Fayetteville State University
DigitalCommons@Fayetteville State University

Faculty Working Papers from the School of Education

School of Education

8-14-2012

RESEARCH STUDIES IN HIGHER EDUCATION: EDUCATING MULTICULTURAL COLLEGE STUDENTS-Ch 2

Pamela A. Larde

Follow this and additional works at: http://digitalcommons.uncfsu.edu/soe_faculty_wp

Part of the Bilingual, Multilingual, and Multicultural Education Commons

Recommended Citation
Larde, P. (2012). Inspired to be the First: How African American First-Generation Students are Predisposed to Pursue Higher Education, In T. Hicks & A. Pitre (Eds.), Research Studies in Higher Education: Educating Multicultural College Students (pp. 27-67). Lanham, MD: University Press of America, Inc.

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the School of Education at DigitalCommons@Fayetteville State University. It has been accepted for inclusion in Faculty Working Papers from the School of Education by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@Fayetteville State University. For more information, please contact mlawson@uncfsu.edu.

Chapter Two
Inspired to Be the First: How African American First-generation Students Are Predisposed to Pursue Higher Education

Pamela A. Larde, Ph.D.,
Mercer University

Introduction

Two African American boys of the same bloodline are raised in the same household of an urban Detroit neighborhood—a neighborhood rich with drugs and slim with educational opportunities. One shows signs early on that he's going to go somewhere in life and is even given the nickname "Professor" at an early age. The other, somehow lost in his brother's shadow, succumbs to the fast money of the streets. Professor wins the spotlight in the neighborhood, is adored by his church community, and captures the hearts of his teachers, yet his brother finds a way to simply get by and survive.

As a teen and young adult, Professor finds himself in a tough predicament after fathering a child out of wedlock, but he is resilient and decides to pursue a college education to better support his son and does not stop until he has earned his PhD. His brother, long lost in the shadows, finds himself in the wrong place at the wrong time and is convicted of murder and sent to prison for life.

Professor goes on to become who we know today as Dr. Michael Eric Dyson, renowned minister, distinguished Howard University professor, and best-selling author—his heart aching every step of the way over the fate of his beloved brother whom he believes did not receive the nurturing and support needed to seize the right opportunities in life (Dyson, 2008).

How is it that two boys raised together can take such different paths in life, with one going to college and the other to prison for a life sentence? Dyson addresses this question by saying:

> The temptation is to believe that individual choice alone accounts for such differences in destiny. Successful black family members did their work and played

> by the rules; suffering family members ran afoul of the law and were justly locked away. Of course, that is true in many cases, but in far too many cases, it's not the entire truth (Dyson, 2008).

Sadly, the story of the Dyson brothers is not uncommon. This study seeks to uncover some of this truth by focusing in on a group of African American youth who beat the odds through the most challenging of circumstances to become the first in their families to pursue higher education.

Purpose

It is well documented that students whose parents did not attend college are less likely to pursue a college education than their peers. Yet, many find ways to get to college despite the odds that stand against them: poor academic preparation, minimal moral support from family, limited financial resources, a lack of college knowledge, and cultural norms that do not support the pursuit of higher education. Derived from a larger study on African American and Mexican American first-generation students, this chapter focuses specifically on the pre-college experiences of the African American students to develop a greater understanding of the journey to higher education.

Though the presence of first-generation students at institutions of higher education across the nation continues to increase (Terenzini et al., 1996), the problem of college access for this population has yet to be resolved. Even with the services that pre-college programs provide to first-generation students, a great number of college-qualified youth still miss out on the opportunity to go to college (Horn and Nunez, 2000). In order to grasp a full understanding of the barriers that limit students' opportunities to pursue a college education and how these students have overcome these barriers, further study is needed.

In 2001, Choy and MPR Associates reported that only 34 percent of the entering student population at four-year institutions were first-generation students. In most cases, first-generation students attend community colleges, as access to four-year institutions remains a challenge (London, 1992). However, the greatest problem rests in the fact that a significant portion of first-generation students still choose not to attend college at all. "Students whose parents have not attended college and/or have not earned a college degree are much less likely to go to college than their peers, particularly in the four-year sector" (Engle et al., 2006, p. 13).

A number of racial trends have also been identified among the first-generation population. First-generation students are more likely to be Black or Latino (Chen and Carroll, 2005), are typically older Latina females, and are often working mothers (Engle et al., 2006; Inman and Mayes, 1999; McConnell, 2000). Additionally, McCarron and Inkelas (2006) found a difference in college graduation rates among first-generation students of different racial backgrounds. In their study, 42 percent of Asian American students earned a bachelor's degree, compared to 31

percent of White students, 21 percent of African American students, and 19 percent of Latino students. Of greatest concern is the African American population because the number of African American first-generation college students has experienced a dramatic decline, dropping from 62.9 percent in 1971 to 22.6 percent in 2005 (Saenz et al., 2007). Unfortunately, this decline is not attributed to a growing number of students with college-educated parents. It instead, reflects a decline in enrollment from members of this population. To compound these figures, social economic status is another factor that affects the college-going disparity between the privileged and the underprivileged still exists. High school students who come from higher socioeconomic backgrounds attend college at a rate 30 percent higher than their peers who come from lower socioeconomic backgrounds (Walpole, 2007).

To take one step further, it is important to not only understand the barriers but also to understand the ways in which students have overcome them. Such information can provide the basis for a model that outlines what first-generation students may need in order to successfully enroll in and graduate from college. Pascarella and Terenzini (1980) asserted that future studies on successful students of color should take race and the interrelationship between social and academic integration into account. The current study took these factors into account by focusing on the experiences of African American students. It examines strategies for negotiating cultural background while in an academic environment and places significant emphasis on social and academic integration within the college predisposition framework created for this study.

Significance

This study is significant for two reasons: it brings forth the strengths that African American first-generation students possess and it explores how they became predisposed to go to college. Clifton and Anderson (2002) proposed that educators, particularly those in higher education, move away from deficit models, which focus primarily on problems, concerns and defects and that an increased focus is placed on success and achievement. As stated by the authors, “To produce excellence, you must study excellence” (Clifton and Anderson, pg. ix). The intent of this chapter is to zero in on excellence. Acquiring an understanding of the successes of African American first-generation students, the strategies they employ to overcome challenges and the resources they used to access a college education can lead to more effective college preparation initiatives and services within secondary and post-secondary institutions of education, as well as in government-funded and privately owned pre-college programs.

Literature Review

The First-generation College Student

A number of definitions have been used to describe *first-generation* status. In general, it refers to the level of education obtained by a student's parents; however, when defining the specific level of education parents have received, researchers have had differing views. Pike and Kuh (2005), for example, stated that a student could be considered first-generation if his or her parent or guardian never earned a bachelor's degree, meaning that the parent may have had a great deal of college experience, just short of earning a bachelor's degree, or that they completed an associate's degree or certificate program. Other researchers (Choy, Horn, Nunez, and Chen, 2000; Pascarella et al., 2004; Terenzini et al., 1996) have defined *first-generation* status as having parents who did not earn more than a high school diploma, leaving open the possibility of having some college experience, short of earning specialized certification or an associate's degree. A host of other researchers have defined *first-generation students* as explicitly those whose parents never attended college at all (Chen and Carroll, 2005; Engle et al., 2006; Horn and Nunez, 2000; Volle and Federico, 1997). Brooks (1998) articulated a definition that combines the three into what can be considered a summarization of the most common understanding of first-generation status among academic researchers. First-generation students may fall under one of the following two scenarios: (a) Neither parent has completed a college degree, or (b) the student is the first member of the family to attend college (Walpole, 2007). The current study used option B as its operational definition.

Overall, first-generation students are less likely to have aspirations to pursue a college education (Saenz et al., 2007; Terenzini et al., 2001). In 1996, only 26 percent of first-generation students applied to a four-year institution, whereas 71 percent of their peers whose parents are college educated applied to a four-year institution. Even when first-generation students are qualified for admission, they are more likely to delay their enrollment, taking some time in between high school and college to work. In comparison, Saenz and associates (2007) found that 73 percent of non-first-generation students enrolled in college immediately after high school, whereas only 29 percent of first-generation students enrolled immediately after high school (Saenz et al., 2007).

Common Challenges of First-Generation Students

London (1992) described the first-generation student's pursuit of higher education as an act of upward social mobility—a step toward exceeding the educational and financial status of their parents. Some first-generation students pursue upward social mobility with great enthusiasm, while others embark upon the journey with

much fear and skepticism. For some, it is neither. The idea of earning a college degree is simply a means to an end: a necessary task to accomplish in order to secure a job. Undoubtedly, the pursuit of upward social mobility is life-changing and requires, as London stated, "the shedding of one social identity and the acquisition of another" (p. 8). In order to cross into the world of higher education, first-generation students must navigate through a new set of norms, values, and expectations while balancing (and sometimes rejecting) the norms, values, and expectations of their families and communities.

The research has identified a number of challenges that inhibit a first-generation student's odds of enrolling in college. These include: having a low level of *academic preparation*, lacking strong *family support*, having limited *financial resources*, not having *college knowledge*, and struggling with the *cultural transitioning* that takes place between high school and college. These challenges have an adverse effect on the decision to enroll in college (Engle et al., 2006).

Academic Preparation

One of the most common challenges that first-generation students face is a poor level of preparation for succeeding academically in the college environment (Inman and Mayes, 1999). Many African American students struggle to access higher education opportunities of higher education in this country due to economic, social, and racial disparities (Nelson Laird, Bridges, Morelon-Quainoo, Williams, and Salinas Holmes, 2007). These disparities are largely attributed to segregated neighborhoods that offer inferior educational resources. African American youth are more likely to attend public schools with high concentrations of students of color from low socioeconomic backgrounds and do not receive the academic preparation needed to advance to college.

Coursework that lacks rigor, teachers with low expectations, and subpar resources (i.e., not enough textbooks or certified teachers) are major contributors to a lack of academic preparation in first-generation students, particularly those who attend schools in low socioeconomic communities. Students who are products of these academic experiences tend to lack the expected level of content knowledge and study skills needed to successfully pursue a college degree (Engle et al., 2006). Additionally, first-generation students often do not participate in academic programs that set them on the path to enrolling in college. For example, most are removed from the college preparation track as early as the eighth grade, a time when they are less likely than their non-first-generation peers to have taken important courses, such as Algebra 1 (Adelman, 2006). These students do not usually have access to the rigorous coursework that will prepare them for college such as AP and Honors courses (Cabrera and LaNasa, 2001). As a result, their academic skills tend to be weaker than those of their peers (Horn and Nunez, 2000). This is evident in their traditionally lower standardized test scores and GPAs (Terenzini et al., 1996).

These schools are also more likely to have fewer college counseling resources that will prepare them for college (Cabrera and LaNasa, 2001; Terenzini et al., 2001). The consequence of not receiving adequate academic preparation for college is a lack of confidence in academic abilities, leading students to believe that they are not "college material." Consequently, many dismiss the prospect of going to college altogether (Engle et al., 2006).

Family Support

Another significant factor affecting students' decision to aspire to and enroll in college is the encouragement and support they receive from family (Hossler, Schmit, and Vesper, 1999). According to Choy and MPR Associates (2001), "The likelihood of enrolling in post-secondary education is strongly related to parents' education even when other factors are taken into account" (p. 7). Parent educational level is also positively related to how far students persist in college. Unlike their second and third-generation peers, many first-generation college students lack the support needed from their parents to foster a successful college experience, from the admissions process through graduation (York-Anderson and Bowman, 1991). Parents who are college educated, on the other hand, are more likely to be involved in their children's education. When parents are more involved, students are more likely to take a rigorous high school curriculum and enroll in college (Horn and Nunez, 2000). Findings in a study of students from low socioeconomic backgrounds indicated that combining parental involvement with a school curriculum that prepares students for college were critical components leading to graduation and college enrollment (Cabrera and LaNasa, 2000).

However, while most studies posit that the families of first-generation students provide the least amount of support, Saenz et al. (2007) identified a new trend in a recent study. In this study, first-generation students actually placed equal importance on their parental support to attend college when compared to their non-first-generation peers. In 2005, almost 50 percent of first-generation students reported the fact that their parents wanted them to go to college was a key reason they pursued higher education. According to Saenz et al., "This trend has reversed for the two groups—first-generation students are now *more* likely to report parental encouragement as a very important reason for going to college" (p. 2). For some students, the very fact that their parents lack a college education served as a motivator to pursue one for themselves. In such cases, students recognized the hardships their parents endured as an opportunity to attend college and make a better life for themselves. The choice to go to college was a gesture of appreciation for their parents' hard work (Engle et al., 2006). According to Engle et al., "First-generation students do not view going to college primarily as a personal pursuit, but rather as the culmination of generations of effort and progress in their families and communities" (p. 22).

Financial Resources

First-generation students, who often come from low socioeconomic backgrounds, are adversely affected by financial constraints. First-generation students and even non-first-generation students from low socioeconomic backgrounds have been found to have lower educational aspirations, persistence rates, and rates of educational attainment than their peers from higher socioeconomic levels (Pascarella and Terenzini, 2005). In a longitudinal study of graduates of the class of 1992, just over half of the first-generation students were from families of low socioeconomic background. Comparatively, less than one-third of the students whose parents were college educated could be classified as low-income (Horn and Nunez, 2000). These factors present a real challenge to student success and college access, as lower incomes are associated with lower high school graduation rates and lower rates of college success (Volle and Federico, 1997).

> More first-generation students than their peers considered financial factors very important to their choice of specific colleges, and at college entry, they are twice more likely than their peers to report having a major concern about financing college. (Saenz et al., 2007, p. 2)

This line of reasoning resonates with human capital theory, which states that students' decisions about pursuing a college education are based on the economic feasibility and benefits of doing so. Specifically, students consider tuition, fees, books, housing, lost wages, and even emotional costs to determine whether or not these costs will reap greater benefits in the end (Walpole, 2007). These considerations affect the type of college they choose, the geographical location of the college, and the decisions about employment. In most cases, first-generation students choose to take on a job to pay for college expenses. This decision often leads them to delay enrollment to work and to choose the more affordable two-year institution (Chen and Carroll, 2005).

College Knowledge

A marked difference between first-generation students and their peers whose parents are college educated is the amount of information they have with regards to preparing for, applying to, and paying for college. This arsenal of information is referred to as *college knowledge* (Engle et al., 2006). Students who are armed with college knowledge often receive this information from parents, guidance counselors, teachers, and other influential adults. York-Anderson and Bowman (1991) found that the amount of college knowledge students have is strongly related to how much support they *perceive* they are receiving. Their findings indicated that those students who perceived that they had more family support "had more factual

information about college than did those students who perceived less support" (p. 120).

College knowledge affects awareness on three levels: (a) college benefits awareness, (b) college resources awareness, and (c) college planning awareness. On the college benefits level, first-generation students and their parents are often unaware of the social and economic benefits of attending college (Volle and Federico, 1997). Non-first-generation usually have the advantage of receiving direction and having expectations set by parents who know the benefits of attaining a college degree, have experienced the demands of college, and can pass this knowledge on to them (Volle and Federico, 1997). As a result, they are more likely to be aware of and employ a number of effective strategies to increase higher education opportunities, such as hiring a private consultant to assist with the application requirements, enrolling in test preparation courses, and applying to a large number of colleges to increase the odds of acceptance. It is not surprising that this group is typically from higher socioeconomic backgrounds and tends to have higher rates of attendance at elite and selective universities (McDonough, 1994).

Conversely, first-generation students generally have fewer resources, less understanding of the benefits of a college degree, and less knowledge about different types of colleges and the college admissions process. This lack of college knowledge strongly affects the likelihood that they will attend college at all (Bedsworth, Colby, and Doctor, 2006; Cabrera and LaNasa, 2001; Choy et al., 2000; Terenzini et al., 2001). Most do not have people in their families or social circles who can help them with the college admissions process (Engle et al., 2006). Consequently, they are more likely than their peers whose parents are college educated to perceive the prospect of college as overwhelming and the application process intimidating.

Cultural Transitioning

The fifth challenge is related to the process of transitioning from the home culture to the college culture. Real consequences and challenges are associated with the pressures of shifting from one cultural community to another. The very fear of such change can bring displeasure from family and friends as first-generation students prepare to leave the culture in which they grew up to join an unfamiliar culture on a college campus. This experience of dislocating from one culture and relocating into another can be traumatic when the academic world is drastically different from first-generation students' home communities (Rendón, 1992). The process includes renegotiating old relationships with family and friends as they may question new habits, interests, and peers (London, 1992). For first-generation students, these challenges may come as a shock as they are often unprepared to pay the costs of the personal and social dislocations that take place through this pursuit of upward mobility. According to Inman and Mayes (1999), "First-generation students often

feel they have to make an all-or-nothing decision about maintaining their parents' way of life or rejecting their family's culture to pursue an academic goal" (p. 4).

A Theoretical Framework for College Predisposition

Predisposition refers to a condition or quality that is based on natural and environmental factors (Dictionary.com, 2008). Based upon this definition, a student who has a predisposition to pursue higher education does so in response to a natural or innate desire. In other words, such individuals are more inclined than others to have college aspirations, due to a combination of natural and environmental factors. Naturally, they may possess a hunger and desire to learn. Environmentally, they may have received the support, validation, and information needed to nurture that hunger and desire.

The current study employed a three-tier college predisposition framework designed to encapsulate the experiences of first-generation students of color and to acquire a greater understanding of the characteristics possessed and strategies used by these students to pursue college enrollment. The framework was developed for this study in response to the limited scope of academic research that explores the *strengths* of first-generation students. Its purpose was to help the researcher identify the characteristics and background experiences that predispose first-generation students to pursue higher education. The framework pulls together the components of self-determination, academic achievement, and resourcefulness to explore the ways in which first-generation students of color overcame the common challenges that can inhibit the pursuit of a college education. It was constructed using elements of Ryan and Deci's (2000) Self-Determination Theory, a body of research on academic success (Astin, 1975; Griffin, 2006; Harper, 2005; Tinto, 1975; Yazedjian, Toews, Sevin, and Purswell, 2008) and common challenges faced by first-generation students (Horn and Nunez, 2000; London, 1992; Rendón, 1992; Hsaio, 1992; Chen and Carroll, 2005; Engle, Bermeo and O'Brien, 2006; Adelman, 2006).

The theoretical framework, as shown in Figure 2.1, consists of three tiers, each intended to explore the path to enrollment for first-generation students of color. Self-Determination Theory was used to develop the first tier to explore the students' internal drive for educational enhancement. The literature on high-achieving students formulated the second tier to explore the academic strategies students possess to ensure that they qualify for college acceptance. The final tier was derived from research identifying the common challenges first-generation students face to explore resourceful strategies employed to overcome these challenges.

Figure 2.1. College Predisposition Framework

Self-Determination (having college aspirations)	**Academic Success (being qualified)**	**Resourcefulness (successfully enrolling)**
Competence	Classroom Performance	Getting Academically Prepared
		Securing Financial Resources
Autonomy	Sense of Responsibility	Learning the Admission Process
	Stereotype Threat Resistance	
Relatedness	Social and Academic Integration	Shutting Out Negative Cultural Norms
		Building a network of human support

Self-determination

The first tier of the framework is self-determination. As was indicated in the research, first-generation students face a number of challenges that make it difficult to pursue higher education, including lacking academic preparation, family support, financial resources, college knowledge, and an environment that embraces the pursuit of a college education to enable smooth cultural transitioning. Thus, if first-generation students who face these challenges manage to develop college aspirations and follow through on those aspirations, it can be said that they *choose* to take these challenges on, rather than conform to the pressure to not go to college. Self-Determination Theory (Ryan and Deci, 2000) was used to explore the extent to which self-determination played a role in this decision-making process.

Self-Determination Theory posits that all human beings have a natural propensity to pursue growth and integration. The authors explained that even as infants, humans are self-motivated to learn and progress and will continue in this motivation as long as the three psychological needs—competence, autonomy, and relatedness—continue to be met. Self-determination is interrupted only when at least one of these needs goes unfulfilled.

The first psychological need, *competence*, refers to believing that one is capable of accomplishing a goal. This term resonates with Nasim, Roberts, Harnell, and Young's (2005) characterization of positive self-concept as possessing qualities

such as strength of character, motivation, independence, confidence, and a strong feeling of self.

Ryan and Deci (2000) described *autonomy*, the second psychological need, in terms of having a sense of personal control, freedom, and choice. In their words, it is "the feeling of volition that can accompany any act, whether dependent or independent, collectivist or individualist" (Ryan and Deci, p. 74). A group of high-achieving African American students in one study described the sense of autonomy they felt through the ability to be "agents of their own success" and to rely on their own "will, effort and resourcefulness" (Griffin, 2005, p. 11).

The final psychological need, *relatedness,* refers to having social support or strong connections to other people. Schlossberg's transition theory identifies five types of social support, including intimate relationships, family units, networks of friends, institutions, and communities (Evans, Forney, and Guido-DiBrito, 1998). It has been noted that students who are successful in college have found ways to connect themselves with the community through service and extracurricular activities (Harper, 2005). When students interact with others and feel accepted within the environment, the likelihood of achieving academic success increases (Astin, 1984; Harper, 2005; Tracey and Sedlacek, 1984; White and Sedlacek, 1986).

To consider how the psychological needs of competence, autonomy, and relatedness affect college aspirations of first-generation students, the self-determination tier in this framework explores the connection between these key supportive conditions and the disposition to aspire to a college education. However, while this theory serves to explore the internal drive that a first-generation student may possess, it cannot stand alone in uncovering the academic and resourceful strategies that these students employ to enable them to progress from having college-going aspirations to actually setting foot on a college campus. Hence, it is necessary to also examine how these students might ensure that they are qualified for college and how they might go about securing the resources necessary to make a college education possible.

Academic Success

The second tier of the theoretical framework explores the strategies students employ to gain acceptance into a four-year university. *Academic success* is a collective term that embodies both in-class and out-of-class success (Harper, 2005). The academic success tier in the framework includes four specific components that enable students to navigate the wide range of experiences they have in the academic environment. These components are rooted in the work of Astin, 1975; Griffin, 2006; Harper, 2005; Tinto, 1975; and Yazedjian, Toews, Sevin, and Purswell, 2008. The four components used to explore academic success strategies included: (a) successful classroom performance, (b) a sense of responsibility, (c) an ability to resist stereotype threat, and (d) social and academic integration. These four

components are rooted in the vast amount of literature that examines academic success strategies and characteristics in college students. The underlying assumption here is that college-bound high school students may utilize these same characteristics in order to be successful enough to gain acceptance into the institution of their choice. This tier of the framework sought to explore the existence of these components, and any strategies employed to maintain academic success.

Resourcefulness

The final tier of the framework is resourcefulness. This tier enabled the researcher to explore the decisions students made and the strategies employed that enabled them to overcome common educational barriers. Like academic success, resourcefulness must also precede college enrollment. Students who have college aspirations and the grades to qualify for college admission may not make it to college if they are not resourceful enough to overcome barriers (i.e., not having the funding to pay tuition or not knowing the college admissions process). Therefore, overcoming barriers must precede college enrollment.

Resourcefulness is an action-oriented term and relates to college preparation strategies. First-generation students face a number of challenges that prevent many from pursuing a college education. It is important to understand how students who make it to college navigate these challenges. For example, if a resourceful first-generation student was challenged by insufficient academic preparation, the student would need to find ways to get academically prepared. If faced with the challenge of not having the financial resources to attend college, the student would need to address the problem by seeking out ways to pay for college. It is important to note that not all first-generation students face every challenge described, but as the literature indicates, many face at least some of the challenges. This final tier of the framework serves as a tool to explore the strategies the first-generation students used to address the five common challenges in order to successfully enroll into college.

This college predisposition framework is multidimensional in nature because, as described above, the college enrollment puzzle has many pieces. As Griffin (2005) put it, "A multidimensional framework best explains these students' motivation patterns" (p. 391). A student cannot make it to college on self-determination alone if he or she is not academically prepared. Likewise, a student cannot make it on academic achievement alone if he or she does not have the resourcefulness needed to figure out how to get to college. The three categories work together to illustrate what a first-generation student who can successfully make it to college might look like. This framework serves as a starting point from which researchers, educators, pre-college program staff, and policymakers can gain a greater understanding of the strategies used and strengths possessed by first-generation students who go to college.

Methodology

This chapter addresses the following research question: What set of factors predispose African American first-generation students to pursue a college education? The related research questions were as follows: (1) To what degree were the three innate psychological needs that cultivate self-determination met for these students? (2) What skills and assets do these students possess that enabled them to be academically successful enough to qualify for college? (3) What strategies did these students employ to successfully enroll into college?

Given the purpose of exploring the nature of a first-generation college student's decision to attend college, the research approach was phenomenological to capture the essence of the students' lived experiences and employed the method of interviewing. The site for this study was "Private University," the pseudonym for a private, religiously affiliated, four-year university in the Midwestern region of the United States. This university reported a total undergraduate population of 8,048 students during the 2007-2008 academic year. Demographically, the university maintains the following average enrollment percentages: 82 percent Caucasian, 4.6 percent African American, 4.5 percent Asian, 4.1 percent Latino, and 0.3 percent American Indian (U.S. College Search, 2008).

The researcher used purposive sampling to identify and select participants (Weiss, 1994). The sample was developed by contacting members of the university's Black student organizations by email to invite them to participate in the study. The email specified the requirement that participants must be the first in the family to attend college. Student affairs administrators were also contacted by email and asked to refer students whom they believed met the qualifications.

To filter out students who do not meet the qualifications of the study, each respondent was asked to complete a short demographic survey that would help determine if the student was in fact, first in the family to pursue a college education. This survey was also used to describe characteristics of the sample. Those students whose questionnaires indicated that their parents had never enrolled in college were invited to participate in one-on-one interviews. When more participants were needed, the researcher used snowball sampling (Weiss, 1994) by asking participants to refer other students who might qualify to participate in the study. The larger study yielded a sample of 17 African American and Mexican American Students. This chapter highlights the experiences of the eight African American students in the sample.

Description of the Participants

The participants described in this chapter are eight African American first-generation college students enrolled at the participating university. Having parents with no college experience was used as the characteristic that defined students as "first-generation" because of the presumed greater lack of knowledge and resources parents would have to help prepare their children for college. Of the study participants, four were female and four were male. The average participant age was 20.2, with ages ranging from nineteen to twenty-four. One participant was a sophomore, two were juniors, and five were seniors. All participants were full time students who were actively involved in student organizations.

High School Background

Of the participants, five attended public high schools before attending Private University, and three attended private high schools. The racial makeup of the students' high schools ranged tremendously. Three reported attending predominantly White high schools, three attended predominantly African American high schools, and the remaining two attended racially diverse high schools. The average cumulative high school grade point average was 3.45. Only two of the students reported involvement with a pre-college program in high school or middle school.

Family Structure and Background

Of the participants, two were raised by both parents, and the remaining six were raised in single-parent homes. Seven of the students had mothers who completed up to a high school diploma, and one had a mother who had less than a high school diploma. Five reported that their fathers had earned a high school diploma, two had fathers who had less than a high school diploma, and one did not know their fathers' educational status. The vast majority of the students came from lower socioeconomic households: six of the students reported a family income of less than $35,000 per year, one reported an income within the $35,000-$49,000 range, and one reported $75,000-$99,000. Table 2.1 shows brief profiles of participants in the study.

Table 2.1. Study Participant Profiles

Partici-pant	Gender	School	Parent	GPA	Pre-College Program ?
Nicole	Female	Predominantly White Public School	Mom	3.2	No
Daslyn	Male	Predominantly African American Private School	Both	3.4	No
Jerell	Male	Predominantly White Public School	Grandmother	3.4	No
Nia	Female	Predominantly African American Private School	Mom	3.8	Yes
Shawna	Female	Predominantly African American Public School	Dad	3.1	No
Elijah	Male	Diverse Public School	Mom	3.1	No
Lamar	Male	Predominantly White Private School	Both	3.7	No
Cherise	Female	Diverse Public School	Mom	3.9	Yes

Results

Most of the students were raised in homes headed by single mothers who did not heavily emphasize the pursuit of an education. This was largely due to pressing life challenges that prompted these mothers to focus more on overcoming day-to-day challenges, such as simply putting food on the table. Taking time to plan for the future was not always a feasible option. As children, these students had to be highly resilient to accomplish their educational goals. They had to exercise diligence and persistence to get to college. This was highly reflective of Cherise's experience:

> My mom had me when she was sixteen; my grandmother died probably two years prior to that and she didn't have any guidance at all. I think the only person who graduated directly from high school was my oldest aunt. So, she didn't have any background on this is what you do in life, you go to school and you graduate. And, money, our status is poor. The main thing was having food and lights outside of college. College just wasn't real.

Despite the financial hardships, most of the students were able to find moral support for their academic endeavors within their immediate households. When this type of support was not available (as was the case for both Cherise and Nia), they took measures to receive encouragement from relationships developed outside of

the home. Cherise received much encouragement from the Upward Bound staff, and Nia received support from her pre-college coach at school. Thus, all students, regardless of whether they received moral support from within or outside of the home, had each of the three psychological needs fulfilled: competence, autonomy and relatedness.

Findings for Research Question One: Self Determination

Research question one explored the degree to which the three innate psychological needs that cultivate self-determination were met for the students. Based on Ryan and Deci's (2000) Self-Determination Theory, the participants in this study were indeed self-determined, as all three psychological needs were fulfilled in their lives. While there was some evidence of variation in how these needs were met, it was quite clear that based upon the criteria of self-determination set forth by Ryan and Deci (2000), these students were fully provided with the provisions necessary to become self-determined individuals. Most participants were intrinsically motivated to do well, meaning that they were more driven by an internal passion or desire to succeed.

The students simply loved to learn. This love for learning was highly reinforced by important adults in their lives, such as parents and teachers. Parents (and in some cases, other influential adults) played a critical role in meeting the three psychological needs that promote self-determination by providing (a) the encouraging environment needed to feel *competent*; (b) the empowerment needed to feel *autonomous*; and (c) the inclusiveness needed to feel a sense of *relatedness* to others. Figure 2 provides a visual representation of the self-determination themes and how these served to fulfill each of the three psychological needs.

Figure 2.2. Self-Determination Themes

Self-Determination		
Competence	**Autonomy**	**Relatedness**
Strengths that are validated by others	Parents who encourage independence	Assurance of love from significant others
Spiritual assurance	Sense of responsibility	Relationships that are healthy and satisfying
Distinction as "the smart one"	Preference for self-reliance	Sense of acceptance by others within peer group
Desire to pave the way for others	Desire to exceed parents' financial status	

Competence

The participants exhibited a strong sense of competence, which they maintained through a varying combination of the following themes: having (a) strengths that were validated by others, (b) spiritual assurance, (c) distinction as "the smart one" in the family, and (d) a desire to pave the way for others. Elijah described how his ability to do well in school is ultimately tied to his purpose in life, and impels him to continue in his success:

> I always felt like [God] has got big plans for me. And, in my life, if I make some type of difference, I know what it is. But, I am meant to make a difference for somebody. A difference, whether in school or at work, friends, anything . . . . I just had a revelation one day. It was my junior year in high school. He has a purpose for me and ever since then, I've felt that way. I've just always felt that there is a bigger purpose than I can see. But, yeah, he wants me to do something. I don't know what it is, and I can't figure it out, but I've just always felt that way.

It was the combination of his role as mentor to his younger siblings and a belief that God chose him to set the example that reaffirmed his ability and commitment to be successful. The participants knew that they were capable of achieving academic success, and this knowing was validated by important people in their lives who affirmed their strengths and abilities.

Past successes also played a role in validating competence. When they accomplished goals or maintained good grades, this reinforced a sense of competence. The participants' academic abilities, along with the passion and drive to do well, made them stand out among their peers and siblings. As indicated by the literature, competence is characterized by a strong feeling of self, confidence, independence, motivation and strength of character (Nasim et al., 2005). The participants embodied these characteristics through school work, their spiritual connections, as the "smart" one in the family, and through the desire to use their strengths to benefit others.

Autonomy

The participants were highly autonomous, and this was largely reflective of the relationships they had with their parents. In most cases, the parents laid the foundation by instilling values and having high expectations for their children, but did not step in to control their lives. This was largely because parents were unable to. They needed to commit a great deal of time to their jobs to maintain the stability of the home. Instilling the ability to be independent is a parenting strategy driven by cultural norms in which autonomy is necessary for mere survival. The students expressed a sense of autonomy in four ways, which included having (a) parents who encouraged independence, (b) a sense of responsibility, (c) a preference for self-reliance, and (d) a desire to exceed their parents' financial status.

Jerell's story is one that embodies all four of the autonomy themes. Abandoned by both parents at an early age, he was raised by his grandmother, who became terminally ill during his high school years. The challenges he faced in his life required that he exercised a great deal of responsibility at a young age. Here's how he described his experience:

> You know, my grandmother was sick and all . . . her body had shut down and was in the hospital for two months . . . . When she came home, it was just me and her and the roles completely reversed and I was the provider and I was working . . . . I'd get up, go to school, come home, eat and do some homework. Work from 4-11, come home, go to sleep. Grandma would wake me up at 2 am because she didn't feel well and wanted me to sit with her. Literally sit with her until 3 and then go to sleep and get up to get ready to go back to school.

All cases were not as extreme as Jerell's, but all of the participants' parents highly valued autonomy for their children. Unlike the parenting styles of helicopter parents, who hover over their child's every move, the parents of the participants placed more value on allowing their children to solve problems themselves so that they could learn to survive life's harsh realities of discrimination and financial hardship.

More often than not, this was also a result of being unable to spend the time that it would take to manage their children's lives in the way that a helicopter parent would due to the greater amount of effort needed to maintain financial stability for their families. The fact that parents had to work long hours to provide for the family meant that the participants were expected to contribute by taking on roles that may have typically been the parents' responsibility. These responsibilities, as well as the encouragement their parents provided to live independently, were key components that resulted in the participants' sense of autonomy.

Relatedness

All participants felt a strong sense of belonging or connection to a significant individual or group of people. For many, this meant being well-connected to family; for others, it was a church group, an athletic team, an academic group, or a group of friends; for a select few, it meant being connected to extended family members when the immediate household was not stable. There were three dominant themes that reflected the students' experience with relatedness: (a) assurance of love from significant people in their lives, (b) healthy and satisfying relationships, and (c) a sense of acceptance by others within their peer groups.

Nicole spoke with great depth about her family:

> My family's support is extremely important. I feel my drive and determination helps me along the way, but their support helps me go further. They are always there to put things into perspective for me.

It was Nia's grandmother who contributed to her sense of relatedness:

> My grandmother who passed two years ago—I was my grandmother's baby. That's probably the reason I am the person I am versus the way typical people are in my area.

Daslyn's parents modeled what it meant to maintain a healthy and satisfying relationship:

> My parents instilled those important educational values when I was really young. That was a pretty much a big impact on my life. Additionally, the fact that they were still together the whole time I was growing up—I'm pretty much one of the few people I know my age whose parents are still together. Them being married has been a huge part of it and the reason I'm still alive.

Most of the participants had a strong sense of relatedness through their connections to family. There were a few cases in which the students did not feel strongly connected to their parents or other close members of their households. In these cases, the students drew their support from other relationships with teachers, staff, members of the extended family, or friends. Thus, all students were able to maintain relationships that were healthy and satisfying and found a context within which they could feel accepted by others.

Findings for Research Question Two: Academic Success

The central goal of the second research question was to explore the strategies the students employed to be academically successful enough to qualify for college.

Figure 2.3. Academic Success Themes

Academic Success		
Classroom Performance	**Stereotype Threat Resistance**	**Social and Academic Integration**
Earning good grades Having high expectations Nurturing strengths and managing weaknesses	Disproving negative stereotypes Ignoring the threat Avoiding "stereotypical" peers	Getting involved through extracurricular activities Developing relationships with teachers and staff

Academic success is a collective term that embodies both in-class and out-of-class experiences (Harper, 2005). Themes included (a) successful classroom performance, (b) the ability to resist stereotype threat, and (c) social and academic integration. Based upon this understanding of academic success, the participants demonstrated that they were highly successful.

Classroom Performance

Successful classroom performance is an essential component that includes maintaining a strong grade point average and having the ability to score well on tests and writing assignments. Classroom performance is generally strengthened through the students' active involvement in the educational process. The participants demonstrated successful classroom performance in the following three ways: (a) earning good grades, (b) having high expectations, and (c) and nurturing strengths while managing weaknesses.

Making the grade was of utmost importance. The participants were highly committed to getting the most out of their high school careers as a strategy to position themselves as strong college admissions candidates. They were self-aware enough to understand their strengths and weaknesses and tailored their academic and extracurricular decisions accordingly. For example, Cherise, who was not a great test-taker described her strategy to compensate for her weakness:

> Every extra credit assignment, I'd ask for, because my ACT scores weren't great, so I was trying to find all that I could do to get to college. And then coming from [this school district], I never had any AP courses. So I felt like the contending part was my GPA.

The participants took the work that they accomplished in the classroom seriously. They were intentional about establishing a strong academic record and consistently looked for ways to keep their grades up. Many were not willing to settle for average performance and took measures to ensure that they stood out among their peers. The expectations they held for themselves were high, from the work they completed for their classes to the type of colleges that they anticipated attending. Every student was aware of the importance of maintaining good grades and made this a priority, specifically so that they would meet and exceed college admissions requirements.

Stereotype Threat Resistance

Resisting stereotype threat is a task that takes a substantial amount of energy to acknowledge, process, and respond to (Fries-Britt and Griffin, 2007; Griffin, 2005; Solorzano, Allen, and Carroll, 2002; Steele, 1997; Steele and Aronson, 1998). Generally, resisting stereotype threat within an academic setting has a negative

impact on academic performance and well-being (Griffin, 2005). Steele asserted that not overcoming the threat can bring down intellectual performance and, if left unchecked over time, can cause a student to seriously question his or her own abilities. This was not the case for the participants in the current study. Not only were they convinced that they did they not suffer academically from the stereotypes they encountered, but many of them were not interested in giving much attention to the idea of being stereotyped or discriminated against. The participants who spoke about encountering stereotype threat resisted the threat in three ways: (a) disproving negative stereotypes, (b) ignoring the threat, and (c) avoiding "stereotypical" peers.

In some cases, the threat seemed to effectively motivate them to maintain a strong academic record. The racial makeup of the participants' schools and the highly diverse set of activities that they became involved with likely reduced the extent to which stereotype threat affected them. Thus, the combination of extracurricular involvement, the ability to develop relationships with teachers and staff, and the ability to maintain a strong academic record seemed to work together as a buffer against stereotype threat, and as a means for academic achievement.
Nicole explained that she was always aware of the assumption by others in school that she was the "typical Black girl," which she described as being "bad" or a product of a dangerous urban environment:

> I had this teacher. He was also a basketball coach and he was giving me a ride home. He says to me, "I know you've probably seen people get shot and killed," and I was kind of like, "Okaaaay" [laughter]. I'd get the pity look, you know. The "I feel sorry for you" look.

Situations like these created a drive in her to prove the stereotypes wrong. This is the approach that she often took:

> I always try to make myself known. I am going to talk to you. Shake your hand. Let you know what I am all about. I am always the type where I want you to get to know me. It's typical, I mean, I've been known to do it . . . . I just feel like it's my job to let them know who I am to prove them wrong.

Shawna's response was similar:

> I don't know if it's a personal thing, but I felt that because where I was at in high school, that people viewed us as those that aren't going to do well. . . . I responded in a way that if that's how someone feels about me, that's going to drive me to do better and prove them wrong.

Lamar's approach was to simply ignore or minimize the threat:

> I think our generation is a step above racism, but there were a lot of sheltered people that got to me because they didn't understand our culture. They'd ask

> stupid questions or act out. Most of the kids came from the [Brook Hills] area and suburbs to Private High and just didn't understand. Not flat out racism as in "I don't like you because you are Black," but a lot of ignorance. . . . It's not that they try to personally attack me.

Many of the participants reported that they did not experience being stereotyped by peers or teachers, and attributed this to the fact that they attended highly diverse schools or schools that had student populations largely reflective of the participant's racial background. However, even in such cases, while these students easily dismissed the idea that they may have experienced stereotype threat, their stories painted a different picture, indicating that some may have indeed experienced the threat. For those students who did identify situations in which they felt stereotyped, they described two ways in which they actively responded. They would either take measures to prove that the stereotype was not true, or they would avoid peers who seemed to embody the stereotype so that they would not be associated with the behaviors of that group. In every case, however, the students insisted these negative experiences were not powerful enough to negatively impact their grades

Social and Academic Integration

Social and academic integration pertains to becoming fully immersed into the many dynamics of the educational environment. Its concept reaches beyond maintaining a high grade point average and into developing close relationships with faculty and peers, as well as actively engaging in school-related activities. Students who are both socially and academically integrated are more likely to stay in school (Cabrera et al., 1992), experience greater moral and cognitive development, and have clearer vocational aspirations (Astin, 1984). All of the participants were socially and academically integrated and expressed this in two ways: (a) by getting involved through extracurricular activities and (b) by developing relationships with teachers and staff members. Most knew that a strong academic record could be used to participate in programs such as the National Honor Society to further boost the extracurricular resume. Additionally, the students who struggled in a particular subject were intentional about taking the extra time needed with a teacher until they fully understood the concept.

Nicole was involved in basketball, the prom committee, Key Club, and the Young Women Leadership Organization. However, she did not simply join organizations. She was also a mover and shaker on campus. She described an initiative that she and a friend started while in high school:

> I started a movement with a friend called INAG. It's an acronym for *It's Not A Game*. We had dress up Thursdays. It started with four people and turned out to be a whole school thing. But, I just couldn't dedicate the time. But I'd like to make it an official thing for the school.

Nia demonstrated academic integration through her deliberate efforts to develop relationships with her teachers by presenting herself as a student who was serious about her studies:

> They would say that I just have this essence about myself that I am all business-y and every time they see me I would be doing something "nerdy." In terms of my teachers, they would see it firsthand. I'm always asking for additional things to do. I am always looking for something more, or start ahead in class.

Becoming an integral part of the campus community was an important strategy for fostering the participants' academic success. Campus involvement allowed the participants to take on leadership roles, test out their strengths and weaknesses, and develop an even stronger sense of self. In the relationships they developed with teachers, the students received affirmation of their strengths and were extended opportunities that other students would not necessarily have. The participants' social and academic integration on campus was pivotal to their academic growth and development.

Findings for Research Question Three: Resourcefulness

The third research question explored how the participants navigated the challenges that prevent many potential first-generation students from pursuing a college education. These challenges include poor academic preparation, limited financial resources, a lack of college knowledge, debilitating cultural norms, and minimal emotional support. Essentially, the students addressed these challenges by ensuring that they (a) were academically prepared for college, (b) had acquired the college knowledge necessary to navigate the admissions and funding processes, and (c) developed the support system necessary to help them achieve their academic goals.

Figure 2.4. Resourcefulness Themes

Resourcefulness		
Academic Preparation	**College Knowledge**	**Support System**
Selecting the right high school Enrolling in competitive courses	Not being intimidated Following the money trail Searching independently Accepting help	Overcoming negative cultural norms Seeking encouragement Seeking resourceful individuals

Academic Preparation

This strategy addresses the challenge of having poor academic preparation for college. The participants identified two ways in which they went about ensuring that they would be prepared for college: (a) selecting the right high school and (b) enrolling in competitive courses.

With the help of an older cousin, Nia enrolled into Conners Academy, a competitive college preparatory school on the opposite end of town. When it was time to choose a high school, she was sure that she did not want to attend the high school in her neighborhood because of its negative reputation:

> I went to an academy near the [local university]. It was a public school in a good neighborhood. It was a well ranked school. You had to be pre-selected into the program because they instilled the No Child Left Behind program my junior year. If you didn't pass or get selected, you had to go to your districts school. They were horrible. I was so excited that I got selected . . . . I was in honors classes . . . it was challenging. My high school kind of helped, as well, because I was in honors courses and the grades are different than regular courses. It was a reality check.

Shawna's high school did not offer advanced courses. As a member of the school's debate team, she learned that the suburban schools she competed against offered much more than what her high school had to offer. She expressed her frustration over the lack of advanced courses offered through her high school and opted to take courses at the local college to boost her transcript and enhance her grade point average:

> It was kind of depressing to see the types of courses that Whites were offered throughout the cities here, versus what I was offered. I already knew when I got to college that I was going to be behind because my school didn't offer particular courses. It was a source of frustration for me. I didn't know if it was just the MPS school district, or if it was because my school was predominantly Black.

Being academically qualified for college was one thing, but being academically competitive was entirely different for the participants. They believed that earning good grades was important, but if they earned good grades in a non-competitive high school or by taking average courses, the grades would not carry as much weight. Therefore, the participants and their families were intentional about the type of schools they attended and the course load they took on. For the parents, it was important that the schools were safe, and for the students, it was important that the schools had the resources necessary to adequately prepare them for college. Many of the schools that the participants chose to attend made it a priority to help students through the college application process and provided them with a wide scope of information to aid them in the decision making process. Shawna's case was the exception because she did not have the option to attend a high school out of her neighborhood. She took measures into her own hands and enrolled in college courses to enhance her course load and contacted the university directly to receive

help with the application process. Her actions certainly qualify as resourceful, as she worked within her means to become academically prepared for college.

College Knowledge

Having college knowledge entails possessing the information necessary to successfully enroll into college and to fund the education. This strategy addresses two challenges: the challenge of not having the money to pay for college and the challenge of not having an understanding of the college admissions process. The participants described acquiring college knowledge by employing four different strategies: (a) refusing to be intimidated, (b) following the money trail, (c) searching independently, and (d) accepting help from others.

Most of the participants did not have a plan for financing college, but they were not preoccupied with worry over how college would be paid for. Most stated that a lack of money simply would not be a barrier to their college education, and that they would take out loans as a last resort. All were confident that the money would come somehow. Nicole, for example, did not know how she would pay for school, but she did believe that by applying for as many grants and scholarships as possible, her hard work would pay off:

> When I applied for school, getting scholarships was the whole thing, but I really didn't have a plan. I really did not. It was like, "We'll find some type of way to pay it," and that's kind of how it has been this whole time. "We'll find some type of way." I didn't have any game plan going into this.

Lamar was also unconcerned because of his father's promise to pay for his college education:

> My father and I worked out that I would look and apply for scholarships and he is paying for my tuition. We didn't take out any loans or anything. He is using his pension/savings money; I guess it's his 401k. I get a little financial aid and a scholarship, too. I got a notice about a scholarship competition and I took that opportunity to go for it and I ended up getting an award.

Shawna's father also encouraged her not to worry about college:

> My dad told me not to worry about it and focus on my grades. I always thought I would take out a loan. My dad always said if you get a degree from Private, you'll get a good job and you'll be able to pay your loans back.

Nia, who did not have the moral support of a parent employed her own strategies to make it happen:

> I never really knew the steps in terms of paying for college. For me, all I knew was scholarships and grants. I definitely went straight to all the ones that nobody

> really knew about. Everyone always went to the Tylenol and Coca-Cola scholarships; I went to those ones that didn't have a whole lot of exposure. I had no idea how I was going to pay for Private. I thought that scholarships would be sufficient and the first year comes and you realize it's not enough. But I did get a four-year scholarship funded through [Urban] Public Schools. It is $7,500 a year, and that helped me as well.

Daslyn had parental moral support, but his parents did not have the money to pay for college. He shared some of his creative strategies for financing his education:

> The funny thing is my parents told me that I had a college fund, started by my grandpa when I was four or five, and I was relying on that. I was thinking that I had $5,000-$6,000 and then when I get ready to go to college, I only have two $100 bonds. That wasn't enough to cover my books! I was outside of Wal-Mart selling chicken dinners for tuition and I didn't really have a plan. We would be in my kitchen and my aunt would be cooking up a storm. I knew that manager of Wal-Mart and he was cool with me and all and knew what I was trying to do. So, they were supportive as long as I wasn't disruptive or disrespectful. They were all for it because they knew that not a lot of kids in our area could go to college.

Ultimately, Daslyn was able to secure grants and loans to cover his tuition.

The participants made it a point to do as much as possible without seeking out or accepting help, but they were wise enough to utilize the help that was offered to them when it was needed. Lamar was able to get assistance through his school:

> Our high school has college prep that has guidance counselors that are on you about deadlines and everything. They were amazing and made sure you were on top of things and deadlines.

Cherise, who was only one of two participants who were a part of a pre-college program, credited her involvement with Upward Bound with providing the most valuable assistance with the college application process:

> I was naïve to the whole process and they informed me. My ignorance was evident when I went to do applications. So, it was all upward bound. I knew of scholarships my freshman year and I had a resume by my freshman year. I was working hard to get ready. And there were counselors, but I was always five steps ahead of the counselors in school because of Upward Bound.

Acquiring the information necessary to search for, apply to, and pay for the colleges of their choice did not seem to be a difficult task for the participants, as they had surrounded themselves with a set of teachers, mentors and counselors who were committed to helping them with the college application process. Additionally, they were highly ambitious and primarily pursued this process independently by searching the internet for information about different colleges and how to fund their education. The participants approached the process confidently, and would not

allow themselves to become discouraged with the cost of tuition or the competitive nature of the universities they desired to attend. They remained focused, and if faced with a challenge that had the potential of jeopardizing their educational futures, the participants would simply continue to move forward until they found a solution. Many, for example, did not know how college would be paid for, but instead of stagnating in their uncertainty, they moved forward and explored options until the problem was resolved.

Support System

The participants were deliberate about identifying and connecting with a group of people who would morally support them in their college aspirations or serve as resources to help achieve goals. The three strategies that participants used to create a support system included (a) overcoming negative cultural norms, (b) seeking encouragement, and (c) seeking resourceful individuals.

All of the students faced negative feedback from people within their communities regarding their academic aspirations. For Cherise and Nia, it came from their mothers. Nia's response was to use this relationship as a catalyst for doing well in her life:

> It's like me and my mom grew up together and I sometimes feel she feels I am trying to be better than her because I had an opportunity to be exposed to things she has not. She didn't have an opportunity to really have a mother or graduate from high school or go to college. I have to escape that relationship that isn't really there anyway and that negativity. She just doesn't understand—not understanding why I am studying, working so hard. I was kind of the mom in some of the situations—my mom sometimes did drugs and stuff, so I had to step up. That's why I knew I wanted to go to college, regardless of these negative situations in my life. I had to escape that and my escape was school.

For the rest of the participants, the negative feedback came from outside of the household, through relatives or other kids in the neighborhood. Many were accused of "acting white" or being a "sellout." The commitment to their race and culture was consistently being called into question. Here is how Daslyn described his experience:

> For whatever reason, people might have been jealous because they didn't have this opportunity to go. Those are the people who wanted to be in my shoes, or thought I was a sell out because I wanted to get out. I'd get the same flack, being told the same thing that I'm going to the suburbs with all the White people. After a while I got tired of hearing it. One time I did get into a fist fight over it, but after that I realized it wasn't worth it. If they can't see that I'm going to college to help out the area that I am from, and have more people from where I am from get to where I am at, I figured it wasn't worth my time and tried to ignore it.

All participants resisted these negative messages, but had various tactics for doing so and all found ways to barrel through the criticism, so that they could stay focused on their goals. They were quite instrumental in securing support. The participants valued the importance of having people in their lives who encouraged them to pursue their educational dreams, so they placed much more emphasis on those who supported them than those who did not.

Nia described the people she intentionally surrounded herself with in order to be successful:

> I had friends and mentors I kind of picked up along the way. One of the post secondary coaches that I had in school, I am very close to today. She really pushed me with different scholarships and applying for aid and things. It was all of those little things like that and networking. We actually had our own office at school to go to and fill out the FAFSA and applications and doing personal statements and things like that. There were just great things and being in the right place at the right time. I can say my teachers and friends motivated me.

Cherise took similar measures to ensure that she was surrounded by the people who could help her:

> I usually try to seek out and find somebody who will help me and find the most simplistic way of getting things. But, what made me different was I was persistent.

It is clear that all participants needed encouragement to aid in their success. If they already had the encouragement at home, they put less effort into creating a support system. If the encouragement did not exist at home, they were more deliberate about surrounding themselves with people who believed in them and would assist in the achievement of their educational goals. For many of the participants, the value of education was instilled early on, and they received a great amount of encouragement from their families. Most families highly valued education and expected their children to maintain good grades in school. Much of this encouragement was fueled by the parents' desire to have their children take advantage of the opportunities that they did not have.

As was previously noted within the findings related to autonomy, the males were much less likely than the females to ask for help. None of the males indicated that they would ask for help whereas, all of the females indicated that they would. For example, when asked about seeking encouragement, Jerell said, "I wouldn't say that I really turned to anyone, but more or less they gave me the words of encouragement." The males preferred to work independently over reaching out for help; however, in cases where they already had resourceful individuals in their support networks, they were more than willing to accept the resources offered to them.

Most participants were aware of the importance of networking and used this to their advantage as they employed strategies to achieve their educational and future career goals. With resources ranging from teachers who would write letters

of recommendation to mentors who could provide tips about law school, the participants each recognized these opportunities and used them to their advantage.

Discussion

Through an exploration of the factors that contributed to the African American students' decision to pursue a college education, it is apparent that the fulfillment of the students' three innate psychological needs of competence, autonomy and relatedness helped them to maintain the natural human inclination to be self-determined. The high level of self-determination that the students displayed enabled their success by driving them to desire stellar academic performance and to secure the resources necessary to achieve their goals. While the students were active agents of their own success, it was clear that they did not go the journey alone. All were influenced by important people along the way who provided them with the support and resources they needed to accomplish their goals.

The role of the family was critical in providing foundational support. Despite what much of the research says about first-generation students not having parental support, it is clear that this support was central to setting the college aspirations ball into motion. By providing love, support, and high expectations, and by encouraging independence and upward social mobility, the students were armed with the tools necessary to desire a college education.

Because of the foundational support that they received by family and other influential adults, they had the disposition—or the mindset—necessary to aspire toward a college education. Once this disposition was set into place, complete with a strong sense of competence, autonomy and relatedness, the participants had the volition to act upon their aspirations. They engaged in strategies such as selecting the high school that would best prepare them for college, taking the initiative to research college and financial aid information, and developing relationships with people who would help them succeed. These actions were inspired in a variety of ways, including the spiritual assurance that God had provided them with the skills and tools necessary to accomplish their goals, the desire to avoid the financial challenges that their parents struggled to overcome, and the desire to make a difference in the world.

The students credited their schools, the pre-college programs they participated in, and even local colleges and universities with providing them with the information they needed to pursue a college education. Nicole and Shawna chose to directly contact the universities they wished to attend for information. It was clear that the high schools (and in some cases, the middle schools) contributed greatly to providing critical information and support. The students who could not attend college-focused schools were fortunate to have parents who strongly supported them; and similarly, the students who did not have strongly supportive parents were fortunate to attend college-preparatory schools. For Cherise, who had neither the support of her family nor the school she attended, Upward Bound

became her safety net. Cherise's story is a prime example of how a pre-college program can provide resources and support for students who may not receive this from home or at school. These programs can serve as a buffer to these deficiencies when the school or family does not provide either moral support or college information. This demonstrates the important role that schools and other institutions can play in providing the foundational support that all students need to be academically successful.

Because the participants in the study were self-determined, they believed that anything was possible. They fully believed in themselves, but also drew upon the support of others to ensure that they had what they needed to succeed. Thus, for these students, having a sense of competence, autonomy and relatedness were important prerequisites to their success.

Self-determination

Parents played an integral role in cultivating the participants' self-determination. The love and support they provided through such parenting strategies as validating their children's strengths, encouraging independence, and instilling a desire for upward social mobility were pivotal in meeting the three innate psychological needs of competence, autonomy and relatedness. Students who did not have these foundational needs met at home were fortunate enough to find fulfillment from other adults outside of their homes.

Students from nurturing and non-nurturing households alike felt highly competent and credited themselves for their accomplishments. The students who did not grow up in supportive and nurturing homes were grateful for their challenges because they explained that these experiences further emphasized where they did not want to end up in life and prompted them to do all that they could to be successful. They heavily attributed their success to their own academic abilities, and placed great emphasis on their personal drive as the catalyst for their success.

The participants who grew up in highly supportive and nurturing homes were grateful for the sacrifices their parents made to get them into the right schools and provide them with a stable and secure childhood. Like the students who grew up in non-nurturing homes, these students also attributed successes to their own academic abilities and personal drive. They often emphasized that no one forced them to get good grades or to pursue a college education, and did not consider the possibility that their parents' high academic expectations for them may have contributed to the personal drive to succeed academically.

As is indicated in Ryan and Deci's (2000) research, it was indeed necessary for the students to have a sense of competence, autonomy and relatedness to aspire to a college education. Because the participants had a sense of competence, they had the wherewithal to believe that they could succeed in a college environment, and did not fear taking that next step in the educational process. Their competence was planted and reinforced by the important adults in their lives who believed in them

and wanted to see them do well. As a result of the participants' sense of autonomy, the students had the freedom to explore their strengths and weaknesses and to take part in important decisions regarding their lives. This level of freedom further developed their aspirations and helped them devise a plan for pursuing a college education. Having a sense of relatedness enabled the participants to share their dreams with others who would support and help them accomplish their goals. It is indisputable that humans are social beings and need one another to accomplish goals. The important connections that the participants were able to maintain kept them in contact with people who would both encourage and assist them as they took the steps necessary to go to college.

Each of the participants had the three innate psychological needs met, and can thus be considered to be self-determined individuals. For first-generation students, self-determination is a necessary characteristic to possess to make it to college, because as the research indicates, this population of students must overcome a number of challenges that their peers often do not face. Overcoming these challenges requires the determination to do so. First-generation students are generally not coerced into pursuing a college education; it takes personal volition—the will do it, which is fueled by self-determination.

Considering these findings about self-determination, a call to implement self-determination initiatives within schools and pre-college programs is in order. Many first-generation students do not have the same level of support from their families that the students in the current student study were privileged to have, and countless others also lack support from their schools. As such support demonstrates the powerful effect it can have on a child's self-perception and educational aspirations, measures must be taken to incorporate similar support structures within the schools in which our children spend much of their childhood. This is not to suggest that parents are off the hook when it comes to ensuring that their children are cared for, but schools also must understand the pivotal role that they play in a child's development.

Academic Achievement

The high level of competence the participants possessed was clear in their academic achievement, particularly in the high expectations that they held for themselves. They were determined to be the best among their peers and were consistently aware of how the activities they engaged in and the grades they achieved would affect their chances of being accepted into a competitive college or university. As they became more academically successful and more involved in their high schools, their competence was more strongly reinforced by teachers, guidance counselors and peers. Experiences that included receiving awards and recognition for academic competitions, being voted class president, and earning high grade point averages fueled them to keep achieving. Lamar said it well when he stated, "My past successes keep me motivated."

For all of the students, being academically successful meant truly valuing their educational experiences. It meant performance. It meant taking classes seriously and employing strategies that would enable them to produce quality results. By understanding their strengths and weaknesses, the students found ways to use their strengths to their benefit and keep the weaknesses from pulling them down. Academic success also meant being resistant to stereotype threat. The participants understood that they would not be successful if they became consumed with or believed that they characterized the stereotypes often held against African Americans. Thus, they took measures to ensure that they would remain academically focused and could become an integrated part of the school without being adversely affected by the constant threat of being stereotyped or discriminated against. While many researchers (this one included) would argue that the strategies they employed were not necessarily healthy ones, it must be acknowledged that as these students advance in their racial identity development through their college experiences, they will find other ways in which to handle stereotype threat. As high school students at this developmental stage, the participants addressed the threat in ways they knew best, and these strategies proved to be successful during this phase in their lives.

Academic success also meant getting involved. It seemed that for this sample, the more students became socially involved and connected with teachers, the more they enjoyed their high school experiences. This did not necessarily result in better grades, but it certainly contributed to a more overall rewarding experience. Cherise, the student who was least involved, had the strongest grade point average, but least favorable high school memories. Toward the end of Cherise's interview, she expressed regret for not being more involved in school as she said, "High school was okay. I wish I could have enjoyed it more."

Being academically successful in high school is, of course, essential for students who wish to attend college. Due to increasingly competitive admissions requirements, the participants took deliberate measures to ensure that they would be qualified for college by their senior year in high school. Taking these measures required that the students upheld high academic expectations, valued responsibility and desired upward social mobility. This disposition was made possible by the foundational support they received by family and other influential adults in their lives who helped to shape them into competent, autonomous and well-connected individuals.

This underscores the importance of personal motivation. When students have a strong foundation of support and are self-determined, they rely less upon others and take matters of achievement into their own hands. Once self-determination is in place, little effort is needed to push these kids to set and accomplish their goals. Parents, schools and pre-college programs can aid in developing academically successful students by teaching them how to address stereotype threat and discrimination, and by ensuring that they are connected with teachers, staff and other students at their schools. Student success is a domino effect that begins with

foundational support, is fueled by self-determination, and is propelled from continuous successes that validate a sense of competence.

It is also important to help students discover and utilize their strengths. When they understand what they are good at doing and can match this with extracurricular and co-curricular activities, the chance that they will be academically successful dramatically increases. This not only provides students with direction as they seek out future aspirations, but it also helps to validate them as competent individuals, and will help to set them on track towards the accomplishment of their goals.

Resourcefulness

Taking the measures necessary to overcome potential barriers to college enrollment required that the participants were resourceful enough to come up with solutions to any of the problems they faced as they prepared for college. Many first-generation students face challenges including poor academic preparation, limited financial resources, insufficient college knowledge, a lack of moral support, and negative cultural norms. Most of the participants shared in the struggle to secure financial support to battle debilitating cultural norms, and were strategic in their endeavors to overcome those struggles. However, they did not struggle through poor academic preparation, insufficient college knowledge or a lack of emotional support because they took proactive measures to ensure that they were not deficient in these areas. The decision to carefully select a high school proved to be a wise one, as this instantly placed the participants into college-going environments that maintained college-preparatory curriculums, caring and supportive teachers, and a wealth of information about college. This simplified the participants' efforts to gain college knowledge and to develop a support system, as much of this was already built into their schools. The few who did not have these benefits integrated into their schools were even more deliberate about employing resourceful strategies to ensure that they would matriculate into college.

These students were problem solvers. They did not dwell on challenges, but were driven by them. The people that they were connected to and their own personal volition to "make it happen" (as Shawna would say) enabled the students to take the challenges set before them and find the solutions that would help them move forward. When faced with family or friends who criticized them for their academic achievement and college aspirations, the students made it a point to surround themselves with people who would support them so that the pressure to conform to these negative cultural norms would not be so great.

Self-determination and experiences with past successes helped the students to develop the strength in character that refuses to be unmoved by the challenging circumstances they faced. It is essential that schools and pre-college programs are equipped with the resources that students need to accomplish their goals. Too many schools, especially urban schools, lack even basic resources such as textbooks and computers. It is difficult to understand how any child is expected to succeed in such

environments, especially when this is compounded with teachers and staff members who are unsupportive and critical of their students. Self-determined students can only be resourceful to a point—they can only utilize the resources that exist for them. Again, most of the participants in the current study were deliberate about selecting high schools that offered important resources, but this, again, demonstrates what works to aid first-generation students in their preparation for college. If more students had the opportunity to attend schools or participate in pre-college programs that provide college information, offer competitive courses, and enable students to explore educational and career options, a significantly greater number of African American first-generation students would not only enroll, but would graduate from college. So, while it is clear that support is essential to a student's ability to be self-determined, it is also essential that students have access to the resources they need to make a college education possible.

College Predisposition Model

In the spirit of increasing college aspirations in students through solutions grounded in research that explores what works for students (as opposed to following a deficit framework), a College Predisposition Model is proposed. This model suggests that when an individual is exposed to certain environments and elements of support, they develop an inclination to desire and pursue a college education. Essentially, the model identifies the three primary entities that contribute to a first-generation students' successful college enrollment. These entities are: family, which provides foundational support; the individual, who possesses the personal volition to act upon their aspirations; and institutions, which are the bearers of the information and preparation students need to gain college acceptance.

The first entity involves the critical role the family plays in providing foundational support. By providing love, validating strengths, encouraging upward social mobility, racially socializing, and maintaining high academic expectations, families make it possible for children to develop a strong sense of competence, autonomy and relatedness. As the findings of the current study suggest, nurturing the psychological needs that cultivate self-determination are a precursor to desiring a college education. This foundational support of the family is crucial, as it influences the self-determined disposition in students needed to achieve academic success. It should be noted that students who do not receive this foundational support from home can still develop a self-determined disposition if they receive this validation and support from other significant adults.

The second entity involves the students themselves. Complete with a strong sense of competence, autonomy and relatedness, the students are able to develop a self-determined disposition, are driven to be academically successful and have the ability to overcome challenges along the way. This disposition includes the following characteristics: having high expectations, having the ability to resist stereotype threat, not being easily discouraged, not being influenced by negative

cultural norms, having a sense of spiritual assurance, being driven to pave the way for others, desiring social mobility, having a sense of responsibility, and having a preference for self-reliance. As self-determined beings, they are equipped with the volition to employ strategies that will help them achieve their goals. Volition makes the difference between the student who simply aspires to go to college and the student who actually makes it to college. Aspirations can exist without self-determination, but volition cannot.

The third entity involves institutions. The institutional role includes P-12 schools, pre-college programs and colleges and universities. These institutions are important for two reasons: they are the keepers of the information needed to successfully qualify for and apply to colleges and universities; and they are the safety net for the encouragement and support that all students need, but do not always receive from home. Secondary schools have the greatest opportunity of the three institutions to provide this information and support because they are the buildings of which the students spend most of their childhood. This is accomplished by maintaining a caring and supportive staff, implementing self-determination based learning, providing college information, offering competitive courses, and engaging in effective outreach to parents.

These roles—that of the family, the individual, and the institution—are all integral to a first-generation student's decision and ability to pursue a college education. The foundational support provided by the family influences the disposition to aspire to a college education. Once that disposition is in place, the student begins to take action—that is, the measures necessary to gain college enrollment. Collectively, they have the potential to provide the moral support, resources and opportunities necessary to make a college education possible.

The College Predisposition Model on is proposed to demonstrate the important role of the family, the individual, and institutions to the first-generation students' desire and ability to go to college. This model reflects the roles that the three entities play to make the transition to college possible.

Summary

By engaging in one-on-one interviews with first-generation college students, this study sought to uncover the factors that may have contributed to the participants' desire and ability to attend college. It was evident that most of the students received parental support and were actively engaged in their educational pursuits. Despite the research that points to a lack of parental support and susceptibility to common challenges of first-generation students, the participants in the current study were well supported and had the volition to move through common challenges. Additionally, institutions played a critical role in providing the students with the information needed to qualify for and apply to college.

Implications for Practice

This study offers implications that can help P-12 schools, pre-college programs, institutions of higher education, and families assist first-generation students in the pursuit of a college education. It is recommended that P-12 schools strive to transform into college going environments, that pre-college programs evaluate their programs and services to ensure that they continue to meet the needs of first-generation students, and that families recognize and maximize the important role that their support plays in the formation of their children's future aspirations.

Implications for Research

This research invites quantitative inquiry into a larger sample of first-generation students to determine whether or not these factors are also salient to other students. A survey, for example, can determine the level of significance these factors have for other first-generation students and whether or not there are differences for various populations. A quantitative study would be an important follow-up to the current study because such a methodology can test the results found in the current study against a larger population.

Comparative Sibling Study

The fact that many of the participants in the current study had siblings that did not choose to go to college causes one to question why these family members chose two very different directions in life. Having grown up in the same household, it would be valuable to compare each of their experiences to examine whether or not any dominant factors point to an explanation of this phenomenon. This contrast may help to explain personality differences, varying parent-child relationships and academic experiences that may inspire one child to pursue a college education and cause the other to show little interest in such academic pursuits.

Conclusion

The first-generation students represented in this study were resilient, focused and resourceful in their approaches to accomplish their educational goals. Their self-determined nature, made possible by the foundational support they received, was the greatest indicator of the students' success. They understood that they had to take responsibility for their own destiny and did so with great persistence.

This study demonstrated the multidimensional nature of first-generation students and the many pieces of the college enrollment puzzle. Understanding the complex nature of first-generation students and the entities that work together to aid in their success is an important first step toward increasing college enrollment rates for this student population.

The multidimensionality of the students' experiences also underscores the importance of employing a framework that evaluates success to better understand what self-determined students actually do to make a college education possible for themselves. While a deficit model would indeed tell us what they do not receive

and what they do not do, understanding what *has* worked for first-generation students places researchers and educators in a much better position to develop solutions to the college access problem. The proposed College Predisposition Model is a starting point. It is the researcher's desire that others will build upon this study to further understand what works for students and how educators can use this knowledge to develop programs that will effectively serve their students. It is important to reemphasize that this study does not attempt to frame the experiences and characteristics of every first-generation student of color, but serves as a foundation from which we can build a greater understanding of the strategies used and strengths possessed by first-generation students who go on to college.

References

Adelman, C. (2006). *The toolbox revisited.* Washington, DC U.S. Department of Education, Office of Educational Research and Improvement.

Astin, A. (1975). *Preventing students from dropping out.* San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Astin, A. (1984). Student involvement: A developmental theory for higher education. *Journal of College Student Personnel, 25*, 297-308.

Bedsworth, W., Colby, S., and Doctor, J. (2006). *Reclaiming the American dream.* Retrieved May 29, 2007, from http://www.bridgespangroup.org/kno_ articles americandream.html.

Berkner, L., and Chavez, L. (1997). *Access to post-secondary education for 1992 high school graduates.* Washington, DC: National Center for Educational Statistics.

Cabrera, A., Castañeda, M., Nora, A., and Hengstler, D. (1992). The convergence between two theories of college persistence. *Journal of Higher Education, 63*(2), 143-164.

Cabrera, A., and LaNasa, S. (2001). On the path to college: Three critical tasks facing America's disadvantaged students. *Research in Higher Education, 42*, 119-149.

Chen, X., and Carroll, C. (2005). *First-generation students in post-secondary education: A look at their college transcripts.* Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, Institution of Education Sciences.

Choy, S., Horn, L., Nunez, A., and Chen, X. (2000). *Transition to college: What helps at-risk students and students whose parents did not attend college.* San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Choy, S. P., and MPR Associates, Inc. (2001). *Students whose parents did not go to college: Post-secondary access, persistence, and attainment.* Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, Office of Educational Research and Improvement.

Clifton, D., and Anderson, E. (2002). *Strengths quest: Discover and develop your strengths in academics, career, beyond.* Washington, DC: Gallup.

Dictionary.com. (2008). Retrieved August 5, 2008, from http://www.dictionary.reference.com.

Dyson, M. E. (2008). Commentary: Me and my brother and black America. *CNN.com*. Retrieved August 22, 2008 from: http://www.cnn.com/2008/US/07/23/bia.michael.dyson/index.html

Engle, J., Bermeo, A., and O'Brien, C. (2006). *Straight from the source: What works for first-generation college students.* Washington, DC: The Pell Institute.

Evans, N., Forney, D., and Guido-DiBrito, F. (1998). *Student development in college: Theory, research, and practice.* San Francisco, California: Jossey-Bass.

Fries-Britt, S., and Griffin, K. (2007). The Black box: How high-achieving Blacks resist stereotypes about Black Americans. *Journal of College Student Development, 48*(5), 509-524.

Griffin, K. (2006). Striving for success: A qualitative exploration of competing theories of high-achieving Black college students' academic motivation. *Journal of College Student Development, 47*(4), 384-400.

Harper, S. (2005, March/April). Leading the way: Inside the experiences of high-achieving African American male students. *About Campus*, 8-16.

Horn, L., and Nunez, A. (2000). *Mapping the road to college: First-generation students' math track, planning strategies, and context of support*. Washington, DC: Office of Educational Research and Improvement.

Hossler, D., Schmit, J. V., and Vesper, N. (1999). *Going to college: How social, economic, and educational factors influence the decisions students make.* Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press.

Hsaio, K. (1992). First-generation college students. Retrieved August July 1, 2008 from ERIC Clearinghouse for Junior Colleges: http://www.ericdigests.org/1992-1/first.htm.

Inman, W., and Mayes, L. (1999). The importance of being first: Unique charac teristics of first-generation community college students. *Community College Review, 26*(4), 3-22.

London, H. (1992). Transformations: Cultural challenges faced by first-generation students. In L. Zwerling, and H. London (Eds.), *New directions for community colleges.* San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

McCarron, G., and Inkelas, K. (2006). The gap between the educational aspirations and attainment for first-generation college students and the role of parental involvement. *Journal of College Student Development, 47*(5), 534-549.

McConnell, P. (2000). What community colleges should do to assist first-generation students. *Community College Review, 28*, 75-87.

McDonough, P. (1994). Buying and selling higher education. *Journal of Higher Education, 65*, 427-446.

Nasim, A., Roberts, A., Harnell, J., and Young, H. (2005). Non-cognitive predictors of academic achievement for African American across cultural contexts. *The Journal of Negro Education, 74*(4), 344-358.

Nelson Laird, T., Bridges, B., Morelon-Quainoo, C., Williams, J., and Salinas Holmes, M. (2007). African American and Hispanic student engagement at minority serving and predominantly White institutions. *Journal of College Student Development, 40*(1), 39-56.

Pascarella, E., and Terenzini, P. (1980). Predicting freshmen persistence and voluntary dropout decisions from a theoretical model. *Journal of Higher Education, 51*, 60-75.

Pascarella, E., Pierson, C., Wolniak, G., and Terenzini, P. (2004). First-generation college students: Additional evidence on college experiences and outcomes. *Journal of Higher Education, 75*, 249-251.

Pascarella, E., and Terenzini, P. (2005). *How college affects students: A third decade of research* (Vol. 2). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Pike, G., and Kuh, G. (2005). First- and second-generation college students: A comparison of their engagement and intellectual development. *Journal of Higher Education, 73*(3), 276-300.

Rendón, L. (1992). From the barrio to the academy: Revelations of a Mexican American "scholarship girl." In *First Generation College Students: Confronting the cultural issues* (pp. 55-64). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Ryan, M., and Deci, E. (2000). Self-Determination Theory and the facilitation of intrinsic motivation, social develoment, and well-being. *American Pschologist*, *55* (1), 68-78.

Saenz, V., Hurtado, S., Wolf, D., and Yeung, F. (2007). *First in my family: A profile of first-generation college students at four-year institutions since 1971.* Los Angeles: Higher Education Research Institute.

Solorzano, D., Allen, W., and Carroll, G. (2002). Critical race theory, racial microaggressions, and campus racial climate at the University of California Berkeley. *Chicano Latino Law Review, 23*, 15-112.

Steele, C. (1997). A threat in the air: How stereotypes shape intellectual identity and performance. *American Psychologist, 56*(6), 613-629.

Steele, C., and Aronson, J. (1995). Stereotype threat and the intellectual test performance of African Americans. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 69*(5), 787-811.

Terenzini, P., Cabrera, A., and Bernal, E. (2001). *Swimming against the tide: The poor in American higher education.* Princeton, NJ: College Board.

Terenzini, P., Springer, L., Yaeger, P., Pascarella, E., and Nora, P. (1996). First-genertation college students: Characteristics, experiences, and cognitive development. *Research in Higher Education, 37*(1), 1-22.

Tinto, V. (1975). Dropout from higher education: A theoretical synthesis of recent research. *Review of Eductional Research, 45*, 89-125.

Tracey, T., and Sedlacek, W. (1984). Non-cognitive variables in predicting academic success by race. *Measurement and Evaluation, 16*, 171-178.

U.S. College Search. (2008). *Marquette University*. Retrieved August 6, 2008, from U.S. College Search: http://www.uscollegesearch.org/marquette-university.html.

Volle, K., and Federico, A. (1997). *Missed opportunities: A new look at disadvantaged college aspirants.* Washington, DC: Institute for Higher Education Policy.

Weiss, R. (1994). *Learning from strangers: The art and method of qualitative interview studies.* New York: Free.

White, T., and Sedlacek, W. (1986). Non-cognitive predictors of grades and retention for specially admitted students. *Journal of College Admissions, 3*, 20-23.

Walpole, M. (2007). *Economically and educationally challenged students in higher education: Access to outcomes.* San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Yazedjian, A. T., Toews, M. L., Sevin, T., and Purswell, K. E. (2008). "It's a whole new world:" A qualitative exploration of college students' definitions and strategies for college success. *Journal of College Student Development, 49*(2), 141-154.

York-Anderson, D., and Bowman, S. (1991). Assessing the college knowledge of first-generation and second-generation college students. *Journal of College Student Development, 32*, 116-122.