

FROM UNDERDOG TO OVERCOMER:
COUNTER-STORIES OF ACADEMIC RESILIENCE FROM BLACK, FIRST
GENERATION COLLEGE STUDENTS FROM LOW-INCOME BACKGROUNDS,
STUDYING AT A PREDOMINANTLY WHITE INSTITUTION

By

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ABSTRACT

FROM UNDERDOG TO OVERCOMER: COUNTER-STORIES OF ACADEMIC RESILIENCE FROM BLACK, FIRST GENERATION COLLEGE STUDENTS FROM LOW-INCOME BACKGROUNDS, STUDYING AT A PREDOMINANTLY WHITE INSTITUTION

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The purpose of the current study was to explore the academic resilience of Black, first generation, low-income college students at a particular Predominantly White Institution (PWI). Through an exploration of lived experiences of Black, first generation, low-income college students, the current study sought to understand, from student perspectives, the institutional, communal, and personal factors contributing to academic resilience in ways leading to continued persistence. Using Critical Race Theory (CRT) as the macro theoretical lens and critical race methodology, the study elicited counter-stories that focused on academic resilience in the face of daily and historical challenges. The study employed purposeful sampling to select 10 participants who identified as Black, first generation, and low-income. Each participant engaged in a single semi-structured interview and follow up participant focus group; both of which lasted no more than two hours.

Based on thematic analysis, I identified three primary themes that arose from patterns in the data. To honor CRT and participant voice, I used participant quotes to assist in the naming of the themes. The themes include (a) “Do whatever needs to be done to get the goal accomplished. That’s really all it is.” – Intrinsic motivation, grit, and academic resilience; (b) “It kinda just puts you in a situation where you just feel like failure’s not an option; even after you fail, you gotta get back up.” – Academic resilience

and the sense of obligation to family and the broader Black community; and (c) “They raised a doctor” – The village model and academic resilience. The themes represent students’ lived experiences of remaining academically resilient while navigating an institution and society rife with classed and raced oppression. Student experiences were taken into consideration to develop recommendations and conclusions for theory, research, and, most importantly, future practice.

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This dissertation is dedicated to the 10 participants who shared their stories with me. Who have refused over and over to give up despite what they may be facing. Thank you for inspiring me. YOU are Black excellence. You are the reason this work exists and the reason my work is meaningful.

This dissertation is dedicated to Ethel and Tommy Culpepper. Thank you for your sacrifice of love and hard work to set a strong foundation for our family. Though you were unable to attend college, I honor you with this work.

And as promised:

“Black lives matter. Black power. Power to the people and all that good stuff. Just want that to be on the record, so when you listen to it, transcribe it, say Black lives matter.”

Paul, study participant

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"You feel like an underdog... just because you feel like all the odds are stacked against you and most of the time, people don't even believe that you can accomplish what you set your goals to....For some people, it might be discouraging but to me, it's motivating because you don't even think I can do it, and I know I can" – Simba, Junior, Black male study participant

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction: Being Black, First Generation, and Low-Income at a Predominantly White Institution

During the past four years, I have served in a variety of capacities at a large, land grant, predominantly White Midwestern institution. Throughout my time in this role, I have worked with students from around the world. One student in particular stands out to me: Shawna Martin.

Like many, Shawna is a first-generation college student from an urban community and comes from a low-income background. She is an intelligent and capable student, but consistently struggled academically due to the numerous trials she encountered. The challenges Shawna faced seemed to combine three primary concerns: coming from a low-income background, being first in her family to attend college, and being Black at a large Predominantly White Institution (PWI). Shawna's college transition was overwhelmed with challenges regarding her financial aid or lack thereof. In addition to being a student, she was balancing jobs both on and off campus, at points working almost 35 hours in a week. Despite Shawna often sending money home to support her family, she was unable to find support from anyone in her home who could help her with navigating her college-specific needs such as her struggles with roommates, joining student organizations, and learning how to appropriately speak with her professors.

Further exacerbating her struggles, Shawna was often the only Black student in her classes and she struggled with fitting in, making friends, speaking up in class, and asking for help. She convinced herself no one would understand what she was going through. Most

critically, Shawna believed voicing her challenges and needs would make all Black students look bad. However, despite the odds faced, Shawna seemed to remain resilient in her pursuit of higher education. She continued to show up and push through challenges no matter what.

Shawna's academic resilience is what led to her persistence. Shawna, and students like her, who display a high level of academic resilience, succeeding academically despite difficult and challenging life circumstances, which may prevent them from succeeding (Bryan, 2005; Wang, Haertel, & Walberg, 1997), are exceptional within higher education and are worthy of study. Their exceptionality is rooted in their ability to remain academically engaged in spite of the barriers they may face. Further, exploring the factors contributing to students like Shawna within higher education and engaging in the academic resilience necessary to overcome odds during their college matriculation serves as a starting point for understanding ways to support the growing body of diverse students within American higher education.

The focus of this dissertation is on students whose experiences are missing from the higher education literature. More specifically, this study examines the ways in which Black, first generation, low-income college students engage within the higher education environment, and seeks to explore how, if at all, the higher education environment fosters their academic resiliency contributing to their ability to persist and successfully complete college.

Research Purpose and Questions

The purpose of the current study is to explore the academic resilience of Black, first generation, low-income college students at a particular PWI. Through an exploration of lived experiences of Black, first generation, low-income college students, the current study seeks to understand, from student perspectives, the institutional, communal, and personal factors contributing to academic resilience in ways leading to continued persistence. Given the purpose

of this study to explore, in a nuanced way, student in-environment experiences that produce academic resilience, the study expands knowledge on Black student experiences through an intersectional approach considering race, socio-economic class, and familial educational background. Accordingly, the following research question is used to guide the study.

What are the factors contributing to the academic resilience of Black, first generation, low-income college students studying at a 4-year predominantly White institution?

The following sub-questions will also be taken into consideration:

- What specific skills, and local knowledge (e.g., heuristic knowledge [Padilla et al., 1997]) do Black, first generation, low-income college students see as vital to their academic resilience?
- What components of the institutional environment do Black, first generation, low-income college students view as most helpful to their academic resilience?
- What relationships do Black, first generation, low-income college students see as vital to their academic resilience?
 - What about the nature of these relationships do Black, low-income, first generation college students view as vital to their academic resilience?

What follows is a detailed discussion of the importance of focusing on academic resilience in higher education, and more importantly in the lives of the given participants.

Why Academic Resilience?

Academic resilience is not an individual trait possessed by specific students (Luthar, Doernberger, & Zigler, 1993), but instead is a process including multiple variables and occurring over time (Ungar, 2012). Characteristics of higher education institutions, student communities, and interpersonal relationships all play key roles in the development of academic resilience. The

current study aims to explore how all of these components contribute to academic resilience within Black, first generation, low-income college students. While focusing on Black students specifically, this study examines the intersections of identities (e.g., Black, first generation, low-income) and how those intersections interact with institutional (e.g., university based resources and relationships), communal (e.g., community based resources and relationships), and personal factors (e.g., behaviors, habits, skills, and personal relationships) to bolster academic resilience within these students in higher education environments.

Statement of the Problem

Black, first generation, low-income students studying at PWIs have lower college enrollment and graduation rates (Snyder & Dillow, 2015). For example, the most recent National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) *Digest of Education Statistics* reports the 6-year college graduation rates for Black, first-time, full-time freshmen from the 2005 cohort who attended 4-year institutions was 40% as compared to the 59% graduation average across race (including Black students) and 62% for White students (Snyder & Dillow, 2015). Only 14.7% of college eligible Black students within the U.S. enrolled in college in 2013, as compared to 59.3% of White students (Snyder & Dillow, 2015). Similarly, only 15% of high school graduates from low-income families nationally enrolled in college as compared to 78.5% of high school graduates from high-income families (Snyder & Dillow, 2015).

Higher education institutions continue to struggle counting the number of enrolled first generation students (Davis, 2012), but Saenz, Hurtado, Barrera, Wolf and Yeung (2007) estimated one in six students at 4-year American universities are first generation college students. A seminal NCES national study (Nuñez & Cuccaro-Alamin, 1998) estimated 43.4% of all beginning postsecondary students are first generation and recent studies convey little change

to this percentage (Chen & Carroll, 2005). Moreover, first generation college students are less likely to attend college within eight years after high school graduation and are more likely to leave college without completing their degree (Chen & Carroll, 2005). While Black, first generation, and low-income college students face statistical challenges getting into and through college, if enrolled, like all students they face the additional challenges of rising undergraduate tuition, and room and board cost, which increased 39% in the past 10 years for 4-year public institutions (Snyder & Dillow, 2015).

Once enrolled, Black, first generation, low-income college students attending PWIs continue to face socio-emotional challenges (Harper & Hurtado, 2007; Strayhorn, 2012; Walpole, Simmerman, Mack, Mills, Scales & Albano, 2008). Such challenges include priority negotiation (e.g., negotiating between work, and school priorities) for low-income students (Engle & Tinto, 2008); lack of academic preparation and family support for first generation students (Williams & Butler, 2010); and challenges with belonging and racism for students of Color at PWIs (Poyrazli & Lopez, 2007; Utsey & Hook, 2007). Given the dire rates of enrollment, achievement, and completion of Black, first generation, and low-income college students, considering broad challenges faced during their college matriculation and understanding the ways they employ academic resilience to overcome these challenges is vital. Having a better understanding of challenges faced and how academic resilience contributes to the persistence of these students will allow for the creation and implementation of practical solutions on the part of institutions and student communities.

Gap in the Literature

Higher education literature is replete with studies regarding the experiences, persistence, and graduation rates of Black students (Brown & Bartee, 2008; Davis et al., 2004; Grier-Reed,

2013; Harper; 2005; 2010; 2012; Stewart, 2015; Strayhorn, 2009; 2013), first generation students (Darling & Smith, 2007; Davis, 2012; Padgett, Johnson & Pascarella, 2012; Stephens et al., 2012), and students from low-income backgrounds (Hoxby & Turner, 2013; Quaye & Harper, 2009). Some scholars focus on students with intersecting identities (Strayhorn, 2013; Harper & Griffin, 2011; Williams & Butler, 2010). Separately, there is a growing body of literature around academic resilience in college students (Morales, 2000; 2008a; 2008b; 2010; Morales & Trotman, 2004; 2011). Overall, however, there is a dearth of the literature on how race, socio-economic class, and college background intersects to influence academic resilience while pursuing a postsecondary degree at a PWI. Further, studies that claim to use an intersectional lens, which considers how intersecting social identities affect our experiences in the world, are missing an in-depth look at how race and racialized oppression influences other social identities. For example, although Williams and Butler (2010) argued the need to consider the experiences of “race, class, and first generation college students” (p. 3), they spent much of their discussion focused on the experiences of first generation, low-income students without full consideration of how racialized experiences intersected with the students’ other identities and how all their identities influenced their overall college experience.

Purpose and Background of the Study

Participants within this study are Black, first generation, low-income college students. The chosen intersecting student identities of focus are often seen as at-risk in educational contexts (Moote & Wodarski, 1997), thus their presentation within mainstream higher education discourse is historically associated with negative and deficit language (Fries-Britt, 1998; Harper, 2010; McDougale, Way, & Yash, 2008). Referring to the individual students as at-risk is student focused, and does not consider the role of the institution or historical context in student success,

which contributes to the continued deficit discourse on certain students. Ladson-Billings (2006) argues deficit discourse contributes to the experiences of marginalized and minoritized student populations, resulting from negative characterizations of their racial demographic or background, and does not account for the systemic oppression they experience in society.

A deficit ideology perpetuates student-focused blame instead of attributing the negative marginalized student experience to the contemporary and historical institutional structures prohibiting certain students from succeeding within schools (Ladson-Billings, 2006). Due to the historical nature of oppression, exclusion, and discrimination, Black, first generation, low-income students face greater barriers within higher education, and are statistically less likely to persist to graduation. Given this understanding, one can argue students themselves are not at-risk, instead, they are put at-risk within educational institutions; nor are they “falling behind,” instead, they were put behind from the founding of the education system within the U.S. society (Anderson, 1988; Ladson-Billings, 2006).

Though Black, first generation, and low-income, as individual or intersecting social identities at PWIs are associated with risk factors, the current study takes an anti-deficit view point and explores the intersection of these particular identities, and how that intersection contributes to academic resilience in certain populations. Moving forward, instead of using the terms “at-risk,” “unengaged,” or “falling behind,” I use the term “underserved” to represent the broader context within which these students reside. My use of the term underserved aligns with critical race theory in its consideration of context, which includes historical and contemporary racialized exclusion, disenfranchisement, discrimination, and oppression, both within broader society and specifically within schools. Furthermore, underserved as a terminology allows space to consider the individual and intersecting identities as sources of strength instead of isolated

barriers. Though the students within this study have been, and continue to be, underserved, they persist. Given research suggests these students are least likely to persist, finding students who are persisting, and exploring *how* and *why*, has important implications for higher education.

Implications include greater understanding of student needs broadly, which can lead to the implementation of practical solutions (e.g., programming, initiatives) to support their academic success and university graduation.

The current study adds to the growing body of anti-deficit literature (Fries-Britt, 2004; Fries-Britt & Turner, 2001; Harper, 2010; 2012), which provides a counter to the dominant narrative often associating Black students with being at-risk (McDougle, Way, & Yash, 2008), unintelligent, or incapable (Fries-Britt, 1998; Harper, 2010). An anti-deficit framework allows for a line of inquiry focusing on why and how these students are able to remain academically resilient, instead of why they may not persist. Considering and presenting the ways academic resilience contributes to a student's ability to overcome barriers and persist through their college matriculation helps to combat negative stereotypes of Black collegians and gives this study great significance. What follows is a discussion of the studies significance.

Significance of Study

Many students within U.S. universities experience life through more than one "risk factor" or variables within one's background disenfranchising them to the point they are statistically less likely to achieve academically (Moote & Wodarski, 1997). The literature suggests several individual characteristics proposed as educational risk factors such as being Black, low levels of maternal education, perceived neighborhood disorder, and low-socioeconomic status (Resnick et al., 1997). Thus, students who are Black, first in their family to

attend college, and from low-income backgrounds, are likely to experience intersecting oppressions, and multiple barriers (Collins, 2000) during their college matriculation.

While many students face the world through historically disenfranchised identities, many students, like Shawna, continue to overcome barriers placed in their way. Studying academic resilience from student perspectives provides an understanding of the ways in which underrepresented students use their multiple, interrelated identities as sources of strength, which in turn help them to persist and succeed in American higher education. By examining the personal stories of resilience from college students who are Black, first-in their family to attend college, and from low-income backgrounds, my study advances understudied considerations regarding the college matriculation of underserved students in higher education and the ways in which institutions, communities, and key relationships can contribute to academic resilience in a way that leads to college persistence.

The current study contributes to higher education literature regarding academic resilience and Black students at PWIs in two ways. First, the current study contributes to the literature by utilizing an intersectional approach, which considers how racialized experiences intersect with class and educational background for Black, first generation, low-income college students and how that influences their academic resilience. Second, through utilization of critical race theory and methodology, the current study provides a counter-narrative of the at-risk rhetoric in regard to Black college students.

The current study stresses the social construction of reality and uses an interpretive approach to the meanings individuals give their realities (Denzin, 1994; Denzin & Lincoln, 1994; Guba & Lincoln, 2005). While the current study focuses on three primary interrelated identities, racialized experiences of Black students are centered because race is one of the most salient

characteristics in many students' lives (Thomas, 2000; Twine & Warren, 2000; West, 1993). A focus on Black, first generation, low-income college students, also furthers the history of Blacks seeking formal education consistently in spite of ongoing challenges and obstacles against them (Anderson, 1988; Perry, 2003).

Additionally, the current study provides a more nuanced understanding of race and racialized experiences and their interaction with other social identities in ways that do not reinforce deficit explanations for disparities in achievement, transition, and schooling experiences. The centering of race in no way implies class, gender, or the educational background of one's family as unimportant. Rather, an intersectional lens allows for space to consider the ways in which students' racialized experiences interrelate with other social identities, to create unique student experiences around academic resilience within higher education.

The focus on academic resilience in the lives of students who are Black, first generation, and low-income is significant and appropriate for this study due to students' overlapping identities that are historically, and remain, underserved within the field of education. However, continued focus on failure and deficit speaks little about how and why many Black students with similar backgrounds continue to achieve academically in college while others fall behind, or drop out of school all together. Harper (2010; 2012), Fries-Brit (1998; 2002; 2004), Padilla, Trevino, Trevino, & Gonzalez (1997), and Strayhorn (2009) are among the few scholars doing work focusing on success or an anti-deficit perspective for Black collegians. Outside of their bodies of work, there is rarely success or achievement-oriented literature presented regarding Black students persisting through college. Additionally, this study expands the knowledge on academically resilient students who are not considered high-achieving or gifted and yet continue

to achieve academically. Further, a lack of defined focus on students who are “high achieving” helps to expand the definition of academic success within higher education literature beyond high grade point averages (GPAs).

Although the current study takes place in a college context, the results are relevant to all aspects of education, beginning with pre-kindergarten. Centering voices and experiences of the commonly unheard or marginalized populations within education (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002), regardless of age, reinforces a sense of value for individual personal narratives. Understanding student experiences along the K – 16 pathway allows researchers, practitioners, and policymakers to better understand student needs, particularly those who are part of marginalized populations and pushed to the periphery.

Considering the power in the stories of the unheard, the current study explores student’s “experiences and behaviors, opinions and values, feelings and personal background” (Patton, 1990, pp. 290–293), which are all consistent with qualitative research. More specifically, the current study explores student perceptions of their first year transition and how it leads to academic resilience during the remainder of their college matriculation. Considering the likelihood of graduation increases exponentially once students complete their first year of college (Wetzel, O’Toole, & Peterson, 1999), focusing on the contribution of academically resilient behaviors and support systems within one’s first year is greatly important. Lastly, a better understanding of the first year interactions leading to the academic resilience necessary for certain students to overcome barriers, institutions and more specifically first year programs, can harness best practices aimed at increasing graduation rates of Black, first generation, low-income students.

Theoretical Framework

The previous sections outlined the broader context, knowledge, and significance regarding Black, first generation, low-income collegians, which influences my theoretical orientation for the current study. What follows is a brief introduction to the theoretical frameworks, which serves as the foundation of the current study. The frameworks will be outlined in greater detail in Chapter 2.

Within qualitative research, theory is used to design a research question, guide the selection of relevant data, interpret data, and propose explanations, influences, or implications. For the purposes of this study, I use macro theory (overarching paradigm) and micro theories (discipline specific theories) (Esterberg, 2002), to explore academic resilience in the lives of Black, first generation, low-income collegians. Together, the macro and micro theories of this study provide a nuanced exploration of academic resilience and the ways it is developed during the first year transition of Black, first generation, low-income collegians studying at PWIs.

Critical race theory (CRT) serves as the macro theory for the current study. CRT considers race and racism aberrant in every day society and considers the ways racialized experiences impact one's everyday life (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012). Further, one main tenet of CRT, intersectionality, argues one has racialized experiences, which intersect with classed and gendered experiences to create unique viewpoints of life (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012). Particularly useful in the current study, Ladson-Billings (1998; 2005; 2009), Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995), Solórzano and Yosso (2001; 2002), and Solórzano, Ceja, and Yosso (2000; 2001) consider the ways CRT examines racial structures within educational settings and the ways racialized experiences impact students. Further, Crenshaw (1989) and Yuval-Davis (2011) consider the ways intersecting identities create unique racialized, gendered, and classed

experiences for people of Color, while Strayhorn (2013) considers these intersections for the experiences of Black collegians, particularly as they study on predominantly White campuses.

Serving as micro theories, the input-environment-outcome (IEO) model of college effects (Astin, 1993) and the local model of student success (LMSS) (Padilla, Trevino, Trevino & Gonzalez, 1997) take into consideration student inputs, student-in-environment interactions, the outcomes they produce, and the specific knowledge necessary for students to continue their college matriculation. Further, in alignment with the CRT commitment of social justice, the micro theories represented allow for a success-oriented approach to the current study, which will assist in dismantling negative stereotypes of Black, first generation, low-income collegians.

Definitions

In order to create shared knowledge between the reader and author, this section provides a definition of terms to operationalize how terminologies are used within this study.

Academically Resilient – Students who continue to strive despite barriers during their college matriculation

First generation – Students who are first in their nuclear families to attend a postsecondary institution (Hsiao, 1992).

Low-income – Students whose families are at or below the national poverty line, are Pell grant eligible, or have displayed high financial need by qualifications of the institutional financial aid office.

Racism - “A system of ignorance, exploitation, and power used to oppress African-Americans, Latinos, Asians, Pacific Americans, American Indians, and other people on the basis of ethnicity, culture, mannerisms, and color” (p. 5, Marable, 1992). I intentionally include this definition to ensure readers understand that my use of “race,” “racism,” and “racialized” within the current

study inherently includes a focus on the systemic aspects of oppression, and not only the interpersonal ways racism is experienced by students.

Matriculation v. Transition – Within the current study, both matriculation and transition are used often. As a point of clarification, my use of transition refers to the first year, while my use of matriculation refers to the remaining academic journey through college.

Chapter Summary

Chapter 1 provided an overview of the purpose and significance of the study and a brief explanation of the theoretical framework. Chapter 1 also presented the research questions guiding the study. Lastly, Chapter 1 included a discussion of the broader context and background concerning Black, first generation, low-income collegians who are attending PWIs. The remainder of the dissertation is as follows: Chapter 2 expands on the theoretical framework for the study and it provides a review of literature to serve as the foundation for this study. The reviewed literature speaks specifically to the historical and contemporary experiences of Black, first generation, low-income college students and provides a foundational understanding of academic resilience in the lives of college students.

Chapter 3 begins with a reflexive narrative, as consistent with critical race methodology, which discusses my positionality to this study, and continues by restating briefly, the purpose of the study, the guiding research questions, and expounds on the qualitative methods used to collect and analyze the data. Chapter 4 presents a discussion of the current studies' participants and context within which they matriculate. With a rich narrative describing important aspects of participant's academic lives and a description of the context at Midwest University (Midwest), Chapter 4 seeks to contextualize participant experiences with academic resiliency.

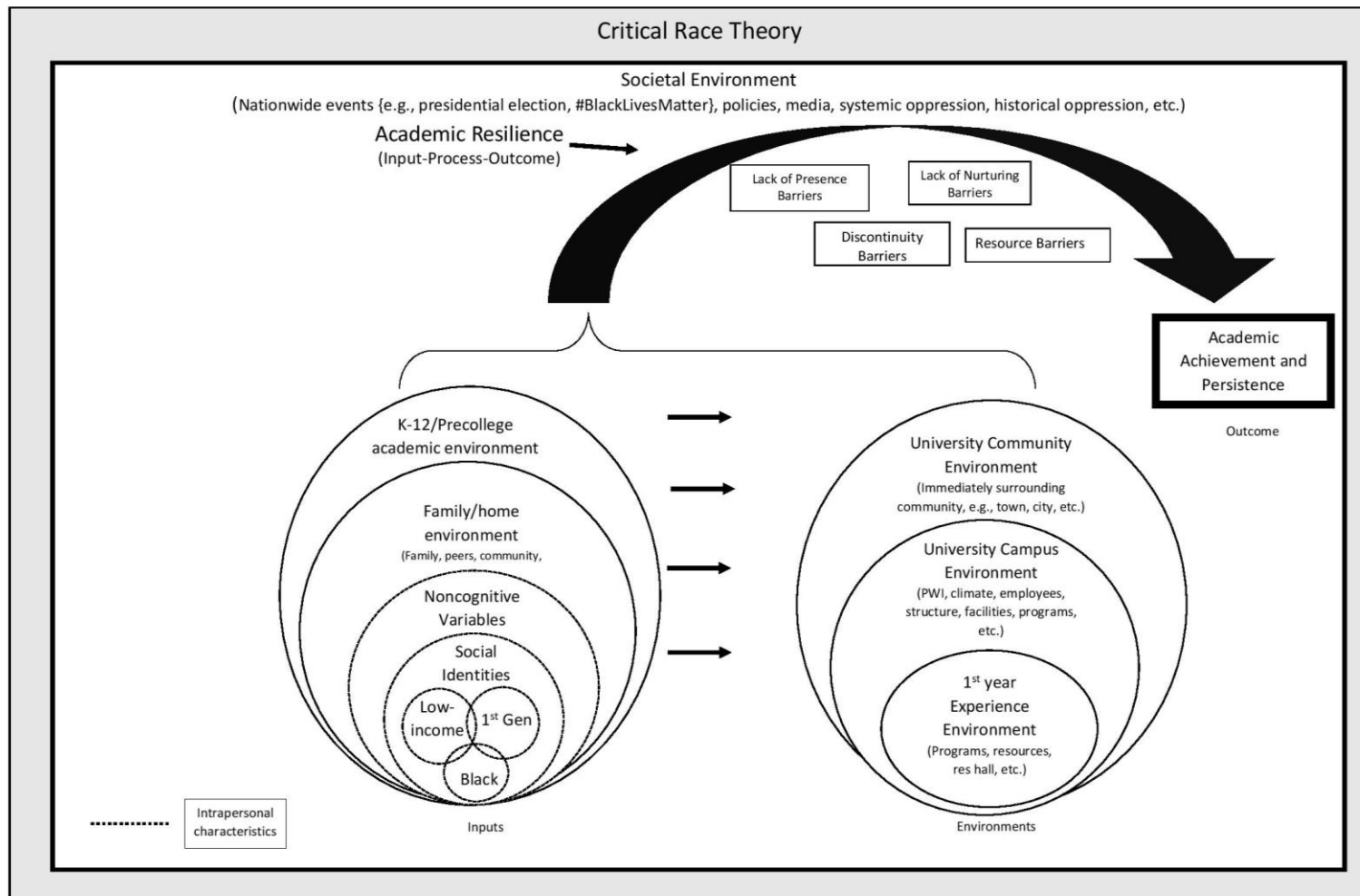
Chapter 5 presents the lived experiences of participants, which I have grouped into primary themes to assist in understanding the ways Black, first generation, low-income college students at a particular institution are able to remain resilient despite challenges faced. Chapter 6, the concluding chapter, provides a nuanced meaning-making discussion of the findings, followed by practical institutional implications.

CHAPTER TWO

Conceptual Framework and Literature Review

Chapter 1 provided a brief introduction of the research problem, including its background and context. Chapter 2 expands on the theoretical foundations of the current study and provides a review of relevant literature. More specifically, Chapter 2 presents the theoretical components of Critical Race Theory (CRT), the Input-Environment-Outcomes (IEO) model of college effects, and the Local Model of Student Success (LMSS) and the ways they work together to create a nuanced exploration of academic resilience for Black, first-generation collegians, from low-income backgrounds who are studying at PWIs. Following the theoretical foundation is a review of relevant literature. First, I provide a broad historical context of U.S. higher education as a foundation for understanding contemporary experiences for underserved college students. Next, I present historical and contemporary experiences for Black college students at PWIs, which is followed by discussions of present day experiences for Black, first generation and low-income college students. The final section explores academic resilience and its usefulness within higher education research and practice involving underserved populations.

Figure 1: Conceptual Framework: This figure shows the conceptual framework for the study, which demonstrates the various theoretical aspects that went data collection and analysis.



Theoretical Framework

Within qualitative study, theory can be presented in the form of macro and micro theories to help situate data within a given framework. Macro theories act as the overarching viewpoint or “lens” through which the researcher examines a phenomenon, whereas micro or mid-level theories (discipline-specific theories) provide guidance for understanding and practice specific to the discipline (Esterberg, 2002). Within this study, CRT serves as the overarching lens through which the study is conducted and analyzed. As such, what follows is the historical context of CRT and what it is, followed by a discussion of how CRT is used within the field of education and its appropriateness for the current study.

Macro Theory: Critical Race Theory (CRT)

CRT serves as the overarching lens through which the current study is considered and conducted. CRT has many uses within research including epistemological stances, theoretical frameworks, methodology, and method of analysis.

Historical Context. While it is beyond the scope of this dissertation to provide an in-depth history of CRT, what follows is a discussion of key points relevant to the current study. Delgado and Stefancic (2012) describe the CRT movement as a collection of activists and scholars committed to social justice through studying and transforming the relationship among race, racism, and power. The movement examines similar issues as conventional civil rights and ethnic studies discourses, but includes broad perspectives such as “economics, history, context, group- and self-interest, and even feelings and the unconscious” (2012, p. 3). Historically, in addition to seeking policy and law changes, CRT sought to combat the less overt forms of racism (e.g., microaggressions) gaining ground in the early 1970s (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012; Ladson-Billings, 2009). CRT continues to argue existing power structures are based on White privilege

and White supremacy, which perpetuates the marginalization of people of Color (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012). As such, CRT is used to facilitate racial social justice, through action, involvement and empowerment of people pushed to the margins of society (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). Action, involvement, and empowerment is facilitated in multiple ways, from centering the voices of marginalized populations within research, to critiquing the ways equality laws or policies impact people of Color.

Examining various institutions within U.S. society, CRT explores how race and racism contribute to the ways power structures exist. CRT scholarship is action oriented and seeks to depart from slow incremental change (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995), such as the decades taken to end school segregation. Thus, CRT scholarship is used to expose social inequality, advocate for social change, and provide pragmatic strategies for material social transformation (Ladson-Billings, 1998). As such, with a goal of social transformation and social justice, the current study explores college matriculation experiences for Black, first generation, low-income students, with a specific focus on academic resilience. Further, the current study provides a counter-narrative of the experiences of Black collegians broadly but also seeks to explore and promote the ways institutions can better support underserved students through a clear understanding of the ways they remain academically resilient.

Within education CRT, used as an evolving conceptual, theoretical, and methodological construct, attempts to challenge and dismantle prevalent notions of fairness, meritocracy, color-blindness, and neutrality in the education of racial minorities in the U.S. (Ladson-Billings, 1998; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Solórzano & Yosso, 2001). Further, CRT is used to explain and

combat the sustained inequity for students of Color regarding curriculum, instruction, assessment, school funding, and desegregation (Ladson-Billings, 1998).

CRT Foundational Tenets. In order to expose inequity within U.S. institutions, including education, CRT has foundational tenets, or basic principles, to which the work is centralized. The first tenet of CRT argues racism is prevalent, ordinary, and non-aberrant within U.S. society (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). Morrison (1992) contends race as always already present in every social configuring of our lives, and Roediger (1991) asserts even in all White spaces, raced experiences are still very much present. Due to its ordinariness, racism is difficult to address and easy to ignore because it is not often acknowledged (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012). Thus, CRT challenges the often used color-blind or equality focused philosophies which strive for “same treatment”, but negate oppressive realities due to race and other -isms.

Secondly, CRT acknowledges race to be a social construct without real biological meaning. However, despite its social construction, race proves to be real within every day experiences (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012), and with it comes real material and social consequences. The social construction thesis is of particular importance because reducing race to strictly an ideological construct denies the reality of a racialized society and its impact on people in their everyday lives (Ladson-Billings, 1998; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995).

The third basic principle is interest convergence, sometimes called material determinism, within which Whites or other dominant groups will give up power, or provide certain benefits to other groups as long as there are inherent benefits for the dominant group (Bell, 1980; Delgado & Stefancic, 2012). For example, in 1980, Bell took up the *Brown v. Board* decision. In his interest convergence thesis Bell (1980) argued the U.S. Supreme Court only ended state-

mandated racial segregation due to a brief period of converging interests among races to make the *Brown* decision possible (Bell, 1980). For various reasons, Bell (1980) contends school desegregation and the beginning of educational equity reform was rooted less in Whites morality and more in the convergence of benefits. Bell (1980) argues the decision to desegregate schools was to “save face” with the world and was not rooted in actual desires to make education equitable across races. The outcome of this “surface level” decision continues to be seen as numerous underfunded and overcrowded schools continue to be overpopulated with low-income Black children (Garda, 2007). Foundationally, interest convergence suggests that because racism advances the interests of both White elites (materially) and working-class people (physically), large segments of society have little incentive to eradicate it (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012).

Fourth, CRT aims to provide a critique of liberalism and challenge dominant ideology. CRT argues liberalism and liberal legal practices reinforce incremental, slow change which go against the sweeping changes needed to dismantle racism within U.S. society (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012; Ladson-Billings, 1998). Further, and specific to higher education, this framework challenges dominant ideologies of color blindness, race neutrality, meritocracy, and objectivity, and the ways they are used to further the power and privilege of dominant groups in American society (Parker & Villalpando, 2007).

The fifth tenet, differential racialization, considers the ways society racializes different minority groups at varying times, specifically in response to the needs of the labor market at hand (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012; Ladson-Billings, 1998). Consider the racialization of Mexicans and Japanese people specifically. At one point in history, each group was considered White, though over time, given the political, economic, social, and cultural shifts of society, they were pushed out of the White category (Ladson-Billings, 1998).

Of particular importance in my work, a sixth tenet of CRT is intersectionality and anti-essentialism. Intersectionality takes into consideration the varying identities all people have and how they interrelate in order to create unique experiences for various individuals (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012; Yuval-Davis, 2011). Anti-essentialism establishes all individuals, due to their varying identities, experience the world in unique ways, and no person's experience is exactly the same (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012). Further, CRT scholars argue even within larger groups (i.e., Blacks, Chicanos, and women) there may be shared experiences and shared oppression, but each group and individual still has unique experiences within the world (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012). Due to the uniqueness of experiences, CRT centers experiential knowledge and the unique voice of Color. Together experiential knowledge and unique voice of Color serve as the seventh tenet.

Experiential knowledge and unique voice of Color, together acknowledge the exclusivity of racialized experiences with oppression. The unique voice of Color tenet does not assume all people of Color are able to speak to the exact same experiences, but they are collectively able to speak to things their White counterparts are likely unfamiliar with, such as issues of and experiences with race and racism (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012). To illuminate the unique voice of Color, CRT scholars subscribe to legal storytelling, counter-narratives, or counter-storytelling (Ladson-Billings, 1998), which are methods of telling the stories of those who fall within the margins of society and whose experiences are not often told (Solórzano & Yosso, 2009). Further, counter-storytelling as a framework legitimizes the racial and subordinate experiences of underserved groups (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004; Ladson-Billings 1998; Parker & Villalpando, 2007) and provides space for personal stories or narratives of people of Color (Delgado, Bernal & Villalpando, 2002).

Finally, because the current study explores student experiences within higher education, I include commitment to social justice (Ladson-Billings, 1998) as an additional focal point; which is a specific to CRT within the field of education. While CRT argues for the aberrant and permanent nature of racism within U.S. society and its institutions, such as education, it still aims to dismantle institutions perpetuating and maintaining racist ideologies (Buenavista et al., 2009). As such, CRT scholars use their research to intentionally seek pragmatic solutions leading to social justice and equity for racialized minorities within education.

The aforementioned tenets serve as the foundational ways CRT critiques society and its institutions. Tenets one (racism is aberrant) and two (race is a social construct) are of great importance within the current study given my focus on Black collegians. Though an intersectional lens is used for the exploration of student experiences, participants self-identifying as Black, and the saliency of this identity illuminates the ways their racialized experiences intersect with their low-income and first generation identities. With a focus on race and even class, the current study helps to illuminate the ways students remain resilient during their college matriculation while taking into consideration the historical and current oppressive realities of racism and classism, which are particularly relevant given the participants of this study.

With a primary focus on higher education, tenets three (interest convergence), four (critique of liberalism) and five (differential racialization) are also useful in framing the current study. Interest convergence takes into consideration the ways higher education institutions develop specialized diversity programs and admissions policies to increase the numerical categories as a way to boast a commitment to inclusion and diversity. However, without institutional change associated with such policies, the results are merely numerical and surface level, where students continue to face chilly climates as a result of racist and classed oppression

at PWIs; which is reflected in the experiences of participants within the current study. Further, a critique of liberalism argues against such policies creating slow, incremental and sometimes nonexistent change for underserved students. As a part of the context discussion within Chapter 4, I later share briefly the experiences had by participants where they participate in protest and resistance against espoused values and policies of the institution which they do not feel have actually benefitted their matriculation. Lastly, while differential racialization exposes the ways different groups are raced over time, the current study explores the ways Black, first generation, low-income college students continue to be raced within higher education and further explores the ways the raced experience may influence their ability to remain academically resilient during their college matriculation.

Tenets six (intersectionality) and seven (unique voice of Color and experiential knowledge) are pivotal to the current study, both in data collection and data analysis. Intersectionality allows for me to consider the Black student participants in a holistic way as opposed to only through their race. Within the current study, an intersectional approach illuminates the ways intersecting identities assist students in the development of academic resilience, without forcing participants to identify as a single identity at a given time. Additionally, the unique voice of Color tenet is integral as Black voices are centered within the current study, and also provides the methodology by which the stories are considered: counter-storytelling.

CRT in Higher Education. CRT has a growing body of literature within higher education as scholars have used it to critique the institutions of education and higher education broadly (Hiraldo, 2015; Ladson-Billings, 2005; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Munoz, 2015; Smith-Maddox & Solórzano, 2002; Solórzano & Yosso, 2000), institutional policies and research

(Harper, 2012; Harper, Patton & Wooden, 2009; Iverson, 2007; Parker & Villalpando, 2007), campus environments (Hurtado & Ruiz, 2012; Solórzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000; Solórzano, Miguel, & Yosso, 2000), student experiences (Ladson-Billings, 2009; Solórzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000; Solórzano & Villalpando, 1998), and to present ways higher education institutions can better support students of Color (Solórzano & Villalpando, 1998). I use much of the aforementioned scholarship in forthcoming sections to describe the common experiences had by Black students at PWIs. While CRT's use within the current dissertation is focused on Black students, various forms of CRT have also been used to explore the experiences of Asian American (Buenavista, Jayakumar, & Misa-Escalante, 2009; Liu, 2009; Teranishi, 2002), Latino/Hispanic (Bernal, 2002; Villalpando, 2003; 2004; Yosso, 2005), and Native American (Brayboy, 2005; Writer, 2008) students within higher education.

The use of CRT within higher education practice and scholarship is vital to explore and understand the experiences of underserved students of Color, especially Black students. Patton, McEwen, Rendon, and Howard-Hamilton (2007) argued "little attention has been devoted to incorporating race into theories most widely used" (p. 41) in the higher education profession. Moreover, Patton et al. (2007) suggest the three most widely used higher education student development theories coined by Chickering and Reisser (1993), Magolda (1992), and Kohlberg (1975) fail to acknowledge race and racism in the developmental experiences of students. Such an omission ignores the ways race and racism are entrenched in the edifices of discourse and policies that guide the everyday practices of post-secondary institutions (Taylor, 1999). Such an omission further disregards race as "deeply embedded in social, cultural, and political structures" (p. 43, Patton et. al, 2007). Therefore, a critical race perspective within higher education practice

and scholarship inherently provides an analysis on racialized experiences otherwise missing within higher education literature.

Hiraldo (2015) provided a broad overview of the ways CRT tenets fit within higher education. He argued that all tenets help to illuminate and critique institutional policies and norms within higher education while providing a space to better understand the experiences of underserved students of Color. Hiraldo (2015), Decuir and Dixson (2004), and Ladson-Billings (2005) further posit most CRT scholars within higher education focus primarily on counter-storytelling and racism as aberrant tenants, leaving other tenants largely unutilized. Beyond just sectional focuses within higher education scholarship, Patton et al. (2007) suggest the full usage of CRT in research and every day institutional practice. Parker and Villalpando (2007) further argue scholars and practitioners push for a critical race praxis that encourages a layered discussion and analysis on the part of higher education institutions who have an unachieved goal of diversity. As such, the current study utilizes all CRT tenants to analyze and explore student experiences with academic resilience at a PWI. Further, the current study aims to use the data collected to make recommendations for every day practices for higher educational professionals. Lastly, in an attempt to further CRT scholarship around a particular tenant, the current study sees the commitment to social justice and call to action as vital. As such the entire study should be seen as a basis from which practice and programmatic changes can be gleaned to further social justice and equity for Black, first generation, low-income college students at PWIs.

Intersectionality and Black, First Generation, Low-Income College Students. In previous sections, I presented the historical context of CRT broadly and a discussion of CRT within education. Here, I discuss more specifically intersectionality and the ways it is used within the current study. An intersectional approach argues class, race, and gender-based

explanations individually are not powerful enough to explain all of the differences in school experiences (Ladson-Billings, 1998). More specifically, Delgado and Stefancic (2001) argue intersectionality as referring to “the examination of race, sex, class, national origin, sexual orientation and how their combination plays out in various settings” (p. 51). Patton et al. (2007) add to the list identities focusing on culture, ethnicity, ability, religion, and faith. An intersectional approach argues an examination of class and gender, taken alone or together, do not account for the nuanced and unique experiences associated with being raced or seen as a race (e.g., Black, White, and Brown) in a racialized society (Ladson-Billings, 1998). Intersectionality focuses on the ways varying identities or social categories interact to “affect particular social behaviors or distribution of resources” (Yuval-Davis, 2011, p. 6).

An intersectional lens takes into consideration how the intersections of varying identities such as race, gender, and class influence the interactions one has with the world. Crenshaw (1991) was the first to use the term “intersectionality” in her work to explore violence against women of Color. She argued race, gender, and class as “implicated together” (p. 3) in all social settings, and thus it is impossible to distinguish experiences separately. In addition to CRT, intersectionality is historically and widely used to explore the ignored experiences of Black women (Collins, 2000; Crenshaw, 1989; 1991). However, Brace and Davison (2000) contend when intersections are made across difference, intersectionality can be useful for analysis of multiple variations of identities. For example, Rahman (2010) uses an intersectional lens to explore experiences of gay, Muslim men, focusing on sexuality and religion. Within the current study, the specific focus is on race, class, and first generation status

Thinking specifically of the participants within this study, Walpole et al. (2008) argued the amalgamation of race and socio-economic class decreases the likelihood of certain groups to

attend college. Separate from just an identifier of class, whether previous family members have attended college or not also decreases the likelihood of one attending college and persisting through to graduation (Pike & Kuh, 2005). Scholars argue demographically, first generation students are more likely to be female, Black or Hispanic, and come from low-income families than their peers with college degree holding parents (Bui, 2002; Engle, 2007; Warburton, Bugarin, & Nuñez, 2001). Each of these factors are independently associated with lower rates of college attendance (Engle, 2007). Thus, represented students within this study who enroll, attend, and remain academically resilient during their college matriculation are a research anomaly, and their stories are necessary to understand what contributes to their academic resilience.

While not exploring specifically academic resilience or socio-economic status, Winkle-Wagner and McCoy (2012) used an intersectional approach to analyze Black first generation college student identities. Their analysis delved deeply into the lives of three students from their larger population of 16. Participants described their identities in connected ways, versus individualized. One student consistently referenced himself as a “Black male” (p. 49) as opposed to just Black or just male. His identification with his interrelated identities reinforced the connectedness many feel between their various identities and the importance of intersectional approaches. For the participants in their study, an intersectional approach allowed for a more nuanced interpretation of identity (Winkle-Wagner & McCoy, 2012). Beyond just race, gender, and class, participants described the ways geography, religion/faith, and sexual orientation intersected with other identities to create a unique experience as a Black first generation collegian. In the current study, an intersectional approach provides an intentional consideration of the ways participant identities intersect and interact in-environment to create academic resilience.

Outlining various identities and exploring how their intersection creates experiences bolstering academic resilience is imperative for higher education practitioners, educators, and administrators to understand students and create meaningful programming leading to increased persistence rates of Black, first generation, low-income collegians. An intersectional lens assists in deconstructing the ways in which being a part of multiple identities influences outcomes contributing to academic resilience among certain student populations. To this point I have discussed CRT, and with it intersectionality, as the macro theory of the current study, what follows is a discussion of the micro theories used in this study, both of which are specific to higher education and student experiences.

Micro Theories

Recall the macro theory serves as the broader lens of this study, while the micro theories are discipline-specific and provide guidance for understanding and practice (Esterberg, 2002). Input – Environment – Outcomes model of student involvement (IEO) and the Local Model of Student Success (LMSS) serve as the micro theories for this study. IEO considers the student inputs as they enter the institution, the student-in-environment, and subsequent outcomes. LMSS considers college experiences for students of Color and their persistence on predominantly White campuses. What follows is a more detailed discussion of each and the ways they are used within this study.

Input-Environment-Output Model of College Effects. The IEO model is widely considered a foundational theory on student development. The IEO model examines the relationship between three elements of student involvement. The first, inputs, reference student's background characteristics such as demographics and any experiences prior to college. Second, environment, accounts for all student experiences during their college matriculation. Lastly,

outcomes, which accounts for the student characteristics, knowledge, attitudes, beliefs, and values existing as a result of college experiences. Astin's (1993) IEO model of college effects is useful within the current study as I explore the dialectical relationship between students and the campus environment and how this relationship contributes to academic resilience.

Inputs. Inputs refer to student characteristics at the point of entry (Astin, 1993), and include demographic characteristics, which within this study are considered through an intersectional lens. Within the current study, the inputs considered are race, class, and first generation status, and their associated experiences (e.g., under resourced and overpopulated schools, lack of college knowledge, life experiences). The discussion of first generation and low-income status, in addition to race, allows for inclusion of factors, or inputs, such as parental background, high school resources, and academic preparation.

Because my study specifically focuses on Black, first generation, low-income college students, I also intentionally include a discussion of non-cognitive variables (NCVs) (Sedlacek, 2004) as characteristics students bring at entry to their post-secondary experience. NCVs refer to variables relating to motivation, adjustment, and student perceptions as opposed to the traditional verbal and quantitative areas typically measured by standardized tests (Sedlacek, 2004). Originally coined for better, more holistic admissions processes, the use of non-cognitive variables argue for an appraisal of variables outside of standardized testing and GPA to measure the likelihood of a student's success in college (Tracey & Sedlacek, 1982). NCVs are particularly important for underserved students "who do not know how to play the admissions game" (Sedlacek, 2004, p. 5). While measures of cognitive variables such as GPA correlate with persistence among traditional White college students, they do not correlate with persistence among students who are non-traditional or non-White (Sedlacek & Gaston, 1992). Various

studies demonstrate the validity of NCVs in predicting the persistence of Black college students (Hood, 1992; Nasim, Roberts, Harrell, & Young, 2005; Shorette & Palmer, 2015; Ting, 1998; Tracey & Sedlacek, 1982; 1985; Warren & Hale, 2016), first generation college students (Ting, 2003; Cokley, 2000), and low-income college students (Cokely, 2000).

Sedlacek (2004) outlines eight NCVs as vital to understanding important characteristics underserved students bring with them at entry to college. The first NCV, *positive self-concept or confidence*, references students' strength of character, determination, independence and strong self-feeling. The second NCV, *realistic self-appraisal*, focuses on the ways students recognize or accepts any deficiencies and in response works hard to develop themselves, particularly in academic arenas. The third NCV, *successfully handling the system*, is of particular importance given the population of focus within the current study. This NCV references students' ability to understand and navigate a system not built for them. Noonan, Sedlecek, and Veerasamy (2005) argue students who possess this variable are committed to fighting to improve the existing system and emphasizes their role fighting racism.

The fourth NCV, *preference for long-range goals*, refers to students' desire to seek long-term goals over immediate needs, and ability to engage in the discipline necessary for delayed gratification. This variable also references students' patience, persistence, and long-term planning. The fifth NCV, *strong support person or system*, focuses on the sense of and literal support from a person or people in times of crisis or need. This variable further addresses where students gain help and encouragement, and the degree to which they rely on their own resources. The sixth NCV, *leadership experience*, references students' leadership skills and experiences from formal and informal leadership roles and experiences. The seventh NCV, *community involvement*, refers to students' connection or identification with cultural, geographical, or racial

groups and their activity within the community group(s). The eighth and final NCV, *knowledge acquired in a field*, references students' experiences, both broad and in-depth, in a certain field. This variable also pays particular attention to nontraditional, perhaps culturally or racially, based views and experiences within a certain field.

Taken together, the pre-college academic experiences/environment, family home experiences/environment, NCVs, and the intersecting social identities serve as inputs in the current study. The inputs interact in various ways to create experiences, reactions, memories, skills, biases, and opinions that will undoubtedly influence participants' experiences with academic resilience at Midwest. Further, the inputs and associated experiences have likely already influenced the development of resilience in the lives of participants. Therefore resilience itself is seen as an input in response to or as a result of participants' experiences prior to entry at Midwest.

Environment. Within IEO, the interaction between the student and the environment plays a key role in the subsequent outcomes. The environment includes but is not limited to programs, personnel, curricula, teaching practices, facilities, and the social and institutional climate (Astin, 1993). Within the current study, the campus environment is a reflection of its institutional characteristics (e.g., public, level of selectivity, predominantly White), the history and mission of the institution, and the peer environment (Milem, Clayton-Pederson, Hurtado, & Allen, 1998; Langhout, Rosselli, & Feinsten, 2007; Nora & Cabrera, 1996). Consideration of the campus environment is pertinent because individual students engage with the campus environment through involvement in the academic and social aspects of campus life (Astin, 2003). Within the environment, students are able to engage with peers and faculty, both of which positively affect academic ability, self-confidence, and leadership skills (Guiffrida, 2003; Tinto, 1993).

Given the participants, consideration of the campus environment, which is a PWI, and the campus climate is extremely important. Negatively racialized experiences and perceptions of a negative campus racial climate at PWIs can negatively influence students' desire or ability to engage (academically or socially) in ways leading to academic success (Mendoza-Denton, Purdie, Davis, & Pietrzak, 2002; Solórzano, Ceja & Yosso, 2001). Even beyond race, first generation and low-income students sometimes feel they do not belong (McGregor et al., 1991) and perceive the campus to be exclusionary on the basis of social class (Aries & Seider, 2005; Ostrove & Long, 2007). Thus, campus climate and whether a student feels as if they fit or belong on a particular campus is important to consider.

When considering important aspects of the student environment and how student inputs interact with the environment to create academically resilient behaviors, I intentionally consider various environments. Within the current study, the campus serves as a key aspect of the student environment. Moreover, as students constantly traverse between multiple environments, I also include family and hometown environment (i.e., family, peers, religious institutions, teammates, and organization members), campus community environment (i.e., resources or climate of surrounding town), and national climate (culture, ideologies, current events).

National climate takes into consideration the ways broader society impacts college student experiences. Particularly through a CRT lens, consideration of the broader society serves as a reminder that, historically, Black students must assert their intelligence in a society saying both overtly (Hernstein & Murray, 1994; Jensen, 1969; Rushton & Jensen, 2005) and covertly (pop culture, tracking, hidden curricula, conservative perceptions of affirmative action, media stereotypes, etc.) “that you are not smart” (Morales, 2008b, p. 161). Further, given the situatedness and timing of this study, participants are being interviewed within a societal climate

where uprisings against police brutality, social media protests, and demands for racial justice on campuses nationwide are prominent. As such, thinking about the ways interactions with the broader environment influence academic resiliency is important.

Exploration of the ways in which students interact with various environmental systems allow for a robust consideration of the multiple places students receive motivation, encouragement, guidance, rest, acceptance, and numerous other forms of support needed to remain academically resilient within higher education. The crux of the current study is found within the environment(s) context of the IEO model. Using an intersectional lens to understand student interactions within various environments leads to a better grasp of academically resilient outcomes for Black, first generation, low-income students. Practitioners who understand the ways student-in-environment interactions lead to or contribute to academically resilient outcomes are better equipped to support the persistence of underserved populations within higher education.

Outcomes. Astin (1993) identifies outcomes as the talents and skills that are the aim of development within higher education. Outcomes are to be assessed based on inputs and the student-in-environment interaction (Astin, 1993). Taken together, the input and output data help to measure student development and how the environment influenced that development. Given my focus on the further development of or contribution to existing academic resilience within various environments of student interaction, the outcomes are central to the current study.

Within the current study the outcomes are represented by who is being selected to participate. Students selected for participation are students who have remained academically resilient within their university experience, despite seemingly insurmountable odds. Resiliency in the face of challenges is an important aspect of overcoming barriers. For the purposes of the

current study and to reinforce co-constructed meaning, students were considered academically resilient based on their own definitions. Further, through an exploration of their experiences, I came to better understand what they see as factors of said resilience.

Many foundational student development theories focus on predominantly White traditionally aged, full-time students attending 4-year institutions and do not take into account the experiences of other student populations. Regardless of a focus on majority populations, the IEO model recognizes pre-college experiences and demographics as mattering, which allows for an in-depth consideration of the ways in which students' intersecting identities influence their university experience. Further, use of the IEO model allows for an examination of the ways underserved students interact with the campus, both physically and psychologically, in order to contribute to academically resilient outcomes. Scholars have expanded the IEO model to include diverse populations (e.g., Bryant, Choi, & Yasuno, 2003; Cabrera, 2014; Chen, Ingram, & Davis, 2014; Harrison, Comeaux, & Plecha, 2006; Pike & Kuh, 2005; Walpole et al., 2008). I will further expand the IEO model to consider the experiences of Black low-income, first generation college students who are studying at PWIs.

Local Model of Minority Student Success. Similar to Astin's (1993) IEO model, many of the seminal models used to assess student departure, student experiences, and student retention are based on "traditional" student populations. Most models are not based on experiences of first generation, low-income, or students of Color, let alone a single model for the exploration of interrelated identities. As such, in addition to IEO, the current study uses the LMSS to explore specifically what leads to academic success for Black students on predominantly White campuses. I use the term "success" loosely, attributing it not to high academic achievement but instead to continued academic resilience in the face of various

barriers. The focus on academic resilience is a bit more than persistence alone as it exemplifies a fight to persist after being set up to perhaps fail within an educational system historically excluding you.

From a qualitative study, Padilla et al. (1997) developed a model identifying and categorizing first year transition barriers for students of Color, specifically African American and Latino students. The barriers identified are composed of four categories. Category one is identified as discontinuity barriers, which include challenges faced that hinder a student's smooth and continuous transition into college directly from high school. These challenges may include lack of support applying for college or financial aid and little to no support during or understanding of the college search process. Category two is identified as lack of nurturing barriers, which is represented by a lack of supportive resources on campus to help with adjustment and development for students of Color. Supportive resources include relationships with advisors, professors, or resident and peer advisors. Additionally, supportive resources include supportive offices on campus such as the counseling office or learning center; category two barriers work under the assumption that when students do not take advantage of supportive resources, they are less likely to do well during their first year transition. Category three is identified as lack of presence barriers, which represents the literal absence in experiences of or stories from people of Color within the curriculum. Moreover, lack of presence includes the absence of students, faculty, and staff of Color in the university population, and within university programs. Such a lack of presence or lack of representation on college campuses can lead to a sense of oneliness (Fries-Britt & Griffin, 2007; Fries-Britt & Turner, 2001; Harper, 2012) and lack of belonging, both of which are seen as important factors in the engagement of Black students at PWIs. Finally, category four is identified as resource barriers, or challenges faced by

students regarding access to financial aid resources. These challenges include navigating the financial aid office and gaining access to financial aid resources but also being seen as fit for high level, competitive scholarships.

The four categories of barriers faced by students of Color during their first year transition to a PWI impact students differently but are particularly relevant when considering the interrelated identities of being a Black, first generation, low-income, collegian. Padilla and colleagues (1997) argued in order to overcome these challenges, students of Color must acquire a repertoire of theoretical (formal/book) knowledge and heuristic (campus specific) knowledge including specific office resources, personnel resources, and peer resources.

Within LMSS, both theoretical knowledge and heuristic knowledge are seen as crucial to overcoming barriers of first year transition commonly encountered by students of Color. Although, I am not studying student success as Padilla et al. (1997) define it, I do explore what theoretical and heuristic knowledge Black, low-income, first generation students develop to contribute to their in-environment academic resilience.

Consistent with an anti-deficit framework, Padilla et al.'s (1997) model is useful because it presents findings based on what students are doing “right” to persist, versus reinforcing the negative stereotypes surrounding Black, first generation, low-income college students. Further, the model was developed based on student of Color experiences on a predominantly White campus, which is consistent with the methodology of this dissertation. Together, the IEO model and the LMSS, create a framework within which I explore how students’ intersectional identities interact within their environment(s) to develop the heuristic and theoretical knowledge necessary to remain academically resilient in the face of the four categories of barriers. Within the current study, the inputs are represented by student identities and associated experiences. The

environment is represented by the various spaces college students interact with one another, and others who influence their collegiate experience. The outcomes are represented by academic resilience, which I see as a process outcome. Therefore, I view academic resilience as an input and outcome, which is further developed or hindered as a part of the in-environment interactions. In the current study, I explore in-environment interactions for participants leading to their ability or desire to remain academically resilient (Refer to figure 1).

To this point, I have presented the theoretical framework for this study, which is represented by the combination of a macro theory, CRT, and two micro theories, IEO and LMSS. What follows is a review of literature providing context for college experiences of Black, first generation, low-income college students, and a foundational understanding of academic resilience.

Review of Literature

In the previous section of this chapter, I outlined the overarching theories guiding this work. CRT serves as the macro theory, through which student experiences will be considered, with IEO and LMSS serving as the micro-theories, discipline specific studies used to consider college student experiences. Given the participants of the current study, what follows is a review of relevant literature as it pertains to Black, first generation, low-income college students attending PWIs and academic resilience for college students.

This literature review is divided into five categories. Because CRT finds context and situatedness (Liu, 2009) to be important when considering personal stories, I begin by providing a broad historical context to higher education. The historical context helps to situate experiences for underserved students within higher education. Next, I situate the ways Black students are underserved within U.S. education throughout history. Following, I present contemporary

challenges faced by many Black students studying at PWIs. Next, I discuss the unique, and in many ways similar, contemporary challenges of first generation and low-income college students. Next is a discussion of academic resilience. In the concluding paragraph, I summarize the literature and its collective usefulness in studying Black first, generation college students from low-income backgrounds.

Broad History of Higher Education in America

Because colleges were established for the White elite within the early parts of the United States, most “non-traditional” populations such as students from low income backgrounds, women, or students of Color, share a history of challenges with college access, discrimination, and resources (access to or lack thereof). While I do not explore in great detail the history of the U.S. higher education system, I provide a context of some historical aspects of education broadly within the U.S. and how they influence contemporary collegiate experiences, and challenges for underserved populations.

U.S. higher education began in the late 1700s when institutions known today as Harvard, William and Mary, Yale, and Princeton were founded as colleges during the early colonial years. The colonial colleges were the first institutions of U.S. higher education with a mission to educate future leaders who would build and maintain the current society and social structure (Thelin, 2011). A power differential between the leaders of the country and those who lived within it was apparent, and higher education was created as a means to maintain this differential. Civic leaders, clergy, and other elites were among the select few who had access to higher education (Thelin, 2011). The sons of these leaders were also the beneficiaries of this privilege and were set up to replace their fathers as leaders in positions of power (Thelin, 2011). Through the colonial colleges, one begins to see the early issues of a power differential between those

with access to education and those lacking access, which lead to exclusion in one of the most influential institutions of U.S. society. The early colleges excluded those who were not considered elite, such as poor Whites, women, tradesmen, farmers, and people of Color (Thelin, 2011). Though the early colleges were exclusively against access for Blacks and far too expensive for the poor (including poor Whites), there was still a divergence between historical access and contemporary challenges for either population.

This brief historical analysis provides a glimpse into the beginnings of U.S. higher education. Historically, certain populations were excluded from education and there were policies and practices in place systemically underserving certain groups of students from the very beginning. What follows is a brief, but more specific discussion, providing historical context in regard to Blacks within higher education in the U.S.

Blacks in Higher Education: Historical Context

As the early colonial colleges took root within the U.S., so did the institution of slavery for Africans, and later their decedents, who are referred to as Black or African American (both terms used interchangeably) within this dissertation. Within the U.S. systems of education, Black students are historically victims of violence, discrimination, and oppression based on race, which have influenced their educational experiences, even through postsecondary education (Ladson-Billings, 2006; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). Particularly relevant to this research are experiences faced by Black students on predominantly White campuses, so what follows are key influential points in history regarding Black student experiences at PWIs.

Despite a cultural commitment to education as a means of freedom and liberation, Blacks were systematically excluded from economic and educational resources through postsecondary education (Anderson, 1988). Particularly in the south, the Morrill Land Grant Act of 1862

established state funded colleges and universities adding agriculture, science, military science, and engineering to the classic liberal arts curriculum, in parallel to the industrial revolution (Geiger, 1999; Thelin, 2011). Very few Blacks were permitted into these Land Grant institutions. Roughly 30 years later, with the passing of the second Morrill Land Grant Act, Blacks who completed secondary education were able to attend newly established colleges and institutes for Blacks, which are currently known as Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) (Anderson, 1988; Geiger, 1999; Thelin, 2011).

In large part, HBCUs fell into two groups: classical education or vocational/trade education (Anderson, 1988). Classical education, largely supported by W.E.B. DuBois, was modeled after a New England style of education with a focus on math, languages, and science. Vocational/Trade education, largely supported by Booker T. Washington, focused on agriculture and other trades seen as requiring low-level academic skills (i.e., planting, plowing, etc.) (Anderson, 1988). As the number of Blacks completing secondary education continued to grow, they were encouraged, and in some ways funneled, by northern philanthropists and educational leaders into vocational education as a way to maintain the class and race based social order (Anderson, 1988). However, regardless of the academic focus, most HBCUs were systemically under resourced and were unable to provide students with high-level academic training (Anderson, 1988). Here, the inequitable schooling experiences for Black students are seen as an aspect of being underserved within higher education throughout history. Despite inequity, over the next several decades Blacks continued to pursue education primarily at HBCUs, and in small numbers at PWIs, as a means for political involvement, freedom, and economic development.

Following the landmark 1954 case of *Brown et al. v. the Board of Education* in Topeka, Kansas, historically White institutions were legally required to open their doors to all students, regardless of racial background. While PWIs admitted more students from various cultures, there was relatively little thought given, or action taken, to accommodate these incoming students (Saddlemire, 1996; Taylor, 1989). More Blacks were admitted into White institutions, but there was little to no real change in how these institutions approached education or the socioemotional effects the campus environment had on these students. To date, Black students continue to attend PWIs and many continue to face racialized barriers. As such, what follows is a discussion of common experiences faced by Black students attending PWIs.

Blacks in Higher Education: Contemporary Experiences

Despite the increasingly diverse population on historically White college campuses (Snyder & Dillow, 2015), Black students continue to report low levels of satisfaction at PWIs (Harper & Hurtado, 2007; Mitchell, Wood, & Witherspoon, 2010; Utsey, Ponterotto, Reynolds, & Cancelli, 2000). Harper and Hurtado (2007) conducted a review of numerous post-1992 journal articles focused on the racialized experiences of college students and campus racial climates. They found since 1992, students of Color, primarily Black students, continue to contend with isolation, alienation, and stereotyping on predominantly White campuses (Harper & Hurtado, 2007). Further, via a multi-campus qualitative study of racial climate including five large institutions, three different geographical regions of the country, and 278 racially diverse students, Harper and Hurtado (2007) found Black students to report the highest degrees of dissatisfaction in the social environment.

Many of the studies in Harper and Hurtado's (2007) meta-analysis are over 10 years old; however, the experiences represented then are still pervasive today. In 2012, Hurtado and Ruiz

reported survey findings from a national study of 4,037 participating students of Color across 31 campuses. Within their study, “students of Color” references African Americans, Asian Americans, Latino/Hispanic Americans, and Native Americans. As a part of the findings, 37% of Black students reported racial incidents to campus authorities at campuses with a population of Color 20% or below, which is significantly higher than overall percentage of incidents reported—13% for all student of Color. Further, at institutions with low percentages of students of Color (20% or less), 55.4% of Black students reported feeling some level of exclusion from events and activities in peer environments. In regard to verbal comments made by others, 60.4% of all students of Color in the study reported being a target; when further disaggregated by race, 67.2% of Black students reported the same. Similarly, Black students represented higher percentages (40.2%) of experiences with discriminatory or offensive images than all students of Color (32.4%). In each case, Black students reported more experiences of discrimination and hostility than all students of Color across institution type.

Further, Rivard (2014) conducted a cross-racial qualitative study and found Black participants and White participants found the racial climate to be distinctively different. Black participants primarily used neutral or negative descriptors to describe interactions between Black and White peers, including awkward feelings, ignorant interactions, detachment from peer environment and issues of segregation. Consistent with examples of stereotype threat discussed in forthcoming sections, Black participants felt the need to prove themselves in the classroom. Both Rivard (2012) and Hurtado and Ruiz (2012) presented findings demonstrating the uneasy, uncomfortable, and discriminatory experiences and behaviors had by Blacks students on predominantly White campuses.

While all Black students at PWIs do not have the same exact experiences, particularly due to various intersecting identities, CRT argues there are shared experiences of oppression (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012). Across socio-economic class, family educational backgrounds, and other social identities, Black college students studying at PWIs are likely to have similar experiences with various levels of oppression (i.e., institutional, symbolic, and individual oppression [see Harding, 1986]). Further, while Hurtado, Milem, Clayton-Pedersen, and Allen (1999) found that students of Color who perceived less racial tension had an increased likelihood of academic success, scholars continue to report students of Color as perceiving PWIs as hostile and racist (Harper & Hurtado, 2007). Additionally, Quaye, Griffin, and Museus (2015) suggest prejudice, discrimination, isolation, and marginalization to be among top concerns for students of Color broadly at PWIs.

The experiences with racism or other racialized experiences are varied, but what follows are specific discussions on overt/covert racism, microaggressions, stereotype threat, and racial climate for Black students at PWIs. These experiences are specifically discussed because they are seen as commonly faced by Black students attending PWIs. Further, discussions on microaggressions and campus climate concerns are explored due to their roots in CRT scholarship.

Overt/Covert Racism. Black students attending PWIs often face prejudice and discrimination as a result of their race or ethnicity (Nadal et al., 2014; Solórzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2001; Tynes, Rose, & Markoe, 2013). Overt racism is less common on college campuses than covert racist incidents, but they are common nonetheless. Overt racism is considered as specific extreme incidents, such as racial slurs, physical assaults, and hate crimes (Fries-Britt & Turner, 2001; Smith, Allen & Danley, 2007). Other examples seeming more common to college

campuses are racially incited vandalism, such as when someone writes a racial slur on a student's residence hall door or racially insensitive parties/gatherings. Seemingly common to most college campuses, these parties are where college fraternities and sororities and other social groups throw "Black parties" or "Black face parties" like at Auburn University in 2001 and Arizona State University in 2013. Other recent examples of overt racist activity on campuses include: White fraternity members at Oklahoma State University dressed in KKK attire, performing a mock lynching of a black-faced prisoner (Patton, 2008), 2015 University of Oklahoma fraternity members singing and chanting racial slurs while celebrating lynching (Kingcade, 2015), and the hanging of a noose at Duke university on the morning of a university-wide visit of a prominent Black scholar (Sola, 2015).

Less obvious, covert racism is considered as less extreme and includes incidents such as "race-laden misunderstandings" (p. 191, D'Aguelli & Hershberger, 1993), hyper surveillance and harassment from campus police (Smith, Allen & Danley, 2007), and microaggressions. Both covert and overt types of racialized experiences are likely to negatively influence Black students both in their sense of safety and in their desire to remain fully engaged within the academic culture of a given university. Furthermore, when not addressed correctly various forms of overt and covert racism can hinder a student's sense of belonging at their institution (Strayhorn, 2012).

Microaggressions. Solórzano, Ceja, and Yosso (2000) describe microaggressions as subtle insults (verbal, nonverbal, or visual) directed toward people of Color, often automatically or unconsciously. Microaggressions are frequent and reoccurring forms of every day racism and daily experiences with another's prejudice, stereotypes, and discriminatory behaviors (Solórzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000; Swim, et al., 2003). Other microaggressions are when someone faces

expectations or assumptions of being “disadvantaged” or “at-risk” based solely on perceptions of race (McDougle, Way, & Yash, 2008; Solórzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000).

Microaggressions are often perceived on the part of the victim, and are so subtle they are sometimes overlooked. Swim et al., (2003) conducted a two-week study, within which Black undergraduates documented any instance of experienced or perceived racism on their campus. Thirty-six percent reported unfriendly looks and skeptical stares from White students and faculty, 24% documented derogatory, and stereotypical verbal remarks directed toward them, 18% chronicled experiences with bad service in the dining hall and other facilities on campus, and 15% documented various other incidents; all of which were attributed to racism by the students.

Stereotypes tend to play a large part in racialized microaggressions. Common stereotypes projected onto Black students include assumptions of athletic ability (Rasmussen, Esgate, & Turner, 2005), academic capabilities or lesser intelligence (Swim, 2003), admission via affirmative action (Harper, 2012), and of disadvantaged background (McDougle, Way & Yash, 2008; Solórzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000). As a result of the negative consequences of facing daily microaggressions such as stereotyping and others, Black students experience a decrease in academic confidence (Fries-Britt, 2002) and an increase in feeling socially alienated on predominantly White campuses (Solórzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000).

Stereotype Threat. Another common experience for Black students at PWIs is stereotype threat. Stereotype threat is a perceived risk of confirming negative stereotypes about one’s group, and can manifest via two pathways: internalization and externalization (Owens & Massey, 2011; Steele & Aronson, 1995). In the educational context, when students of Color internalize a negative stereotype, they may choose to de-identify with the idea of academic success to avoid

feelings of inferiority. To de-identify is when a student intentionally underperforms so failing cannot be attributed to their true abilities. Conversely, during the process of externalization, minority students expect majority students and professors to hold discriminatory beliefs about their group. The expectation of incompetence or self-fulfilling the stereotype, increases anxiety about performing badly, which can lead to diminished confidence, poor performance, or loss of interest in the academic environment (Owens & Massey, 2011; Steele & Aronson, 1995).

In some cases, such as when Black students are stereotyped as lazy (Fries-Britt, 2004; Steele & Aronson, 1995), one feels pressure to over perform. Pressure to over perform may be internal (self-inflicted) or external (coming from a source other than oneself). Both forms of pressure to over perform are in direct result of the broader systems of inequality, oppression, and racism endemic within U.S. society.

Campus Climate. The next common racialized experience for Black students at PWIs is associated with campus climate. Campus climate is made up of the “perceptions, attitudes, and expectations that define the institution and its members” (Bauer, 1998, p. 2). Furthermore, the campus racial climate includes current attitudes, perceptions, and expectations within an institutional community specific to issues of race, ethnicity, and diversity (Hurtado et al., 1999). Therefore, stereotypes of Black students being lazy, admitted via affirmative action, or unwilling to do work in a particular class can all negatively influence the racial climate within classrooms or general school climate for students of Color (Fries-Brit, 2004; Harper, 2012; Solórzano, Ceja & Yosso, 2000; Strayhorn, 2009). Both Fries-Britt and Griffin (2007), and Harper (2012) discuss the challenges of onlyness, which is when students of Color find themselves as the only Black, Latino, or Arab American in a given classroom. Onlyness is exacerbated when students of Color find few, if any, faculty or staff of Color on campus. A sense of onlyness causes students to feel

invisible, undervalued and disconnected from their institution (Solórzano, Ceja & Yosso, 2000). In addition to a sense of onlyness, when there are few students of Color in class or on campus, they are often tokenized and seen as speaking for or representing their entire community (Fries-Britt, 2004; Morales, 2008; Tatum, 1992).

As a result of experiences with stereotype threat, hostility on campus, and daily microaggressions, Black students have historically experienced lower attachment to their schools, and therefore lower engagement and more challenges regarding academic performance (Harper & Hurtado, 2007; Flowers, 2004; Fordham & Ogbu, 1986; Museus, 2008; Bridges, Holmes, Williams, Morelon-Quainoo, & Nelson Laird, 2007). Further, considering Padilla and colleagues (1997), and their LMSS, one can associate the aforementioned negative racialized experiences with the four categories of barriers (i.e., discontinuity, lack of nurturing, lack of presence and lack of resources) faced by students of Color during their first year transition; particularly lack of nurturing and lack of supportive resources. What follows is a brief review of literature regarding these topics regarding barriers and racialized experiences, and the ways they influence the pre-college, access, transition, and retention experiences of Black collegians.

Blacks in Higher Education: Pre-college, Access, and Retention at PWIs

Despite the historical racialized challenges and experiences had by Black collegians attending PWIs and with the exception of a small drop in enrollment across races in the past three years, the number of Black students attending 4-year institutions continues to rise (Snyder & Dillow, 2015). However, Black college students continue to be underrepresented in number, only representing 14.6% of the total undergraduate student population for 4-year institutions, across institution type (Snyder & Dillow, 2015). Despite the growing numbers of African

American students attending PWIs, these institutions continue to face challenges supporting Black students.

Further, PWIs continue facing challenges retaining Black students. In his study of academic achievement and self-concept of 206 African American students attending PWIs and HBCUs, Cokley (2000) found although participants attending PWIs entered college with higher high school grade point averages (GPA) than those attending HBCUs, they still reported lower academic achievement in college, and exhibited lower academic self-concept. Furthermore, according to Davis et al. (2004), 70% of African Americans who attended PWIs did not complete their baccalaureate education in comparison to only 20% of those attending HBCUs. Historically, Black students attending PWIs have lower persistence rates, postsecondary academic achievement levels, enrollment in advanced degree programs, graduation rates, occupational earnings, and poorer overall psychosocial adjustment (Allen, Epps, & Haniff, 1991). Evidence suggests low graduation and persistence rates among Black students could be due, at least in part, to their inability to find a sense of membership on predominantly White campuses (Kuh & Love, 2000; Tinto, 1993), which is supported by the host of discriminatory experiences discussed in previous sections.

The challenges facing Black students attending PWIs are not entirely the fault of their given postsecondary institution. In many cases, due to segregation, and educational and resource disparities at the K–12 level, many students coming from urban communities enter postsecondary education underprepared for the academic rigors of college (Orfield & Lee, 2005). The *2013 Digest of Education Statistics* (Snyder & Dillow, 2015) reports disturbing statistics regarding the pre-college experiences of Black students. For example, the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) reading, math and science scores for 2013 found Black students

consistently scoring lower than their White counterparts. The difference in achievement is also represented in the percentage of students participating in Advance Placement (AP), International Baccalaureate (IB), dual enrollment courses and graduation. The NCES reports only 41.4% of high school graduates enrolled in AP, IB, or dual enrollment courses, with 42.5% being White participants and only 27.3% of participants being Black. Similarly, the average high school graduation rate from the 2009-2010 class is 78% across race, with an 83% graduation rate for White students and 66% graduation rate for Black students. Though abysmal, these statistics showcase the persistent gap in achievement plaguing our education system. Discussing in detail the racial achievement gap is beyond the scope of this study. However, given the participants of the current study and their pre-college experiences, which are seen as inputs to the IEO model, consideration of the racial achievement gap is important. Thus, what follows is a very brief discussion of the racial achievement gap to help contextualize common pre-college experiences for Black, low-income, first generation collegians. Further, I use Ladson-Billings (2006) to situate the racial achievement gap within a broader structural critique avoiding the student-centered, deficit discourse. I follow that discussion with a brief discussion of segregation and how it is relevant to the common pre-college experiences for Black, low-income, first generation college students.

Racial Achievement Gap. The “racial achievement gap” refers to the gap in academic scores (e.g., standardized tests) and graduation rates between Black and Latino youth, and their White and Asian American peers. Some of the most cited reasons for the persistent racial achievement gap include arguments against intelligence level of Blacks (Madaus & Clarke, 2001; Thernstrom & Thernstrom, 1999); little to no family or home support for education (Thernstrom & Thernstrom, 1999); academic tracking and lack of access to high quality teaching, curriculum,

and other school resources (Lubienski, 2002). Other commonly cited reasons include cultural mismatch between communities and teachers (Boykin & Allen, 2000; Gay, 2000; Hale, 2001; Ladson-Billings, 1998); and stereotype threat, and its impact on student behaviors and academic engagement (Massey & Owens, 2014; Steele & Aronson, 1995). Lastly, achievement gap arguments are also rooted in poor neighborhoods, lack of valued cultural capital, undernourished children, and inexperienced teachers (Ladson-Billings, 2006). However, Ladson-Billings (2006) offers a CRT perspective of the ways the achievement gap is rooted in racialized and class-based disparities or what she refers to as debts. She first argues the achievement gap as rooted in economic debt, which are economic and resource disparities between schools serving White students versus those which serve students of Color. Second Ladson-Billings (2006) also contends the racial achievement gap as rooted in a moral conflict between what is right and what schools actually do, which she refers to as a moral debt. Finally, Ladson-Billings (2006) argues the exclusion of people of Color from the civic process as a socio-political debt, which adversely impacts the racial achievement gap. These debts (economic, moral, and socio-political) have created an educational system consistently underserving Black students and sending them to postsecondary education underprepared (Ladson-Billings, 2006).

Segregation. Participants in the current study all came from communities and schools predominantly of Color. A single participant spent some time at a predominantly White school before relocating to live with her other parent, but still spent much of her formative schooling within predominantly Black spaces. Furthermore, the dissertation site is situated within a very segregated state, with some of the most segregated school districts across the country (Orfield & Lee, 2004). In 2004, Orfield & Lee reported 63% of Black students attending school with 80%

non-white students. Therefore, understanding the ways segregation of communities and schools influenced participants' higher education experiences is vital.

Given the history of housing discrimination, White flight from inner city communities, red lining within communities, and separate but equal schooling (Anderson, 1988), there should be little surprise regarding the history of segregated communities and schools across the country. However, despite schooling integration and laws against housing discrimination, such segregation remains pervasive, with K–12 educational and residential communities in the U.S. remaining divided by race (Orfield, 2009; Saenz, 2010). For example, Orfield and Lee (2005) suggest the average high school with 10% or less of its student body living in poverty has a student body made up of 82% White students. In 2006-2007 only 14% of White students, 25% of Black students, 28% of Latino/a students, and 21% of American Indian students attended high schools classified as multiracial, while during the same time frame, 36% of White students attended a high school 90-100% White (Orfield, 2009). Moreover, low-income Black and Latina/o students are more likely to attend racially homogeneous schools with high concentrations of students living in poverty (Orfield, 2009).

Not only is understanding segregation within communities and schools important for the purposes of understanding student inputs, it is also vital to understanding the ways they interact with diversity (or lack thereof) upon entry into a post-secondary institution. Park, Denson, and Bowman (2013) concluded segregated living and schooling experiences as significant influencers of the ways students engaged with diversity during their college matriculation. Studies have shown attending racially homogenous secondary schools is linked with lower levels of engagement with diversity during college, particularly for White students (Bowman, Hurtado, Locks, & Oseguera, 2008; Saenz, 2010; Liang, Miliem, & Umbach, 2004). Therefore, when

exploring the inputs and in-environment experiences of participants within the current study, understanding their precollege interactions with diversity and the ways those interactions shape their ability to remain academically resilient within the Midwest climate is important.

To this point, this section provided present-day experiences of Black students at PWIs, which can be understood as barriers to academic achievement within higher education settings. Further, I presented NCVs and pre-college experiences providing context for the inputs of underserved students as they transition into college. Providing a broad context for the experiences of Black, low-income, first generation college students helps lead to a greater understanding of why academic resilience in the face of these barriers is important.

Because first generation students are more likely to be of Color and low-income (Saenz et al., 2007; Darling & Smith, 2007; Engle & Tinto, 2008), understanding how these intersecting identities influence their first year transition is important. Furthermore, understanding the individualized experiences of first generation and low-income college students leads to a clearer understanding of how their intersecting identities may lead to unique and intersecting experiences. Thus, what follows is a discussion detailing some of the challenges and experiences faced by low-income and first generation college students, respectively.

Low-Income and First Generation Student Experiences

Separating low-income and first generation identities is virtually impossible. While Davis (2010) asserted less than one-quarter of first generation students come from low-income families, in most cases, students from low-income families are in fact, first in their family to attend college (Choy, 2001; Darling & Smith, 2007; Engle & Tinto, 2008; Horn & Nuñez, 2000; Thayer, 2000). Thus, the overlapping identities of being first generation and from a low-income background exacerbates challenges getting to, and through college. Family income influences a

student's likelihood of entering and completing college (Thayer, 2000), while being first in one's family to attend college can lower the access to the resources and college knowledge necessary to get into, and do well at, a postsecondary institution (Darling & Smith, 2007; Davis, 2012; Terenzini, et al, 1996). Together, first generation and low-income college students are less likely to enroll in college, and if enrolled are more likely to disenroll prior to completion, or more likely to take longer to graduate (Chen & Carroll, 2005; Roderick, Coca & Nagaoka, 2011; Rowan-Kenyon, 2007). Further, first generation and other nontraditional students enter college with lower reading, math, critical-thinking skills, SAT scores, and high school GPAs (McConnell, 2000; Fenske, Porter, DuBrock, 2000; Ishitani, 2005; Pascarella, Pierson, Wolniak, & Terenzini, 2004). Additionally, both first generation students and low-income students are more likely to attain lower grades and take fewer credits, than continuing generation or middle- to upper-income students (Bowen, Kurzweil, & Tobin, 2005; Housel & Harvey, 2009; Pascarella et al., 2004). Of the many challenges faced by first generation and low-income college students, there are three closely aligned with the four categories of barriers (i.e., discontinuity, lack of nurturing, lack of presence, and lack of resources) outlined by the LMSS. Challenges with family support (Darling & Smith, 2007; Davis, 2012; Engle & Tinto, 2008), priority negotiation (Engle & Tinto, 2008; Phinney & Haas, 2003), and lacking a sense of belonging (Lehman, 2007) present significant odds for low-income and first generation students face during their college matriculation.

Family Support. Accessing family support presents as a significant challenge for first generation students from low-income backgrounds. Particularly in low-income communities of Color, where many families do not have college-going histories, outside of teachers and counselors, students seldom have access to resources and information necessary to effectively

manage the college application and matriculation process (Roderick et al., 2011). Thus, a student's family may provide little to no support as a result of lacking the knowledge of how to support their child while in college.

When students are first in their family to go to college, they have less support and understanding from their family, experience more pressure to remain home, often have a lack of financial support, and lack college educated role models and mentors (Davis, 2012; Darling & Smith, 2007; Terenzini et al., 1996; Thayer, 2000; Ting, 1998; York-Anderson & Bowman, 1991). Further, first generation and low-income college students have less exposure and access to the types of cultural capital, cultural norms, values, or unwritten codes providing access to privilege (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990; Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992; Delpit, 2006), and seen as normative by many universities (Stephens et al., 2012). This is not to suggest first generation, low-income or students of Color broadly as not having a wealth of cultural capital, but is to assert their cultural capital as not being valued within most post-secondary institutions (Yosso, 2005)

Beyond the lack of family support, first generation and low-income students who leave home to attend college often experience a sense of survivor's guilt (a unique intrapersonal, and noncognitive struggle experienced by first generation students [Hsiao, 1992]). Survivor's guilt is seen as excessive worry about being in a better position than parents, family, or peers (O'Connor et al., 2000). Experiencing survivor's guilt hinders or prevents well-being, normal progression through life, academic success, and the development of positive relationships for students (Piorkowski, 1983). Also leading to students becoming consumed with their families or hometowns at the expense of their present life in school (Tate, Williams, & Harden, 2013), survivor's guilt can negatively influence student transition experiences. Being overly consumed

with one's family or hometown can hinder first generation and low-income students from taking full advantage of engaging in the academic and social experiences fostering student success such as study groups, study abroad, undergraduate research, and interacting with faculty (Engle & Tinto, 2008).

Priority Negotiation. The opportunity to engage in academic and social experiences is further lessened due to the negotiation of priorities often faced by low-income and first generation students while attending college. Priority negotiation occurs when working students must negotiate between work and school priorities (Engle & Tinto, 2008). First generation students are likely to work more hours per week at off campus jobs than their continuing generation peers (McGregor et al, 1991; Billson & Terry, 1982). In addition to more hours, first generation and low-income college students have a higher likelihood of working more than one job in order to pay for tuition and living expenses (Phinney & Haas, 2003; Warburton, Burgarin, & Nuñez, 2001). Further, both first generation and low-income students often must negotiate between needing to work over the summer and during the school year or taking advantage of unpaid internships possibly leading to future job opportunities (Delaney, 2010; Pascarella et al., 2004).

Sense of Belonging. Similar to issues of fit for Black students at PWIs, first generation and low-income college students often struggle with their sense of belonging – feeling as if they do not fit in (Lehmann, 2007; McGregor et al., 1991) – and their belief in whether they can be successful in college (Johnson, Richeson, & Finkel, 2011; Ostrove & Long, 2007). Specifically, first generation students are more likely to report feelings of low confidence and isolation in relation to their college experience (McConnell, 2000; Engle, Bermeo, & O'Brien, 2006). In a qualitative study with 25 interview participants who left college prior to graduation, Lehmann

(2007) found a majority of the students' cited challenges with fitting in and unfamiliarity with institutional culture and university demands.

Likewise, Stephens and colleagues (2012) found cultural mismatch, when one's cultural norms and values do not match with the institutional norms and values, amongst first generation college students and U.S. higher education institutions. Having conducted four studies, with diverse methods (e.g., surveys, longitudinal, and experiments), Stephens and colleagues concluded cultural mismatch as leading to an unseen academic disadvantage for first generation college students within higher education institutions. More specifically, first generation students are more likely to value cultural norms of interdependence or community, while higher education institutions value independence and other middle-class cultural norms (Stephens et al., 2012). Such cultural mismatch may further lead to lack of belonging for first generation and low income college students.

In sum, first generation and low-income students face significant barriers during their college matriculation. However, because first generation and low-income students are more likely to be of Color than their peers (Bui, 2002; Darling & Smith, 2007; Engle & Tinto, 2008; Saenz et al, 2007; Warburton, Bugarin & Nuñez, 2001), paying special attention to the population represented in the current study is important. Students with these intersecting identities (i.e. Black, first generation, low-income) are more likely to experience lower faculty expectations, lower self-concepts and feelings of support, and a higher likelihood of attending college in non-traditional ways (i.e. part time or breaks in attendance) (Dennis, Phinney, & Chuateco, 2005). Thus, understanding the ways race, income, and family educational background intersect to influence the college transition experience is vital. However, searches for empirical studies using an intersectional framework specifically focused on college transition

return one-sided with studies that lack a full intersectional analysis. For example, despite Williams and Butler's (2010) study arguing institutions as considering the experiences of "race, class, and first generation college students" (p. 3), they spend much of their discussion on the experiences of first generation, low-income students without full consideration of how racialized and gendered experiences simultaneously intersect with those identities.

In this section I have used higher education literature to demonstrate the challenges faced by Black, first, generation, low-income college students pursuing post-secondary education, particularly at PWIs. However, in spite of the referenced challenges, students continue to pursue and attain their post-secondary degree. The current study is about those students. The current study explores the ways students remain academically resilient to overcome such challenges during their college journey. Further, the current study explores the in-environment experiences that may contribute to or hinder such resilience. When considering in-environment experiences, and the specific population within the current study, one must consider institutional first year transition programming. Such programming includes traditional Summer Bridge and programs such as seminars, courses, or mandatory tutoring throughout the full first year. As such, what follows is a brief discussion of first year transition programming and its relevancy to the current study. Following that section is a discussion of academic resilience broadly, academic resilience in higher education, and the usefulness of academic resilience to the current study.

Black, First Generation, Low-Income College Students and First Year Transition Programming

To this point I have presented the historical and present day challenges faced by Black, first generation, low-income college students. Many of such challenges are faced during their college transition which often begins the summer prior to college. As such, many institutions

have developed first year transition programs to ease the transition of entering students (Barefoot, Griffin, & Koch, 2012). Nearly 45% of institutions across the United States offer first year transition programs for incoming students (Barefoot, Griffin, & Koch, 2012). Such transition programs provide an introduction to campus living, regulations, policies, and resources; academic and professional development workshops; and enrollment into a variety of summer courses (Kezar, 2001). Relevant to the current study, many first year transition programs are intended for underserved college students due to their likely pre-college experiences with under resourced schools and lack of rigorous, standards-based education (Greenfield, Keup, & Gardner, 2013; Kozar, 2000; McDonough & Fann, 2007; Strayhorn, 2011). Further, first year transition programs aim to assist transitioning students with social adjustment difficulties (e.g., developing a peer network, connecting with faculty, getting familiar with campus life, academic self-efficacy) (Walpole et al., 2008).

Generally, scholars support participation in first year transition programs as they are seen as key to academic success and retention (Conner & Colton, 1999; Noble, Flynn, Lee, & Hilton, 2007; Strayhorn, 2012). Such programs are created on the principle that both social and academic integration are critical influences on student persistence (Tinto, 1975; Spady, 1970). As such, first year transition programs aim to support students in developing academic self-efficacy; academic skills such as goal setting, time management, and connecting with faculty; and staying engaged in the classroom (Kezar, 2001). Further, first year transition programs are designed to help students develop skills and supportive peer networks that lead to academic resilience (Kezar, 2001; Garcia & Paz, 2009). As such, students who are conditionally admitted, eligible for Equal Opportunity Programs or TRIO programs, or are historically underrepresented are often required to participate (Garcia & Paz, 2009; Greenfield et al., 2013; Kezar, 2001).

Despite their purpose and aim, research continues to produce conflicting results. Some scholars argue first year transition programs produce positive academic outcomes and increased academic engagement (Cabrera, Miner, & Milem, 2013; Santa Rita & Bacote, 1997; Strayhorn, 2011; Walpole et al., 2008), increase academic self-efficacy (Strayhorn, 2011), and mitigate academic inequalities and ease general social transitions (Conner & Colton, 1999; Noble et al., 2007; Strayhorn, 2012), while other scholars suggest little to no impact (Ackerman, 1991; Fletcher, 2001).

Academic outcomes are commonly associated with cognitive variables such as impacts on grade point average (GPA) and academic skills (e.g. use of technology, asking questions in the classroom, understanding syllabi) (Strayhorn, 2011). Conducting a 2-year longitudinal qualitative study, Walpole and colleagues (2008) found first year transition program participants to demonstrate higher levels of academic and social engagement, which are associated with increased persistence and retention (Tinto, 1993; Astin, 1993). Further, in his study of first year transition program participants, Strayhorn (2011) found a positive gain in academic skills and academic self-efficacy. Wolf-Wendel, Tuttle, and Keller-Wolff (1999), Walpole et al. (2008), and Santa Rita and Bacote (1997) all sought to explore the impact of participation in first year transition programs with traditionally underserved students. They observed positive impacts on academic outcomes from the program's introduction to campus (Santa Rita & Bacote, 1997), training on how to maximize resources (Walpole et al., 2008), and learning to assess one's academic abilities (Wolf-Wendel, Tuttle, & Keller-Wolff, 1999).

Generally, first year transition programs have proven successful in increasing social integration (Velásquez, 2003). However, while participants have experienced positive academic outcomes and increased social integration, social adjustment outcomes in the face of raced and

classed based challenges are less clear. While Strayhorn (2011) found first year transition program participation to influence academic self-efficacy of underserved participants, his study reported no effect on participants' sense of belonging at the institution. Similarly, although Velásquez (2003) sample reported an increased sense of competence (i.e., understanding of one's general abilities, identifying strengths and weaknesses), and social integration (i.e., felt a part of campus life), participants still reported feelings of marginalization due to onlyness.

Many studies conducted research on students of color with little attention to how the identities of individual groups (e.g., Black students versus Asian students versus low income students) may produce different barriers to a successful transition. Scholars have examined the efficacy of transition programs with samples of underrepresented students, yet research on programs successfully targeting the unique challenges faced by Black, first, generation low income college at PWIs is scarce (Lee & Barnes, 2015; Strayhorn, 2011). As such, while scholars suggest first year transition programs support a successful transition for entering students, I question the degree to which first year transition programs ease the cultural transition for underserved students, specifically in regard to their likelihood of negative raced and classed experiences. A clearer understanding of the ways first year transition programs prepare Black, first generation, low-income college students for raced and classed challenges they are likely to face at a PWI is necessary to have a fuller understanding of the ways institutional experiences influence their academic resilience. As such, the current study explores the first year transition of Black, first generation, low-income college participants and the components of the program influencing their academic resilience.

Overcoming Odds: Academic Resilience in Higher Education

To this point, I have discussed the ways many Black, first generation students from low-income backgrounds are historically underserved and mislabeled within the U.S. education system. Additionally, I have discussed the ways those historical experiences have led to present-day challenges for first generation, low-income, Black collegians, studying at PWIs. Further, I have discussed one way institutions have attempted to mitigate challenges through targeted first year transition programs. However, despite the many barriers, there continue to be students from these backgrounds who demonstrate academic resilience as they pursue higher education. Morales and Trotman (2011) argued resilient students are the “statistically elite...those who avoid the dreadful educational outcomes associated with a historically underprivileged” (p. 1) status. Thus, consideration of the ways students beat the odds through their resiliency is important. The forthcoming section defines and discusses academic resilience in the lives of college students. In conclusion, I discuss the perceived usefulness of academic resilience within my study and to the academy.

Resilience Broadly

There is no universal definition of resiliency (Gardynik & McDonald, 2005). Drawing on the fields of psychology and social work, the term resilience is often used to describe people who “function at a high level after experiencing numerous stressors” (LePage-Lees, 1997, p. 468). Within the medical field, resilience assumes exposure to particular conditions, or risk factors, increases the likelihood an individual will experience certain adverse consequences and in turn overcome them (Fin & Rock, 1997). Scholars also use the term to define people who successfully cope with or overcome risk and adversity, or who develop competence in the face of severe hardships (Doll & Lyon, 1998). The varying definitions consider both outcomes and

processes. McCubbin (2001) contends there are disagreements as to whether the term resilience refers to outcomes or to a process, which contributes to the lack of a single definition.

For the purposes of the current study, I consider resiliency to refer to both the process and the outcome, in addition to an input. Thus, to be considered resilient, one must have the ability to thrive, mature, and increase competence in the face of adverse circumstances. To thrive, mature, and increase competence, one must draw upon all of their resources: biological, psychological, and environmental (Gordon, 1995). For this reason, within the current study, resilience considers pre-college experiences, the process by which students develop or strengthen their academic resiliency, the institutional, communal and personal resources drawn upon in that process, and the outcome of overcoming barriers during one's college matriculation.

Academic Resilience

I use resiliency within the context of higher education and refer to it as academic resiliency. Similar to the broader understanding of resilience, defining academic resilience can be challenging. For the purposes of this study, academic resilience takes into consideration the reasons why individuals experience academic achievement despite the presence of factors historically labeled as risk factors within education (O'Connor, 2002; Wang, Haertel, & Walberg, 1997; Bryan, 2005). When considering academic outcomes risk factors have historically included being a minority student, attending inner-city schools, coming from a low-income or non-native English speaking home (Fin & Rock, 1997; Moote & Windarski, 1997), and being first in one's family to attend college (Chen & Carroll, 2005; Ishitani, 2003). Such risk factors are a part of the broader academic resilience discourse but are only part of what should be considered.

Kitano and Lewis (2005) argued risk factors, protective factors, vulnerability areas, and compensatory strategies as necessary components of academic resiliency. Risk factors, such as being underserved within the U.S. education system, are the preexisting constructs having the potential to create challenges to academic success (Kitano & Lewis, 2005). Conversely, protective factors, such as relationships, resources, or noncognitive factors such as motivation or determination, have the ability to mitigate risk factors within a student's college matriculation (Kitano & Lewis, 2005). Finally, vulnerability areas are distinctive manifestations of risk in an individual's life, while compensatory strategies are specific responses to vulnerability areas (Morales, 2010). As such academic resiliency includes various aspects, components and changes depending on the individual in question. Despite the unique ways academic resiliency is developed or deployed, its study is embedded in a focus on academic success, as opposed to academic failure (Morales & Trotman, 2004).

Academic Resilience and College Students

The literature on academic resiliency is a growing field and is deeply rooted in a success orientation around the persistence of students of Color. Given the unique challenges faced by students of Color within higher education settings, the following studies are specifically focused on collegians of Color. Each of the studies describe behaviors exhibited by the participants in order for them to develop and/or employ academic resilience while studying on predominantly White campuses.

McGee (2009) sought to analyze the experiences of 23 high-achieving Black mathematics and engineering college students (both upper level and graduate level). Using counter-narrative methodology, McGee found in the face of various challenges, Black math and engineering students exhibited two forms of resilience: fragile form of resilience and robust form

of resilience. The fragile form of resilience included a desire to prove racial stereotypes wrong and a fear of failure, both of which included over working one's self in some cases (McGee, 2009). Some students also remained resilient due to pressure from parents to pursue academic excellence in some capacity (McGee, 2009). The fragile form of resilience is consistent with student responses to stereotype threat. The robust form of resilience included a redefining of one's self through self-generated criteria, such as coping mechanisms or compensatory strategies honoring their individual identities and abilities (McGee, 2009). The robust form also included a desire to serve as a role model to peers and students who may come after them and a desire to encourage others, even to the degree some were committed to becoming math or engineering teachers (McGee, 2009). According to McGee's findings much of the academic resilience demonstrated was based on individual traits, decisions, and feelings, as opposed to process oriented (including other variables, e.g., relationships, resources, institutions, etc.).

Morales (2008a) presented findings around individually employed academic resilience behaviors. In a qualitative study with 50 participants, Morales (2008a) examined resiliency of high-achieving students of Color across various institutions. Participants within the study struggled with adhering to White middle class norms, isolation from family and same raced peers, reinforcement of negative stereotypes, and feeling disconnected from or disidentification from culture of origin (Morales, 2008a). Poor Black students experienced greater stress than Black peers who were not poor, which is significant given the participants of the current study: low-income, first generation (Morales, 2008a), Black collegians. Based on findings, Morales posits to be resilient at a PWI, students need to first acknowledge the history of disenfranchisement within the educational system based on race, nationality, and income.

Morales reported students acknowledged their pre-collegiate conditions (e.g., high school resources) as subpar and actively took steps to meet their academic needs. Participants displayed “inordinate amounts of consciousness, creative problem solving, emotional management, and steadfastness” (Morales, 2008a, p.163). Lastly, participants exhibited a strong sense of pride in their accomplishments, having overcome adversity, and as a result viewed themselves as leaders among their peers (Morales, 2008a). The African American students (n=21) and the Hispanic students (n=20) within the study experienced the greatest number of challenges at the various PWIs. However, Morales found in the face of adversity and perceived cultural mismatch, the students continued to pursue a successful journey through postsecondary education.

Morales (2008b) conducted additional analysis on his study. He sought to find differences in academic resilience processes of high achieving low socioeconomic male and female college students of Color, specifically Black/African American and Hispanic/Latino students. His findings, revealed there was a gendered and racialized experience surrounding academic resilience. Specifically, female participants experienced more resistance in pursuit of their college degree but were more strongly motivated by post-college goals and found more importance in having a mentor, regardless of the mentor’s gender. The gendered responses regarding academic resilience revolved around students fulfilling their “womanly duties” while simultaneously exhibiting the effort necessary to maintain high levels of academic excellence. Other participants, similar to McGee’s (2009) robust form of resilience, reported disregarding family expectations and redefining expectations for themselves. These particular findings begin to consider the ways other variables (e.g., relationship with mentors) are important in developing academic resiliency. Additionally, specific to intersecting identities, Morales (2008b) found female participant experiences were interconnected between gender, race, and socio-economic

class. Thus, student's academic resilience processes were rooted in a uniquely gendered, classed, and raced response, as opposed to a response rooted in a singular identity.

Similarly, in a quantitative resilience study, Miller and MacIntosh (1999) considered the influence of "culturally unique" protective factors in 131 Black urban teenagers. While participants were not in college yet, this study included a consideration of the influences of racial socialization and racial identity on participant education resilience. According to Miller and MacIntosh (1999), Black parents attempt to simultaneously instill their children with a sense of racial pride, while teaching them how to react given the likelihood of negative racialized experiences. While Miller and MacIntosh (1999) did not find racial socialization to be statistically significant, they found the sense of racial identity and pride instilled by parent's positively affected academic resilience. In a quantitative study of 154 Black students at a Midwestern PWI, Brown (2008) studied the influence of racial socialization and support systems on academic resilience of participants. Unlike Miller and MacIntosh (1999), Brown (2008) found racial socialization to be positively associated with academic resilience with the students he studied, as were various support systems including extended family and adult members of their communities.

Furthering Morales's (2008b) findings, both Miller and MacIntosh (1999) and Brown (2008), found key relationships (i.e., parents, family, adult members of their community) to be vital in the academic resiliency process. The aforementioned studies found race and culture to play large parts in the students' ability to remain academically resilient. Having a strong sense of self or pride, (Morales, 2008a, 2000b; Miller & McIntosh, 1999) and a strong connection to one's family or community (McGee, 2009; Brown, 2008), was found to be vital for academic resilience for students of Color, particularly Black students attending PWIs.

What seems to be missing from Brown (2008), McGee (2009), Miller and MacIntosh (1999), and Morales (2008b) is an analysis of the ways various environments students interact with within the institution and key relationships build academic resiliency. Further, an analysis examining the influence of predominantly White environments on Black, first generation, low-income collegians is missing. Moreover, a clear connection between student interrelated identities, their college matriculation and academic resiliency seems to be missing from higher education literature. As more students transition into higher education from underserved communities and as they continue to experience higher education through the lens of their intersecting identities, institutional practitioners must understand the best ways to support them in their college matriculation. Focusing on sustained academic resiliency is one such way to support Black, first generation, low-income college students.

Academic Resiliency and its Usefulness in the Current Study

Studying academic resilience in the lives of Black, first generation, low-income students is useful to the field of higher education for three primary reasons. First, studying academic resilience allows for consideration of the ways students interact with their environment to produce or contribute to their academic resilience. Much of the resilience literature focuses on characteristics exhibited by individual students, instead of the ways in which life experiences, academic matriculation, or structured relationships can contribute to or hinder students' academic resilience during their academic matriculation (O'Connor, 2002). Approaching academic resilience via individual characteristics only considers the students outside of their environment and outside of relationships. Considering students outside of their environment and relationships, assumes students develop academic resiliency in isolation, which is a problematic assumption and incomplete picture. Luthar, Doernberger, and Zigler (1993) argue protective

factors (individually, institutionally, or communally) as rarely operating in isolation. Thus, considering academic resilience in conjunction with relationships and environments in which they interact is vital and useful.

Ungar (2012) and Rutter (1987) consider resilience to be a process, within which students navigate themselves toward a goal, while using particular resources. The consideration of a process reiterates protective factors as not operating in a silo and resilience as not simply an individual personality trait. The current study helps to address the ways institutions, environments and relationships, can capitalize on student-in-environment interactions to support the development of academic resiliency in underserved students.

Secondly, academic resilience allows for a success orientation opposed to a focus on failure (Morales & Trotman, 2004). The premise of academic resilience is to explore the ways in which students overcome barriers within their lives to continue pursuing education. Particularly for higher education practitioners, understanding the ways in which students develop academic resiliency in the face of perceived barriers, or more importantly, draw strength from identities perceived by others to provide risk, can serve as a beginning place for program development, student support services, and transition programs targeted at certain populations.

Third, while not only focusing on success, academic resilience also allows for a redefining of success. Some scholars have taken to an anti-deficit narrative to present high-achieving Black collegians or those considered gifted, which focuses much on GPA. A focus on high GPAs discounts students who may be facing barriers negatively impacting their GPA but continue to pursue higher education. A focus on academic resilience allows the experiences of students in the murky middle to be centered and explored. Few have discussed those in the middle, such as students who may not be high-achieving but are still pursuing their degree.

Finally, examining academic resilience and contributing to the larger body of higher education literature regarding factors leading to academic resilience for Black, first generation, low-income collegians, can contribute to the positive self-efficacy of students who are consistently seen as “at-risk,” “unengaged,” or “falling behind” within higher education. Academic self-efficacy refers to the belief one can successfully achieve at a designated level on an academic task or attain a specific academic goal (Bandura, 1997). Having positive self-efficacy may help to combat the aforementioned challenges faced by Black, first generation, low-income students, as self-efficacy is reported to affect an individual’s choice of activities, effort and persistence (Bandura, 1997). Knowing other students from similar backgrounds who are overcoming institutional barriers to pursue education may encourage peers, younger and of the same age, to remain motivated during their school matriculation. Thus, this study may serve as a springboard for community exchange or dialogue amongst first generation, low-income Black collegians, while also influencing practice.

Chapter Summary

Chapter 2 opened with a discussion of the macro and micro theories influencing my approach to this work. CRT, IEO, and LMSS together create a cohesive approach toward the study of Black, first generation, low-income students studying at PWIs. Particularly, CRT allows for a nuanced and intersectional approach for the study of Black collegians and the ways racialized and classed experiences together impact their college matriculation. IEO and LMSS take into consideration the influence of student inputs and environmental interactions, the ways they produce outcomes around academic resilience, and provides language around common transition barriers for students of Color at PWIs.

The overall literature review offered contemporary and historical contexts regarding experiences and challenges faced by Black, first generation, low-income students who are studying on predominantly White campuses. Further, the review of literature presents an argument for the study of academic resilience for the aforementioned students, and the ways in which institutional, communal, and personal factors contribute to the development of academic resilience. Exploring academic resilience for underserved students who are inappropriately viewed as at-risk, allows for an anti-deficit or achievement focused exploration of the ways students continue to overcome barriers to their academic matriculation. Further, a critical exploration of academic resilience intentionally explores raced and classed student interactions within environments, including broader society, to unpack the ways our behaviors and decisions are influenced by institutional, communal, and personal factors. Chapter 3 provides a reflexive narrative discussing my positionality for the current study, and it will also describe the methodology and methods employed within this work.

CHAPTER THREE

Positionality, Methods, and Data Collection

Chapter 2 provided a detailed discussion of the theoretical framework and a review of relevant literature pertaining to participants within this study. In this chapter I provide a description of the research methods I employed during this study. The chosen methods assist in understanding the lived collegiate experiences of Black, first generation, low-income collegians studying at a specific PWI and an examination of the factors contributing to their academic resilience. This chapter begins with an overview of the research purpose and questions. I then describe the method used to collect data, counter-storytelling—which is rooted in critical race methodology and narrative inquiry. Additionally, I discuss the coding and analysis techniques used after the collection of data. In closing, I discuss participant and site selection.

Research Purpose and Questions

The purpose of the current study was to explore the academic resilience of Black, first generation, low-income college students at a particular PWI. Through an exploration of these students' experiences, the current study sought to understand the institutional, communal, and personal factors contributing to their academic resilience leading to their continued persistence. Recall the research question guiding this study:

What are the factors contributing to the academic resilience of Black, first generation, low-income college students studying at a 4-year predominantly White institution?

The following sub-questions will also be taken into consideration:

- What specific skills and local knowledge (e.g., heuristic knowledge [Padilla et al., 1997]) do Black, first generation, low-income college students see as vital to their academic resilience?

- What components of the institutional environment do Black, first generation, low-income college students view as most helpful to their academic resilience?
- What relationships do Black, first generation, low-income college students see as vital to their academic resilience?
 - What about the nature of these relationships do Black, low-income, first generation college students view as vital to their academic resilience?

Qualitative Method

Qualitative research involves the scrutiny of social phenomena (Gubrium & Holstein, 1997). Researchers employing a qualitative method aim to look beyond ordinary, everyday ways of seeing social life and try to understand it in novel ways (Esterberg, 2000). Qualitative data are often “spoken or written language, or images having symbolic content” (p. 57), from which meaning is interpreted (Remler & Van Ryzin, 2009). Qualitative study relies on human beings and their lived experiences as the main subjects for research, allowing for windows into thoughts, experiences, and motivations of particular individuals (Remler & Van Ryzin, 2009).

In most cases, qualitative studies are not meant to be largely generalizable, but do offer intersubjectivity, which allows researchers to “stand in someone else’s shoes... and see the world from [their] perspective” (Remler & Van Ryzin, 2009, p. 57). Therefore, a qualitative method provided me, as the researcher, the tools necessary to explore the lived experiences of the participants. Moreover, through a qualitative and critical methodological lens, this dissertation not only explores lived experiences, but seeks to make meaning of them within a broader institutional and societal context.

Further, qualitative research not only aims to understand the meaning of social events for those who are involved, i.e. participants, but also the researchers themselves (Esterberg, 2000).

Understanding the ways in which the researcher's own perspectives affect how the work is conducted is equally as important as understanding participant lived experiences. As such, what follows is a reflexive narrative of my positionality as a scholar-practitioner-activist and the ways this perspective affects the current study.

Researcher Positionality

Similar to narrative inquiry, critical race methodology is an ongoing reflexive and reflective methodology, which begins with inquiring into researchers' own stories of experience (Esterberg, 2002; Solórzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000). In order to situate the aforementioned literature review within the broader scope of my work and my views as a scholar-practitioner-activist, acknowledging my positionality and the epistemology guiding my work is important. I am a Black female who is passionate about working with underserved students. This work is very close to my heart, as I understand the benefit of support, both academically and socially, for underserved students navigating college.

Further my current role as a scholar-practitioner-activist entails working with the exact populations I discuss within this dissertation. Working closely with first generation, low-income, Black students attending a large, mid-western, land grant, PWI, comes with its challenges and victories. Daily I see students overcome seemingly insurmountable odds to continue at the institution, while others quickly return to where they came from deciding for one reason or another college is not for them. In the past 10 years, I have served as a peer advisor, resident advisor, summer bridge program supervisor, first year transition program coordinator, and a director. All of my experiences are particularly drawn to students who begin as or feel they are perceived as "underdogs," as mentioned by one of the participants of the study. In this case, underdog refers to those who statistically should not persist through college, but finish

triumphantly walking across the stage, all the while navigating racialized and classed experiences at their given institution. For these reasons, I am incredibly passionate about working with students and also understand the incredible power in research as a way to produce practical solutions for contemporary challenges faced by students.

As a Black woman who centers race and racialized experiences within my work, CRT serves as my epistemological viewpoint. CRT acknowledges the aberrant nature of race and racism within U.S. society (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012). As a scholar-practitioner-activist, CRT allows me to take into consideration the variety of ways racism, power, and privilege influence research, college experiences, and university policies. Of particular importance, CRT can further be expanded to understand the intersections of multiple social identities (Patton, McEwen, Rendon, & Howard-Hamilton, 2007) including “race, sex, class, national origin and sexual orientation, and how their combination plays out in various settings” (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012, pp. 51). The current study explores the college experiences of Black, first generation, and low-income college students and the factors of their college matriculation contributing to their academic resiliency. I elicited personal stories in an effort to present a narrative considering, from participant perspectives, the institutional, personal, and communal aspects of the college transition process bolstering their desire and ability to remain academically resilient.

With a main tenet of social justice, CRT operationalized within education commands I use my research to dismantle the institutions and policies perpetuating and maintaining racist ideology (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012); thus CRT requires me to take action. Therefore, within a CRT epistemological view of the world, scholarship, practice, and activism encompass my cycle of praxis and is at its foundation aimed to be liberating. Praxis in and of itself includes action and reflection (Freire, 1970/2000). According to Freire (1970/2000), the overall aim and purpose of

postsecondary education is liberation. This liberation includes: unveiling the world of oppression; through praxis committing to transformation; and remaining engaged in the process of permanent liberation (1970/2000). Therefore, through the sharing of experiences with academic resilience, even this dissertation is designed to be foundationally liberating for participants and those who follow in their footsteps.

Critical Race Methodology

This study is grounded in qualitative critical race methodology, which is a methodological outgrowth of CRT. Critical race methodology foregrounds race and racism in all aspects of the research process and also “challenges the separate discourses on race, gender, and class by showing how these three elements intersect to affect the experiences of students of Color” (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002, p. 24). Use of critical race methodology provided a space for me to center the experiences of Black, first generation, low-income college students, while aiming to create a transformative solution to challenges they may face within higher education (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). At its very foundation, critical race methodology takes into consideration the intersection of racialized, gendered, and classed experiences, and more importantly views these experiences as “sources of strength” instead of points of deficit (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002, p. 24). Critical race methodology has a home in the field of education due to its commitment to challenging the dominant ideology, social justice, and the centrality of experiential knowledge (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). The current study has similar commitments and uses counter-storytelling (narratives or experiences differing from the dominant narrative) (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002) as a vital part of the methodology.

Within critical race methodology, and other forms of critical research, a premium is placed on perspective, or the ways a person’s or group’s position or standpoint influences how

they see truth and reality (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). Storytelling is an important part of many ethnic groups' cultural experience, including communication and dissemination of vital information (Graham et al., 2011), and thus storytelling serves as the primary source of data collection within my study. More specifically, counter-storytelling helps to deconstruct the use of a single story or the "master narrative," which "creates, maintains, and justifies racism" through the perpetuation of stories about the "low educational achievement and attainment of students of Color" (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002, p. 27). Counter-storytelling is foundationally a qualitative method rooted in narrative inquiry (Chase, 2005) and is a "method of telling the stories of those people whose experiences are not often told" (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002, p. 32). As an opportunity to hear untold stories, counter-storytelling is a form of resistance to and liberation from dominant culture and systemic oppression for underserved populations. Further validating the importance of counter-storytelling, Delgado (1989) argues "oppressed groups have known instinctively that stories are an essential tool to their own survival, and liberation" (p. 2436). Thus counter-storytelling as a method of collecting data is consistent with cultural norms of marginalized groups and underserved students.

In order to elicit counter-stories, the current research uses *personal stories or narratives*, which specifically recount individual experiences with various -isms (i.e., racism, sexism, etc.) (Espinoza, 1990; Montoya, 1994; Williams, 1991). A narrative may be oral or written, elicited or heard, and may happen via interview or naturally occurring conversation (Chase 2005). Further, narratives may be short and event specific, an extended story regarding a particular aspect of life experience, or an autobiographical sketch of one's entire life (Chase, 2005). Of particular importance, the narrative itself is a distinct form of discourse and is a way to understand one's own, and others', actions from the narrator's point of view (Chase, 2005). Specific to this work,

the narratives elicited will be counter to, or go against the metanarrative (the narrative of the dominant ideology), in an effort to create a new understanding of student experiences and to promote social justice (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002).

Counter-stories need not be largely generalizable as they include and create collective experience and community memory (Delgado & Bernal, 1998), which add to the broader understanding of student experiences across race, class, and gender. True to qualitative methodology, counter-stories explore “how” specific identities intersect to create “what” influences academic resiliency for specific populations. Further, use of personal stories through critical race methodology helps researchers to understand the experiences of students of Color who are epistemologically marginalized, silenced, and disempowered (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994).

Due to the consideration of intersecting identities, the use of counter-stories is particularly useful in the current study as it is a “medium in which intersectionality plays out in a complex manner without being watered down or only marginally taken up” (Graham et al, 2011, p. 88). Thus, counter stories can be forums in which to examine race, class, and family educational background, and ways in which their combination play out in regard to academic resilience in the lives of participants. Thus, by employing critical race inquiry methods, I acquire vital data other methods could not obtain, such as subjective experiences and attitudes (Perakyla, 2005) with intersecting identities.

Site and Participant Selection

Entry Point

Before I began collecting data, I considered my entry point to the site and participants. I considered site selection, participant recruitment and selection, and interview location; all of which helped to ensure a seamless process of gaining entry to conduct this study. Gaining entry is the first step of collecting data, particularly around creating a collaborative nature between the researcher and the participants (Patton, 2002). Given my relationship with and the location of the selected site, Midwestern University (MU), gaining entry came with very little challenge. I first submitted and gained approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB), and then sought support from faculty, staff, and students at the given institution to secure participants. What follows is a description of the site, followed by a discussion of participant recruitment and selection.

Midwestern University

The site selected for this study is Midwestern University (Midwest). Midwest is a large, predominantly White institution, boasting over 45,000 students, with a White student population of approximately 70%, and a Black student population of under 10%. Driven by its land-grant mission, Midwest strives to provide access to students despite financial need, race, or ethnicity.

Midwest aims to support students from underserved populations. Through programs like Summer Bridge, first year transition programs geared toward migrant student populations, and TRIO support services, Midwest continues to expand its services to students. Most recently, Midwest joined 10 other institutions in a nation-wide consortium focused on college accessibility to a diverse body of students. This consortium in particular is driven on supporting first generation students and widening access to low-income students.

Despite the espoused commitment to underserved students, Midwest continues to struggle with graduation rates for certain populations, particularly Black students. Most recent data report 79% and 75% 6-year and 5-year graduation rates, respectively, across all races including Black students, with only 58% 6-year graduation rate for Black students, as compared to 83% 6-year graduation rate for White students. Graduation rates for low-income and first generation students are not much better. Most recent university graduation data report 71% (6-year) and 66% (5-year) for first generation college students, with only 67% and 62% of low-income (Pell grant eligible) students graduating after six or five years respectively. Moreover, for students who are both first generation and from low-income backgrounds, the number lowers: 65% (6-year) and 58% (5-year). Nevertheless, among all numbers presented, Black Midwest students have the lowest 6-year graduation rate. And yet, while this is true, Black, first generation, low-income college students still manage to beat the statistical odds and complete their education at Midwest.

Despite abysmal graduation rates, Midwest's historic land grant mission, espoused commitment to underserved students, admissions opportunities to create college access for students from underserved communities, and its proximity to multiple large metropolitan areas make it a well-positioned site to engage participants who are Black, first generation, from low-income backgrounds, and eligible to participate in this study. What follows is a discussion of the participants and how they were recruited.

Recruitment and Selection of Participants

Because of the specific identities considered within this study, participants needed to define themselves as a Black, first generation college student, from a low-income background. For this reason, I used purposeful or criterion sampling (Creswell, 2012; Patton, 2002).

Purposeful sampling is different from a random sample because it allows the researcher to outline specific criteria the participants must fulfill. Within the criteria, there is still flexibility for randomization, which allows for selection of participants whose rich stories could be studied in depth. Further, the purposeful nature allowed for me to intentionally solicit participants who provided a narrative counter to the meta-narrative. The goal of this study is to better understand how Black, first generation, low-income college students remain resilient in the face of challenges during their college matriculation.

This study explores the collegiate experiences of 10 Black, first generation, low-income collegians, studying at a PWI, and what during their matriculation contributed to the academic resilience necessary to persist beyond their first year of college. As such, the criterion for participants is as follows:

- Upper level students (have earned 56 or more credits)
- Self-identify as Black or African American
- First in their immediate family to attend college (excluding sibling attendance)
- From low-income backgrounds (e.g., Pell grant eligible)
- 18 to 24 years of age
- Began their matriculation as first-time freshmen at Midwest

The aforementioned criteria was intentionally left somewhat vague in order to allow participation from a variety of students attending the university. To recruit participants, I created a solicitation email (see Appendix A) and used relationships with advisors, faculty, staff, and students to send emails to students who fit the profile. Additionally, I solicited email list serves from Black student organizations and freshmen seminar courses on campus in order to expand my reach for participants. Final participant selection was based on students who responded to the

solicitation and confirmed the primary identifiers (see above). Once participants were secured, the following methods were employed to collect the data. Pseudonyms selected by participants were used during the collection of data, analysis, and thus used during the presentation of findings.

Methods

In order to gain individual counter-stories, the use of one-on-one interviews was a viable option. In order to explore shared counter-stories across individual lived experiences, I conducted an additional focus group following interviews. More specifically, I engaged in semi-structured interviews (see Appendix B), which were conducted one-on-one and averaged 45 minutes to 75 minutes in length. The interviews were carefully planned and aimed to facilitate a conversation eliciting rich stories allowing for flexibility, while generating detailed accounts as opposed to brief answers or general statements (Esterberg, 2002; Patton, 2002). Semi-structured interviews were particularly useful in my attempt to co-construct meaning with participants. Use of semi-structured interviews allowed for exploration of participant experiences by allowing them to express their opinions and ideas in their own words (Esterberg, 2002). True to qualitative interviewing, the interviews focused on questions regarding student experiences, behaviors, opinions, values, feelings, and personal background (Patton 1990). Further, I asked open-ended questions (Patton, 2002), which allowed me to build rapport during the interview process, but also allowed space for the interviewee to select from among their full repertoire of possible responses.

The focus group interview was conducted after the conclusion of all 10 individual interviews and questions were established based on points of clarification, shared phenomena, and missing components of the preliminary analysis. While sometimes conducted individually,

focus groups are often conducted in conjunction with other methods, such as interviews, which is the case in the current study (Esterberg, 2002). The focus group interview itself was semi-structured with few questions serving as a guide for the group interview (Appendix C). The benefit of the focus group was the ability for participants to build on one another's ideas, share experiences, and further my analysis of factors contributing to academic resilience for Black, first generation, low-income college students. Seven of the studies participants, engaged in the follow-up focus group. During the focus group I moderated mildly to ensure everyone had an opportunity to share their experiences, but I allowed the interview itself to flow in the direction led by the participants. Very few times I redirected the participants to the question posed or the goal of the study.

All interviews (including focus group interview) were digitally recorded and later transcribed verbatim. Transcribing verbatim allowed me to capture exact wording and thoughts throughout the interview. Accuracy in capturing student experiences ensures my ability to not only provide an accurate analysis, but also remain true to student lived experiences. Further, this is consistent with critical race methodology, which centers lived experiences, and the unique voice of Color. Some of the prompts included the following: Tell me about your experiences before college. What does it mean to you to be Black, first generation and low-income? Tell me about moments you felt particularly motivated to push through in the face of a challenge. Consistent with a critical analysis, the interview protocol served as a guide and not a strict path, which allowed for co-constructed meaning between the participants and I. Co-constructed meaning is of particular importance in my desire to shift the power dynamics where underserved students are often found on the bottom (Ladson-Billings, 1998). A focus on co-constructed meaning allows the participants' power to determine the outcomes of the analysis, including, but

not limited to the themes, profiles, data excerpts most relevant and other important aspects within the study. Therefore, the outcomes of the current study are not based on my interpretation, but instead a co-constructed interpretation of reality between the participants and I.

Data Analysis

In qualitative research, data analysis is the process of making meaning of the data; it is a creative process and not a mechanical one (Esterberg, 2002). The data analysis process engaged was true to critical race methodology, which is similar to narrative inquiry, and centers experiences of participants (Chase, 2005; Solórzano & Yosso, 2011). Because critical race methodology research centers the voice and experience of the interviewee, I first listened and coded individual transcripts, followed by a coding and thematic analysis of all transcripts collectively seeking for redundancy. To do this, I utilized an open coding method (Strauss & Corbin, 1998) first, followed by a focused coding (Coffey and Attkinson, 1996) second.

Although there is no single approach to coding (Esterberg, 2002; Strauss & Corbin, 1998), many researchers begin with an open coding process, which is typically employed in grounded theory research. Open coding is a process of meaning making involving a brainstorming approach to the initial coding stage which allows the codes to arise organically, as opposed to using pre-established codes (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Esterberg, 2002). Beginning with an open coding process allowed me to explore themes and categories within the data instead of imposing my own sense of what ought to be present. As a part of this process, I first broke the data up into manageable pieces, i.e. individual transcripts. Next, I read along each transcript as I listened to the recording to ensure accuracy of the transcript. From there, each transcript was approached with an open coding method individually. Thus, each individual transcript was examined closely, writing codes in the margins as they organically arose to me. While engaging

in open coding, I maintained a reflective journal and compiled analytic memos to help brainstorm codes, unpack my own assumptions, and ultimately contribute to the studies trustworthiness.

After initial open-coding, I engaged in a stanza-by-stanza coding process for each individual interview. Given counter-stories is similar to narrative inquiry, the stanza-by-stanza analysis process allowed me to analyze complete thoughts, which provided greater insight into participant experiences as opposed to the restrictive line-by-line method (Esterberg, 2002). Further, providing individual thematic coding for each interview reinforces CRT philosophical underpinnings, which argues each individual story as valuable. Further, Riessman (2008) argued narrative analysis as a process first locating voices within each narrative, as opposed to distinct themes across interviews.

As such, to locate voice for each individual interview transcript, I (1) noticed relevant phenomena. I did this by reading through the codes developed during the open coding process to establish thoughts, ideas, and experiences that stand out. Next I, (2) collected examples of phenomena. I did this by grouping stanzas or experiences into similar umbrella topics such as “sense of community” or “support system.” Lastly, I (3) analyzed those phenomena in order to find commonalities, differences, patterns, and structures. I did this by restructuring stanzas to develop primary themes and sub category themes such as “family support” and “peer support” within the “support system” primary them. The process of 1, 2, and 3, is consistent with Coffey and Atkison’s (1996) suggested qualitative coding process. This process was engaged for each individual transcript and repeated for a collection of primary themes across transcripts. Essentially, while I reread transcripts and listened to interviews, both simultaneously and separately, I engaged in a three step coding process: individual transcript open-coding first,

individual transcript focused coding second, and focus coding across all transcripts third to find collective themes which outline the ways participants remain resilient during their matriculation of a PWI. The overall process led to three primary themes across transcripts which are as follows:

- (1) “Do whatever needs to be done to get the goal accomplished. That’s really all it is.” –
Intrinsic motivation, grit, and academic resilience
- (2) “It kinda just puts you in a situation where you just feel like failure’s not an option; even after you fail, you gotta get back up.” – Academic resilience and the sense of obligation to , family, and the broader Black community
- (3) “They raised a doctor” – The village model and academic resilience

To align with CRTs valuing of lived experiences, personal voice, and co-creation of knowledge, I titled each of the themes using language provided by a particular participant. Due to space and flow, throughout much of the remaining text, I refer to the themes as shortened versions of themselves (introduced in Chapter 5), but wanted to acknowledge up front participant voices in the theme titles.

During my data collection and analysis process, my goal was to find reoccurring themes amongst the transcripts, but I wanted to give each individual counter-story special attention.

Thus, the individual coding process first, followed by a shared coding process across transcripts, allowed me to cherish individual experiences while seeking a phenomenon shared by all. During the data collection and analysis process, I employed various methods to ensure trustworthiness for the study.

Trustworthiness

Due to the centering of personal counter-stories and lived experiences, it is necessary to

deal with a particular set of issues concerning trustworthiness, and ensuring such is vital. Trustworthiness is a means through which a researcher evaluates whether their claims are sufficiently supported by evidence (Hammersley, 2008). However, “supported by evidence” takes on a slightly different meaning within qualitative research. Instead of seeking the accuracy in reflections regarding actual events, my primary aim as a researcher collecting counter-stories is to understand the meanings people attach to specific events (Polkinghorne, 2007). Of particular importance, as I seek to find counter-stories, Riessman (2008) argued stories that “diverge from established truth” can indicate “silenced voices and subjugated knowledge.” As such, counter-story and narrative research presents “people’s lives as lived” (Josselson, 2007, p. 8) and often reveals “experiences and meanings that have not been previously exposed by other types of research” (Riessman, 2008, p. 186). With this in mind, trustworthiness does not argue that my co-created meaning of the given data is the only possibility, but instead as a viable interpretation. The trustworthiness of the findings is grounded in the presenting of careful evidence from the narrator’s accounts and supported by other seminal texts.

Qualitative researchers typically use member-checking, triangulation, thick description, peer reviews, and external audits to ensure trustworthiness. Similarly, there are multiple methods employed in the current study to ensure the trustworthiness of my work. First, the semi-structured and in-depth interview itself allows for a co-constructed meaning making process, allowing the interview participants to guide the interview process. In-depth interviews are intensive individual interviews with small numbers of participants. Due to the in-depth interview process, narrative inquiry requires vulnerability on the part of both the researcher and the participant. Different from general qualitative research, where participants often generalize their experiences, narrative inquiry elicits longer and deeply personal narratives from participants,

which can be misinterpreted if not dealt with carefully. As a part of the in-depth interview process, I aimed to remain vulnerable and genuine in order to increase the reliability of participant responses. Following the interviews, member-checking (Chase, 2005; Patton, 2002) was the second method of trustworthiness used.

Member-checking is when narrative researchers return to the narrators to “inform them, and ask again for permission to use their stories” (Chase, 2011, p. 424). During the interview, transcription, and analysis process, I employed various member-checking strategies. Prior to beginning interviews, I explained clearly to participants the intent of my inquiry, the desire to co-construct meaning based on participant experiences, and the process of returning to them multiple times following the interview and focus group for confirmation and clarification. For example, after completing transcription for each individual interview, I met with individual participants to review the transcript to ensure what was included is what they intended to say. Further, after establishing themes for individual transcripts I returned to the narrators during the focus group to confirm themes as they also see them. Lastly, when writing participant profiles, I established accuracy by allowing them to confirm their lived experiences as I summarized them, and made adjustments as requested.

The third method employed to ensure trustworthiness was the maintenance of analytic memos, procedural memos, and a reflective journal for the entirety of the research process (Esterberg, 2002). Analytic memos are used to examine the categories and codes I developed and the ways in which they connect to the data. The analytic memos have served as a connection point between the procedural memos (process) and analysis of data. I began maintaining analytic memos once I began conducting interviews. Thus they also included initial thoughts and hunches as they arose throughout the interview, coding, and analysis process. Procedural memos are

essentially logbooks of how I conducted the research (Esterberg, 2002). They summarize which codes I settled with, which I discarded, and why. Additionally, they outline exactly what I mean by a particular code and how I arrived at a particular decision. Unlike analytic memos and reflective journals, I began keeping these memos as I began the coding process.

Reflective journals are used within various forms of reflexive research as a method to facilitate reflexivity during the research process (Ortlipp, 2008). Reflective journals assist researchers in examining “personal assumptions and goals,” while clarifying “individual belief systems and subjectivities” (Ahern, 1999). Additionally, similar to analytic memos (Esterberg, 2002; Morrow, 2005), reflective journals include interpretations, queries, notes, decisions, values, and experiences from the beginning to the end of the research process. Reissman (2008) argued for consistent documentation and tracking of narrative procedures for collecting and interpreting data. As such, maintaining analytic memos, procedural memos, and a reflective journal helped me to make the data collection and analysis process as transparent as possible (MacNaughton, 2001). Use of all memos and the journal assisted in my ability to remain critical throughout the research process.

The fifth, and final, method employed to ensure validity was peer debriefing. Peer debriefing is the process of peer review or debriefing by a colleague familiar with the research or phenomenon being explored (Creswell & Miller, 2000). Seeking assistance of peer debriefers, particularly those external to the study, added credibility to the study (Cresswell & Miller, 2000). Lincoln and Guba (1985) argued a peer reviewer provides support, and challenges the researcher’s assumptions, methods, and interpretations. My approach to peer debriefing was focused on connecting with colleagues who had expertise in areas related to my study, particularly as it relates to CRT and qualitative methodological approaches. Colleagues included

my advisor, who has expertise in work with undergraduate student experiences, those with expertise in CRT and critical methodologies, and those with expertise in academic resilience. This process was consistent from the beginning of the study, which supported my ability to remain critical during the collection, analysis, writing, and editing process.

Limitations and Delimitations

As with any research study, there are a number of delimitations and limitations that should be addressed. I first discuss the four delimitations, which represent decisions I made during the research process. First, I decided to do a study within which all participants attend the same institution. Given this study's focus on experiences at a particular institution, it does not fully consider the ways academically resilient factors may change at different institutions, different institution types, or institutions of different sizes. Second, I intentionally chose to focus on race, income status, and family educational history, with a clear centering of race at the intersection. Therefore, although there is space for participants to share a variety of experiences, the study does not foreground the roles other identities such as gender, sexuality, or religion play in students' experiences with academic resilience. Thirdly, as a qualitative researcher and within a CRT framework, I chose to utilize a qualitative critical race methodology for this work. As such, the study is not intended to be widely generalizable, but is indeed transferable.

Fourth and final, my focus on academic resilience intentionally centered the ways students overcame challenges within a broader context of raced and classed oppression. While there is some structural critique regarding the environment within which students matriculate, I intentionally do not center the problematic aspects of focusing on resiliency, which would be a contextual focus on systems reinforcing structural oppression. Similarly, as the ideas of grit (see Duckworth, Peterson, Matthews & Kelly, 2007) and intrinsic motivation arose from participant

experiences as a primary theme, and was later confirmed by participants via the member checking process, I intentionally do not center the problematic aspects of focusing on grit. For example, Perry (2016) argues that a “focus on resilience and grit moves the focus or blame away from the racist and failing” (p. 1) systems of education. Foundationally, I do not disagree with this idea. As discussed in Chapter 2, an anti-deficit view of underserved students indeed focuses in part on the ways educational systems fail students, as opposed to students failing within education. However, within this study and as a result of the ways participants shared their experiences, I see academic resilience as a cultural strength that underserved students develop throughout their life (due to facing unfair systemically oppressive challenges) which, when fostered overtime, makes them uniquely prepared to withstand and overcome various challenges faced within life. Furthermore, my choice to center resilience and grit honors and recognizes the ways underserved students (and cultures) cope, manage, and navigate oppressive systems overtime; even those not designed for them.

I now discuss the two limitations of the study. First, given research is not neutral, this research was conducted via my own perspective, subjectivities, experiences, and based on my background. As such, while I used trustworthiness methods to unpack my biases and assumptions throughout the process, these biases naturally influenced the questions I asked, which aspects of the conversations stood out to me, what I chose to unpack, and assumptions I made during the interview process. Further, these subjectivities guided my analysis process including coding, theme development, and interpretation. Given my perspective, this research conducted similarly, but by a different researcher, would likely yield different results and conclusions.

Second, because I used purposeful sampling, all participants self-identify as Black, first generation, and low-income. However, due to responses and availability of interested parties, the final 10 participants happen to be extremely similar in some ways. All participants come from similar hometown communities (i.e., nearby metropolitan areas that are predominantly of Color), and all but one participant participated in some version of a first year transition program. Additionally, no participant discussed any particular challenges around sexuality, gender identity, or gender expression. Therefore, the current study is limited from a certain level of nuance in regard to varied experiences on the part of participants.

The aforementioned delimitations and limitations showcase the ways the current study would perhaps produce different results if certain decisions were altered. During the discussion of implications in Chapter 6, I revisit some of the aforementioned delimitations and limitations as implications for future research.

Chapter Summary

Chapter 3 outlined the methods I employed in order to conduct this study. Critical race methodology serves as an umbrella methodology, beneath which, critical narrative inquiry is the primary method of data collection because of its ability to collect relevant counter-stories from participants. What follows in Chapter 4 are participant profiles, discussion of the environmental context at Midwest, and a focused discussion of shared contextual experience had by participants.

CHAPTER FOUR

To this point I have presented relevant literature regarding Black, first generation, low-income college students and academic resilience. Further, I presented the methodological underpinnings and conceptual framework guiding this study. Chapter 4 begins with a presentation of participant profiles and relevant lived experiences. The experiences shared help to provide a context to better understand their academic resilience at a PWI and within the broader societal context. The profiles allow the reader a glimpse into the participants' high school, college, family, and social lives. Each profile shares some challenges faced during participant pre-college and college matriculation, and the multiple places from which they received motivation, encouragement, guidance, rest, acceptance, and the numerous other forms of support needed to remain resilient in the face of discussed challenges. For confidentiality reasons, participants were allowed to select their own pseudonyms. Jovan, Carter, Simba, J, MJ, Chloe, Lyric, Paul, George, and Toni each participated in a single one-on-one interview, followed by a single focus group interview. Following participant profiles is a brief summary of the profiles.

Participant Profiles

Chloe

Chloe is a senior student at Midwest, on track for graduation in May 2016. She is from a metropolitan city about an hour southeast of Midwest and graduated from one of the top schools in her community. The high school she attended is a magnet school and is one of the top public schools in the community. While in high school, Chloe was extremely active in Dance, where she was elected captain, and was also active in the marketing major offered by the school, where

she was chosen as the Marketing Director by her teacher. Although Chloe was committed academically, admittedly, the GPA requirement of the school helped her to remain focused.

Chloe grew up with both her Mother and Father, siblings, and significant support from extended family such as her grandmother, aunts, and family friends. Chloe's family participated in parent/teacher organizations, supported her passion for dance, and assisted her academically as needed. Although her parents were always supportive, Chloe has always felt a sense of pressure to do things differently than her mom, who became pregnant with her eldest sibling when she was a teenager. Particularly during her high school years Chloe found this pressure to be her largest challenge to overcome.

Coming from her competitive high school, Chloe never felt unprepared for the college application process. She was admitted to Midwest during a special admissions procedure wherein the university's admissions office provides admissions counseling and decisions directly to applicants on campus at their high school. Particularly relevant, this admissions procedure allows for special consideration for students who are eligible for free or reduced lunch in high school, and who are first in their family to attend college. This admissions procedure allows Midwest to widen college access to high school students from urban communities, and those who may fall below the median GPA or ACT range for the institution. As a participant in this admissions procedure, Chloe knew early on she was admitted to Midwest and decided the distance, "not too close and not too far", was perfect for her. Due to Chloe's family income, she was admitted to Midwest on a need-based financial aid scholarship, within which her full tuition has been covered.

Chloe had a rather strong first year academically. She was extremely proud of her first semester grades, which motivated her to remain engaged academically. During the summer prior

to her first semester, Chloe participated in a summer institute run by Midwest's business school. During this program, Chloe was connected to campus resources and campus faculty and staff, who proved to be vital during her first year. Additionally, Chloe made connections with older students who took her "under their wing," supported and encouraged her, and shared experiences with helpful campus and community resources. During her matriculation at Midwest, Chloe has remained active on campus, participating in a dance group student organization, where she was elected President.

As a Black, first generation college student from a low-income background, Chloe has had various struggles at Midwest. During her sophomore year, Chloe struggled academically, which lead to the switching of her major from Marketing in Midwest's business school to Food Industry Management in a different college on campus. During this challenging time, Chloe relied on prayer, and relationships with faculty, staff, friends for support and guidance. Chloe also experienced various challenges with racial discrimination at Midwest. Chloe has witnessed a violent interaction between a Black student riding a bike and a campus police officer, and has been a victim of unfair treatment between her predominantly Black dance group and other White dance groups on campus. Experiences with racism on campus and across the country, such as at Missouri University, have caused Chloe to feel simultaneously concerned about her safety as a Black student, and also motivated to keep pushing toward graduation. Through these experiences her Black pride is affirmed as she is reminded her college experience is larger than her and is necessary to make the broader community better. Additionally, during the beginning of her senior year, Chloe experienced the death of a very close Aunt who she felt was a key source of support during her college matriculation. She continues to use her aunt's memory and memorable motivation to remain encouraged during her final year of undergraduate school.

Upon graduation, Chloe plans to attend graduate school to pursue a Master degree in Organizational Communications.

J

J is a student with junior status at Midwest. She is currently majoring in political science and is from a metropolitan community about an hour west of Midwest. J was raised by her Mom and her Grandma, and has an older brother who has struggled with illness much of his life. Although she was the younger sibling, J describes herself as the “oldest child” due to her brother’s illness. J graduated from a local high school, which she describes as somewhat of a mixed school racially, even though her community was predominantly Black. Although J enjoyed her high school, she did not feel academically or socially prepared for college. Additionally, J was unsure how she would pay for school. Prior to committing to Midwest, J planned to enlist in the army, assuming they would eventually pay for her undergraduate education. J was granted a city-wide scholarship paying for four full years of college tuition to any public or private school in her state. Had J not received the scholarship, she would have not enrolled in college immediately following high school.

During her time in high school, J enjoyed being social and physically active. She joined the basketball team and ran track. Both sports activities allowed J to participate in a team atmosphere, wherein she felt supported and engaged. They also provided opportunities for her to talk with others, which is something she enjoyed. Friendships were an important part of J’s college transition and college decision. Unlike many other students, J was never emotionally tied to Midwest. J’s final decision to attend Midwest was settled once her friends were admitted and committed to attending the institution as well.

J's first year at Midwest was fun, but she was recessed or disenrolled ¹from the university after her second year. As a first year student, J describes herself as disconnected, a "yes man", who was going along with any suggestions of her friends, and "kickin it." Although J was surrounded by friends and had a rather large social circle, she did not feel she had friends who kept her focused on her academics. Instead, she spent most of her first year "partying." J was not only disconnected academically during her first year, she was also disconnected from academic guidance and direction. She changed her major several times and enrolled in courses she would later find out were unnecessary. J was required to remain disenrolled from the university for one academic year. However, due to financial challenges, J did not return to course work at Midwest for two and a half years. Although J felt disconnected from campus, during her first year she continued to find support from her mother and her grandmother, whose prayers provide J a "sense of relief."

Upon returning to the university J has actively sought out connections with peers, faculty, and staff to help her get connected to campus and provide academic guidance. One such faculty person has served as a primary source of support and guidance for J, and helped to peek her interest in undergraduate research around African American women. Further, J relies on her relationship with her academic advisor for similar support. As a Black, first generation, low-income college student, J found significant challenge with being one, or one of few, Black students in a particular classroom, such as grade discrimination within a science lab class. The low numbers of students of Color at Midwest, which causes J to be one or one of few in her classes, though challenging, has served as a source of motivation for her. J uses these

¹ At Midwest, a students is involuntarily recessed or disenrolled if they achieve a GPA of 2.0 or less for two consecutive semesters, or achieve a 0.0 in all courses in a given semester. In J's case, she'd received a 2.0 or less for two consecutive semesters.

experiences motivate her to “do better” and “make it easier for those coming after” her.

Additionally, J finds rest, encouragement, and motivation from a student organization on campus focusing on community building between students of color on campus, within which she is on the executive board. Since returning to campus, this organization served as a welcoming space for J and helps her feel connected to the campus. J is still establishing post-graduation plans. She will spend 10 weeks in Washington, D.C. participating in a study away program offered by the university. She is interested in advocating for womens’, minority, or human rights and hopes to become a woman in government.

Carter

Carter is a senior student at Midwest, focusing on social policy. Carter is from a large metropolitan community near Midwest where he grew up in a small family with his Mother and sister. Carter is a graduate of one of the top high schools in is community. Carter described himself as an average student, but was able to take advantage of multiple opportunities within his school. One such opportunity was Carter’s internship with a local architecture firm. As an intern, Carter was able to engage his artistic self in ways he was unable to do within the classroom. Although high school provided a meaningful experience for Carter, participation in a TRIO program during the summers of his high school career seems to stand out most.

Participation in this particular boarding school model program provided Carter exposure to colleges across the country, college preparation skills, and socialization skills that would later prove vital, such as living with a roommate and connecting with faculty. Perhaps most interesting about this program is its juxtaposition of low-income populations and middle to high socioeconomic populations. The program brought low-income high school students who were largely of Color and from a local urban community to the “well to do” suburbs to engage in a

summer of academic and social activities. For Carter, participation in this program displayed “options” for college and career he had not been exposed to before. In regard to college preparation, Carter describes this program as one of his most formative experiences.

Similar to other participants, Carter was admitted to Midwest during an on-site admissions process provided by the university. Although Carter was granted admission to the university immediately, he knew right away the financial burden would be cumbersome. He struggled finding resources for the deposit and even move-in day as a freshman. However, Midwest was his top choice given the financial support from the financial aid office of the university. While Carter has had unique experiences while in college such as traveling to Amsterdam and Israel for study abroad programs, financial struggle has continued to be his primary challenge. Carter has spent the past four years balancing academics, social engagement on campus, and working to survive while in school. Further, the pressure of feeling obligated to help his family financially while in school in some ways took a toll as well.

During his first semester of his freshmen year at Midwest, Carter was enrolled in a freshmen success seminar providing academic support and focused on transition success skills. During his second semester of his freshmen year, Carter participated in a first year transition program geared toward underserved college students (i.e. first generation, low-income, international status, and of Color). The freshmen seminar course taught specific skills like goal setting, and time management, while the transition program provided social support, a sense of community, and a space for discussions around topics such as race, gender, sexuality, power, and privilege. Participation in the transition program during his second semester seemed to change Carter’s college experience positively, as the participation in the program helped Carter develop friendships which have proven to be vital during his college matriculation.

Now a senior at Midwest, Carter attributes many of his positive experiences to his friends. While his family has always been supportive and he's had meaningful experiences with staff on campus, his friends are what "kept [him] at the university." Regarding financial support, Carter has a complicated relationship with the university's financial aid office. While he is often frustrated by the lack of resources provided and the lack of financial guidance, Carter continues to find the resources necessary to remain within the institution. Following our interview, Carter left for his internship in New York state and upon graduation plans to apply to graduate school on the east coast.

Jovan

Jovan is a graduating senior from a large metropolitan city who grew up in a single parent household, with his Mother and no siblings. Although he knew his father, he was not present for much of Jovan's life. Despite financial challenge, Jovan has lived a "pretty good life." He has been involved in the martial arts since he was very young, which has provided a source of consistency, motivation, and spirit to overcome challenges he's faced throughout his life. He's witnessed the death of his Grandma, Godmother, and Godfather within weeks of one another, was homeless during his childhood, and spent much of his younger years fighting peers. For these reasons, Jovan was told by teachers and peers that college was not for him and he would have an unsuccessful future. The doubt from others fueled his decision to attend college and the financial support in the form of scholarships fueled his decision to attend Midwest.

Transitioning from a racially diverse school in to Midwest helped Jovan to avoid culture shock on the part of race, but admittedly, he faced culture shock on what it meant to be a student. Jovan did not know how to be a student, did not know how to study, and had a challenging first year academically. However, in the midst of his academic challenge, Jovan took advantage of

every resource made available to him on campus. As a participant of a one-week summer program prior to college and being admitted via an eligibility program for students who are first generation and received free or reduced lunch while in high school, Jovan was connected right away to faculty and staff who he found to be extremely supportive. Further, during his first semester of his freshmen year he was enrolled in a freshmen seminar course, within which he was introduced to academic skills such as time management, choosing a major, and utilizing campus resources.

Throughout his college matriculation, Jovan's primary challenge has been remaining motivated when things do not go the way he hoped. Although he has adopted an "indomitable spirit" from his participation in martial arts, there are still moments when he becomes depressed and thinks about giving up. In these challenging moments, Jovan chooses to believe in faith. Jovan does not describe himself as a spiritual person, but does find solace in having faith he is at Midwest "for a reason." Upon graduation, Jovan plans to begin working in the career of his choice.

Paul

Like many of the participants, Paul hails from a predominantly Black metropolitan community and was raised in a single parent home. Due to significant financial struggle, Paul spent much of his younger years moving from house to house. He describes many experiences watching his mother struggle and sacrifice to ensure him and his sister had what they needed personally, academically, and socioemotionally. Paul attributes the closeness of his family to their ability to embrace these struggles together and to support one another along the way.

Although Paul was raised by his mother, he was able to tap into community programs providing a sense of extended family for him. For several years Paul participated in a male

mentoring program, within which he was paired with a Mentor. As a part of the program, Mentors would work closely with Paul to provide guidance, a listening ear, nurturing care, and career networking and advice. What stood out most for Paul was the large number of Black males who served as mentors in the program. Through participation in this program, and particularly the relationships he developed with older Black men, Paul was able to garner wisdom around manhood, growing up, and being Black. Upon high school graduation, Paul began serving as a mentor within the program, and has continued to do so throughout his college matriculation.

Paul attended Southfield high school and was what some would call a high achiever. He was extremely active within extracurricular activities at his high school and was simultaneously academically engaged. As a result, Paul graduated valedictorian. Although Paul was a high achieving, academically engaged student, within his school he still did not have the guidance he needed to learn about and go through the college application process. In fact, he spent much of his junior and senior year seeking information and figuring things out on his own. In order to successfully apply for college, Paul called places like admissions departments from colleges and administration from the Common Application program on his own. Once admitted to Midwest, Paul was awarded a significant financial scholarship providing him and his family the confidence they needed to know he “would be ok”, but there was single experience solidifying his commitment to the university.

During the last day of summer orientation, while sitting outside, Paul was approached by a Black staff member. He recalls she went out of her way to speak to him, affirmed his presence at the institution, and offered her support once he returned in the fall as a first year student. This experience of connecting with a Black person early on not only solidified his decision to attend

Midwest, but also demonstrates his broader experiences of both challenge and resilience during his college matriculation. Being Black at a PWI has largely influenced his college journey. While at Midwest Paul has had many experiences with overt and covert racism, and also acknowledges the many ways he has been victimized by systemic oppression as a Black male at a PWI. Simultaneously, Paul has found strength, courage, and affirmation to be himself, to grow in his racial identity, and to overcome challenges faced, through the adoption of an “unapologetic, radical, Black love” approach to himself and to the broader community. This sense of activist love, has allowed Paul to engage not only with the Black community, but also in meaningful ways with all marginalized populations.

At the time of the interview Paul was a senior student, majoring in Journalism at Midwest. He has since graduated and has begun his graduate career on scholarship at the university. Following his Master’s degree pursuit, Paul plans to pursue a PhD in Africana Studies.

Lyric

Lyric is a junior at Midwest. Raised in a large metropolitan community about four hours from Midwest, Lyric dealt with quite a bit of transition due to her parents’ divorce. Constantly moving between the suburbs and inner city, Lyric felt she always needed to code switch, or communicate differently depending on the audience. The movement between the different communities brought with it constant navigation of the “ghetto” and the “suburbs”, which caused Lyric to often feel the need to code switch, or communicate differently depending on the audience. Further, the movement between communities introduced Lyric to a racial diversity she grew to appreciate greatly.

During middle school Lyric moved to a city near Midwest with her Mother, to a new community and a new school district. While she was extremely active in sports, ranging from

basketball to swimming, Lyric still struggled to develop meaningful friendships or connections to teachers. Additionally, Lyric struggled with a bit of culture shock attending a predominantly Black school for the first time in her life. She admits at the outset “things felt weird”, but overtime she grew frustrated she was only now learning about certain Black figures, Black authors, and other forms of Black history. Her interest in Black history grew to the point where she was committed to attending a Historically Black College or University (HBCU). Unfortunately, after visiting several HBCUs Lyric found they were out of her price range. Without her family able to contribute any funding toward her college education, Lyric decided to attend Midwest due to a tuition scholarship offered for first generation college students from low-income backgrounds.

Lyric describes her first year as “tragedy, after tragedy”. Her first year was marked by the death of her grandfather early in her first semester. From there things seemed to quickly spiral out of control. Lyric’s primary challenges during her first year were predicated on dealing with the darkness of mental health issues. Having been diagnosed with depression, Lyric spent much of her first year in her room, avoiding class. After finally seeking support from the campus’ counseling center, Lyric opted for a medical withdrawal from the university during her second semester. However, after being home for the summer, Lyric returned to Midwest committed to completing her undergraduate degree.

In addition to struggling with mental health, Lyric has had some academic struggles, and has continued to struggle with developing meaningful relationships. However, she has continued to return to school every year, fully committed to completing her undergraduate degree. Lyric has relied heavily on faculty and a particular older peer mentor for socio-emotional support while facing challenges. She finds relationships with faculty on campus to be one of the primary

reasons she has been able to navigate the “finesse of college”. Despite support from faculty and the care of a particular mentor, Lyric is extremely motivated. She has known since she was very young she would go to college. As she continues to face challenges, her seemingly high levels intrinsic motivation force her to push through. Additionally, due to her first generation status, she sees completing college as something she is not only doing for herself, but also for her family. Upon graduation, Lyric sees herself continuing school toward a PhD.

Simba

Similar to other participants, Simba grew up in a large metropolitan community. While Simba also had significant financial challenge, unlike other participants, many of Simba’s childhood struggles were due to his father’s incarceration and struggle with alcohol addiction. Simba dealt with quite a bit of moving around between his parents and siblings, and remembers times when he and his mom were homeless. Understandably, facing numerous challenges from a young age, caused Simba to develop some hostility, which turned into fighting, which turned into constant trouble at school. As a result, Simba attended a different school each fall for several years. Despite trouble, Simba still seemed to be engaged in school, both academically and athletically. Through middle school and high school, Simba managed to keep his “grades up” and do well enough continue on the various football teams of the schools he attended.

During his high school transitions, being in and out of school for various reasons, and spending a significant amount of time in high school administration offices, Simba found support from his high school administrators. Although he was in their presence for getting into trouble, they encouraged him to live bigger than his circumstances and to stay focused on school. In some circumstances when they should have sent him home, they allowed him to stay at school for fear if they sent him home, he would have nowhere to go. In the midst of it all, Simba

remained hopeful he could find a “future for [himself] within all of the madness going on”.

College was undoubtedly apart of this future. While Simba was unsure how he would pay for college, he knew he would go. Because his family could not contribute financially to college, his decision to attend Midwest was predicated on the funding support offered from the university.

Simba transitioned to Midwest as a part of a summer academy provided by the engineering college, as he was an engineering major at the time. As a part of this program, he took summer courses, while being intentionally connected to faculty, staff, and academic resources. Additionally, he participated in the university sponsored TRIO support programs which offered tutoring, and specialized academic advising. As a result of taking advantage of the aforementioned college transition programs, Simba made it to the Dean’s List after his first semester and was invited to the Honors College. Unfortunately, Simba became involved in several student organizations and eventually fell a bit behind academically during his sophomore year. However, despite his academic challenges during his second year, Simba remains driven to complete his undergraduate degree. In many ways, completing his degree is to help him make it to any career helping him to become financial stable for himself and for his family. Further, he sees his college matriculation as if “he’s carrying the torch” for his younger siblings and cousins. Although Simba is extremely intrinsically motivated, he garners motivation from support from peer mentors, supportive staff members he met during his freshmen year.

Additionally, Simba finds great strength in being a part of something bigger than himself. Particularly in regard to the Black community, Simba finds his college matriculation to be tied to advocating for other Black students with similar backgrounds as his. He sees a bit of himself in younger students and hopes to serve as a mentor to them as they matriculate through college as well. Especially this year, in response to the protests started at the University of Missouri and

quickly spread across the country on various university campuses, Simba was exceptionally motivated to get involved in protesting on his own campus to demand institutional equity for Black students. His involvement in campus protests inspired him to reengage academically in order to ensure he completes his undergraduate education in order to positively impact the Black community on a larger scale.

MJ

From a young age, MJ has been used to figuring things out on her own. She is a native of a large metropolitan city, who grew up with her mom and younger siblings and spent some of her later years living with her father and half siblings. Having grown up with a step father who was in and out of jail, and later meeting her biological father, while her mother was simultaneously battling depression and other mental health concerns, MJ describes her life prior to college as complicated. Due to life's complications, MJ developed a "figure it out" type of attitude, which helped, since she felt in some ways she always to support herself. Similar to her mother and other folks in her family, MJ also battled with depression as a child, but coped by being active in as many things as possible. Being active carried her into her high school career, where she danced, volunteered, and participated in multiple organizations. Additionally, while in high school MJ took advance placement (AP) courses and was relatively academically engaged.

Although her parents did not attend college, MJ was introduced to college at a young age. While in elementary school, her friend's older sister attended a local university and introduced MJ and her friend to conversations about college. Over time, the influence of older peers and mentors proved to be vital in her ability to remain resilient in the face of challenges. After hearing about college for the first time in the 4th grade, MJ was committed to attending college, but knew she wanted to attend a university with a diverse population. After a peer mentor invited

her to campus where she had a chance to eat in the cafeteria, and learn more about programs offered on campus, MJ ultimately settled on attending Midwest.

During the summer prior to her freshmen year, MJ participated in two college transition programs; both of which were designed for underserved students. As a part of these programs, MJ was connected to peers, academic support, and campus mentors. One of the programs was directly connected to her major in business and helped to provide her with the foundation necessary to be successful in the program. Further, participation in the transition programs provided entry way to involvement and leadership in other student organizations for MJ. Particularly the National Association of Black Accountants and a university wide organization for Black students, MJ was able to not only find her passion for the Black community, but was also provided the language she needed to describe her daily experiences with microaggressions and other forms of racialized oppression.

For MJ, some of her largest challenges attending a PWI are rooted in the experiences she has with racialized oppression and frequent frustration with financial aid resources provided on campus. Although when faced with challenges, MJ may cry or attempt to escape the immediate environment, in general, she remains extremely determined to complete her undergraduate education. Particularly for her younger siblings and to honor the legacy of her ancestors, MJ is committed to overcoming all odds she may encounter. Further, she gains courage, strength, and encouragement from mentors, who have come before her and help to guide the way. Upon graduation MJ plans to pursue a master's in Business administration or Fulbright language program.

George

George is a native of a metropolitan community southeast of Midwest, who grew up with both his mother and father, and a younger sister. His parents were divorced when he was young, but developed a close friendship in an attempt to support George and his sister. Around 12 or 13 years old, George's father passed away while he was away on a class trip to Europe. Just before he graduated high school, his grandfather passed away. Both deaths were significant for George and he continues to reflect on them frequently.

Always being seen as academically engaged and bound to go to college, George was known as Mr. Harvard amongst his aunt's coworkers. He remembers fondly having great relationships with teachers, having great grades, and always loving school. Particularly during high school George was often frustrated his grades did not reflect his academic ability or his level of academic engagement, but he enjoyed challenging himself intellectually while remaining active in student organizations. George found pride in being admitted into and graduating from one of the local top high schools. He attributes his ability to successfully transition into Midwest partly on the preparation provided by his college preparatory high school.

Outside of high school George found support from a particular mentorship organization focusing on developing Black males and was tied to a national historically Black fraternity. As a part of the program George was introduced to Black male mentors from across the city who helped him to develop his professional acumen and networking relationships. Whether he was dealing with things at home or high school, the organization served as an "escape from frustrations" for George. As a result, he has continued to maintain relationships with some of the participating mentors from when he was a member.

Similar to other participants, George was admitted into Midwest via an onsite admissions program. One of his deciding factors for attending Midwest was the funding opportunities provided by the university's college of education, which provided special funding for students interested in teaching within urban districts. Although George is pursuing a teaching certification, his primary major is biology. As such, during his first and second year, he participated in a university program for students in STEM fields. The residential program provided academic coaching, tutoring, a cohort of peer support, and direct connections to faculty and staff. George has had unique opportunities while at Midwest, including undergraduate research and conference presentations. Similar to high school, while George remains academically engaged, his GPA does not always reflect his intellectual capabilities; which brings George great frustration. The battle with his GPA causes George to experience stereotype threat and imposture syndrome. In many cases, he admits he struggles to see his own potential.

During his college matriculation, George keeps his mother and his sister at the fore front of his mind. "Doing it for them" is a consistent source of motivation for him. Additionally, relationships with current PhD students who serve as mentors and staff who see "success" in him keep him pushing forward academically. While the PhD students remind him he can do it, they also remind him he can serve as that same source of motivation for those who come after him. As a Black, first generation, low-income college student, and a future educator, George wants to "make the same investment" others made in him. George's immediate goal upon graduation is to teach, but his long term goals are to pursue a Ph.D. and become a college professor.

Toni

Similar to majority of the participants, Toni grew up in a large predominantly Black metropolitan community. She is an only child and was raised by her father. Her mother was

absent much of Toni's life and though it was just her and her father, he and Toni did not always have the best relationship. Regardless of their tumultuous relationship, Toni's dad always pushed her to be focused and remain 100% committed to her academics. Toni attended one of the local top high schools. The predominantly Black atmosphere shielded Toni from much of the racial discrimination she sees now attending Midwest. Despite most of her high school teachers being White, because the student body was predominantly Black, Toni perceived the teachers as being accommodating to possible race issues which created a more comfortable school environment.

During high school, Toni participated in multiple programs. One of which was an after school program sponsored by Midwest, which introduced participants to a variety of majors at the university. Here Toni found about her now major in social policy. While she wanted to attend a historically Black college or university, her and her father settled on MU due to funding provided by the university and the lack of out of state fees. Ultimately, given their financial status, Midwest was the most feasible option.

Toni participated in a first year transition program focused on supporting students from underserved backgrounds while encouraging them to connect cross-culturally. The program provided a cohort model of peer support and connection to faculty mentors. Participation in the program, helped open Toni's "eyes to the world beyond [my city]". Toni found the program useful, but overall her first year was a bit of a struggle. During her first year, Toni experienced significant roommate and academic challenges. Most challenging of all, during her first year Toni began to experience significant obstacles in her health, both physically and mentally.

Prior to college, Toni denied any real mental or physical health concerns, but during her college matriculation, they were unavoidable. As a Black, first generation, low-income college student, Toni has had a unique experience attending a PWI, has had some experiences with

discrimination, but by far her largest challenge has been with her health issues. Over the past three years, Toni has had to struggle with the opportunity cost of being sick and low-income. She finds she must work to fund her life, but working on top of school often causes great stress which makes her sicker. Luckily, Toni has found advocates and support people amongst the administration within her college and a center on campus which works closely with students who are disabled in any way. Their care and advocacy has given Toni the strength and support she needs to continue pursuing her undergraduate degree. Further, Toni's daily thoughts about others and desire to help others, allows her to look beyond her own needs, which also serves as a motivating factor for her continued matriculation.

Unique among the participants, Toni's view of her resilience is predicated on her "desire to try" on a given day and further, the reasons why she is trying. Toni describes her constant forward motion on her desire to be done as opposed to her desire to actually want to be present and pursuing a degree. Ironically, at the time of the interview Toni did not see herself as resilient. However, her consistent forward motion toward her long-term goal of working in politics at the federal level, despite challenges, displays great resilience. Upon graduation, Toni plans to participate in a summer research program, teach locally, and pursue a graduate degree.

Chapter Summary

Summary of Profiles

The aforementioned profiles demonstrated points of similarities and differences amongst participants. Similarities include financial aid support, closeness with family and community, participation in a first year transition program, similar hometown make up, and general belief in their ability to be resilient. All participants received significant financial aid support. In fact, as communicated above, the financial aid support served as one of the primary reasons participants

chose to attend Midwest. Moreover, a majority of the participants were admitted into Midwest via an accessibility program with eligibility based on applicant profiles and looked at such characteristics as income background, school, and whether or not their parents had attended college. This admissions process is often conducted onsite at their high school, and provides opportunity to wave the application fee.

Participants also all discussed a certain level of closeness with family and community. From moms to siblings and from student organizations to mentoring groups, all participants shared a love for and closeness to their family and the broader community. This closeness surfaces again in the discussion of the findings in Chapter 5, as it proved to play a pivotal role in participant's ability to remain resilient.

Additionally, all but one of the participants were active in some version of a first year transition program. Whether Summer Bridge or first year success class, as you will see in Chapter 5, participants found participation in first year transition programs to be a part of the positive experiences they had while at Midwest. Participation in the first year transition programs connected students to key resources and relationships on campus, which ultimately contributed to their ability to remain academically resilient while at Midwest.

Noting participants all came from metropolitan areas within driving distance of Midwest is important. While not all from the same cities or schools, participants all hailed from communities predominantly of Color. Noting hometown is important given Midwest is situated within a largely segregated state. Therefore, growing up in predominantly Black or Brown communities and in many cases attending predominantly Black or Brown schools prior to attending Midwest, which is predominantly White, likely influences participants' transition and matriculation experiences.

Lastly, all participants had their own working definition of resilient. Although all but two participants described seeing themselves as being resilient, they still saw the need for academic resilience within their collegiate matriculation. Furthermore, while they did not believe themselves to be academically resilient, they still engaged in similarly academically resilient behaviors as the other participants in the study.

Differences among participants included mental and physical health concerns, level of academic engagement, and general home life differences. Three participants specifically discussed challenges with mental and physical illness. Balancing mental and physical health concerns as a student brings with it great challenges. However, for the participants in this study, being low-income and having to work added additional challenges. Additionally, as discussed further in Chapter 5, the challenges with mental and physical health influenced how both participants viewed their level of academic resiliency.

All participants were matriculating through Midwest at the time of interviews, but their level of academic engagement varied for different reasons. Three of the 10 participants had experiences with academic probation, with one in particular being recessed for a period of time before being able to re-enroll at Midwest. These specific participants had challenges with remaining academically focused due to immaturity, being over engaged in student activities, or mental health concerns, however in each case, students continue to progress toward graduation. On the other hand, one of the participants is highly engaged and has been on the Dean's List multiple semesters. Other participants are academically engaged through other outside of classroom activities such as undergraduate research and study abroad.

Lastly, while all but one of the participants spent much of their adolescence being raised by one parent, their general home experiences pre-college were different. One participant dealt

with a jailed parent and significant challenges in school. Two of the 10 participants dealt with substantial moving between homes, and at moments dealt with homelessness. Two participants experienced the death of close relatives which greatly impacted their lives and schooling experiences.

Above I presented the largest similarities and differences among participants. Note, all of these experiences both pre-college and during college contribute to the broader context within which students have developed and remain academically resilient.

In addition to what is discussed above, understanding the climate and environmental context of Midwest is important to understanding the academic resilience of participants in this study. As such, below I use interview and focus group data to situate the findings of the forthcoming Chapter 5 within the broader context of Midwest, with a particular focus on racialized and classed experiences as shared by participants.

Climate and Environmental Context

Recall Midwest University is a large PWI in the Midwest. As discussed in Chapter 2, Black students often face challenges with racism and sense of belonging when they attend PWIs. Similarly, and also discussed in Chapter 2, first generation and low-income college students also face a number of challenges when they pursue post-secondary degrees. In many ways, each of those individual challenges can be exacerbated with identities intersect. As discussed below, participants within this study, faced a number of in-environment challenges during their Midwest matriculation.

All participants spoke of challenges with the very racism outlined in Chapter 2 (i.e. microaggressions, over/covert racism, stereotype threat, and general challenges with racial climate). For example, during our one-on-one interview, Chloe shared frustrating experiences

from summer parties with friends. She experienced targeted policing while at a party, which resulted in a dangerous encounter between an officer and a friend. Due to this experience, she perceives the local police as hyper-policing Black parties more than White parties.

Where it's mostly just all Black students... The police will come knocking on our door like an hour within versus a White party. Like they may come but they don't shut it down... or they might not even say nothing to them period, versus I've seen like in the summertime where there's no classes, no one was complaining and I've seen the police come and they arrested someone who was on their bike. They slammed him to the ground and arrested him. And I don't even know if he was coming to the party but he was Black and he was around the party. And [then] they shut the party down like within the hour so just things that would say it's more discriminatory towards Black orgs or Black people on campus than it is with White people. (Chloe, senior, Black female)

Chloe went on to discuss how such interactions influenced her experience at Midwest; "I don't want to say it discourages me from wanting to stay here but it kind of makes me like, I don't know, second guess some of the things that I do on campus." While this exact experience was not shared across participants, all of them shared similar experiences of overtly and covertly racist interactions with their White peers, faculty, and staff.

In addition to racist experiences, students were dealing with the daily challenges of being first generation and low-income. Challenges with being low-income included the stress of constantly seeking after resources, having to balance work and school, and sometimes not knowing where they would sleep on a given night when they were not living on campus during the summer. For example, Carter discussed the stress and frustration of wanting to help his family financially, but being unable to. Between him, his mom and his sister, there always

seemed to be too little money to go around. In his experience, his mom and sister would argue about money, or ask him for money, but as a college student, he would not have any to offer. This experience at times was so stressful, which made Carter want to move further away from his hometown upon graduation.

...so like my mom and my sister are both receiving assistance from the government and it used to be often that I would get a phone call from them, like asking me for money and it's just like I'm the brokest college student! And that's really stressful because it's my mom and it's my sister, and my sister has two kids and I need to help. But how can I help? And then that, I mean, I don't know if this is relevant but that contributes to like the stress I have about wanting to move away so badly [after I graduate]. (Carter, senior, Black male)

Further, adding the experience of being a first generation college student creates layers of experiences making a college matriculation challenging. Consistent with literature discussed in Chapter 2, among other things students struggled with not being able to talk to parents out of fear they would not understand what participants were going through. At the same time, such experiences intersected with being Black and first generation to create unique challenges and experiences. Therefore, students had varied experiences where their layered identities created a unique positionality and situated experience while at Midwest. Lyric sums up this sentiment perfectly:

I just feel like when it comes to having like the experience of being a first generation college student, like I don't have the luxury of calling my mom or my dad and saying, like, how do I study for this class or what do I do when this happens because they never been to a big university. They don't understand what it means to be in a 300 lecture hall

and you're the only Black girl. They don't understand what that feels like. (Lyric, junior, Black female)

While only a few examples were shared for added context, one can begin to see the ways participant experiences as Black, first generation, and low-income create a unique positionality from which they employ academic resilience on a daily basis. In spite of challenges faced on a daily basis, participants still did everything they could to remain in school, to remain engaged academically and ultimately saw themselves as overcomers. Further, while research may often argue their intersecting identities as Black, first generation, and low-income as sources of risk, participants saw their identities as sources of possibility, pride, and source of resistance. For example, Carter saw the possibility in his intersecting identities. When asked what being Black, first generation, and low-income means to him he explained the way his intersecting identities made him think he could do anything he wanted, almost as if he was a superhero.

I'm Black and I'm low income and I'm a first generation college student and it means, I don't know, it kinda just puts me in this like head space of like, a little bit of a super hero. Because no matter what I can kind of do anything. Or as much as I want or as little as I want. Like I can kinda do whatever I want. (Carter, senior, Black male)

George found pride in his identities. When asked what being Black, first generation, and low-income meant to him he boasted with satisfaction; he was visually happy to be all three identities, discussed the ways he found joy in watching peers like him overcome amazing things.

I don't know how I feel about it but I love the skin I'm in, I guess. Where I wouldn't change it... I think students who have had institutionalized adversity are more resilient and are just a little more cunning in the things that they go after, just to see my fellow Black students being involved in multiple organizations and are working jobs and are still

in school. You know, it's impressive to me to see how many students that are not of color don't do anything and college is a big party, but then you have kids who are doing everything in the world to make it work, to make stuff work because nothing is really handed to us Except for the Pell grant. (George, junior, Black male)

Finally, Paul sees his interrelated identities as a source of resistance throughout history and within the broader context within which he exists. When asked what it means to him to be Black, first generation, and low-income he discussed the ways a “shared consciousness”, “collective solidarity” and “resistance” are able to manifest simply from the experiences had by this particular population throughout history.

I think for me, being Black, [and] being first generation, it's a positioning in society that creates the soil... creates the environment for a shared consciousness, a collective solidarity and a type of resistance to manifest.... a lot of my education friends talk a lot about persistence ...and I just, I don't know. I just feel like that's so bred in Black folks just because we always been persistent in like resisting. (Paul, senior, Black male)

It is from this pride and resistance I see academic resilience flowing from within participants' lives. Though their identities are often seen as a source of risk by researchers, for participants their positionality is much more complicated. Regardless of the complications, their interrelated identity seems to cultivate an unbreakable spirit producing academic resilience throughout their lifetime, which continues to exist while matriculating in order to overcome academic and college specific challenges. What I am curious of are the factors contributing to students' ability to remain academically resilient while matriculating at Midwest. As such, in Chapter 5 I share participant experiences with remaining academically resilient in the face of challenges and the three primary themes arising from their stories.

CHAPTER FIVE

Counter-Stories of Academic Resilience

The purpose of Chapter 4 was to introduce participants and present a brief examination of the environmental context regarding racialized and classed experiences at Midwest. I chose to present participant profiles and brief environmental context prior to this chapter in order to help the reader better understand the layered environments within which students are academically resilient. The purpose of Chapter 5 is to present the primary themes that arose from the one-on-one interviews with participants and the follow up focus group. Additionally, I used CRT during the analysis process in order to intentionally center the ways participants remain resilient within their particularly layered environmental context.

As mentioned in Chapter 4, participant environmental context includes the following: macro-system (i.e., broader society, media coverage of #Blacklivesmatter protests, protests at the University of Missouri, Presidential primary race, etc.); hometown experiences of participants; and on campus experiences of participants. Thus, participants remained academically resilient or employed resilient behaviors within a layered environment rife with multiple challenges including institutional racism and class-based oppression, pressure to succeed, the need to balance work and school, and other interconnecting occurrences such as gendered experiences or those relating to mental or physical health. What follows are lived experiences as shared by participants. As presented, the conversation excerpts are glimpses of counter-stories which demonstrate the ways participants remain academically resilient despite challenges. Recall, counter-stories are a methodological tool used to challenge how power is used to privilege some stories over others (Knight, Nadjwa, Courtney, Dixon, 2004). In this study, counter-stories focused on academic resilience highlight daily realities for Black, first generation, low-income

participants but specifically focuses on the ways they engage academic resilience during their college matriculation process. Thus what follows are counterstories told against a backdrop of racialized and class-based oppression within the academic setting to highlight the multiple ways participants press forward toward their academic goals despite facing barriers. From their experiences arose three primary themes, which each have associated sub-themes. Participants within this study remained academically resilient through (1) intrinsic motivation, grit, and academic resilience (2) sense of obligation to family, friends and the broader Black community, and (3) the village model; this is also the order the findings will be shared below. While the purpose of this study was not to generalize student's experiences, I developed primary themes to assist in organization and sense making of the larger ideas and similar experiences emerging from the data.

During the thematic analysis process, several CRT tenants served as foundational. Racism as endemic, intersectionality, commitment to social justice, and unique voice of Color were guiding points as I reviewed participant data. Racism as endemic allowed me to keep participant experiences within the broader context of race and class-based experiences. Analyzing their experiences within context, provides space to better understand the ways their academic resilience is situated within their layered environment and is, therefore, a result of or in response to their broader context. Intersectionality reminded me to take into consideration the ways their experiences with academic resilience are interrelated between their multiple social identities and how the saliency of each may change at a given time. Staying true to a commitment to social justice during the analysis process ensured an anti-deficit frame of inquiry and analysis to better understand and promote the ways participants overcome challenges they face during their college matriculation.

Additionally, giving space for similar experiences across all interviews or unique to only one, I honor the CRT tenet of the unique voice of Color. As such, I identified experiences and themes helping to tell compelling counter-stories regarding academic resiliency in the lives of participants. This decision underscores the need for researcher judgment and flexibility in the analysis process (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Reissman, 2008). Additionally, this choice reiterates the goal of transferability as opposed to generalizability across all 10 interviews. Although the themes help to summarize patterns found in the data, they do not equate to being found across all 10 interviews. Reisman (2008) posits this form of analysis as “case-centered as opposed to theorizing across cases” (p. 74). Similarly, Braun and Clark (2006) repeated this sentiment saying, “a theme might be given considerable space in some data items, and little or none in others, or it might appear in relatively little of the data set” (p. 10).

Lastly, as mentioned in Chapter 3, I used stanza-by-stanza coding as opposed to line-by-line, which allowed me to capture and present participant experiences in extended and more complete stories. Although I employed thematic analysis, in some areas I intentionally extended participant stories as to be true to their lived experiences, honor their voices, and provided their experiences of academic resilience within the context they happened. Participants’ stories and voices in relation to the primary themes are discussed in the remaining portion of the chapter. Following the theme discussion, I offer an analysis of the ways CRT illuminates the academic resilience of participants within context. I conclude with a chapter summary. Please note, the following excerpts are lightly edited for readability.

“Do whatever needs to be done to get the goal accomplished. That’s really all it is.” – Intrinsic Motivation, Grit, and Academic Resilience

For most participants in this study, the influencers of their academic resilience were from the outside (environment, family, etc.) → inward and from the inside (self-driven, intrinsic) → outward. This particular theme focuses on the ways students’ self-driven or intrinsic motivation influences their academic resilience during their college matriculation. This theme was exhibited for students through grit, grittiness, and gritty behaviors.

Duckworth, Peterson, Matthews, and Kelly (2007) define grit as “perseverance and passion for long-term goals,” which “entails working strenuously toward challenges maintaining effort and interest over years despite failure, adversity, and plateaus in progress” (pp. 1087–1088). Quite naturally, given the perseverance over adversity, grit seems to go hand-in-hand with academic resilience. Particularly for participants within the current study who are facing systemic oppression and racism, challenging college transitions, lack of college knowledge within families, and constant financial struggle, an innate sense of grit seems necessary.

When focusing specifically on the “effort and interest of years despite failure” aspect of the grit definition, J immediately comes to mind. J, is a 24-year-old junior at Midwest. Unlike many of the participants, J did not participate in pre-college or college transition programming. She came to Midwest from a metropolitan community west of the university. Midwest offered J a substantial financial aid package, but she admits she was likely not mature enough to be a college student. She spent much of her first semester “partying” and enjoying college, which led to academic probation and the following semester academic recess.

For many students, particularly those who are first in their families to attend college, being recessed after your first full year is certainly seen as a failure. Only one third of students

who stop out of college, due to recess or other reasons, go on to complete their degree (Insidetrack, 2014; New, 2014). As such, most students in J's position are likely not to return to finish their education. J on the other hand, took the opportunity to work, "grow up," and later return to Midwest. In our one-on-one interview, she shared how she refused to let a temporary "failure" keep her from her long term goal of completing college.

My life was just the same. I'm working, making the same amount of money. I'm not progressing in my job and everything. It was like I needed to do better. So when I realized that and I just was kinda done having fun, it was like, okay, it's time. (J, junior, Black female)

Since returning to Midwest, she had a dramatically different approach to her college experience, which involved community support and mentorship, which are all discussed in greater detail in forthcoming sections. As mentioned in the quote below, after returning to Midwest, J seemed to realize she needed to put in the work necessary to do well and if she remained committed and self-motivated, she could do anything.

Just realizing that it's time to do work. For me, if I set my mind into something, I'm really able to do it. So for myself, it's a lot of self-motivation, constant reminders. This is what has to go on now and not the things that were going on previously. I wanta be successful so I gotta act like it. (J, junior, Black female)

While Simba was never recessed from the institution, he certainly faced enormous amounts of adversity and struggle, not only getting through college, but also getting to college. Recall from his participant profile presented in Chapter 4, prior to his college transition, Simba struggled with homelessness, constant changes in schools, and consequences of frequent fighting. Despite these challenges, he developed and maintained long-term goals, which kept him

driven and resilient and ultimately solidified his decision to attend college. As demonstrated in the excerpt below regardless of what was going on, he remained optimistic that as long as he gave his best to accomplishing his goals, over-time, something good would come of it.

I had goals. I mean, even though all the stuff that was going on, I had certain things that I wanted to see out of life. And it was really the fact that all the stuff seemed unattainable to the point that I felt like, if I gave it my best, what's the worst that could happen? That was kind of my ideology.... I was knowledgeable of the fact that if I was gonna do anything different in my life, that [college] was probably going to be my best bet...

(Simba, junior, Black male)

While in college, Simba continued to face various challenges, specifically financial ones; at one time being homeless while still a student at Midwest. He met these financial challenges head on and still remained gritty despite the difficulty and frustration. His innate sense of grit and desire to meet his long term goals of financial stability kept him pushing forward.

What's been really troubling through my whole process here just because I mean, you asked, I had a problem with my, my freshman year here, I didn't really have a home, coming here or leaving here, so I really was just staying... pretty much all the people that I met my freshman year was pretty much helping me throughout once the summer came and stuff cuz I didn't have anywhere to stay. I feel like the financial burden was just really, really, I guess that was probably pushing me, too, to keep going. (Simba, junior, Black male)

During our one-on-one interview, Simba used a brick wall metaphor to describe what being resilient in the face of challenges was like. Within this analogy, he described a brick wall with a missing brick someplace along the way. His goal was to find the missing brick, so he can break

out of the overall struggle. As Simba saw it, there is a necessity to break out, because he saw nothing to go back to.

Just because, I mean, regardless of what's happening, I'm gonna keep trying to find a way out or a way in more so or I don't know. Say it's a wall and they just tell me it's gonna be a brick missing somewhere, you just gotta find it. I'm just gonna really try to look for it and spend all my time until I get there cuz I mean, you can't go back. Ain't nothing to go back to. (Simba, junior, Black male)

When Simba mentioned "go back" he was referencing going back to his hometown, which is a metropolitan area about an hour southeast of Midwest. While he found pride and joy in being from his hometown, he also saw it as a source of challenge; particularly regarding the lack of financial and educational equity. Like all of the participants, for Simba, the need to be resilient was truly situated within the broader context of systemic oppression and the resulting trauma within his home community. In moments of frustration and challenge, Simba engaged in gritty self-talk, or pep-talks with self, to encourage himself to remain resilient, and patience, which helped him remain resilient and pushing toward his long-term goals over time. According to Simba, such gritty self-talk helped him to develop a sense of mental toughness, even in the moments of disappointment and challenging emotions. This mental toughness leads to self-motivation, which connects to his ability to remain academically resilient.

Mental toughness, that's just having the point where even when you are down and you might even get emotional about it, being able to self-motivate yourself, just to, just to tell yourself what you need to hear to keep moving. Cuz I mean, it's, everybody faces some things that make them feel like they're gonna break down or they can't go no more. But lot of times, it's just keep doing what you're doing and let time, time is a big factor in a

lot of things. Sometimes you just gotta let time itself move on and a lot of doors will open after that... (Simba, junior, Black male)

J and Simba had such strong examples of grit within their life experiences, which is why I presented their experiences in greater detail above. Other participants also demonstrated a passion and drive toward their long-term goals. When asked when he felt most resilient, Paul referenced a challenging semester in chemistry class. He was told he would fail by the professor, but instead of giving up, he changed his behaviors and passed the course. Furthermore, for Paul, the opportunity see failure, make adjustments and find success, positively contributed to his overall academic experience.

So chemistry, I was slated to fail and then I was, I'm not failing. I started going to lecture two times a day, six times a week, plus recitation plus study hours, plus help rooms... so I would say my tenacity and my ability to persevere during that semester is what I think I'm most proud of and what has sort of shaped the rest of my academic experience. (Paul, senior, Black male)

Duckworth et al. (2007) argue gritty individuals “stay the course” (p. 1088) even in moments where others may give up due to “disappointment and boredom” (p. 1088). Within participant stories one can see grit manifest during times of challenge. Not only did Paul change his behaviors in order to continue pursuing his long-term goal of graduation, the process of change positively influenced the way he engaged in the rest of his college matriculation. He went on to tie this experience to his sense of inner purpose, “yeah, again, I think my sense of purpose was always very strong. Even if it, I wasn't necessarily sure what I wanted to do, I knew that I had to be doing something” (Paul, senior, Black male).

Lyric, a junior at Midwest, Jovan, a senior at Midwest, and MJ a senior at Midwest, also exhibited grittiness. Jovan did not seem to remember a time when he was not fighting. “I’ve always had to fight twice as hard” he said when asked what contributed to his ability to remain resilient. Jovan went on to say “I sometimes get really depressed when I go through things and just think about giving up. But you can’t really give up on life, you know. Things happen, you just kinda gotta roll with the punches.” Similarly, for MJ, grittiness is really just a part of life: “it’s so much in life to, experience, you can’t just let one thing, permanently stop you from doing what you do. You can temporarily let it stop you for a day, or a week, but you can’t let it stop you from what you have to do.... just cry, get over it, move on.” Although she may take a break or let her emotions take over briefly, MJ remains committed to the path she is on at a given time. Lyric also had moments of challenge seeming to get the best of her. During our one-on-one interview she shared at one point her mother told her she could stop going to school and go home. While, she considered it briefly, Lyric saw going home as the easy way out and instead decided to continue pursuing her degree.

And so she proposed, you can come home. You don’t have to go to school and I’m like what else am I gonna do? And I [said], any ideas? She [said], we’ll figure it out. But I was [sure] I’m going back to school and of course, dropping out, it’s just that shame of you quitting. Or you gave up and ...I’m not, I don’t feel like I’m a quitter. And I want a degree. I want the degree. (Lyric, junior, Black female)

Grit in the lives of these participants seemed to be a natural part of their academic resilience. The ability to stay the course despite bumps in the road, missed directions, or cracks in the pavement seemed to come natural as a part of their innate approach to life. When asked how she managed to keep pushing forward, Lyric said “do whatever needs to be done to get the

goal accomplished. That's really all it is." This strong level of commitment in the face of odds is deeply connected to grit.

Unique to MJ, Lyric and Toni, grit in the face of chronic mental and physical health challenges continues to be important. MJ and Lyric were both diagnosed with depression and anxiety. Toni on the other hand struggles both with mental health concerns and a chronic physical illness. In all three cases, students are juggling remaining engaged academically, staying well physically and mentally, having a social life on campus, and funding their college education. Toni specifically described the challenges she faces with her health concerns, which interconnect with her financial concerns of being a working student. She described the necessary juggling as a vicious cycle of being unable to give her best self in any situation; ultimately each space has a negative impact on the other.

So it's very stressful in itself. Opportunity costs, you have to work which takes time from studying which takes time from sleeping.... and then also, your prioritizing working sometimes happens over school which is not a [good] thing because you come to school to go to school, not to go to work. And it's very hard because as you're doing this, someone who has been sick their entire life, the more stress you get, the more sick you become....So it's a ripple effect because you're getting more sick now which is affecting every single thing now and then whether it's mental or physical and then once you get sick, you have these medical bills which also along with everything else you had to pay for before, now you have to pay for these medical bills so now you have to work more or harder or longer. So it's just a ripple effect of everything and constantly having to worry about you paying for this and you paying for that when college students should be worried about going to class and doing everything a college student should be and not

worried about being able to pay for everything. But I mean, you can't go to class unless you have money to pay for class....it is a very gruesome the worrying that happens with that. That I deal with all the time. And it's just like now I've just accepted it. That's just what adulthood is. (Toni, junior, Black female)

Toni battles with both mental and physical health concerns, while Lyric's primary concern is battling depression. In our one-on-one interview, she recounted a time when she sought counseling because even on her birthday, she was extremely unhappy and felt there was no solution, all the while, her grades were greatly suffering.

I was going to counseling. I was talking with [the counselor] and it wasn't getting better and it got to a point where I had, my 19th birthday, ... I thought your birthday's your happiest moment. I was crying, like crying the whole weekend. I had a party. I went to the club. I was drunk and I just wasn't happy. So I stopped going to class. From February 23rd and so I didn't go to class the rest of that semester....unless somebody comes to my door and knocks on my door, I don't leave and so she [said], I think you should go medical withdraw....your grades are suffering. I was failing all of my classes. It was really going to be bad. And so I did a medical withdraw in April....So that was freshman year. Came out with a 0.8. Yeah, I came out with a 0.8 as a GPA. (Lyric, junior, Black female)

Struggling with medical concerns as a college student brings with it numerous challenges. Adding financial concerns, being a first generation student, and being Black at a PWI is certainly considered adversity, and facing that adversity head on in pursuit of their academic goals is what represents their sense of grit. Interestingly, when both Toni and Lyric were asked if they considered themselves resilient, of all 10 participants, they were the only ones who said no.

Their responses fit into this particular theme of intrinsic motivation and grit because they demonstrate the ways participants press forward even in moments when they doubt themselves or do not seem themselves as academically resilient.

For Lyric, there was a clear disconnect between how she saw herself and how the world may perceive her. When asked if she felt resilient, she described seeing herself as folding from the pressure, regardless of what it looked like to others watching her.

I don't feel like I [am resilient]. I feel like I fold under pressure but on the outside looking in, [people might say] 'oh, my gosh, Lyric, I can't believe you went through that, you're still here'. But to me, no... I'm not doing good in my classes....no, this is not pushing through. This is like breezing by. So to me, no, but to the outside world, yes. (Lyric, junior, Black female)

Toni also did not see herself as resilient, but for different reasons. When asked if she saw herself as resilient, Toni described herself as almost lost in darkness, just trying to find her way out. Furthermore, she described her intrinsic motivation as a force to push her to find the way out, as opposed to a singular desire to be resilient.

No. I do not think I'm resilient yet. I think that even though I'm finding myself, I'm someone who is locked in a building that is black and cannot find her way out to the sun and she just keeps trying which is what resilience is, but she's not trying to be resilient. She's trying to get out. She's not trying to keep trying. She's trying to get out and she hasn't gotten out yet... I think of resilience as the desire to want to try (Toni, junior, Black female)

Toni's definition of resilience in this case was particularly interesting, because she was alluding to not wanting to try, but saw no other way. Our ensuing conversation went as such:

Toni “I’m not trying, I’m trying to try but I’m dying to get out...I’m not dying to try”

Jasmine “so you’re doing it essentially, or at least what I’m hearing you say is that you’re doing it because you kinda don’t have a choice. Like you have to, but if it was up to you, you would be doing something else”

Toni “Right, but I don’t know what that something else is.”

Even in moments where she did not see herself as resilient, and perhaps when she was ready to quit, she still felt she did not have the choice of quitting. In these moments she remained resilient and gritty even when she did not want to. In both Lyric and Toni’s cases, although they may not see themselves as resilient or acknowledge their resilience, they were still engaging in grit, which was contributing to their resilience. They were still pressing toward their long term goal of degree attainment despite whether they believed in themselves or were intrinsically motivated or not. Their drive to continue demonstrates the layered ways students engage in academic resilience, with grit being just one possible aspect.

As presented above, MJ, Lyric, J, Toni, and Simba faced numerous challenges during their college matriculation, and at the time of the interview, the four participants continued to overcome challenges and barriers in their way. Their ability to overcome setbacks such as academic recession, inconsistent home lives, and mental and physical health concerns was rooted largely in their capacity to self-motivate in order to remain at the institution. For both Simba and J, it was engaging in self-pep talks and remaining focused on long-term goals of “success.” Additionally, both J and Paul made conscious adjustments to their behaviors in order to stay the course and get different academic outcomes. For MJ, Toni and Lyric, their intrinsic motivation was displayed through their navigation of mental and physical health concerns while remaining academically engaged to the degree they were able to. However, Toni’s clear discussion of not

being able to quit even when she wants to connects well to the next theme *sense of obligation*, which demonstrates the outward influencers of academic resilience for participants. As presented in the next section, many of the participants remained resilient due to the sense of obligation they have to others in their lives, in their communities, and throughout history.

“It kinda just puts you in a situation where you just feel like failure’s not an option; even after you fail, you gotta get back up.” – Academic Resilience and the Sense of Obligation to Family, and the Broader Black Community

The sense of obligation theme illustrates the ways participants find motivation to complete their degree or pursue college from relational sources outside of them. As such, for nine of the 10 participants attaining a college degree was communicated as bigger than them. In essence, participants exhibited a strong sense of obligation to remaining academically resilient for their parents, siblings, ancestors, others with similar backgrounds, or the broader Black community. The idea of college being about more than just a theme is better understood below as a part of three sub-themes, (1) for family; (2) for similar others (i.e., other similarly marginalized populations); and (3) for us (i.e., the Black community). In the third sub-theme, the term “us” represents the ways students saw themselves interconnected with the Black community, both present-day and throughout history. The interconnection manifested itself in participant’s use of “us” and “we,” or even “my ancestors.” For some participants the sub-themes are interwoven, meaning participants may remain resilient for individuals in all three sub-themes, while for other participants they only remain resilient for individuals in one of the sub-themes. However, for all participants, there was clearly a source of motivation beyond themselves, which influenced their ability to remain academically resilient to continue their college matriculation; these sources are presented below.

For Family. Of the 10 participants, nine shared some experience or strong connection to completing college for someone in their family. J, a junior studying community and governance, saw her college experience as something she did, not only to “help” her mother and grandmother, but also to make them proud. More specifically, her desire to make her grandmother proud pushes her forward.

I’m doing it for my mother and grandmother.... my grandmother just being so proud.

‘My granddaughter goes to Midwest’... That really pushes me to wanta graduate and get it done, and she’s struggling now so I have to do this so I can help my granny cuz nobody else is. (J, junior, Black female)

Similarly, Simba, a junior with an interdisciplinary major connected his completion of school as an accomplishment for both him and his mom, “my mom tried to go to school. But she had me, and so she didn’t really make it through. And so I think that’s a motivation for me, just kind of wanting to finish this goal for the both of us almost.”

Unique to Chloe and George, who both experienced the death of close family members, an aunt and father, respectively, the memory of their loved ones serve as reasons for resilience. In discussing the passing of her aunt, Chloe shared how her aunt’s passing shook her but also continues to push her: “...my aunt passing away. That really has shaken me cuz I didn’t wanta keep going but she at the same time, kinda pushed me to keep going.” Although a significant member of her family passed away, she still gained motivation for resilience from this particular family member. Even in her aunt’s death, their relationship and the need to “keep going” pushed Chloe through challenges she faced during her college matriculation.

In an attempt to have a better understanding of the ways participant identities influenced participants since of obligation or the feeling their need to be resilient was bigger than them, I

asked a specific question, and participant answers were very telling. When asked what it means to be Black, first in their family to attend college, and from a low-income background, most participants made meaning of their identities to include their relational connections and that explained their sense of responsibility to others.

In a powerful way, participants saw themselves as gatekeepers between their non-college going family, future-college going family (i.e., younger siblings, cousins), and a college education or a better, more stable financial future. In our one-on-one interview, J saw her past mistakes and her current matriculation as opportunities to educate her younger cousins on what not to do during their time in college. Among other things, her desire and ability to remain resilient was connected to her desire and ability to set out guideposts as they follow in her footsteps.

It means to me that it's my right to... make it easier for who's coming in after me, my little cousins. To guide them to say okay, I messed up and if you listen to some of my words, I may be able to help you. For instance, coming into college, saying oh, you need 120 credits to graduate? That just freaked me out. I'm like, how will I get all that but you know, you break it down and this semester, you'll take, you know, X, Y and Z. It just makes it a little easier. So as crazy as my road to success has been or to graduation cuz it won't stop there, I feel like I can put little guides out. (J, junior, Black female)

Similarly, as the first in his family to attend college, Paul saw himself as breaking a mold and setting a new path for his younger family members. For Paul, the need to remain academically resilient was tightly coupled with his desire to not return home without finishing school first.

I don't know, sort of breaking a mold within my family is something that I was very much sort of entangled with the idea of doing.... And my younger sister and my younger cousins and all of them being very close with me... what would be the point if I came up here, like nah, and then came right back? (Paul, senior, Black male)

Lyric, who is a part of a large family, saw her ability to remain resilient tied in her obligation to provide exposure to her younger family members who are coming after her. In some ways, she even saw herself as going to school in their place.

My grandma has about 20 something grandkids. There's only five girls. I'm the only girl that graduated school with like over a 2.5.... Okay, so that alone is like okay, I have to show them college is important. It's not just okay to graduate high school, cuz college, college is becoming nothing. It's becoming the norm. So I have to show them, school is to learn, not to be on TV. School is to \network, not to just come and party. I have to share my experiences with them because they don't get those, they don't get exposed to those things in their community. So I do kinda have to go to school for them because they're not going to school for themselves. (Lyric, junior, Black female)

Similar to Lyric, Simba's ability to remain resilient was intertwined with his ability to carry a torch and light the way for his family and siblings, both younger and similar aged. His sense of obligation to carrying the torch is what pushed him in challenging moments. He felt the need to "dig deep" in order to serve as a positive influence to his family.

I always wanted to do good stuff for my family and stuff like that. I had little siblings and stuff that was ten years plus younger than me. So I mean, I had desires to do good things by them and stuff like that... I got high school cousins who, I got about five of them, the same age as me, or maybe a little older than me really and they didn't even finish high

school. So I would just be feeling like I'd be carrying a torch for a lot of people. And I feel like it's an influence because ... when I gotta dig deep, it's, I got stuff to dig deep about...It kinda just puts you in a situation where you just feel like failure's not an option; even after you fail, you gotta get back up. (Simba, junior, Black male)

As demonstrated, most of the participants seemed to find pride in their ability to bridge the gap, carry the torch, or break the mold in regard to family college attendance. For MJ, a senior at Midwest, the experience is much more nuanced as she finds it to be both a source of pride and a source of stress, or pressure, from family or self. On one hand, she is excited to provide exposure opportunities for her younger siblings. She spoke fondly about bring her siblings up for siblings week and introducing them to Midwest culture.

So my brothers and sisters are a really big factor. I brought them up for siblings week ...so they love Midwestern! They wanta go here. They got so much Midwestern gear already. And they particularly just makes me just push and keep going cuz they wanta go here every year I'm up here so I can't not be in college cuz they can't come for siblings weekend is our tradition to come up for siblings weekend. So yeah, I do it for the kids... My brother, he's probably four, but my sister she's two so I have to do it for them. What are they gonna do if I quit? If I drop out of school? (MJ, senior, Black female)

On the other hand, when discussing her life away from home and how it is displayed through Facebook, MJ shared frustration about not being able to be completely open about struggles she faces in college. She perceived people to see her as a source of motivation and experienced pressure to present a certain life through social media.

Even my family at home, like on Facebook... I don't like posting anything that's depressing cuz people think, oh, they look to me as encouragement. I don't even know

why... but it's like I do know why,... if I told you all my struggles, you wouldn't think my life was so great (MJ, senior, Black female)

Similarly, Lyric faced pressure from family to not only push through challenges, but also to demonstrate a sense of perfection, as if she was the “golden child.”

I can't flunk out of school. I just can't not go to school. And it's weird, being a first generation college student, where nobody in your family's in college or if they are, they're far removed from you so it's all this pressure, you're the golden child that's going to school. You can't not go to school. I'm the kid that gets good grades... you get good grades, you go to school. (Lyric, junior, Black female)

In the experiences above, I demonstrate the ways participants found a sense of obligation to remain resilient for their family, especially, for younger family coming after them. The sense of obligation to family showcases the ways participants saw their college matriculation as bigger than just them or their personal long-term goals, but instead their ability to remain resilient was deeply connected to the sense they are “making a way” or “doing it for” their family. What follows is a discussion of the ways students discussed a sense of obligation to their peers who have similar backgrounds (i.e., Black, first generation, and low-income).

For Similar Others. As Lyric discussed above, being a Black, first generation, low-income college student brings unique pressure. However, sharing these similar identities with others also connects you to a broader community of individuals with similar backgrounds. Carter, a senior studying political science, connects his resilience to those who have similar backgrounds and social identities as him and his desire to serve as an example.

And so what it means to me is I can, I can do it, and I am doing it, and I hope that that's something that people similar, that other first generation students or Black students or

low-income students can think about; that there are lots of people who have done it... so I mean, it means resilience and it means that I'm an example (Carter, senior, Black male)

For Paul, who communicated a strong sense of connection and duty to all marginalized communities throughout his entire interview, bigger than him was connected to "something larger" than even his family or the Black community. In moments where he wanted to perhaps give up, he thought about a broader commitment to others who were similarly marginalized within society.

Understanding that it's something larger than just myself and my family but all of the people in the communities that I've come from, and this experience being emblematic of their commitment to me.... yeah, there's no way that I can just at least give up on myself. (Paul, senior, Black male)

He went on to situate his experiences and the marginalizing experiences of others within the broader context of systemic oppression and how that fueled his need to "show up" and has helped him solidify his own understanding of what education is for.

Understanding that people are literally not here because of all of these operative forces that are working against our bodies. That I have to show up. And so why am I here? A few years ago, I would've answered that I wanta get a good job because my family's poor and I wanta help them. Right? But now, I'm hearing like damn, a whole lot of people is poor and all those people that's poor, they just so happen to be people of Color, too, for some reason.... Oh, dang. All those people that's poor and people of Color, a lot of them happen to be, you know, in the same area. Oh, a lot of those people, and it goes on... right? And so now, what [am I] here for and well, I'm pushing for not only the liberation of myself but the liberation of all oppressed peoples. And that's what I feel like my

education is for and I can make very deliberate choices about how I want my education to look and the way I want it to go because I understand that is the goal of my education now (Paul, senior, Black male)

Being broadly connected to peers who have similar backgrounds serves as a source of motivation to remain resilient through challenges for participants. The need to “show up” as Paul alluded to was necessary in order for him to liberate others, but also to serve as a role model for peers who are coming from similar situations and facing similar challenges. For participants, the sense of obligation to succeed and remain resilient regardless of barriers was tightly coupled with the broader sense of relationship to a community of others who are like themselves. More specifically, being connected to the broader community was deeply interwoven with participants’ sense of Blackness and the ways their Blackness tied them to other Black people and the broader Black community.

For Us. For participants within this study, seeing their ability to remain academically resilient as a sense of obligation to something beyond themselves is uniquely tied to their self-identification as Black and the connection points to other Black people. Whether Black students at Midwest, Black students across the country, or even historical ancestors, students see their college matriculation and the obligation to remain resilient as a sort of service to the Black community broadly.

Recall within Chapter 4’s presentation of context, students shared experiences of being the only, or one of the only, Black students in a particular class or particular major; scholars refer to this as a sense of onlyness (Fries-Britt & Griffin, 2007; Harper, 2012). When situated in such a space of onlyness, participants remained academically resilient as a sense of duty to the other Black people. J, a junior at Midwest, consistently experienced onlyness within the classroom as

the only or one of few Black students. In relation to that sense of oneliness, the low numbers of Black students influenced her sense of obligation to not only accomplish her academic goals for herself, but to also accomplish them for the broader Black community.

Just that low percentage of us [Black students] here, you just wanta do better. You just don't wanta be the one that went home and stayed home ... I think it just influenced me to do better, just to grind harder ... You know, it just kinda feels like as I'm accomplishing this for myself, it's for my community as well. So I think that's the biggest thing. (J, junior, Black female)

When consistently dealing with oneliness within a classroom, students commonly experienced stereotype threat or the sense they may confirm a negative stereotype associated with their marginalized identity (Owens & Massey, 2011; Steele & Aronson, 1995). During the focus group, recalling an experience as the only Black woman in her class, Chloe shared her commitment to not being seen as “just some Black girl with big hair,” which was pushing back on a gendered and raced stereotype. Her experience with oneliness in the classroom caused her to develop a sense of academic resilience that was intentionally counter to her perception of stereotypical thoughts about Black women on campus.

I agree with her but touching specifically at Midwest, what pushes me to do really good in my classes is seeing I'm maybe one out of two Black people in a lecture hall of 100. Or seeing that my dance team, which is Black, you all get turned down for stuff that White dance team don't get turned down for. So that's something that pushes me to wanta stand out in class or wanta get my professors to know my face so that they don't see me as just a Black girl with big hair, loud talker, I really get my work done. That pushes me. (Chloe, senior, Black female)

Chloe's resilience was connected to actively pushing against a perceived stereotype of Black women being unintelligent. As she shared her story, participants around the table nodded in agreement. J went on to further Chloe's statement, arguing she also did not want to be seen as another statistic within society. This desire to not be seen as a stereotypical statistic influenced her academic engagement and academic resilience.

One of the things, I don't know how to word this at all but one of the things that always pushed me consistently is also society in a way. So say for instance, if you ever have a moment that you wanta give up or you ever have a moment where it's you just don't know, where you don't wanta work as hard or whatever, and then you just see something in society that reminds you that you're not going to be that Black person, who just goes back home. Not going to be that Black person that's just this. Or that woman that is just this or that Black male that is just this. So it's society, or I guess you could say the media, it's just something that is a constant, I don't know. I don't necessarily wanta say motivation, too, because it can also deter you. I don't know. It's just something that's constantly. (J, junior, Black female)

Thus in being actively resilient, participants are responding to stereotype threat by presenting a counter narrative of Black success as opposed to statistical failure for this particular population. Participants consciously push backed against stereotypes and onliness in their perceived connection to the broader Black community, and they saw it as an act of courage. In being one of few, Carter felt it was his responsibility (and the responsibility of others like him) to be "visible" and to "represent" for the broader Black community.

There's so few of us [Black students], right? and we all mean a lot to this identity and so we need to be alive. To represent. To be visible. And so I don't know. Those are... that's

important, I think it's important... yes, being alive but also sitting on panels or being a part of research, I think these are all important things and it makes me a bit more courageous.... Generous. (Carter, senior, Black male)

Not only did participants feel connected to doing well for the Black community by specifically resisting stereotypes and serving as an example for others, they were also driven by their desire to make the Black community better in some capacity. When Chloe shared the moments she felt most resilient, she said “with me being Black... that also helps for me to push through, wanting to get into a higher position to make a difference within the Black community here and just period.” Chloe’s sense of duty to help the community via a high career position was similar to George’s sense of duty, which was rooted in a formal career dream of being coming a teacher. George is hoping to pursue his PhD and serve as a teacher. He sees his dreams of being a teacher connected to his ability to make the Black community better in the long run.

I can see what a community can do. I can see when you're invested in somebody, how much better they feel about themselves and their confidence and I see that. I've experienced that. And so knowing that I will love to do that in my role as a teacher, it keeps me going. It keeps me going, thinking about, well, how can I help, you know, other students of color, you know, get some of the same experiences? (George, Junior, Black male)

For MJ, this same sense of obligation was connected to the future and the past. For her, this theme is rooted in the past historical context of being Black in America given the historical struggles faced. This historical context includes exclusion, lack of resources, and underservice within education for Blacks throughout history. In moments of frustration during her academic journey, MJ found strength for resiliency in thoughts of her ancestors and is simultaneously

reminded of a perceived sense of obligation to complete her college matriculation for them. In moments when she wanted to give up, she reminded herself throughout history her ancestors did not give up on her, so why would she give up on them.

Our ancestors historically have been doing this [or pushing forward] all their lives so how can I quit on them? How can I be the person, I'm one of the people I can say of the thousands and thousands of Black people, millions who are on a different spectrum of pushing through ...so why would I give up on them? When they didn't give up on me. So it's my responsibility to take this back and to get my people to where, in the state to where we're all flourishing for the most part. It's not gonna be everybody but still... I don't know. Basically, my ancestors didn't give up on me so don't give up for the future, for the people (MJ, senior, Black female)

Similarly, Paul's resiliency is in part fueled by remembering sacrifices made by others to get him to the present day. During our one-on-one interview he said "understanding the sacrifices people have made for me to be here" is one of his driving forces.

Lastly, as participants engaged in resiliency *for us*, in some ways it presented itself as a cyclical process. Not only were participants remaining resilient for and in connection to the Black community, they were also driven by the Black community in a reciprocal way. Recall the societal context of the time of this study. Participants were living through #BlackLivesMatter protests, uprisings at the University of Missouri and similar others across the country, and general revolutionary forms of resistance by Black students across campuses nationwide. These forms of resistance fueled academic resilience for the participants. When discussing her Black identity and its connection to resilience, Chloe referenced the broader forms of resistance

happening across the country. Essentially, Chloe found pride and motivation from living in a time when Black communities are standing up and protesting for liberation and fair treatment.

Well, I'm always proud to be Black [she smiles] especially since everything that's going on, I would say it kind of increased my wanting to show that I'm Black. I don't really know how to explain it.... I'm proud to be Black. I just don't really know how to explain what its like, all the controversy that's going on. It kinda, it either will push you to wanta make a difference or kinda make you draw back, but for me, it pushed me (Chloe, senior, Black female)

Similarly, Simba, a junior at Midwest, referenced protests at the University of Missouri as a renewed source of energy while continuing his academic matriculation at Midwest. He was so connected to the frustrations of students at MIZZOU, he participated in active protests held on his own campus. During our one-on-one interview he argued the protests at MIZZOU as a motivating force for him "to do his part" on Midwest's campus.

When we was having the protest last month, I definitely was feeling it. I was feeling like I could do everything. Like I said, classes, I mean, cuz classes was still going on. We [were] spending a lot of time doing other things too. Particularly, I guess I'm gonna speak about Mizzou, which was a university in Missouri that was just, the academic, the football team started the protest just because the racial injustices going on on campus and because it could've happened here. It was, I mean, kind of the same institution, just in different states going through the same but maybe different situations and the fact that, it's not that often that stuff like that happens....how they feel and so with them, with them starting a movement like that, I just wanted to do my part in making sure that I did

everything I could to push it forward because, you know, I want students like that to share their voices here on this campus. (Simba, junior, Black male)

Beyond the political and social drive participants were feeling in response to the protests and nation-wide uprisings, participant resilience was also fueled by smaller scale relational experiences within the Black community. During the focus group, J a junior who was academically recessed discussed the ways “Seeing other Black people speak up [on campus]” and be academically engaged influenced her to do the same in moments when she was unsure. Thus, while she remained in response to her relationships with other Black students, she also found encouragement and motivation from her relationships with other Black students; their presence positively influenced her ability to remain resilient.

During our one-on-one interview, Paul, a Midwest senior at the time of the interview, expanded this sentiment when he shared the ways his resiliency is fueled by relationships and seemingly small daily interactions with the Black community across campus. In the excerpt below, he describes his daily interactions with other Black people around campus as affirming and refueling.

And so yeah, I think, I think those, I think the experiences of being affirmed in my Blackness and being able to share, share those experiences with other Black people has been, yeah, has kept me here and kept me going, I think, academically, professionally, socially, politically in all of those different sort of respects (Paul, senior, Black male)

He went on to situate the importance of these affirming experiences within the context of attending a PWI and how these experiences fuel his ability to remain resilient and how they are also foundationally radical. As shown below, the radical nature of the small daily interactions are

rooted in the sense of onliness and invisibility experienced by Black students at PWIs on a daily basis.

When I see somebody on the street, if I see a Black person or I see a person of Color on the street and it's somebody I know, or even if it's somebody I don't know, but more times than not, it's someone that I know, so stopping with them and having a 30, 45 second conversation, it's something that's really important to me because of all that it signifies. Especially on a campus in which you're hyper visible but also invisible at the same time. And where people might overlook you or people might have assumptions about you or, you know, people might interact or engage with you in a particular way because of all of these sort of coded messages that have been indoctrinated into them because of all of these -isms and societal things that we mentioned earlier. Not only is it like, you know, 'you good?' 'are you okay?' Right? But also we see each other...we acknowledge each other. And because so much of the day you go through campus or you might go through wherever, and that might not be the way that people engage with you, just taking the time to do that is something I think that's very radical in essence (Paul, Senior, Black male)

Paul's discussion of affirming experiences around his Blackness across the Midwest community on a daily basis is extremely important. His discussion illuminates the outward influencers of academic resilience by way of "who/what" participants remain in college for, and connects to the broader need for community. Moreover, as discussed further in Chapter 6, Paul's intentionality is pivotal as he actively creates a counterspace (Solózano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000) for his "invisible" existence at Midwest. Counterspaces are literal or emotional spaces, which are culturally affirming for students of Color within larger exclusionary public universities

(Solózano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000). Further, his discussions help to communicate the need for a layered support system, which I present next as the third primary theme entitled, The Village Model.

“They raised a doctor” – The Village Model and Academic Resilience

The village model theme refers to the layered and multiple sources of support participants within this study received and the ways students see them connected to their ability to remain resilient. This particular theme is called the village model as it represents the ancient African proverb: It takes a village to raise a child. The layered and multiple sources of support collectively represent a connected village. This connected village as a theme, is the largest and broadest sweeping theme and is illuminated by the experiences of all 10 participants during their matriculation at Midwest. The aspects of the village represented by participants within this study include (1) support from friends and family, (2) mentorship, (3) sense of community, and (4) faculty or staff, which make up the sub-themes. Many of the aforementioned sub-themes are fluid and co-exist; in some instances, a friend may also be seen as a mentor, faculty or staff person may also be seen as a friend. Lastly, in discussing relationships with Black faculty or staff, I have included a final sub-theme, which I refer to as the (5) key relationships with Black faculty and staff, which focuses specifically on support from Black faculty or staff. More than just a source of support, students found relationships with Black faculty or staff on campus to be particularly necessary. For a majority of the students, the race of their faculty or staff support stood out to them in important ways and increased their ability and likelihood to seek and receive support from Black faculty or staff. Throughout the interviews, students randomly introduced names of meaningful individuals all of whom the students perceived as Black for one reason or another. I followed up on this phenomena during the focus group and garnered a better

understanding of the importance of a connection to the Black community on participants' ability to remain academically resilient, particularly at a PWI.

Also important to note is access to financial resources as a source of support. I chose not to include access to financial resources as a sub-theme because participants were awarded financial aid in most cases simply based on their income status at the time of admittance to the institution. However, I wanted to acknowledge financial support and access to financial resources as an important factor in the lives of participants. Particularly regarding financial aid, similar to support from faculty, financial support was vital for students to gain access to and remain at the institution, and for some students access to it decreased levels of stress which positively influenced their resilience.

Support from Friends and Family. The first sub-theme, support from friends and family, collectively represents the individuals closest emotionally to participants. Support from friends and family took on many forms including words of encouragement, a listening ear, or tough love. Throughout all of the interviews, participants described their friends and family as “very supportive” – Chloe, “reliable” – Carter, and “always there” – MJ, among other things.

No one communicated the village model quite as clear as George did. During our one-on-one interview, George, who is a junior at Midwest, shared his life-long dream of becoming a doctor. From a very young age he was surrounded by family, teachers, friends of family, and community members who supported him and pushed him toward his dream. Additionally, despite losing his father and grandfather during his teenage years, he was still offered mentorship and male role models as a part of a male mentorship program within his local community. As he imagined accomplishing his dream of becoming a doctor during his one-on-one interview, he said “they raised a doctor.”

And to sit and think about how proud my mom will be of me, and if she's here or not, but just think about my sister, and my family and my teachers that'll still be around to say, you know, that they raised a doctor. They raised a doctor and to know that in my, in the work that I'll be doing, I will also be able to call some of my students doctors when they get to that point as well. (George, junior, Black male)

His use of "they" illuminates the ways multiple support people connect to provide a unified source of support for the participants within this study.

From friends, participants felt as if they belonged at Midwest, felt connected to others with similar goals, and were pushed to stay focused. Carter, a senior at Midwest works for his college and overtime has developed strong relationships with faculty and staff within his college. He felt well connected to resources on campus and help when he needed it. However, despite his well-rounded connections on campus and in his college, his friends are what stand out most for him as it relates to his academic resilience. During our one-on-one interview he explained his friendships, the importance of them and how they keep "him going at this school."

I think most of it was my friends. In terms of actually keeping me at this school, the fact that I had friends who, I mean, I don't know, I could talk to about whatever was really important to me and I think that the staff of the college was important. I don't know if the staff of the college could've kept me here the way my friends did because a part it was at the end of the day, literally at the end of the day, not abstractly, actually at the end of the day, these are the people that I get to spend the night with, or a couple of hours or whatever and then, be distracted or whatever and I feel like that was something that I definitely needed in that, that kind of reinforced this idea that it actually really matters how you're doing emotionally and mentally and if these are the people who are

supporting you in that way, then these are the people who are making this experience really special for you... but I just think that at the end of the day, my friends kinda kept me here (Carter, senior, Black male)

For some participants, mentorships and friendships were co-existent, where a single individual serves both roles. Mentors are typically older individuals who provide guidance and wisdom to a younger mentee. In this study, friends became mentors and mentors became friends, but in either case, the relationship itself was vital to a mentee's ability to remain resilient. During our one-on-one interview, Chloe, a senior at Midwest, talked about the importance of connecting with older students during her first year. Although connections with older students does not automatically constitute mentorship, in Chloe's, case the two seemed to intertwine. The older students served as mentors to her and her friends, connecting them to resources, providing a family like atmosphere, and guiding them through their first year.

I will say, and I don't even remember all their names cuz we lost contact but one of my, my former friends, her [older] cousins and everyone were up here, they were seniors and we were freshmen. And they kinda took us in under their wings, they would cook us dinner and stuff like that or they [would] tell us different resources for studying and things like that. We'll go over to their house and spend the night. So I would say having the older friendships is something that definitely helped me my freshman year. (Chloe, senior, Black female)

Lyric had a similar experience with an older female student who she felt positively influenced the way she became involved on campus and encouraged her to remain engaged.

My mentor. I feel like she's my friend... I look up to her and I tell her all the time, you really inspire me. She's says no, you inspire me. You make me wanta do better, Lyric ...

But I just never met somebody who really was doing a lot of things but still is down to earth. Still can cuss you out. Still can check you. And educate you all in the same breath so I just feel that's somebody I look up to. Every time we talk, I feel like somebody sees herself in me and is pushing me to do better. Her just being honest about her experience. That experience with her made me [feel] like, okay, I can be a firecracker and still, you know, progress the way I wanta progress. I can still go through stuff and still get through it some kind of way. I can still overcome the GPA and still do what I wanta do and get the degree I wanted to get and get to the grad school I wanta get into (Lyric, junior, Black female)

Lyric and her mentor connected over similar challenges at Midwest, which helped them to develop a strong friendship. As Lyric mentioned, she felt she could see herself in her mentor, and her mentor frequently told her she could see herself in Lyric. This shared sense of understanding and shared experience made a difference in the level of support she was able to receive from her mentor. Simba, a junior at Midwest, also developed a close relationship with an older Black male student he felt he could see himself in. Via his relationship with his mentor he learned how to network, was connected to various resources on campus, and was, in his own words, exposed to Black culture.

So that's kinda how I ended up networking, networking with [him] just because he had a program and I came there and I was a freshman ... we just ended up being real close and he hit me up to go to see Melissa Harris Perry at a different university and that was kinda my first exposure to Black culture beyond what I was doing myself.... my organization was all freshmen so that was my first big exposure. And then, then we went to the Black Solidarity Conference at Yale and that's kinda when I really got a good understanding on

the culture. He was constantly telling me, he seen a little bit of me in him and that's what made him kinda put more energy into me. (Simba, junior, Black male)

From family, participants found solace in their ability to renew their sense of belief in themselves and space to relieve stress. When asked if there were any people in her life who were key to her ability to remain academically resilient, J talked about her Grandma and how she prayed for her in moments of stress. During our one-on-one interview, she said "my grandmother definitely, she [does] the prayer warrior thing. So it's easy to talk to her and have her pray for me and I actually feel relieved" (J, junior, Black female).

Similar to prayer, many of the participant's family members offered words of affirmation and encouragement. When asked how her family supported her, Chloe answered specifically about encouraging words from her Aunt who recently passed. During our one-on-one interview and demonstrated in the excerpt below, Chloe reflected on her aunt constantly telling her she was smart and she could do it, whenever she was under stress.

Because I get stressed out easily and she'll always tell me you know, you'll be okay.

You're smart. You've got this. And I always just think of her in the back of my mind, like when I wanta give up and stuff (Chloe, junior, Black female)

Throughout the various interviews, participants also referred to sacrifices made by family members, which put participants in a position to emotionally and financially support participants while in college. Jovan, a senior at Midwest, spoke candidly about his mother working several jobs to help him fund college. "My mom always worked, two or three jobs. She worked pretty hard to try to help me out and it worked out for the better." Similar to all study participants, Jovan also continued to work during his college matriculation. His mother's financial support helped to assuage the financial strain he otherwise may have faced. As such, and for many

reasons, he considered his mom as one of his top supporters, “my mom definitely in terms of people, out of all the people I previously named here, you know, that wanta see me succeed.”

Moms seem to play a special place in the lives of participants. All mentioned receiving significant support from their mothers, which was tied directly to their ability to remain resilient during their college matriculation process; both by way of emotional support and support in navigating the college process. Although, none of the participant’s mom’s attended college, one participant’s mother works for Midwest and was able to learn some of the navigation points of the university system. For Lyric, a junior at Midwest, her mom working at the institution and having knowledge about various opportunities made a difference in her access to university program participation during the summer prior to her first year and throughout her first year.

So my mom is very proactive. She’s a little more proactive than I am so she went on the Midwest website and found free programs. I was part of the [college transition] program so I came up and did my little orientation with them and then I did [summer bridge program]. And then I also did [business school transition program]. So I did a whole bunch of programs that summer. (Lyric, junior, Black female)

Lyric’s mom’s knowledge of the university also made a difference in her ability to navigate her mental health concerns during her first year. Conversations with her mom lead Lyric to seek resources regarding accessing a medical withdraw during the semester, which kept her from likely being recessed.

It’s a lot of things on this campus that if my mom didn’t work... My mama works at Midwest. She works at the [satellite] campus for [one of the colleges]. So this is how she knew like ‘oh, there’s a program’. If my mama wasn’t plugged with the school, I wouldn’t have that knowledge of programs, resources, policies that I didn’t... My mom

was the one saying ‘you can do a medical withdraw. You need to tell her you need to do that’. Had she not worked for the school, I wouldn’t have known and just because she worked for the school doesn’t mean that I can get my tuition half off for five years. She’s still getting very low income working for the university. So she has the faculty member [knowledge] but it’s still, we’re still low income. (Lyric, junior, Black female)

Lyric’s experience illuminates the importance of all students having a clear understanding of their resources on campus and the ways they can navigate the institutional policies to the best of their ability. For many of the students this understanding and navigational insight came from relationships with faculty and staff, which serve as the next sub-theme for this particular category.

Support from Faculty and Staff. Support from faculty and staff plays a pivotal role in the lives of participants and their ability to remain resilient at their institution. Relationships with faculty and staff in general as important to student participants is nothing new, as research suggests these relationships, when high quality, positively influence a broad range of student educational outcomes (Anaya & Cole 2001; Bryant, Sax, & Harper, 2005; Kuh & Hu, 2001; Lundberg & Schreiner, 2004; Tinto, 2006). As such, all of the participants spoke of faculty and staff members who connected them to resources, taught them how to be better students, mentored them, advised them on academic issues, and other aspects of college life. Nine of the 10 participants developed strong relationships with key faculty and staff during their first year as a part of the Summer Bridge or first year transition programs they participated in. Key for most participants was the faculty or staff person reached out to them, made initial contact, and have been intentional about maintaining the relationship overtime.

During our one-on-one interview, Paul, a senior at Midwest, shared an experience from his first year when a particular Black male staff person consistently reached out to him regardless of times he denied his support. Paul told me a story about how this particular individual reached out to him over and over again, despite Paul's refusal to accept his assistance. However, overtime, his persistence paid off as he and Paul ended up developing a close relationship and where Paul benefited greatly from his support.

It was kinda a constant battle because he'd say man, you should come to [this organization], and I'm saying, I don't know. And so even when I wasn't in the organization itself, I think [I saw] him as a resource, as a friend, as someone who would just check on me. It was my freshman year, and so I talked to him about things and he'd say, 'well, you know they've got the math learning center right there'. Oh, okay. Yeah, I should probably do that. He'd say, 'yeah, you know... you're having trouble, what have you done? Why are you having trouble? What is it? Is it the experience in the class? Is it the relationship with the professor? Is it, you know', and so he would kinda help me think critically about things, and so he was very resourceful in terms of connecting me to other resources on campus but also just kinda sitting down with me and helping me realize that my education is my own and that I have autonomy over that. I think that was very big and definitive for me. (Paul, senior, Black male)

Similarly, Jovan found relationships with faculty and staff to be particularly useful, as he felt they wanted him to succeed; "one thing I really like about Midwest that really got me to come here was everyone wants to see you succeed." More specifically, Jovan's relationship with faculty and staff was incredibly important to connecting him to resources. As a result, he has been intentional about using campus resources on a regular basis, even when it perhaps did not

work out the way he hoped. During our one-on-one interview, he shared his experience with participation in a first year transition program. As a part of first year seminar class, he was able to access resources like extra tutoring sessions for certain classes, and writing support, while making connections with Midwest's career services, just to name a few. Like many of the participants, Jovan was greatly resourceful and took connecting with the various resources around campus very serious.

I came in through [this transition] program and that was a really big help. The study sessions and the freshman seminar class, at the time, it seemed redundant but looking back on it, it was, it was a really good class and helped me out a lot. The support system...career services, learning centers, tutoring, recitations, extra recitations. Office hours. Writing lab, resume workshops. I've used every resource. My freshman year, I didn't know how to tie a tie. I went and learned how to tie a tie. Didn't know how to write a cover letter, how to properly form a resume. I went to career services. I was in the math learning center every day. Still failed [the class]. But I've [still] used every resource possible. You know, [several faculty and staff members], just a lot of people I met my freshman year who just kind of were very impactful. And they didn't necessarily have to steer me in the right direction. You know, what they had to say just connected with me.

(Jovan, senior, Black male)

Throughout the interviews, participants shared experiences with key faculty and staff who stood out to them, who have made a difference in their lives, and have been foundational to their ability to remain resilient at the institution. Because of my knowledge of the particular institution, I know many faculty and staff members on campus well. As students mentioned names of particular people, I began to notice a phenomenon: all names mentioned were those of

Black faculty or staff. Even in the experiences shared above, both Jovan and Paul referenced Black faculty or staff as vital in their matriculation. As I reviewed the data and began to analyze the ways students receive support and from whom, the key relationships these students had with Black faculty and staff were illuminated further. During the follow-up focus group, I revisited with students about their perhaps unconscious, but important connections to Black faculty and staff, particularly given their attendance at a PWI. This phenomenon is discussed further in the following final sub-theme.

Key Relationships with Black Faculty and Staff. Participants found support from faculty and staff to be important in their ability to remain resilient at Midwest. However, students consistently communicated meaningful experiences and relationships with Black faculty and staff as having made a difference in their academic matriculation. I am not suggesting participants did not have relationships with White faculty and staff, but in their communication about their interactions with Black faculty and staff, there was something different, perhaps more emotional happening. During some of the one-on-one interviews, participants described interactions with Black faculty and staff as “revolutionary” (Paul), and “important” (Simba), while during the focus group, participants described them as “family like” (Lyric). In either case, as Black, first generation, low-income college students at Midwest, participants found relationships with Black faculty and staff to be vital and necessary.

One experience that has stayed with me since my one-on-one interview with Paul is how an interaction with a Black Midwest staff member solidified his decision to attend the institution. Recall, Paul is a senior at Midwest and is from a metropolitan and predominantly Black area about an hour from the university. He describes the interaction below, which happened at

orientation, and made all the difference in his college going process. When asked why he decided to attend Midwest he shared the following:

Paul - I always have a story that I tell. One, some of the other places that I applied to weren't providing me enough aid so that ruled out a lot of places. But then I visited here and specifically when I came to orientation, after all the orientation activities, I was sitting on a bench right outside of [one of the residence halls] and a lady came up and she [said], 'hey'. And I [said], I don't know if she's talking to me or not. She [said], 'yeah, hey', so I [said], oh, hey, how are you? And she [said] 'I'm good, how are you'. I [said] 'I'm fine. Just got done with orientation?' I [said] yeah, just finished, just kinda relaxing, waiting for my mom to get up here. And she [said], 'okay, well, I'm glad that you made the decision to come here. Do you know where you're staying?' I [said] 'I think I'm staying at one of the residence halls' and she [said], 'that's where my office is. If you ever need anything, come talk to me'. And so it was really cool cuz in [my hometown], you don't really talk to nobody like that. And so that was kinda revolutionary for me cuz it was like well, she don't even know who I am. She just came up to talk to me. And she was Black, and I had just spent basically a whole orientation session where I was there was no Black folks, for real. And so [it was] interesting. That moment was very affirming.

Jasmine – so you kinda needed that

Paul - Yeah, uh huh. And so for that to happen and then for it to just feel so genuine, I think for me, that's when I said 'I think I'll be okay [here]', and so I think all of those things kinda coalesced to make the decision to come here.

Even prior to beginning on campus as a student, for Paul this single interaction with a Black Midwest staff member has stayed with him. While on campus, he has gone on to have numerous important and meaningful relationships with Black faculty and staff, so much so that during his junior year he added an Africana studies minor to his academic course load.

During the focus group, I was able to dig deeper into key relationships with Black faculty and staff had by participants. As I described what I noticed around the number of Black faculty or staff people named during one-on-one interviews, participants nodded around the table and affirmed what I noticed in the importance of their relationships with Black faculty and staff. I wanted to better understand the ways they saw relationships with Black faculty and staff as different from relationships with other faculty and staff and why these relationships were so important to their ability to remain resilient while matriculating through Midwest. Simba suggests while he does not outright seek to develop relationships only with Black faculty or staff, he feels more closely connected to and supported by Black faculty and staff.

Well, in my experiences the most influential members of faculty and staff definitely were Black. Maybe, maybe one that wasn't. And it seemed like they, [Black faculty or staff], had this attitude that, one, they would try to understand your story or they'd try to listen to your story. They understand where you're coming from. And it's just something to connect over. I don't know, with all the White [faculty and staff], they hit you with the I wanta understand, or they've studied something [about] what's it like to be Black but you know, it's just, I don't know. It's easier to connect with the Black professionals or the Black professors. And like I said, a lot of times, the Black professors will kinda go out of their way sometimes to help you. I got a Black professional who I actually have this person's number as a mentor and I can text them sometimes and have since I was a

freshman. So you know, it's just, you don't ever get no White professor that's gonna open up to you in that form. And so you do notice, cuz I mean, nobody's color blind so you do realize that's a Black person. You're a Black person, but it's not like you just chose that person because they're Black. It's just somehow involved in the package.

(Simba, junior, Black male)

Within the focus group, Simba went on to describe the difference in the relationship he has with White faculty or staff members. He described the relationship as useful; it served as way to connect him to resources and opportunities, but he still did not feel as "close" to White faculty and staff as he did to Black faculty or staff.

The one White faculty that I kinda got connected with, he was definitely in my major but I was a supply chain management major and we would go on these trips to see different companies and what not and so she was supportive in the measure of trying to get me to apply to stuff, it still wasn't like a family thing, but it was definitely a really good mentorship, relationship, I guess you could say. And it was definitely just the dynamic of it, but you just somehow feel closer to the Black folk (Simba, junior, Black male)

Similarly, for Lyric, the relationships with Black faculty and staff are very much like a family. She feels supported, understood, and comfortable with them in ways she does not with White faculty and staff. Furthermore, she finds the family like relationship allows for the space to "get checked" or told to refocus by Black faculty or staff. For her, this tough love is reminiscent of home. When describing her relationships with Black faculty and staff on campus she described the family aspect of relationships with Black faculty and staff who seemed to go over and beyond the call of duty to push her toward her goals. She described the relationship as

one where she can cry, be herself, share her spirituality, and be educated on things going on around her.

I have mentors but it's just, it's just something about the family aspect. I have [this Black academic advisor]. I went to her office just when I changed my major. She prayed for me. 'Here's my number. You need to come back. You wanta come eat'. That family piece that you don't get cuz you not at home or [this other Black professor], I've been talking to him, he cut into me [saying] 'so my exam, you didn't pass the exam. What's going on? I don't know. You need to get it together'. That family aspect, it feels like oh I'm getting checked because I'm not on my stuff, or I need guidance. You're gonna come help me. So you're gonna go out your way to get these resources to help me understand, 'oh, there's a program for you. You haven't applied yet. You need to apply'.... Just that family aspect and that, they kinda know your struggle... How do you know my struggle in this is 2016, and you still relate to me, I can still cry to you and say this is what happened. 'I know, I understand. Here's some literature, read about it, come back and we can talk'. That's just that family, gravitational, you get it, I don't gotta say too much. Versus with White faculty, you have to go through loops and hoops to explain, first, how you feel, to the historical background, two and three, how can you help me and then they probably still can't help you. (Lyric, junior, Black female)

Within her relationships with them, she felt affirmed, validated, and supported, which were similar and shared experiences between all participants.

Among the participant experiences, with Black faculty and staff, there was one outlier. Toni, who was in a department on campus with only three Black faculty members, two of which she disclosed were away much of her time in the program, only had a single significant

relationship with Black faculty and staff people in her department. Unfortunately, the faculty person with whom she had the relationship left the institution for a different university. During the focus group discussion, as other participants were describing their experiences with Black faculty, Toni decided to share a similar experience she had with a White faculty person. I include this outlier within the Black faculty and staff heading because of its similarities to the ways students described their experiences with Black faculty. Additionally, she felt strongly about a relationship she had with this individual, which she felt resembled the ways other participants described their relationships with Black faculty or staff. She described the close relational bond she felt between them and the ways their relationship was vital to her ability to remain academically resilient at Midwest. Within her description of the relationship, she acknowledged the ways the administrative person advocated for her, supported her, checked on her and seemed to genuinely care for her.

It's just interesting to me because I'm actually closer to White faculty and I don't know if that's because I'm in [a particular college] and the disproportion of faculty of Color. The closest person is our assistant dean and he's a White male. And every single thing you guys described about Black faculty, he is that for me. And he's that person that always pushes me continuously before, cuz my professors will say something to him like yeah, Toni's not doing too good but even before that, or even before the semester, he sends me notes and emails cuz we have a very informal emailing relationship, it's so funny, but he sends me emails all the time about just being okay. Taking it one step at a time regarding my health. Just academics, and it's okay if you don't get it right the first time. So it's just really interesting. So I don't know if it has to do with me being in [a particular college]

but most of my people I look up to, I won't say look up to but most of my help is from White people. (Toni, junior, Black female)

In Toni's description of the relationship she has with a White staff person in her college, she sheds light on the importance of the relational aspects of their relationship. For her, the actual familial connection was necessary, even if she had to go outside of her race to find it. Within their relationship, Toni felt supported, cared about, and looked after even though the staff person was White. I include Toni's experience within this particular subtheme of relationships with Black faculty and staff because, while the faculty person is White, the description of the relationship is similar to that of her peers and their relationships with Black faculty and staff. Furthermore, in her description of their relationship, Toni first discloses the lack of access to Black faculty and staff in her department and how this influenced her ability and desperate need to develop a relationship with this particular, regardless of his race. During the focus group discussion, she openly considered if this particular relationship was a result of her particular college having a disproportionately low number of Black faculty compared to the number of Black students. Nevertheless, her experience still outlines the familial aspect other participants seem to get from Black faculty and staff, and that Toni herself once received from a specific Black faculty person, before she left Midwest.

As referenced above, the fact relationships with faculty and staff in general are important to students in college is nothing new. However, the familial type of relationships participants referenced within this study reiterate what Fries-Britt and Turner (2002) noted in their study of students at HBCUs who perceived supportive Black faculty as willing to go "beyond the call of duty" (p. 321) and what Collins (2000) called "othermothering." As discussed in greater detail in Chapter 6, othermothering is specifically discussed regarding Black faculty and staff taking

extensive care of Black students while away at college, as if in place of their mother.

Othermothering is demonstrated above as students discuss the ways Black faculty or staff look after them, connect with them, check them, and care for them.

Othermothering as a framework for faculty and staff, helps to illuminate the key relationships between participants and Black faculty and staff, which arose as participants in the current study spoke about important relationships with Black faculty and staff. While participants seem to be particularly drawn to Black faculty and staff, it is not only because they are Black. In some cases, the drawing in is because of a perceived or actual familial connection students gained from the relationships with Black faculty and staff. Further, as a Black student matriculating through a PWI, one must consider the previously shared experiences, which include multiple types of daily microaggressions, systemic oppression and racism, lack of access to resources due to class, and varied histories within urban communities and under-resourced high schools. When participants say things such as “relate,” “understand,” and “know my story,” in relation to their relationships with Black faculty and staff, one must consider those interactions within the broader racialized and classed context of their experience.

Chapter Summary

In Chapter 5 I presented the compelling counter-stories, or findings, of the 10 participants within my study. The findings as they arose from interviews and focus group with participants. I utilized a critical race methodology to collect and analyze the data, which brought me to the three primary themes (1) intrinsic motivation, grit, and academic resilience (2) sense of obligation to family, friends and the broader Black community, and (3) the village model, which I present as basic components of the academic resilience of Black, first generation, low-income students studying at Midwest University.

While participants are situated within a collegiate experience layered with racism, financial struggle, systemic oppression, and the effects of wide-ranging campus protests across the country, students remained resilient in their pursuit of a college degree. As Black, first generation, low-income college students, participants communicated experiences and behaviors that counter statistical assumptions about their possible failure. As opposed to being unengaged and uninterested academically, participants like Jovan, George, Carter, and Paul took advantage of every possible resource on campus and went over and beyond in their coursework to ensure a passing grade. As opposed to having little to no relationships with faculty and staff, participants like Chloe, MJ, and Lyric had incredibly meaningful, family-like relationships with specifically Black faculty and staff. Instead of giving up, participants like Toni, Lyric, Simba, and J battled with mental and physical health concerns, academic recess and homelessness to remain at the institution. Additionally, I must also acknowledge while there was some conversation around participants' experiences with socio-economic class and lack of financial resources, much of our discussion was rooted in their experiences as Black students at a PWI. As such, they negotiated between the saliency of identities, and their intersectionality, was in fact negotiated. Nevertheless, for these participants, having strong intrinsic motivation, a sense that attending and completing college was bigger than them, and having access to a well-connected village of support, made the difference in their ability to remain resilient.

In Chapter 6, the final chapter, I present the discussion and implications of the themes and the ways they can and should inform future practice and research for working with Black, first generation, low-income college students at PWIs. The implications discussion includes perspectives from participants regarding the ways they see institutional responsibility. Additionally, in an effort to use this platform to elevate further the voice of participants, I include

a special discussion focused specifically on what participants would like to tell others from similar backgrounds. Lastly, I close the chapter with a concluding discussion of the study and its importance.

CHAPTER SIX

Discussion, Implications, Recommendations and Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to explore the in-environment experiences that lead to or contribute to academic resilience for Black, first generation, low-income college students attending a Midwestern PWI. The following research question and sub-questions guided the research study and connected the use of CRT (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012), IEO (Astin, 1993), LMSS (Padilla et al., 1997) and the overarching purpose of the study:

What are the factors contributing to the academic resilience of Black, first generation, low-income college students studying at a 4-year predominantly White institution?

The answers to the guiding research question were elicited through a critical race methodology which assisted me in conducting semi-structured interviews of 10 students who self-identified as Black, first in their family to attend college, and from low-income backgrounds. Chapters 4 and 5 presented participant profiles, the environmental context, and the co-constructed interpretation of students' experiences. Therefore, the purpose of Chapter 6 is to offer a summarization of findings through connections between themes, conclusions, macro and micro theories, and relevant literature. Additionally, the final portion of the chapter focuses on practical recommendations and suggestions for future research.

The previous chapter revealed three themes that I identified as vital factors to academic resilience in the lives of participants. The three themes are (1) intrinsic motivation, grit, and academic resilience; (2) academic resilience and the sense of obligation to friends, family, and the broader Black community; and (3) the village model and academic resilience, were important aspects of academic resilience for participants who identify as Black, first generation, and from low-income backgrounds. Together, the themes demonstrate the layered ways participants

engage with their college environment, which includes their home communities, campus experiences, and macrosystem to remain academically resilient within a space that is rife with class- and race-based oppression. In the forthcoming sections, I discuss these themes in relation to literature presented in Chapter 2, paying close attention to the macro and micro theories together served as a framework for the study.

The development of the three themes stem from a CRT lens sought to center and validate the lived experiences of Black students in relation to academic resilience during their college matriculation in a predominantly White space. CRT as a methodological approach foregrounds race and racism in all aspects of the research process and also “challenges the separate discourses on race, gender, and class by showing how these three elements intersect to affect the experiences of students of Color” (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002, p. 24). Both the foregrounding of race and the intersectional experiences presented within this study are further discussed by relating research and scholarship to the current study’s findings in the coming sections. In addition to the use of CRT, the three themes also connect back to the micro theories discussed in Chapter 2, which included Astin’s (1993) inputs-environments-outcomes (IEO) model of college effects and Padilla et al.’s (1997) local model of student success (LMSS). The connections between the themes, the aforementioned theories, and literature, is discussed in the following sections.

Macro Theory – Critical Race Theory

Recall, CRT served as the macro theory to the study, while LMSS and IEO served as micro theories. CRT argues race is a normal part of society and therefore influences our daily experiences (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012). As the macro theory, CRT provided provided space to explore the academic resilience of participants through a racialized and intersectional lens.

Furthermore, using counter-storytelling and critical race methodology (Solózano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000), the current study centered lived experiences and honors situatedness.

Particularly for the participants in the current study, racialized experiences influenced their ability and desire to remain resilient in multiple ways. While the current study took an intersectional approach, aiming to explore academic resilience factors for Black, first generation, low-income college students, participants often communicated their experiences first through a racialized lens, which is consistent with Thomas (2000), Twine and Warren (2000), and West (1993) who suggested that race is one of the most salient characteristics in many students lives. As demonstrated in Chapter 5, regardless of the question asked, many of the experiences shared centered participants' race first, with added layers of intersections with the other two identities or additional identities (i.e. mental/physical health). This further reiterates the importance of a CRT framework as it provides space for an intersectional approach, but centers an institutional and individualized look at the ways race and racism influence one's every day lived experiences (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995).

The primary themes which arose from the current study, (1) intrinsic motivation, grit, and academic resilience; (2) sense of obligation to family, friends and the broader Black community; and (3) the village model, illuminate the ways participants were able to traverse various barriers and challenges during their matriculation at a PWI. More specifically, their experiences are situated within a broader racialized and class-based context, which suggests their experience is a result of or in response to this broader context.

The intrinsic motivation and grit students used in order to remain resilient through challenges is a result of past interrelated experiences they have had in regard to their race and class, among other things. Participants consistently shared challenging experiences from their

youth. Some were perhaps “normal” challenges faced during adolescence such as divorce, death of family members, and academic challenges in classes. However, participants in this study faced challenges that were much more common for students from low-income backgrounds and compounded when interrelated with race, such as being homeless, attending under-resourced schools, or having a parent in jail or absent all together. Having faced such challenges throughout their youth and adolescent growth, participants developed a sense of grit, which has carried them through their most challenging times. White (2016) argued that “many [first generation, low-income students of Color] have succeeded through challenging economic and social conditions with a measure of grit and tenacity that is beneficial in a highly competitive, fast-paced society” (p. 2). Further, Duckworth et al. (2007) and Strayhorn (2014) assert grit positively predicts achievement in the face of challenges over and beyond just skill or talent. Such grit and commitment to long term goals has carried these students through their academic matriculation and is a key component of their ability and desire to remain resilient.

These Black, first generation, low-income college students participants seem to be greatly used to facing challenges based on race and income and overtime have developed a “because I have to” attitude. Thus, the intrinsic motivation they display on a daily basis is not only a character trait of their personality but is a result of their learned responses within their situated environments. Similarly, as they face race and class based challenges during their college matriculation, they draw on past experiences and past challenges they have overcome to display the resilience necessary to remain committed to their long term goals. Intrinsic motivation is only one component of participants’ academic resilience and perhaps suggests that resilience is an individual trait. However, as consistent with findings from Brown, (2008), Luthar, Doernberger, and Zigler (1993), Miller and MacIntosh (1999), and Morales (2008b), my findings assert

participants intrinsic motivation as interacting with multiple variables within the environment. Therefore, my study reiterates that academic resilience does not exist in and of itself, but is instead a result of and in response to in-environment experiences overtime. Further, when associated to the sense of obligation theme and the village model theme, collectively the three themes demonstrate the ways participants' academic resilience were not individual trait, but were developed and deployed in connection to a variety of variables and in response to varied environmental experiences.

The sense of obligation demonstrated via student experiences within this theme showcases the obligation Black students often feel in relation to their families, peers, and the broader Black community (Herndon & Hirt, 2004). Consistent with Jones, Castellanos, and Cole (2002) such a sense of obligation illuminates the burden students of Color often carry as a result of the historical educational exclusion, invalidation, and segregation, which often causes them to feel as if they must change stereotypes, represent their entire community, or as if they are responsible to their communities . As revealed in the experiences from the current study, participant's obligation to remain resilient during their college matriculation is deeply connected to their Black identity but also the ways their Black identity intersects with their identities as first generation and low-income college students. Participants seeing themselves as gatekeepers for siblings, torch carriers for families, and representatives for the broader Black community in spaces where there are few Blacks is consistent with McGee's (2009) findings regarding fragile and robust forms of resilience. Participants in the current study demonstrated robust forms of resilience in their desire to serve as role models to peers and younger family members (McGee, 2009). Simultaneously, participants in the current study also demonstrated fragile forms of resilience through their desire to prove racial stereotypes wrong, and in response to pressure

from family and friends (McGee, 2009). As demonstrated by participants' experiences the sense of obligation in some ways seems to bring the participants great pride but also brings pressure, stress, and frustration. However, even in moments of great stress, participants' resilience was fueled from both their sense of grit or internal motivation and the feeling their college matriculation was indeed bigger than them.

Furthermore, Stephens and colleagues (2012) posit first generation and low-income students as being more likely to express motives of interdependence and a high appreciation for familial and communal collaboration. As such, my findings assert a sense of obligation as more than just a connection to the participants Black identity. The interdependence displayed within this theme also reveals the interrelated nature of their multiple identities as Black, first generation, low-income college students studying at a PWI. The sense of obligation and the ways it fueled participant resilience, also connects to the third theme of the Village Model, which demonstrates the interconnectedness of relationships and support for participant's ability to remain academically resilient during their college matriculation.

As revealed in the findings, all of the participants found great support in an interconnected village of family, friends, faculty and staff, and mentors. This village not only provided great support, but it also served as a source of tough love, connection to necessary academic, financial, and social resources, and a counterspace, which is a physical or emotional space of racial validation and resistance to institutional racism (see Solórzano, Ceja, and Yosso, 2000) within the predominantly White campus of Midwest. While the village adage is deeply connected within Black communities as an African proverb, it also resonates with first generation and low-income college student needs.

The use of the village as a framework for “raising Black children” is not new for Black communities, it is indeed a result of years of interdependent and collective Black communities. The village framework is demonstrated by the ancient African Proverb referenced earlier in the chapter, “it takes a village to raise a child.” For participants of the current study, going off to college did not change the need for this interconnected village. In fact, the need seems to be greater. A CRT analysis suggests for Black, first generation, low-income college students, the need to develop and remain interconnected within a layered village was also created in response to the need to survive and resist challenging racist and classed experiences. The village therefore is a result of the macrosystemic structure, within which students matriculate. Thus village model is both in response to and a result of the broader context of race- and class-based oppression that contributes to the structures of their academic matriculation.

In totality, the three themes demonstrate the components of academic resilience for Black, first generation, low-income college students. Their lives are much more complicated than balancing work and school, or simply dealing with being one of few in a classroom, they must actually deal with all three challenge types. Additionally, such students carry the burden of being the torch bearer for their family, while also being unable to gain from their family the “college knowledge” necessary for a seamless college transition. However, in spite of challenges, participant’s remained resilient. Due to intrinsic motivation and grit, a sense of obligation or responsibility to one’s broader community, and support from a layered village, participants were and continue to overcome barriers great and small during their college matriculation. Understanding these components and the ways they influence matriculation for students from Black, first generation, and low-income backgrounds will assist higher education

institutions in providing stronger sources of support for marginalized populations regardless of race.

The three themes discussed in the current study further illuminate the counter-story of Black, first generation, low-income college students within higher education studies. Too often, such students are described as lazy, at-risk, unengaged, and uninterested in education. These assumptions are microaggressive, and as further demonstrated by the data collected here, they are faulty. The participants within this study shared experiences of being incredibly engaged in their education and their long-term goals despite challenges happening around them.

Furthermore, they were exceptionally resourceful, took great initiative in doing what was required of them to remain at the institution, and sought resources for support as they needed them. For these participants and many students like them, this is their everyday reality, not the negative stereotypes and assumptions that researchers often present about them. This is not to say they are not facing challenges, they are not making mistakes, or that there are not cases where they are entering into the institution being placed at-risk due to their access to pre-college resources, high school environments, or home communities, but despite it all, they are pressing forward and that is the counter-story I present here.

Further inline with CRT, although I have presented findings specifically from Black, first generation low-income college students at a particular institution, race-centered theories such as CRT suggest understanding experiences from underserved or marginalized students helps to illuminate the experiences of all students within higher education (Mazama, 2003). Further, as CRT argues, understanding the components of academic resilience for this particular population also informs the ways institutions can think about how to better develop or contribute to the academic resilience of all students as they face a variety of challenges.

Micro theories – IEO and LMSS

Within the current study I utilized Astin's (1993) IEO model of student engagement and Padilla et al.'s (1997) local model of student success as micro, discipline specific theories to help guide the study. Within these two micro theories, the primary focal points of the current study were the in-environment experiences for participants, four barriers students faced, and the heuristic knowledge students developed and engaged to produce academic resilient outcomes. By focusing on these areas, I was able to examine the guiding research question: *What are the factors contributing to the academic resilience of Black, first generation, low-income college students studying at a 4-year predominantly White institution?* Below I discuss each micro theory and the ways they illuminated participants' experiences with academic resilience at Midwest. I first start with IEO, with a particular focus on inputs interacting with the Midwest environment. Next I discuss NCVs as inputs and the ways they map onto academic resilience in the lives of participants. Lastly, I discuss the theoretical and heuristic knowledge participants developed to overcome the four barriers within the LMSS model.

Inputs, Environment, and NCVs

Participant inputs indeed influenced their ability to remain academically resilient at Midwest. The intentional focus on race, family educational background, and low-income status, allowed for an examination of inputs such as parental background, high school resources, and academic preparation in the experiences of participants. As consistent with literature presented in Chapter 2, when inputs were combined with the environmental aspects of their interactions at Midwest, participants in the current study indeed experienced overt/covert racism (Nadal et al., 2014; Solórzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2001; Tynes, Rose, & Markoe, 2013), microaggressions (McDougle, Way, & Yash, 2008; Solórzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000; Sue et al., 2007), stereotype

threat (Steel & Aronson, 1995; Solórzano et al., 2000; Sue, Capodilupo & Holder, 2008), priority negotiation (Engle & Tinto, 2008; Phinney & Haas, 2003), challenges with the campus climate (Fries-Brit, 2004; Harper, 2012; Solórzano, Ceja & Yosso, 2000; Strayhorn, 2009), challenges with sense of belonging (Lehman, 2007; Strayhorn, 2012) and discontinuity of family support on a daily basis (Davis, 2012; Darling & Smith, 2007; Terenzini et al., 1996; Thayer, 2000; Ting, 1998; York-Anderson & Bowman, 1991). As such, when inputs interacted with the Midwest environment and the broader context of raced and classed based oppression, students faced daily challenging experiences. However, their ability to remain academically resilient is illuminated by exploring the ways NCVs (Sedlacek, 2004) served as inputs, while also as a source of navigation through the challenges faced.

Recall, NCVs refer to variables relating to motivation, adjustment, and student perceptions as opposed to the traditional verbal and quantitative areas typically measured by standardized tests (Sedlacek, 2004). Sedlacek (2004) offers a detailed discussion of eight NCVs as they relate to the persistence of Black collegians. Not surprisingly, realistic self-appraisal; positive self-concept; realistic self-concept; long-range goals; strong support system; leadership; community; and knowing how to navigate the system and understanding racism, which are the eight, have all come up in one way or another in the current study, and span across all three primary themes. NCVs seem to be closely tied to participant experiences prior to college, or during their first year, and their ability to remain academically resilient during their college matriculation, particularly while attending an institution muddled with racism and class-based oppression.

Theme one, intrinsic motivation and grit, can be tightly coupled with positive self-concept, long range goals, and realistic self-appraisal. Intrinsic motivation in relation to

participants' experiences demonstrated a belief in self, a level of high self-esteem, and a "figure out" attitude; all of which, closely relate to a positive self-concept (Sedlacek, 2004). Further, preference for long-range goals refers to participants' ability to continue seeking after a particular goal in spite of challenges (Sedlacek, 2004). Overcoming challenges to continue seeking after a particular goal required participants to demonstrate perseverance and determination overtime (Sedlacek, 2004). Such behaviors are associated with grit and gritty behaviors (Duckworth et al., 2007). Lastly, as participants worked to develop and engage their local knowledge of resources at Midwest, they shared about using academic resources, career service centers, and visiting professor office hours. Such behaviors demonstrate a realistic self-appraisal and commitment to self-development (Sedlacek, 2004).

The community involvement NCV ties closely to participant's sense of obligation to their family, friends, and broader Black community, and fits well within theme two. Simply put, Sedlacek (2004) sees this NCV as referencing participants' identification with and involvement in a particular community. As demonstrated by theme two of the current study, participants were not only involved in their community, specifically the Black community, but they also seen their connection to it in direct relation to their ability or desire or remain academically resilient while at Midwest. Further, participants shared experiences being involved with on campus student organizations and community mentor groups, both of which demonstrate community involvement as Sedlacek (2004) described it.

Theme three, the village model, maps well on to the NCV of strong support system and was vital in fueling participant's ability to remain resilient during their college matriculation. Sedlacek (2004) argues students who have done well in school tended to have a person or group of people from which they gain advice, encouragement, and direction. Similarly, participants

discussed family, peers, mentors and especially Black faculty and staff as a part of this broader system of support. Particularly within the broader context of attending Midwest, a PWI, participants found relationships with and support from Black faculty and staff to be vital in their ability to remain academically resilient.

Lastly, encompassing all three themes and pulling in the macro theory of CRT, is the NCV navigating the system/understanding racism. Sedlack (2004) posits students with this NCV recognize the history of racism and systemic oppression within education and are committed to fighting to improve the existing system. Further, specifically in regard to academic resilience, Morales (2008a) argues in order for underserved students to be resilient at a PWI, they must acknowledge the history of disenfranchisement within the educational system based on race and income. As such, participants' in the current study had experiences with academic resilience within in a broader context of raced and classed based oppression. In such a space it was necessary for participants to understand the ways racism influenced their lives and how to navigate the institutional systems in place at Midwest. Additionally, as Simba and Chloe illustrated in their references to protests at MIZZOU, their interactions with and influence from race and racism went beyond the Midwest campus and included perhaps passive interactions they were having with the media, protests, and nation-wide events. Furthermore, as illustrated by references from Paul, J, and MJ, finding an emotional connection to ancestors and important parts of history fueled participant's ability and desire to remain academically resilient while attending Midwest.

LMSS

Within aforementioned in-environment experiences (i.e., priority negotiation, daily macroaggressions, discontinuity of family support), students were faced with barriers consistent

with LMSS (Padilla et al., 1997), (1) discontinuity, (2) lack of nurturing, (3) lack of presence, and (4) lack of resources, and yet, they still managed to press forward. Padilla and colleagues (1997) argue in order to overcome said barriers, students must develop both heuristic and theoretical knowledge. Within the current study, participants indeed developed both.

Regarding theoretical knowledge, participants consistently took advantage of academic resources made available to them. All participants participated in a first year transition support program of some sort. Whether Summer Bridge or first-year seminar course, all participants were introduced to campus resources early on during the academic matriculation. This early introduction to campus and academic skills positively influenced participant's development of theoretical or book knowledge, which is consistent with scholarly findings in regard to first year transition programs (Conner & Colton, 1999; Noble, Flynn, Lee, & Hilton, 2007; Strayhorn, 2012). As a result of participation in their first year transition programs participants were able to achieve academically despite personal or structural challenges because they developed theoretical knowledge around behaviors associated with academic success. Such behaviors included seeking help from tutoring rooms (Batz, Olsen, Dumont, Dastoor & Smith, 2015; Bowman-Perrott et al., 2013; Feaver, Wasiolek, & Crossman, 2008), meeting with professors (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Komorraj, Musulkin & Bhattacharya, 2010), and engaging in group studying (Feaver, Wasiolek, & Crossman, 2008). The development of theoretical knowledge is part of the LMSS formula to overcome faced barriers, and the development of heuristic knowledge is the second half.

Within the current study, participant's heuristic knowledge is embedded within the three primary themes. What carried them over the four barriers and kept them engaged was their ability to remain intrinsically motivated overtime; their connection and sense of obligation to

friends, family, and the broader Black community, and their layered village of support. Within these three themes, participants were able to develop meaningful relationships with faculty and staff outside of the classroom, connect with and learn from peer mentors, and navigate a culture of racism and classism by remaining connected to a broader community.

The development of theoretical and heuristic knowledge for participants both happened in-environment for all participants, which connects LMSS (Padilla et al., 1997) with IEO (Astin, 1993). Participants arrived at Midwest with varied inputs (i.e., socioeconomic backgrounds, schooling experiences, social identities, etc.), which within the collegiate environment produced outcomes that built upon their preexistent academic resilience. The experiences at Midwest did not produce resilience for participants; they were resilient prior to their arrival at Midwest. Therefore, academic resilience also served as an important input for participants but also is represented as a process-outcome, as participants developed heuristic and theoretical knowledge while employing academic resilience as a result of and in response to their in-environment experiences at Midwest.

Research Questions Revisited

In the previous sections, I offered a discussion of the data that arose in the current study in relation to relevant literature. Further, I unpacked the ways CRT, IEO and LMSS helped to illuminate participants' experiences with academic resilience at Midwest. I will use findings and relevant literature to discuss implications and make recommendations for higher education practice, research, and theory in forthcoming sections. However, I first summarize the discussion and findings section by revisiting the original research question, which was: *What are the factors contributing to the academic resilience of Black, first generation, low-income college students studying at a 4-year predominantly White institution?* I address the primary question, paying

additional attention to the sub-questions, which pushed for nuanced exploration of academic resilience in the given population. The sub questions were as follows: (a) what specific skills, and local knowledge (e.g., heuristic knowledge [Padilla et al., 1997]) do Black, first generation, low-income college students see as vital to their academic resilience? (b) what components of the institutional environment do Black, first generation, low-income college students view as most helpful to their academic resilience? (c) what relationships do Black, first generation, low-income college students see as vital to their academic resilience? (d) what about the nature of these relationships do Black, low-income, first generation college students view as vital to their academic resilience? I will revisit all of the sub-questions first as they lead up to final answers/conclusions regarding the primary question. Although I place relevant areas within subquestions, I acknowledge many of the answers are somewhat blurry and could be used to answer multiple sub questions simultaneously, which makes sense as student experiences do not fit neatly within a box, but are instead blurred lines of understanding and life realities.

The first sub-question was *what specific behaviors and local knowledge (e.g. heuristic knowledge) do Black, first generation, low-income college students see as vital to their academic resilience?* As demonstrated via the stories in Chapter 4 and five students employ a variety of specific behaviors and local knowledge to engage their academic resilience. Such local knowledge includes access to and use of university resources such as the math help centers, tutoring rooms, and the career centers. While many of these sorts of resources are made available at various institutions, participants in this study found them to be closely tied to their ability to remain academically resilient while at Midwest. Further, their participation in various first-year transition programs helped participants to develop this local knowledge in a way that created connection points with on campus resources from the very beginning of their college career. In

regard to behaviors, participants approached their academic matriculation, and life in general with a “must do” attitude. In most cases, and for a variety of reasons, participants did not see failure as an option, but they also seem to maintain high self-efficacy as opposed to a lack of belief in themselves.

The second sub-question was *what components of the institutional environment do Black, first generation, low-income college student’s view as most helpful to their academic resilience?*

As discussed in the previous paragraph, participants found the academic resources offered at the institution (e.g., academic support resources, career resources, first-year transition programs) as most helpful. As evidenced in Chapter 5 participants discussed taking advantage of as many resources as possible, including personnel resources via key relationships with faculty and staff on campus. While this particular question addresses what about the institutional environment was “most helpful,” the challenges presented by the institutional environment being a PWI is also important to note. As demonstrated in Chapter 4 participants repeatedly discussed consistent challenges with daily racism. Much of what they discussed falls into “racial microaggression” categories, also referred to as daily racialized insults. Racial microaggressions, as a term, has become a greater point of focus at Midwest in the past year, with various student organizations hosting a variety of discussions, trainings, and workshops on racial microaggressions. The term itself, however, still equates to experiences with racism for students. Such experiences presented challenges participants would otherwise not face and are arguably counterproductive to their ability to remain academically resilient while at Midwest.

The third and fourth sub-questions were *what relationships do Black, first generation, low-income college students see as vital to their academic resilience? And what about the nature of these relationships do Black, low-income, first generation college students view as vital to*

their academic resilience? In general, experiences of participants in the study suggest relationships with a variety of people and groups are vitally important. These relationships range from parents and family, to community organizations and mentors. Furthermore, in relation to the institution such relationships range from faculty and staff, to peer mentors and friend groups. More specifically, long-term, meaningful, and sustainable relationships with Black faculty and staff were seen as exceptionally “vital” for participants. Not only because of their presence as supportive Black faces, but as an extension of their family away from home. All participants described close and important relationships with their mom and other kin. Therefore, when on campus and away from participant’s families and homes, Black faculty and staff often bridged the gap between the need for close family nearby and the inability for that to exist given the distance between Midwest and participants’ homes.

The types of relationships participants had with Black faculty and staff, in which Black faculty and staff were perceived as going over and beyond their job duties, having a perceived greater understanding of participants’ needs and experiences, holding high expectations for participants, and “checking” participants when they were falling behind academically, are what proved vital to their ability to remain academically resilient. So, the need for relationships with and support from Black faculty and staff was clearly validated within participant’s experiences. However, the experiences also suggest participants need a humanistic, holistic, and supportive approach from all faculty and staff, even perhaps regardless of race.

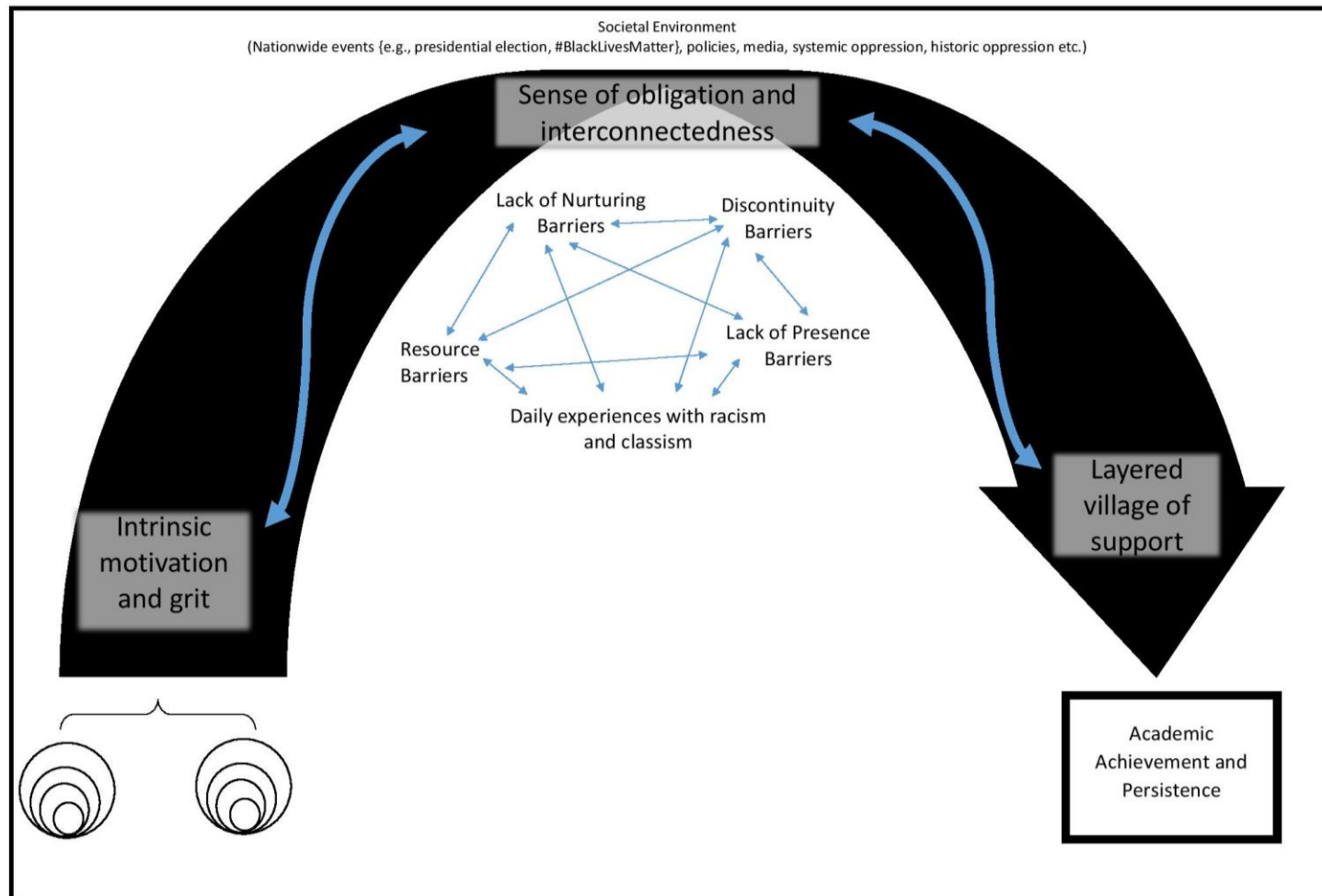
In whole, the above answers to the sub-questions provide greater insight to primary research question *what are the factors contributing to the academic resilience of Black, first generation, low-income college students studying at a 4-year predominantly White institution?* The answers to this question are illuminated via the three themes that arose from the participant

experiences, (1) Intrinsic motivation, grit, and academic resilience; (2) Academic resilience and the sense of obligation to friends, family, and the broader Black community; and (3) The village model and its layered village of support were important aspects of academic resilience for participants who identify as Black, first generation, and from low-income backgrounds. Answers provided for the sub-questions are all represented within the three themes of the study. The behaviors, local knowledge, institutional environment, and type and nature of relationships seen as vital for participants are particularly addressed within the ways participants engaged with their layered village of support, received motivation from their sense of obligation to the Black community, and were able to overcome challenges with their sense of grit and determination.

Conceptual Framework Revisited

As demonstrated in the original conceptual framework (Refer to Figure 1), I sought to explore the ways in-environment experiences influenced participants' academic resilience. Now having a better understating of the factors of academic resilience, I offer added components to the conceptual framework, which help to illuminate what I have found. The added components pay particular attention to the one area that was previously unexplained, the black arrow, which represents the academic resilience bolstered or developed as a result of in-environment experiences had by participants. As described above and represented within the image, the three themes, intrinsic motivation and grit; sense of obligation; and layered village of support work together to provide an environment that bolstered and fostered academic resilience for participants in the study.

Figure 2: Conceptual Framework Revised: This figure shows the conceptual framework slightly revised, after consideration of the data.



Furthermore, one will notice the barriers are positioned differently. In the original framework image, the barriers were in four distinct, isolated, and separate boxes. However, as demonstrated by participant experiences, the barriers actually work in conjunction with one another developing a web of barriers participants needed to navigate and overcome. Additionally, the four barriers presented by Padilla et al. (1997) do not reference specifically the daily experiences with racism and classism as demonstrated by participant's experiences. As such, I have added daily experiences with racism and classism as a fifth barrier. The added fifth barrier indeed serves as an implication for theory, which will be discussed in a later section.

As further represented by the added and changed aspects of the conceptual framework and represented in the current study, participants were not academically resilient solely based on individual characteristic traits but instead thrived, matured, and increased competence by drawing on biological, psychological, and environmental resources (Gordon, 1995), which is consistent with the resiliency literature. Further, participants developed and deployed protective factors such as relationships, resources, and noncognitive factors to mitigate challenges and overcome barriers (Kitano & Lewis, 2005). Such protective factors are seen as vital for academic resilience for students who have such vulnerability areas as being historically underserved or excluded within education due to race, lacking access to financial resources, and being first in their family to attend college (Bryan, 2005; O'Connor, 2002; Wang, Haertel, & Walberg, 1997), which are all true for participants of the current study. Given that participants within the study were academically resilient at entry to Midwest, and their resilience was bolstered based on protective factors engaged, higher education institutions can use this information to make adjustments to the ways underserved students are supported during their college matriculation.

The protective factors participants engaged in are represented amongst the three themes, (1) intrinsic motivation and grit, (2) sense of obligation to family, friends, and the broader Black community, and (3) the village model. Within these three themes, participants were able to draw on biological, psychological, and environmental resources in order to remain resilient amidst challenges they faced during their matriculation (Gordon, 1995). Given these protective factors, the implications for future practice on the part of higher education institutions lies within increasing the ability for said protective factors to exist on PWI campuses. Therefore, what follows is a discussion of various literature and CRT-based ways higher education institutions can bolster components of academic resilience for Black, first generation, low-income college students. Further, the following options discussed are rooted within each of the three themes and presented in that order.

Implications and Recommendations for Future Practice, Research and Theory

At the outset of this study I was committed to using collected data to produce pragmatic solutions for supporting and bolstering the academic resilience of Black, first generation, low-income college students attending PWIs. As such, I see a variety of implications and recommendations for future practice, research, and theory. Because the aim of this study is practice oriented, I first discuss the broad implications and recommendations for practice, followed by a brief discussion of implications for future practice and the use of theory.

Implications and Recommendations for Future Practice

I first discuss two broad implications and recommendations for practice including (a) NCV (Sedlacek, 2004) expansion through first year transition programming and (b) faculty/staff relationships, which discusses the reiterated need for more Black faculty and staff, but also cross-

cultural relationship building techniques between White faculty and staff and Black students at PWIs.

First, I discuss NCVs (Sedlaceck, 2004) and their connection to intrinsic motivation and grit. I further discuss ways higher education institutions can utilize NCVs to bolster academic resilience for Black, first generation, low-income college students, particularly during the first year transition and through the use of transition programming to teach ways of navigating the racialized and classed based context of the institution. Next, I discuss student connections with faculty and staff, which includes a particular focus on the importance of and increased need for Black faculty and a staff at PWIs. Lastly, due to the large number of White faculty at PWIs, I include discussion of ways White faculty can work with Black, first generation, low-income college students to bolster their academic resilience through every day interactions rooted in the CRT framework.

Following a discussion of implications and recommendations for practice and practitioners, I offer a discussion of implications for research and theory. While the implications and recommendations for future research and theory arise from the data itself or during the collection process, some are also in response to the decisions I made during the research process. Lastly, I offer a summative statement to close this chapter and the broader study.

Use of Non-Cognitive Variable (NCVs) in the Development of Grit and Intrinsic Motivation through First year Transition Programming. In-environment characteristics on the part of participants served as a meaningful component of academic resilience within the current study. As a result of the multiple life experiences had by participants, they employed resilient behaviors overtime long before entering Midwest. However, their interactions while at Midwest built upon and added to their preexistent academic resilience. As such, understanding

the ways Black, first generation, low-income college students are already academically resilient upon entering the institution and how institutions can bolster these characteristics is a necessary first step to supporting underserved students. As illustrated above, Sedlacek's (2004) NCVs help to illuminate participant preexistent academic resilience and the ways they remained resilient while at Midwest.

Sedlacek (2004) argues NCVs can be assessed as a part of the admissions process and are a better assessment of a student's likely success within the institution. As such, utilizing information as a part of the first-year transition programming can perhaps lead to ways institutions can bolster academic resilience for specific students. Research suggests first-year transition programs are already great at connecting students to the academic resources necessary to have a strong academic transition (Barefoot, Griffin, & Koch, 2012). Additionally, policy and programmatic interventions are variables linked to grit, with first-year transition programs being one such programmatic intervention (Rojas, Reser, Usher & Toland, 2012; Strayhorn, 2013). First year transition programs often target underserved populations to balance the disparate education outcomes often resulting from attending under resourced high schools (Strayhorn, 2011) or those failing to provide rigorous and standards-based instruction (McDonough & Fann, 2007). Furthermore, scholars suggest the use of first year transition programs to specifically focus on the ease of social, academic, and cultural transition of underserved students (Lee & Barnes, 2015; Quay, Griffin, & Museus, 2015). As represented within the current study, all but one participant took part in some version of a first year transition program and found it as a vital aspect of their Midwest experience and their ability to remain academically resilient.

As discussed in Chapter 4, due to participation in a first-year transition program, participants gained knowledge of academic resources, made connections through key

relationships, and learned basic academic skills such as time management and note taking, which is consistent with transition literature (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Gutierrez, 2007; Kezar, 2001). Many institutions, including Midwest, are using first year transition programs, whether Summer Bridge or first year seminars, to build upon a specific NCV: knowledge of how to navigate the local system of the given institution to connect students to resources, show them where things are physically located around campus, and provide personal connections in various key offices, which is a great way to bolster academic resilience amongst Black, first generation, low-income college students at PWIs. In this way, first year transition programs are able to build upon the NCVs already existent for students upon entry to the institution, while also filling in the virtual holes of the heuristic and theoretical knowledge needed to remain academically resilient at the particular institution or particular institution type.

However, first year transition programs should take a greater focus on the NCV of knowing how to navigate the system and understanding racism within higher education (Sedlacek, 2014). Black, first generation, low-income college students transitioning into a PWI who understand racism within higher education may bolster their academic resilience by combatting and resisting the racialized and classed context within which they matriculate. There is evidence that transition programs are effective at mitigating historic academic inequalities and easing general social transitions (Conner & Colton, 1999; Noble et al., 2007; Strayhorn, 2012). In general, transition programs have proven successful in increasing academic self-efficacy (Strayhorn, 2011), academic and social engagement (Walpole et al., 2008), accessing campus resources (Santa Rita & Bacote, 1997), and social integration (Velásquez et al., 2003). However, with a CRT framework in mind, when first year transition programs intentionally acknowledge the racialized and classed context of higher education institutions to teach skills such as racial

literacy (see Stevenson & Stevenson, 2013), responding to microaggressions, utilizing bias reporting systems on campus, and accessing specialized grant programs, they are building upon the NCVs students have upon entry to better prepare them to be academically resilient during their academic matriculation.

As experiences with microaggressions consistently arose among dissertation participants, first year transition programs working to raise awareness on the psychologically straining effects of encountering such daily microaggressions may have the potential to increase Black students' coping ability (Sue et al., 2008). "One cannot overstate the importance of demystifying microaggressions for Black Americans in producing clarity of vision and a sense of liberation in being able to define their own racial experiences" (Sue et al., 2008, p. 7). Put simply, transition program staff can employ past research to develop curriculum that introduces Black, first generation, low-income college students to potentially unfamiliar concepts (e.g., microaggressions, stereotype threat, cultural capital) and healthy ways to manage the invidious experiences they will likely encounter, in addition to the often academic focus of such programming.

Recall the history and present day policies and practices of exclusion and segregation within higher education for Black, first generation, low-income college students. More specifically, consider historical legacy of inclusion or exclusion on a particular campus, such as Midwest, and the ways such a history continues to shape present-day racial dynamics (Hurtado et al., 1999). Bolstering NCVs focusing on learning to navigate such a system that was not built for said students is vital and necessary for students to thrive. Furthermore, first year transition programs can take a greater focus on utilizing NCVs such as leadership, community, positive self-concept, and long-range goals to assist students in developing relationships with key campus

stakeholders and devising long-term plans to implement strategic, sustainable, and sweeping change on campuses nationwide.

Simultaneously, however, CRT argues for the dismantling of racist policies and institutional norms maintaining the imbalanced systems within education (Ladson-Billings, 1998; Ladson-Billings and Tate, 1995). Moreover, arguments against a singular focus on academic resilience and grit suggest such a focus ignores the environmental and institutional oppression student's face. As Perry (2016) argues a "focus on resilience and grit moves the focus or blame away from the racist and failing" (p. 1) systems of education and onto the onus of the students. As such, administrators and faculty of first year transition programs will simultaneously need to advocate on behalf of their students for changed policies on campus, adjusted financial resources to support students, and programming that truly fits the needs of students, such as tutoring at odd hours of the evening to accommodate student work schedules.

While not intentionally developed during first-year transition programming, much of the inclusionary changes throughout the history of higher education came about due to a rise up of community amongst students, relationships with key campus stakeholders, and bold, confident, student leaders. Such historical changes include, but are not limited to the development of ethnic studies programs (Hu-DeHart, 1993), integration of post-secondary institutions (Anderson, 1998), and recently the hearing and meeting of a variety of student demands including changed building names, removal of administrators or faculty, and changes to institutional policies (Wong & Green, 2016). Beyond the common request for required diversity training for students, faculty, and staff, a focus on changing institutional policies, practices and norms creates an institutional environment where underserved students can thrive and academic resilience perhaps becomes less about overcoming raced and classed based oppression during college and more about

overcoming academic challenges. Such changes can take root when first year transition programs acknowledge the history of race and class within education and use their curriculum to intentionally empower participants to not only navigate that space, but to also resist and fight against it.

Othermothering, and the Need for Black Faculty and Staff. In the present study, participants demonstrated a clear and necessary desire for connections with Black faculty and staff. A desire for relationships with Black faculty and staff is consistent with research on relationships between Black students and faculty and staff at universities, which suggests Black students often have difficulty approaching faculty who are different from them out of fear of negative perceptions due to race (Schwitzer, Griffin, Ancis, & Thomas, 1999). There is benefit to having greater numbers of Black faculty and staff. Smith (1989) suggests Black faculty and staff can serve as mentors to Black students, create more inclusive and comfortable environments for other faculty and staff, offer diverse perspectives on teaching and learning, and hold a pluralistic view of higher education. Further, scholars assert Black students prefer relationships with faculty members of their own race or ethnicity (Noel & Smith, 2006). There are likely a variety of important aspects of the relationships between Black students and Black faculty and staff that cause students to prefer those interactions over such with White faculty and staff.

Within the current study, one aspect of the relationship that arose was the familial connection students experienced with Black faculty and staff. Not only did participants approach Black faculty and staff with a presumed relatability and assumption that they “understood” participant’s stories and experiences, they also approached them as a connection to their home communities. Recall, Simba’s assertion in Chapter 5:

“And it seemed like they, [Black faculty or staff], had this attitude that, one, they would try to understand your story or they’d try to listen to your story. They understand where you’re coming from.”

Simba’s assertion reiterates the ways Black students often find a racialized connection with Black faculty and staff based on a presumed connection of shared experiences, shared struggles, and shared triumphs. Further, whether making connections during the summer before the first year or answering text messages on a week night, Black faculty and staff were seen as consistently going over and beyond to reach out, check on, and remain connected to the participants in the study. One way to frame the familial connections between Black students and Black faculty and staff is “othermothering.”

Borrowing from Black feminist literature, othermothering is defined as “women who assist blood-mothers by sharing mothering responsibilities” (Collins, 2000, p 178). The action of othermothering has been within the Black community for generations, since first enslaved people were brought to the United States (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 1999). Scholars have concluded Black student academic achievement is enhanced when educators implemented an othermothering approach, which is supportive, empowering, student-centered and founded on high expectations (Case, 1997; Guiffida, 2005). These concepts are clearly seen within relationships with Black faculty and staff and the participants in the current study.

While originally coined as a particularly gendered activity, I argue the premise of othermothering within higher education is rooted in actions taken by faculty and staff members and can span across gender. Guiffida (2005) posits it is the “willingness to go above and beyond that distinguished good professors” from others for many Black students (Guiffida, 2005, p. 714). Thus, as demonstrated within the current study, when Black faculty and staff go over and

beyond to connect with and support Black, first generation, low-income college students, they are perceived as an interconnected part of student lives and positively influence a student's desire and ability to remain academically resilient. Further, many of the relationships developed in the study were developed at the beginning of or throughout participant's first year at Midwest and were sustained throughout their matriculation. The sustained aspect of the relationship was also a vital aspect to the meaningfulness of the relationships. Being able to connect with various Black faculty and staff over time, seemed to provide a greater investment and satisfaction in the institution.

Further, while othermothering is specifically situated within theme two as I have presented it, as a concept it also furthers the village model represented within theme three where multiple people take on familial roles in participant lives. Participant's experiences with othermothering and Black faculty and staff bring up and reiterate the need for more Black faculty and staff on predominantly White campuses across the nation. More Black faculty and staff on campus is not a new concept, as scholars have argued for the need of greater numbers of Black faculty and staff (Quaye & Harper, 2014). Additionally, as numerous students and student organizations nationwide demand greater numbers of Black faculty and staff in the range of race centered protests that took over U.S. campuses in 2015 (<http://www.thedemands.org/>), Black students desiring more Black faculty and staff on their predominantly White campuses is clear.

Greater numbers of Black faculty and staff serve multiple purposes for Black students, particularly those who are first generation and from low-income backgrounds. Especially at PWIs, increased numbers of Black faculty and staff can help to combat the feelings of oneliness, isolation, and invisibility participants described within the current study and similar students face across PWI campuses nationwide (Fries-Britt & Griffin, 2007; Griffin 2013). Further, larger

numbers of Black faculty and staff will help to decrease the burden of service felt by the small number of Black faculty and staff on PWI campuses who experience the same sense of obligation participants felt in the current study. When there are so few Black faculty and staff at a given PWI, they are called on to be mentors, student group advisors, serve on panels and often feel the need to be “everything to everybody,” which is another example of role strain as discussed in Chapter 2. Thus, having greater numbers of Black faculty and staff at PWIs who engage in othermothering practices, go over and beyond to support students, and provide long-term sustainable relationships is one way to positively contribute to the academic resilience of Black, first generation, low-income college students, and higher education students broadly.

Othermothering and Building a Cross-Cultural Village through White Faculty

Interactions. The need for greater Black faculty and staff on PWI campuses is made clear above. However, a majority of institutions have predominantly and historically White student bodies, and therefore predominantly and historically White faculty and staff bodies. Therefore, understanding ways White faculty and staff can breach racial difference to support students similar to participants in the current study is of grave importance. Othermothering serves as a useful framework for White faculty and staff to use when aiming to bolster the academic resilience of underserved students.

As demonstrated by Toni’s experience with her assistant dean, the othermothering practices he engaged in helped her to navigate the relationship regardless of race where she found him and their relationship to be vital to her academic resilience. White faculty and staff engaging in othermothering practices could perhaps help bridge the gap between Black, first generation, low-income students and White faculty and staff at Midwest. Othermothering on the part of White faculty and staff will require a willingness to engage in a village model of

relationship building with students, while also intentionally developing skills and expertise that go beyond cultural competency.

Culturally competent White faculty and staff are able to effectively interact with students from different cultural backgrounds and take into consideration awareness of their own cultural worldview, their attitudes toward cultural differences, and knowledge of different cultural practices and worldviews, while having already developed high-level cross-cultural communication skills (Strayhorn & McCall, 2011). Further, the extent to which White faculty and staff understand the various and diverse experiences shaping students' lives has been seen as an influencer of student's success (Pope, Reynolds, & Mueller, 2004). Culturally competent White faculty and staff develop relevant and effective programs and services for students based on cultural knowledge and experiences of ethnically diverse students (Strayhorn & McCall, 2011). However, White faculty and staff being more than just culturally competent is paramount.

I argue many White faculty and staff see themselves as culturally competent or at least want to be, and yet, as demonstrated in the current study, Black, first generation, low-income college students still seem to have an easier time developing relationships with specifically Black faculty and staff. Therefore, cultural competency seems to fall short in regard to considering the broader contexts of race, racialized oppression, power, and privilege, and how they impact the variation in student experiences within higher education. Because U.S. society, education in general, and higher education specifically, are all rooted and built on a foundation of racism, neglecting this reality when serving Black, first generation, low-income college students at PWIs, and all students from historically underserved communities, is doing the students and the broader campus a disservice. Neglecting the history of exclusion and racism within higher education and its influence on Black, first generation, low-income college student experiences,

assumes that students are not encountering and therefore are not impacted by daily experiences of racism; this focus is a bit more than just cultural competency. Not only do White faculty and staff need to be more aware of the inputs (strengths) and pre-college experiences of these particular students, they need to remain informed of the ways students experiences are different regardless of similar backgrounds. CRT is a useful tool to pick up where cultural competency seems to fall off.

Taking the aforementioned into consideration, CRT provides a solid framework for theory to every day practice methods for White faculty and staff. In order to properly work with Black, first generation, low-income Black students White faculty and staff must take into consideration the broader implications of systemic and interpersonal racialized oppression and discrimination. Further, they must actively be anti-racist or actively work against racist ideology, policies, procedures, and norms in order to disengage from the broader system. Lastly, White faculty and staff must actively and constantly check their privilege and make adjustments accordingly to ensure they are readjusting the racialized privilege/power dynamic consistently at play. Below I present three practices White faculty and staff can engage in on a daily basis to bolster the academic resilience of Black, first generation, low-income college students. I argue (1) affirmation; (2) support; and (3) advocacy as three everyday practices rooted in CRT tenets, which serve as a useful starting point for White faculty and staff.

Affirmation. Affirmation is considered emotional support or encouragement. In many ways, affirmation and validation are synonymous. When one feels affirmed, one feels heard, understood and believed. Kuh and colleagues (2005) suggest when students have high-quality interactions within the academic environments, they are more likely to persist than peers with low-quality interactions. Providing an affirming environment for students can lead to high-

quality interactions between students and faculty and staff. Lundberg and Schreiner (2004) argue students from historically underserved backgrounds perceive high-quality interactions as not only those where their academic success is encouraged, but also where their experiences are validated.

Affirmation of racialized experiences on campus is the first way White faculty and staff can create relationships with Black, first generation, low-income college students lead to greater academic resilience. Recall CRT argues race is endemic and aberrant in society. Although it is socially constructed, racism is normal within society, and the lived experiences are real, and create real material and social consequences. As such, when approached by a student experiencing racism, discrimination, or microaggressions, White faculty and staff should believe that they are real for students and act accordingly. Acknowledging and affirming students' experiences, allows them to share their frustration, distain, hurt, surprise or the number of other things they may feel and experience on the campus on a daily basis. Moreover, White faculty and staff should avoid making excuses or questioning if the situation is "actually about race." Ignoring, distracting from, or justifying what the student sees as the primary issue at hand can hinder a student's relationship with White faculty and staff, while simultaneously reinforcing feelings of isolation. One such way to affirm student experiences, namely with microaggressions is for White faculty and staff to engage in daily practices of microaffirmations.

The act of affirming students extends beyond the one-on-one interactions. In response to microaggressions that plague a variety of environments, Rowe (2008) coined the term *microaffirmation*. Microaffirmations are small gestures extended on a daily basis that foster inclusion, listening, comfort and support for people who may feel unwelcome or invisible in an environment (Rowe, 2008). Though originally conceptualized within the workplace,

microaffirmations are particularly useful at PWIs when working with Black, first generation, low-income college students. Microaffirmations can communicate to students they are welcome, visible, and capable of performing well in a given environment and can lead to a greater sense of belonging, self-efficacy, and resiliency to persist in spite of challenges faced (Powell, Demetriou, & Fisher, 2013). Different from general kindness or empathy, microaffirmations explicitly recognize and validate individuals in ways that empower them to thrive in spite of feeling marginalized, hopeless, or lost (Rowe, 2008). Daily microaffirmations include, but are not limited to practicing active listening, and recognizing, affirming and validating student experiences and feelings (Powell, Demetriou & Fisher, 2013). White faculty and staff using microaffirmations in their daily experiences with Black, first generation, low-income college students can help to create spaces that resist and combat the daily racist and classist experiences had by students.

Support. On the surface, affirmation and support may seem similar, however, support is more focused on bolstering or taking on the weight of a thing in order to lessen the burden. As such, supporting students academically may include connecting students with academic resources, and providing academic guidance in regard to course choices, post-graduate plans, and career placement. In addition to these academic methods of support, supporting Black, first generation, low-income college students in particular has added responsibilities. Quay, Griffin, and Museus (2015) suggest culturally-focused organizations and spaces as one such way support these particular students and others from underserved backgrounds. As such, I argue White faculty and staff must actively seek to engage, empower, and co-create counterspaces (Solórzano, Ceja & Yosso, 2000) to support the survival of Black, first generation, low-income college students within the broader context of their experience raced and classed experience.

Solórzano, Ceja and Yosso (2000) consider counterspaces within higher education as settings promoting positive self-concepts among underserved students, within which they are able to establish culturally affirming spaces and experiences. Such spaces challenge deficit oriented dominate cultural narratives and representations (Case & Hunter, 2012). Further, hooks (1990) sees these spaces as opportunities for “radical possibility” (p. 149), within which attempts are made proactively to ensure broader patterns of societal oppression do not exist (Case & Hunter, 2012). Scholars have many names for similar spaces of freedom and resistance for underserved or marginalized populations, such as alternative settings (Chernis & Deegan, 2000), empowering community settings, (Maton, 2008; Maton & Salem, 1995), sites of resistance (hooks, 1990), and sites of resilience (Payne, 2008). In general, scholars have found such spaces to be instrumental in combatting feelings of isolation, marginality, and alienation for students of Color (Guiffrida, 2003; Kiang, 2009; Museus, 2008; Patton, 2006; Wang, Sedlacek, & Westbrook, 1992). Because counterspaces exist on a continuum and can be formal such as student organizations and classrooms to informal such as friend/family/faculty/staff networks (Case & Hunter, 2012), students can access them in a variety of ways. Participants in the current study found and co-created such spaces among student organizations, friend groups, and particularly in relationship with Black faculty and staff.

Within these spaces their academic resilience was bolstered because they were able to gain tools for handling isolation, dealing with negative stereotypes, and developing personal identity (Nuñez, 2011). Additionally, they experienced a sense of mattering and identity validation (Quaye, Griffin, & Museus, 2015). Therefore, as White faculty and staff, working to co-create counterspaces with Black, first generation, low-income college students can demonstrate a sincere desire to connect and support them in their academic matriculation. Within

such sites White faculty and staff can be intentional about preserving spaces where “deficit notions can be challenged and where a positive collegiate racial climate can be established and maintained” (Solórzano, Ceja & Yosso, 2000, p. 70). While the broader institution will not all of a sudden become non-racist or non-classist, the creation of counterspaces will at least allow White faculty and staff a tool to create spaces on campus within which Black, first generation, low-income college students can feel validated, safe, and free to be themselves.

De Sousa (2005) argues that faculty and staff at “high performing institutions are well informed about their students. They know where their students are from, their preferred learning styles, their talents, and when and where they need help”. (p. 2). While I agree with De Sousa’s (2008) argument, his argument is not explicit about the need for faculty and staff, particularly White faculty and staff, to also know the challenges in regard to racialized and classed experiences that Black, first generation, low-income college students are facing at PWIs. Assuming underserved students will have the same experience as White students is a dangerous assumption. In order to successfully support Black, first generation, low-income college students, White faculty and staff should remain educated and aware regarding common experiences of students on their campus, particularly in regard to race, class, and other underserved identities. If there is a history of segregation within the residential halls on a given campus, it is important for White faculty and staff to have a working knowledge of this history. In which case, if a Black student approaches the faculty person regarding racism within the residential halls, it is less likely for the White faculty or staff member to be surprised or confused.

Lastly, in being aware of common challenges faced by Black, first generation, low-income college students at PWIs, White faculty and staff must be careful not to essentialize or

over-generalize their experiences. Within CRT, is a commitment to anti-essentialism, which establishes all individuals experience the world in unique ways and no person's experience is exactly the same (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012). Though there is an acknowledgement of *unique voice of Color*, which posits that all people of Color can speak to some form of racialized oppression (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012), their experiences and reactions to said experiences will vary. White faculty and staff will have the opportunity to communicate with students on a one-on-one basis. As such, supporting students of Color means taking into consideration the broader context of racism and racialized oppression encountered at PWIs but approaching each student individually in hopes of providing the amount and type of support they may need on an individual basis.

Advocacy. There is much literature that focuses on student-faculty relationships, but I was unable to find anything that focused specifically on interactions between White faculty and staff and Black, first generation, low-income college students. However, among other things, Darder (1995) suggests ethnically diverse critical educators and faculty will bring a desire to serve as advocates of students of Color. Through a qualitative examination of faculty impact on the experiences of 19 Black undergraduates, Guiffrida (2005) found faculty who extended themselves through support and advocacy for said students had a positive influence on participants' experiences. Advocacy for students of Black, first generation, low-income college students goes beyond relationships, one-on-one academic advising, and beyond being a "nice" (p. 374, Bemak & Chung, 2010) faculty or staff person.

In encouraging new K–12 counselors to be multicultural and social justice advocates, Bemak and Chung (2010) argued many are nice to work with, nice to be around and nice to students, promoting harmony amongst colleagues and students; unfortunately, this niceness over

shadows their willingness to advocate for change on behalf of students, especially when resulting in conflict or disagreement. While the counselors may sincerely believe in the importance of educational equity, especially for students from marginalized populations, the overarching concern to be perceived as nice leads them away from advocating on behalf of their students (Bemak & Chung, 2010). Similarly, White faculty and staff may desire to present themselves as nice to peers and colleagues to the degree it becomes a detriment to their Black, first generation, low-income collegians. If White faculty or staff person who truly cares for students, regardless of race or ethnicity, spends time being nice and showing care, but has very little engagement with advocacy practices that could create institutional level change for the student, then the niceness matters little and instead leads to nice counselor syndrome or NCS (Bemak & Chung, 2010). NCS (Bemak & Chung, 2010) is characterized by counselors, or in this case faculty and staff, who demonstrate a willingness to perpetuate social norms that reinforce inequities and racialized oppression by neglecting to speak out against and/or actively fight against institutional policies, conversations, or lack thereof. that reinforce the status quo. An advocacy-oriented faculty or staff person goes beyond being nice and actively speaks up for student rights and concerns, aims to create an environment in which students can focus on their interests and strengths, and represents the best interests of the students (Bemak & chung, 2010).

Advocating is quite possibly the most important way White faculty or staff can aim to bolster academic resilience for Black, first generation, low-income college students through fighting for departmental and institutional level change on behalf of students. Advocating for students is rooted in CRTs commitment to social justice and daily call to action in regard to dismantling oppressive policies and institutional norms within education (Ladson-Billings, 1998). Additionally, a focus on advocacy for changed systems and polices addresses the

argument that grit and resilience focus too much on the student and not enough on the systems within which students exist (Perry, 2016).

The American Counseling Association (ACA) provides a comprehensive set of guidelines assist K–12 counselors in better understanding the types of awareness, knowledge, and skills they need to become effective multicultural/social justice advocates and institutional changes agents. Though created for K–12 counselors, the guidelines provided are useful to college level faculty and staff as well because of the similarities in daily work. Advocacy oriented faculty and staff will recognize the impact of social, political, economic, and cultural factors on student development and experiences (Lewis, Arnold, House & Toporek, 2003). Regarding systems, advocacy oriented faculty and staff will identify systemic factors that act as barriers to their student's development, academic success, and social engagement, while simultaneously working to dismantle those systemic barriers (Lewis, et. al, 2003). An adjustment of some of the ACA competencies to fit advocacy for White faculty and staff working with Black, first generation, low-income collegians at PWIs are as follows:

1. Help students gain access to needed resources; work to ensure resources remain available (such as financial aid, academic support, and culturally focused centers, departments and programs)
2. Develop alliances with groups working for change on campus and in the broader scope of higher education
3. Identify institutional, communal or policy based factors hindering student's academic or social engagement
4. Provide and interpret data showing urgency for change (such as graduation gap data, student engagement data, etc.)

5. Collaborate with stakeholders and cross-campus community partners to develop a vision to guide change for the curriculum, department, and institution

ACA advocacy competencies show the critical need for White faculty and staff to extend their important role beyond only teaching, particularly when working with or for students of Black, first generation, low-income collegians. Bemak and Chung (2010) argue through implementation of the guidelines in schools, K–12 counselors are able to “redefine their professional roles in ways that will help promote a high quality education for all students” (p. 373). Utilization of such competencies for White faculty and staff can help to bridge the familial gap between them and Black, first generation, low-income college students at PWIs in ways that assists students in combatting against the racist and classed institution within which they exist, which should also lead to bolstered academic resilience.

To this point, I have discussed specific implications for practice, via ways institutions can build upon NCVs through first year transition programming, the importance of and need for greater numbers of Black faculty and staff at PWIs, and three ways White faculty and staff can develop a cross-cultural village to bolster the academic resilience of Black, first generation, low-income college students studying at PWIs. Meaningful interactions with faculty and staff are vital for the academic engagement and success of all students. Therefore, validating the importance of Black faculty and staff at PWIs and rethinking the ways White faculty and staff can bolster academic resilience for marginalized students are necessary and useful implications for future practice with Black, first generation, low-income college students at PWIs and other underserved student populations.

Other implications for practice include working directly with White students to address issues of bias, better understand privilege, decrease behaviors perpetuating hostile climates for

underserved communities, and to increase opportunities for engagement with social identity development and competency building. While my work is focused on Black, first generation, low-income college students, I acknowledge in order for systems and norms to change, the onus cannot be on them and them alone. As White faculty and staff need to address the ways they interact particularly with students of Color in predominantly White settings, White students need to also carry some of the burden. Examples of such initiatives could include introducing White students to social identities, privilege, and power, as a part of a first year transition program, and creating spaces for intercultural dialogue throughout the collegiate experiences.

Implications and Recommendations for Research

There are five broad implications for future research that arose from this work. The first implication deals with my attempt to conduct a research analysis that took an intersectional approach to understanding student experiences with academic resilience. While I made a valiant effort to include multiple identities in every aspect of the study, including the interview protocol, participants still most often shared experiences through their racialized lens. Therefore, the study accomplished my goal of centering race at the intersection of three identities, but could be furthered by an attempt to center all three identities as opposed to race alone. Furthermore, as traditional forms of intersectionality focus on race, gender, and class (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001) the questions in this study could be furthered by focusing on a gendered reflection of academic resilience as Black, first generation, low-income collegians.

The second implication deals with participants perceived closeness with or sense of understanding from Black faculty and staff. Numerous participants demonstrated an assumption on their part regarding a perceived relatability from Black faculty and staff. In my every day practice, this is something that I notice often. Black students frequently assume they will have

better relationships with, greater understanding from, and a shared background with Black faculty and staff, even before meeting or speaking with them. The same assumption is not there on the part of non-Black faculty and staff. As demonstrated by participant's experiences in the current study, the assumptions may be based on past experiences had with Black faculty and staff, or past negative experiences with non-Black faculty and staff. However, scholars should seek to understand more fully why Black students readily assume that Black faculty and staff have shared experiences as Black students and will care more than non-Black faculty and staff. Furthermore, when participants say things such as "relate," "understand," and "know my story," in relation to their relationships with Black faculty and staff, one must consider those interactions within the broader racialized and classed context of their experience.

The third implication for research is the continued focus on racialized experiences within higher education. Some argue we are existing within a post-racial America. However, given the daily racialized experiences of the participants within the current study, it is clear we are far from post-racial. College students continue to have negative experiences with racism on a daily basis and it seems that higher education institutions have gotten no better at creating a campus climate free from racism. Continued research centering the racialized experiences of students of Color, with a particular focus on theory-to-practice methods, can develop new strategies and practices for today's higher education institutions, and therefore work to dismantle the racist policies and institutional norms negatively influencing the lives of underserved students within higher education.

The fourth implication for research is in direct relation to my implications for practice, regarding White faculty and staff. While the above recommendations are particularly in reference to White faculty, I acknowledge how this perhaps perpetuates the Black-White binary

often present within discussions of race. My choice to deliberately focus on interactions with White faculty is solely based on my data, where students only referenced Black faculty and White faculty, never faculty of any other race or ethnicity. Therefore the implication for research is to explore the ways Black, first generation, low-income college students interact with faculty of other races and ethnicities, such as Latinx, Asian American, or Arab American faculty. Given the ways anti-Blackness is often perceived as global, research should also explore the interactions between Black, first generation, low-income college students and faculty who are considered international at the given institution.

The fifth implication for research is the general focus on grit. In the current study, I recognize grit as a characteristic that has been developed overtime due to challenges faced throughout life. In the current study, I honor the sense of grit, tenacity, and determination in the lives of participants. However, I also recognize challenges around researching and celebrating grit. Scholars argue that a continued focus on grit is victim-focused and takes attention away from the ways the system must be adjusted in order to prove equitable for all students (Perry, 2016). Scholars go on to argue a focus on grit “glorifies poverty” (p.1) and other unfair challenges dictated by the broader forces of systemic oppression (Strauss, 2016). However, while I understand and in many ways agree with grit critiques, I also believe strongly that within higher education, we must recognize and honor the ways underserved students overcome layered and historical systemic oppression to make it to and through college. As such, future research should continue to explore grit as a necessary characteristic for underserved populations. Such research should focus on grit within the context broader of systemic oppression, avoid exploring ways to “teach grit” to students who have already developed it, and explore ways to honor grit and bolster gritty behaviors within higher education. Additionally future research should explore why

some students, particularly those with similar backgrounds, have grit while others do not, and why some students leave the institution all together.

Implications and Recommendations for Theory

The current study used three theories to build the conceptual and theoretical framework to guide the direction, data collection, and analysis process. From the use of these three theories and the outcomes which arose from the data, I see two broad implications for use of these theories and theory broadly.

The first implication and recommendation for theory deals with the use of critical race theory, and other critical theories (i.e., Feminism, Black feminist thought, Queer Theory), in the everyday practices of higher educational professionals. As demonstrated in the implications for practice section, critical theories can and should be used to inform the ways higher educational practitioners work with underserved students within higher education. Patton et al. (2007) argues commonly used student developmental theories ignore race and other “non-traditional” identities, therefore if not enhanced, practices based on such developmental theories inherently ignore race and racialized experiences. I would argue the same is true for other marginalized or historically underserved identities such as sexuality, gender, and ethnicity. Use of theories centering race and other marginalized identities are necessary within the study higher education both for practice and research and therefore should be used at greater lengths by researchers.

The second implication deals with Padilla et al.’s (1997) four barriers faced by students of Color at PWIs. As revealed in the data and discussed previously in this chapter, students of Color are facing more than just the four barriers Padilla et al. (2007) discuss. In the current study, students additionally faced daily experiences with raced and classed oppression, which served as a barrier to their successful college transition. Padilla et al. (2007) discussed challenges with

being a numerical minority in their lack of presence barrier, but this barrier itself does not seem to explicitly discuss challenges relating to racism experienced on the part of students. Padilla et al. (2007) served as a useful micro-theory for the current study, but if used for future studies focusing on Black, first generation, low-income college students, the added there must be consideration of the additional barrier: daily experiences with raced and classed oppression.

The addition of this final barrier takes into consideration the daily microaggressions students faced within the classrooms and residential halls, the hyper policing they faced when attending “Black parties”, and the negative interactions they had with faculty, staff, and administrators. While many of these experiences are perhaps in relation to being a numerical minority within the institution, they are also directly in relation to the interactions students are having with peers, faculty, staff and administrators. Such interactions with covert and overt racism are consistent with the literature regarding common experiences of Black, first generation, low-income college students at PWIs. Therefore, attention to daily experiences with raced and classed oppression must be an intentional aspect of theoretical considerations when exploring the ways students are able to overcome challenges while matriculating through college, including those.

Conclusion

Through qualitative critical race methodology, this study sought to explore the factors of academic resilience in the lives of Black, first generation, low-income college students study at a PWI. Participants’ experiences and themes reveal academic resilience in the lives of Black, first generation, low-income college students is developed overtime and is further fostered through meaningful support and key relationships but is also predicated on intrinsic motivation. Further, participants’ experiences and themes reveal regardless of the environment some students are able

to overcome a variety of challenges in a way that is meaningful and unique. The participants' experiences not only provide transferrable data for policy makers, administrators, faculty, staff, and scholars, but should also serve as a source of motivation and road map for similar students during their matriculation at a PWI. Moreover, when the shared student experiences are mapped onto programmatic efforts, institutions should be able to develop programs that more strategically focus on student needs through a lens that considers intersecting identities.

Ultimately, the purpose of this study was to provide a space for Black, first generation, low-income college students to share their experiences of overcoming in order to further shape the way they are viewed within higher education. I hope from this work, readers take away a clear understanding: as a whole Black, first generation, low-income college students are far from under-engaged, checked out, at-risk or falling behind. I am not suggesting some students are not engaged to the highest degree they could be. Further, I am not suggesting all students entering college are adequately prepared and do not need specialized academic support, especially when considering the pre-college educational disparities. However, despite such realities, I find to acknowledge, via my research, Black, first generation, low-income college students are often carrying the weight of family, history, community, and their own future goals on their shoulders greatly important. As they carry this weight, they find pride and strength to continue moving forward and bring with them great amounts of cultural wealth and strength. It is my hope every reader is inspired to recognize and celebrate the ways such students continue to remain academically engaged within a system that was not built for them and continues to fail them. Finally, it is my hope every reader who is currently a student and identifies as Black, first generation, and low-income finds within the participants' experiences a reaffirmed confidence they too can overcome any challenge faced.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

Solicitation Email

SENT FROM ADDRESS: leejasm@msu.edu
SUBJECT: Black Student Experiences Study Invitation
EMAIL TEXT:

Hello!

You are invited to participate in a study that explores experiences of Black college students who are first in their family to attend college and who come from low-income backgrounds attending a predominantly White university. The purpose of the study is to learn about the ways students overcome challenges during their college journey.

As a participant in this study, you will receive a **coupon to the MSU Dairy Store** for the completion of an in-depth, in-person interview and follow up focus group. The interviews should take no more than two hours. Your responses will only be used for scholarly purposes and will be kept completely confidential.

By agreeing to participate in this interview, you are self-identifying as Black or African American, first in your family to attend college, and that you receive the Pell Grant as distributed by your university's office of financial aid.

If you have any questions, or are interested in participating, please email *Jasmine Lee* – leejasm@msu.edu.

Thank you for your consideration!

Sincerely,
Jasmine Lee
Doctoral Candidate
Michigan State University, College of Education
leejasm@msu.edu

APPENDIX B

Research question and Interview Protocol

Research question:

What are the factors contributing to the academic resilience of Black, first generation, low-income college students studying at a 4-year predominantly White institution?

The following questions will serve as the interview guide for the semi-structured interviews. The primary questions are listed by number and the probing questions are listed by letter.

1. Tell me about your experiences before college.
 - a. What was your high school like?
 - b. What was/is your family like?
 - c. What were your friends like?
 - d. Have you ever had to overcome challenges or barriers that seemed large or overwhelming?
 - i. How did you overcome them?
 - e. Where did you find support?
2. Tell me what influenced your decision to go to college.
 - a. Were there ever times that you felt college may not be for you?
 - b. Did you face any barriers applying to or getting to college?
 - c. Why MU?
 - d. What has gone well for you at MU so far?
3. Tell me about your first year at MU.
 - a. Tell me about any experiences you had that stand out from your first year
 - i. Why do they stand out?
 - b. Tell me about any key relationships that stand out from your first year
 - i. Why do they stand out?
 - c. Tell me about any resources or offices you used that stand out as particularly helpful.
 - i. Why do they stand out?
 - d. Were there any experiences during your first year that seem particularly important to why you are still in college?
 - i. At MU?
4. What do you see as the largest personal challenges you faced during your college matriculation?
 - a. How did you overcome these challenges?
 - b. Where did you go for support?
 - c. To whom did you talk when you were going through this difficult time?
 - d. From which resources did you receive help?
5. What do you see as the largest institutional (systemic) challenges you faced during your college matriculation?
 - a. How did you overcome these challenges?
 - b. Where did you go for support?
 - c. To whom did you talk when you were going through this difficult time?
 - d. From which resources did you receive help?

6. Would you consider yourself as someone who keeps moving forward or pushing through when faced with a challenge or adversity?
 - a. What does it mean to you to keep moving forward or pushing through when faced with challenges or adversity?
 - b. Can you tell me about moments where you've felt particularly motivated to keep pushing through challenges you may be facing?
 - c. Could you describe any things, places, people, thoughts, experiences, or anything else that you see as having contributed to your desire or ability to keep pushing through?
7. What does it mean to you to be Black, first in your family to attend college, and from a low-income background?
 - a. Do these identities influence your experiences in college? In what ways?
 - b. Do these identities influence your ability to overcome challenges you've faced? In what ways?

APPENDIX C

Research Question and Focus Group Interview Protocol

Research question:

What are the factors contributing to the academic resilience of Black, first generation, low-income college students studying at a 4-year predominantly White institution?

The following questions will serve as the interview guide for the follow-up focus group interviews. The primary questions are listed by number and the probing questions are listed by letter.

1. Situating it within CRT
 - a. This is the environment you are surviving within (you share experiences of racism, onliness, frustration with balancing work and school and sickness and families, the constant chase of financial resources, while trying to take advantage of opportunities that come your way) ... These are the ways you seem to be surviving (what I'm presently calling themes)
 - i. Via support system
 - ii. Sense of duty to family, community, your future/the future, ancestors
 - iii. Via intrinsic motivation
 - iv. And other lesser discussed sources of motivation such as success, challenges,
 - v. Is this true? What is missing for you?
 - b. Given the context you are surviving with in, is what I've been calling resilience (the ability to press forward in the face of challenge) actually resistance to and survival within a racially and class oppressive educational system?
 - i. Or perhaps both?
 - c. Do stereotypes play a role in the ways you matriculate through the institution at all?
2. Identity politics
 - a. All of you shared experiences that demonstrated that you see your intersecting identities (Black, first gen, and low income) as a dichotomy, both a source of stress and source of pride; both a source of limitation and a source of opportunity; both a source of isolation and a connection point for community... is this true?
 - i. What is missing?
 - b. There were moments when most of you clearly engaged with the world through all three identities simultaneously, and other moments when it was clear that a single identity was most salient. I call this identity negotiation.
 - i. How do you think those negotiation decisions were made?
3. Institutional questions
 - a. If you were empowered to change anything about this institution what would it be?
 - b. Where does institutional responsibility fall?
 - c. What more from the institution would you need?
 - d. What have been Institutional barriers?

- e. What have been Institutional supports?
- 4. MISC
 - a. How would you describe resistance?
 - b. How would you describe resilience?
 - i. Are there any particularly gendered experiences that you'd like to share regarding your matriculation and your ability to remain resilient?
- 5. Empowering
 - a. Having pushed through your college matriculation, and continuing to do so....
 - i. What would you tell students coming after you?
 - ii. What would you tell your faculty?
 - iii. What would you tell your administrators?
 - iv. What would you tell yourself?
- 6. Pre-college
 - a. You all participated in some sort of support or academic transition programming during either your first year or the summer prior... how do you think those experiences influenced the remainder of your matriculation?
 - b. What components of those programs stand out to you as most important to your matriculation?

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