, will encourage co-workers and staff to be invested in this issue (Salaman, 2015). The goal of cultural humility training is for staff members to increase their awareness of self and others, and to be open to learning more about the students they are serving.

Formerly incarcerated students will also need help navigating the college campus. The Prisoner Re-entry Institute at John Jay College of Criminal Justice in New York City created a resource titled “Back to School: A Guide to Continuing Your Education after Prison” (Crayton & Lindahl, 2015). The purpose of this guide is to assist students with the transition from prison to higher education by disseminating information, defining terms and vocabulary, and providing advice. The manual is designed to “help [students] take the first steps towards continuing [their] education, whether that means learning English, working towards [their high school equivalency], learning an occupation, or building on college credits [they] have already earned” (Crayton & Lindahl, 2015). The guide is organized into three sections: the first part is about preparing to go back to school, and it explains the academic culture and important documents; the second part covers the process of earning a high school diploma or its equivalent; and the last part outlines concrete steps on how to get a college degree. Additionally, the guide contains brief interviews with current students who were also formerly incarcerated about their college experience. Their stories and advice could be motivating for students by seeing people like them succeeding in college. Schools should consider adopting a similar guide to assist students with the transition. Providing them with information on transitioning to higher education is one way to make students feel empowered. If they are given the resources to succeed from the beginning, they will be more likely to persist academically (Crayton & Lindahl, 2015).

There is little evidence-based data that assesses resources for formerly incarcerated students on college campuses, in part due to their mistrust of authority (Montross & Montross, 1997). As a result, it can be difficult to confirm best practices for these students (Wexler, 2014). However, further research needs to be conducted on incarceration and higher education to fully understand the students’ experience. This will provide more tools and resources for student affairs professionals to use. Future research could focus on segregating the data by gender since most of the studies are on men’s prisons. Although there are more men’s prisons, the number of women in prison is increasing at an alarming rate (Evans, 2013). In order to avoid perpetuating the gender inequality that exists...
outside the system, women’s voices need to be included in the conversation of higher education and incarceration.

**Limitations**

Since this literature review is the first of its kind, there are a few limitations. For one, this paper focuses on the policies, resources, and experiences of formerly incarcerated students in New York State and New York City. While the experiences of these students were similar throughout New York State and New York City, it is not assumed that these experiences are equally representative across other cities or institutions. Another limitation is the lack of research and data on formerly incarcerated students. Further investigation into the experiences of these students can inform practice and move schools forward on how to best address these issues.

**Conclusion**

This literature review highlights a need for the collaboration of higher education and incarceration. Incarcerated people are the most disadvantaged in terms of educational advancement opportunities (Law, 2015). There is a powerful connection between incarceration and education level. Studies prove that expanding postsecondary education opportunities to those incarcerated drastically lowers their recidivism rate. It is troubling, then, that these students endure a tedious admissions process that requires additional documents. College applications that require students to “check the box” leave them in a vulnerable position to be discriminated against. Once students are matriculated they still face challenges that lead to high drop out rates. Though research is limited, it is clear that students with a criminal history need a significant amount of support from the institution and staff.

While some argue that those behind bars did something to deserve it, it is important to recognize the inequities in the criminal justice system. The racial and socioeconomic disparities in incarceration rates reveal a larger issue of social justice. Our bias with formerly incarcerated students can negatively impact students of color and low-income students. We cannot expect incarcerated people to be productive members of society by denying higher education access. Higher education provides an opportunity for formerly incarcerated students to positively transform their lives. This is evident in the low recidivism rates for those who participate in prison education programs. It is essential that barriers are removed, beginning with the admission process and certainly while they are on campus. Both their transition and experience are crucial to the overall diversity and inclusion efforts in colleges and universities. Their perspective adds a different dynamic both inside and outside the classroom. These students demonstrate an “enthusiasm for learning, desire to give back to their communities, and a determination to transform their lives” (Halkovic et al., 2013). Now is a critical time for higher education institutions to consider the impact of incarceration, not solely because these students deserve it, but because our society deserves it.

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Strategies to Improve Retention at a Historically Afrikaans University

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Abstract
Socioeconomic status can play a critical role in a student’s transition to higher education. The study was conducted at a historically Afrikaans university in South Africa where the initial focus was to educate one particular population, Afrikaners, but now serves a demographic of diverse languages and ethnicities. The purpose of this pilot study is to explore the impact of secondary education and living accommodations on students’ retention in higher education. This qualitative study includes interviews, observations, and document analysis of ten university students from a range of academic years and majors. The study is important for student affairs professionals because it examines the socioeconomic factors that contribute to dropout and depicts strategies for improving retention.

Keywords: retention; higher education; socioeconomic; academic performance; secondary education; finances; living accommodations

International research on student retention in higher education presents a wide range of reasons why students leave higher education institutions before completing a degree. Finances can play a significant role in premature departure from higher education institutions for students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds. “Students from low socioeconomic status (SES) schools find it especially hard to overcome these challenges... and it is well known that student’s SES has an important influence in their educational achievement” (Taylor & Yu, 2009). This may be due to students having underestimated the full cost of tuition and encountering unexpected financial demands (Brier, 2010). Institutions in South Africa have increased the equity of access, but graduation rates remain stagnant. Studies show that 25% of all students dropout in their first year and 20% in their second and third years, with only 21% graduating on time (Scott, Yeld & Hendry, 2007). In 2005, the average dropout rate was 17% and since then has steadily increased. The government has placed a strong emphasis on equitable access to higher education with the intent of increasing students’ opportunities to succeed (Hendry, 1998). The National Development Plan, constructed by the government, offers a long-term plan to end poverty and promote equality (South African Government, 2012). The plan emphasizes the importance of taking South African students into account when addressing the underlying factors contributing to retention and highlights the need for universities to reexamine the factors that determine students’ academic success (Fraser & Killen, 2005). The study explores strategies to improve retention at a historically Afrikaans university by addressing the challenges of socioeconomic status within the contexts of academic preparedness and living accommodations. 

2 A traditional college student in South Africa graduates in three years.
Literature Review
Living Accommodations

Turley and Wodtke (2010) examined the effects of a college residency experience through the lens of race, for students living on-campus, living off-campus in private apartments, and living off-campus with family. They found that Black students who lived at home with family were more likely than White students to live in isolated and disadvantaged residential areas. These living conditions inhibited college success and enabled student dropout. “Living off-campus with family may be more difficult for minority students if they have more family responsibilities, fewer financial resources, and inadequate transportation to and from campus” (Turley & Wodtke, 2010). Living on-campus can provide lower income minority students with the resources imperative for success such as academic support, space to interact with faculty and the opportunity to be involved in social activities (Turley & Wodtke, 2010). In addition, Schudde (2011) studied the causal effect of college residency on campus retention. She found that students from low economic backgrounds faced a plethora of factors, late acceptance decisions to attend the university and the inability to afford on-campus residence, denying them the experience of college residency.

Secondary Education

Petersen, Louw and Dumont (2008) suggested finances and academics as two consistent challenges of disadvantaged students. The study was an attempt to improve the educational gap and determined a tested model for promoting academic success among first-year students. The study examined first-year students on need-based financial aid at the University of Cape Town, South Africa. The increasing dropout rate was the result of students’ socioeconomic status and psychological factors. The proposed model was based on Robbins, Lauver, Le, Davis, Langley, and Carlstrom (2004) meta-analysis, which identified the key determinants of academic performance. The results of the study revealed that academic performance is not solely based on financial status, but also student’s personal attributes (self-esteem). Breier (2010) examined student retention at seven higher education institutions in South Africa, focusing on the Western Cape, which serves a large proportion of impoverished students. This research analyzed a study conducted by the Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC) in an effort to understand the dropout trends in South Africa. The study indicated that at a historically disadvantaged institution, finances and academics were two main contributing factors to students leaving prematurely. Van Zyl, Gravett, and De Bruin (2012) examined the importance of pre-entry attributes and students’ ability to perform well academically in higher education. According to their findings, previous academic performance was the strongest predictor of future academic performance (Ishler & Upcraft 2005; Kuh 2005; Sibanda & Lourens, 2003).

Purpose

The aim of this study was to analyze factors that impact retention of undergraduate students. Specifically, it explored the determining factors for improving student retention at a historically Afrikaans university.³ To address these strategies, we examined the following interview questions: (1) How did your high school prepare you for university? (2) What

³ The initial focus of the Afrikaans university in South Africa was to educate one particular population, Afrikanners, but now serves a demographic of diverse languages and ethnicities.
are your living accommodations during your time at university and how has this affected your undergraduate academic experience?

**Methodology**

Our research was conducted at a public research university in South Africa with approximately 57,000 students and a racial makeup of 60% African (Black or person of color) and 40% White or Afrikaans. The diverse student population represents all nine provinces in South Africa both culturally and racially. This location was chosen due to the residential nature of the campus and the diverse population of students.

Ten students agreed to participate in our study and were recruited by current university students. Thirty percent attended private high schools and 70% attended public high schools. In addition, 30% were male and 70% were female, representing the majority of participants. The age of our participants ranged from 18-24 years old and represents racially diverse backgrounds. Forty percent of the participants were Black or African; 30% Coloured; 20% White; and 10% Indian.

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4 This university is equivalent to a Research I institution in the United States.

5 In the South African context, Coloured refers to a racial label for people of mixed ethnic origin.
Semi-structured and structured interviews were conducted with all participants to analyze our research questions. The interviews were conducted over a two-week period on campus, based on participants’ availability. Pseudonyms were given to all participants during transcription to ensure confidentiality when analyzing the data (see Table 1 above). This study did not obtain approval from the university ethics review committee; therefore, it is a pilot with the intention to do further research.

This study illustrates a number of important considerations for student success in South Africa; however, there are a few key limitations. A critical limitation is the lack of prior research on retention in South African universities. Comparative studies at different South African institutions would have provided useful information, especially if compared with other historically Afrikaans universities. A second limitation was that both students and administrators were initially interviewed; however, due to biases, administrators were eliminated from the study. Finally, the small sample size affected our results. This is not a

### Table 1: Student Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name (Pseudonym)</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Race</th>
<th>University Year</th>
<th>Major</th>
<th>Secondary Education</th>
<th>Post-Secondary Living Accommodations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tera</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>2nd Year</td>
<td>Education</td>
<td>Public</td>
<td>Residence Hall</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kyler</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Coloured</td>
<td>2nd Year</td>
<td>Biotechnology</td>
<td>Public</td>
<td>Residence Hall</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kerry</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>1st Year</td>
<td>Undecided</td>
<td>Private</td>
<td>Residence Hall</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prithi</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>Indian</td>
<td>1st Year</td>
<td>Undecided</td>
<td>Public</td>
<td>Off-Campus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>2nd Year</td>
<td>Business Communications &amp; Financial Sciences</td>
<td>Private</td>
<td>Off-Campus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alexandra</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Coloured</td>
<td>2nd Year</td>
<td>Financial Sciences</td>
<td>Public</td>
<td>Off-Campus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evan</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>Coloured</td>
<td>2nd Year</td>
<td>Financial Sciences</td>
<td>Public</td>
<td>Off-Campus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paul</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>2nd Year</td>
<td>Financial Sciences</td>
<td>Public</td>
<td>Off-Campus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pauline</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>Honors</td>
<td>Communication</td>
<td>Public</td>
<td>Off-Campus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fefe</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>Honors</td>
<td>Communication</td>
<td>Private</td>
<td>Off-Campus</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
realistic representation of the student population at the university. For example, of the ten students that were interviewed 30% were from private high schools and 70% came from public secondary institutions. Replication with broader a sample would strengthen our findings. Despite these limitations, the results are still noteworthy and present the need for further research in higher education, specifically for historically Afrikaans institutions.

**Preliminary Finding**

- The findings suggest that students’ socioeconomic status is the contributing cause of student dropout at a historically Afrikaans institution. The study illustrates that students from low socioeconomic backgrounds are not being adequately prepared for higher education both academically and/or financially. The data revealed that socioeconomic status plays a critical role for students from low-income households who are underprepared by public secondary schools and forced to live off-campus due to low marks or decumbent finances. According the university, first-year students apply to live in residence and are solely accepted to living on campus based on grade 11 marks. Permission into housing is based on the number of available bed spaces and the re-evaluation of students’ marks in grade 12 to determine their eligibility. After their first year as undergraduates, students’ grade point average (GPA) is re-evaluated and compared to peers to determine their eligibility to remain in housing. The diagram (Figure 1) depicts that socioeconomic status mediates the effects of secondary education and living accommodations for undergraduate students.

The hypothesized relations between the variables are:
- Private secondary education has a positive association with academic performance. These positive associations indicate that students are academically prepared based on the low student-to-teacher ratio and the academic rigor of high school curricula. Public secondary education has a negative association with academic performance. These negative associations indicate that students are underprepared academically.

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6 In South Africa, marks are synonymous with grades in the U.S. and are evaluated similarly to grade point average.
based on the high student-to-teacher ratio, the lack of pre-college resources, and the lack of guidance both in high school and at home. Out of pocket financing has a positive association with academic performance due to their private secondary education. The positive association indicates that students are better prepared academically and are less concerned with financial stressors. The negative association indicates that students from low socioeconomic status display a low level of adjustment to the academic rigor of higher education.

- On-campus housing has a positive association with academic performance and social integration. These positive associations indicate that students acclimate to the campus life and achieve higher level of academic performance based on faculty interaction, accessibility to academic resources (i.e. library, study lounges) and guidance from residential staff. Off-campus housing has a negative association with academic performance and social integration due to the lack of commuter resources. These negative associations indicate that students have low levels of academic excellence due to the lack of accessible and affordable transportation.

Discussion
The proposed diagram models the assumption that socioeconomic status affects a student’s ability to persist. The discussion below provides examples of participants’ experiences that highlight socioeconomic status as a determining factor in their level of academic preparedness and access to living accommodations.

Secondary Education
Secondary education can play a key role in students’ academic preparedness and retention. The two types of secondary education are private and public high schools. Private high schools require high admissions fees and are funded primarily by parents’ income, whereas the government funds public high schools with reduced school fees. Students who attend public schools tend to lack the resources needed to develop necessary study skills and academic readiness for their undergraduate experience compared to their private school counterparts.

Private High School
South African private high schools are known to be a luxury education for wealthy White students due to the high cost of attendance. “A year at a private high school can cost more than a year at university” (David, 22). The data suggest that students who attended private high schools feel academically prepared for the transition from high school to university. “I went to an IB (International Baccalaureate) high school. I feel like I got a lot of exposure and I took AP (Advanced Placement) Math, so that really helped me in first semester… it gave me a head start so I wasn’t as petrified when I got here” (Kerry, 18). International Baccalaureate is a school designed to encourage students to think independently and drive their own learning ("International Education," n.d.). The primary focus of private school is to produce academic excellence and to prepare students for higher education. “My high school definitely prepared me for university; that was their main approach. To prepare you for university, they would make the work a lot harder, but at the same time help you get

7 International Baccalaureate is a program for students age 3-19 that challenges students to excel in their studies and encourages both personal and academic achievement. The goal is to improve pedagogy in leadership. More information can be found at (ibo.org).
through it... I was very fortunate to go to the school that I did” (David, 22). Students who attended private secondary education have less obstacles transitioning academically to higher education due to the difficult workload and academic rigor during secondary education.

Public High School
The data suggest that the majority of students, who attended public secondary schools, did not feel academically prepared for university. “I went to a rural high school and to them the highest you can go is to a TVET (Technical Vocational Education and Training). They expect us to fail; they don’t expect us to do as well as other people because we are short on teachers. In grades 10 and 11, I never had a Math teacher, so I had to make up for that and I had to study on my own and learn” (Kyler, 22). Students who aspire to continue their education need to rely on self-efficacy to succeed due to limited resources and lack of support provided by their high school administration. “There is a huge gap between high school and university, the workload is so much. In high school I could study the night before, but here I fail… The [high school teachers] don’t tell you what university is really like, you have to push hard and study from day one… if you fall behind you are going to fail” (Kyler, 22). Underprepared students are typically unable to pass the required courses and are forced to leave the university.

Living Accommodations
In addition to secondary education, student living accommodations while attending university play an important role in students’ success and retention. The two types of accommodations available for students are on-campus and off-campus housing. Students living on-campus reside in residence halls overseen by the university that house 9,000 students. The strategic plan suggests that “approximately 55,000 students will live on-campus in 2025 and the university will provide quality facilities to all its students and still have sufficient resources to be a research-intensive university” (Strategic Plan, 2011). The Strategic Plan will provide more on-campus bed spaces, but will continue to be competitive process and reliant on students’ marks. This will continue to create a critical barrier for the success and retention by forcing students to live off-campus.

Day Students or Commuter Students (Off-Campus Residence)
For students who struggle financially, the extra cost of transportation may cause additional stress or challenges when pursuing higher education. A student’s commute to university can range from 20 minutes to an hour and a half one-way. The lack of affordable or convenient transportation to and from campus is a challenge that hinders students’ abilities to succeed on campus. “I need to catch a taxi to get to school. I used to go with a bus, but they told me that students at [the university] pay full price, 16 Rands, which is more than a taxi to get home. If I take a taxi it can cost me 700 Rands\(^8\) a month to transport to and from university” (Evan, 19). For students who struggle financially, the extra cost of transportation and lack of accessibility can cause stress when trying to pursue their degree.

Lack of university transportation plays an essential role in students’ academics, social opportunities, and

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\(^8\) 700 Rands are equivalent to 46.30 USD (as of December 2015). The median average of South African income is about $27,609 Rands, therefore 700 Rands is approximately 40% of the South African income.
personal well-being. “If I had transportation I would succeed better academically. If you don’t have to worry about how you get to campus you can start focusing on your studies more and you can get better results, better grades, and socially you are more balanced. A lot of stress is taken off from you, and your overall well-being is better because any kind of negative stress is not good for you” (Alexandra, 20). These examples illustrate that a number of off-campus students struggle with the need for a more convenient, accessible, and affordable transportation system to get them to school as well as home safely.

Residence Halls
There is a stringent process based on a student’s GPA to determine access to residence halls at the university. The students with the highest marks as well as the ability to afford housing are allotted top preference for on-campus housing. Each year students are re-evaluated academically to determine whether they still qualify for on-campus housing. Due to their heavy course load or lack of academic preparation from their secondary education, the GPA minimum and average requirement causes stress and concern amongst those struggling academically.

The GPA requirement to live in my residence hall is a 65⁹ average, which is not fair to everyone on the education campus since some are doing additional modules, which are very hard to get 70 averages…

[What the University Housing Office] wants is 64 [GPA average] but if everyone else gets a 64 then you have to up your marks. So usually you need an average of 70. The average student does 3-4 modules and I am doing 6-7 … Yes, being kicked out of housing is a big concern. I am worried. Living in Res [Residence Halls] is convenient for food and to buy things that I need. If I am out of Res I have to do all of that on my own (Tera, 21).

Tera’s story is a common theme among students living on campus. There is a constant fear that due to some students’ inability to reach the GPA requirement they will be forced to leave on-campus housing and find some other form of living accommodations that is affordable and conducive to their academic success. A student removed from housing can cause negative financial implications such as the inability to afford private accommodations potentially leading to student dropout.

Despite the challenge of a GPA requirement to live on-campus, there are many benefits to living in a residence hall. “The facilities in Res make it easier to get better marks and you don’t have to walk to study. The Res has study centers and they have quiet time where you are forced to study… it helped me to focus and study more. If I had started off-campus I don’t think I would have done well” (Pauline, 22). Another benefit to living on-campus is the accessibility of resources. “It’s a lot better than living in the flat because there are resources. The library is there and I can stay until it closes. I just walk back, and there are buses to the res halls” (Kyler, 20).

In addition to academic support, residence halls ease the process of finding a support system. “I feel supported on campus, part of Res is that we have a very good support system because we have a mentor and a house mom. There are four girls doing the same degree as me in Res so we can help each

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⁹ South Africa’s Grade Point Average is different than the United States. In South Africa grade point average is based on module credits that can be calculated by multiplying the final marks achieved in a module (course) with the credit value and divided by the sum of the total of the credit values of all the marks that the student was enrolled for.
other” (Kerry, 18). On-campus housing provides academic and social support, which is imperative to student success.

Conclusion

The data reveals that socioeconomic status plays a critical role for students from low-income households who are underprepared by public secondary schools and forced to live off-campus due to low marks and/or decumbent finances. To improve student retention and decrease the dropout rate, universities should first consider the needs of low socioeconomic students. Key strategies to consider to improve retention include: 1) affordable and convenient transportation for commuter students, 2) reduction of the GPA requirement for on-campus residences, and 3) increase the number of residential spaces available for undergraduate students. The students from public high schools are struggling to pay college fees, underprepared for university, and need guidance and support services from on-campus living. This will not only improve the academic rigor of the university, but will also help to create a diversified population, specifically by socioeconomic class. Universities should consider socioeconomic factors that contribute to dropout for improving retention.

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