A TRAIL OF BREADCRUMBS: BLACK EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION
STUDENT SUCCESS IN HIGHER EDUCATION

As
35
2015
EDD
#S85

A Dissertation submitted to the faculty of
San Francisco State University
In partial fulfillment of
the requirements for
the Degree

Doctor of Education

In

Educational Leadership

by

Patricia Marie Sullivan

San Francisco, California

January 2015

CERTIFICATION OF APPROVAL

I certify that I have read A TRAIL OF BREADCRUMBS: BLACK EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION STUDENTS IN HIGHER EDUCATION by Patricia Marie Sullivan, and that in my opinion this work meets the criteria for approving a dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree Doctorate in Educational Leadership at San Francisco State University.

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Barbara Henderson", written over a horizontal line.

Barbara Henderson, Ph.D.
Professor Elementary Education

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Daniel Meier", written over a horizontal line.

Daniel Meier, Ph.D.
Professor Elementary Education

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Mina Kim", written over a horizontal line.

Mina Kim, Ph.D.
Associate Professor Elementary Education

A TRAIL OF BREADCRUMBS: BLACK EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION STUDENT SUCCESS IN HIGHER EDUCATION

Patricia Marie Sullivan
San Francisco, California
2015

This dissertation explores strategies used by successful Black early childhood education students completing coursework toward degree attainment at San Francisco State University. Minimum ECE teacher qualifications are gradually changing to require four-year degrees, and without increased graduation rates for Blacks and Latinos, the ECE teacher workforce will lack the diversity of California's population of young children. Data were gathered from intensive face-to-face interviews with 12 Black female participants. Data analysis took place through three sets of lenses drawn from the literature: (1) retention and persistence of college students (Tinto & Cullen, 1973), (2) micro-aggressions (Sue et al., 2007), and (3) stereotype threat and stereotype vulnerability (Steele, 2010; Aronson, 2004). Findings suggest that participants employed multiple strategies to support their social and academic integration at the university including strategically handling social and familial relationships, sheltering within in Ethnic Studies courses, and crafting accurate self-assessments acknowledging their academic skills and accomplishments. In contrast to attrition studies that emphasize failure, this study provides evidence of those who succeed, using a student-centered perspective to examine Black student retention. A key implication describes a program of targeted support which is improving completion rates for Black students in ECE, and could potentially transfer to other disciplines.

I certify that the Abstract is a correct representation of the content of this dissertation.

Chair, Thesis Committee

Date

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

This dissertation was written for all the Black early childhood education students who routinely feel out-of-place in higher education, internalizing and enduring those that question their intelligence, their dedication, their commitment and the value of a diverse teacher workforce. Despite race-specific challenges, implicit and explicit, the American education system, and young children all over the country, of every race and culture, need you to press on.

I would like to acknowledge the thoughtful and patient guidance of Dr. Barbara Henderson, without whom this dissertation would never have been completed, my committee Dr. Daniel Meier and Dr. Mina Kim, who encouraged and supported my work throughout, and my family; my sister Kathleen, my brother Michael, my sister-in-law Velina and my son Matthew, who always believed, even when I didn't.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

List of Table.....	viii
List of Figures.....	ix
Chapter 1: Reflections from a Four Year Old on Racism in Education.....	1
Chapter 2: ECE Workforce Demand and Research Site Demographics.....	8
ECE Teacher Workforce.....	8
ECE Teacher Qualifications.....	10
Blacks in Higher Education.....	11
Unwelcome on College Campuses.....	12
Persistence to Graduation.....	14
Four-year Degrees In Early Childhood Education.....	15
Black Students at SF State University.....	16
Summary.....	18
Chapter 3: A Student Centered Perspective of Black Student Persistence	20
No One is Racially Colorblind.....	22
Counter Narrative to the Deficit Perspective of Black Students.....	23
The So Called Achievement Gap.....	23
The Cycle of Black Student Failure.....	27
The Race and Ethnicity of the Teacher Does Matter.....	28
Teacher Bias and Black Student Underperformance.....	29
The Pygmalion Effect.....	30
Teacher Relationships and Implicit Bias.....	32

The Unintended Findings in Jane Elliot’s Experiment.....	33
Teaching the Teachers.....	35
Teacher Expectations and Student Success.....	36
Black Teacher Recruitment and Black Student Retention.....	38
The Role of Black Teachers.....	40
Low College Completion Rates Limits Black Teachers in the Workforce.....	41
College Retention Research.....	44
The Cycle of Black Student Academic Success.....	45
Black Student Perspectives.....	45
Lifting As We Climb.....	47
Summary.....	48
Chapter 4: Study Design and Methodology.....	50
Design.....	50
Research and Sub-Questions.....	51
Rationale to Methodology.....	53
Ethics and Protection of Human Subjects.....	54
Data Collection.....	55
Data Analysis.....	56
Role of the Researcher.....	56
Summary.....	57
Chapter 5: Lived Experiences of Black ECE Students and Retention Research.....	59
Biographies of the Participants.....	60
Social Integration.....	75

Family and Finances.....	78
Friends at Home and Social Integration on Campus.....	82
Comparing Participant Responses on Social Integration to Retention Research..	83
Protecting Cultural Identity and Creating Safe Black Spaces on Campus.....	88
Micro-aggressions, A Thousand Little Cuts.....	89
Academic Integration.....	92
Stereotype Threat and Academic Performance.....	94
The Positive Effect of Supportive Faculty.....	98
Summary.....	104
Chapter 6: Strategies for Persistence.....	106
Inspiration from Family, Friends, Community and Cultural Heritage.....	107
Navigating in Higher Education.....	109
Ethnic Studies as Inspiration and Resistance.....	111
Stereotype Vulnerability and Academic Confidence.....	113
Chapter 7: Conclusion.....	125
Reference.....	129

LIST OF TABLES

Table	Page
1. Enrollment of students at SF State by race.....	17

LIST OF FIGURES

Figures	Page
1. Cycle of Black Student Academic Success.....	26
2. Cycle of Black Student Academic Failure.....	44
3. Phases of the Research.....	53
4. Data Collection Process.....	56
5. Findings from Black Early Childhood Education Students.....	124

Chapter 1 – Reflections from a Four Year Old on Racism and Education

I was walking down the sidewalk with my sister, on the way to my very first day of school, when a white boy in a passing car yelled, “NIGGER” out of a side window. It couldn’t have been the first time I’d heard the word because I knew what it meant and why he shouted it in our direction. Which is more disheartening – That at four years old I already knew the meaning and intent of the word, or that some young white boy riding in a car felt it was his duty to roll down his window to put me in my place? In a fraction of a second, my enthusiasm became apprehension. The boy and the car were headed in the same direction that my sister and I were traveling so there was an excellent chance that he was being driven to the same school. I turned wide-eyed to watch him pass while my sister, Kathleen, tightened her grip on my hand and quickened our pace. I knew what the word meant, I knew why he said it and, at that moment, we both knew that we were in danger alone on the street simply because of the color of our skin.

Our parents taught us about the dangers of being Black in America, and why people might not like us, still, I was surprised to run into trouble even before we got to school. When he left for work my father had reminded me to use my manners and be respectful as I stood on the front porch to kiss him goodbye, fresh faced, in my new green plaid dress, black and white saddle shoes and two pig tails, still very light brown from a summer outdoors. I knew he was a little worried that we were walking to school alone but my little brother was sick and my mother needed to stay home with him. Besides, Kathleen was in the first grade and had walked the two blocks to school, un-chaperoned, many times. There were other kids on the street walking to school and I was the second

born.... It didn't matter. I didn't need to hold my mommy's hand for courage. I already knew how to read and I thought I was ready for kindergarten.

My teacher's name was Mrs. Green and she was probably the first White woman I'd ever spent any time with. All of the children in my class came from my working class neighborhood in Detroit. The kids were friendly enough but mine was the only Black face in the room. I was happy to see that the boy who yelled at us on the way to school wasn't there. I hoped he wasn't in my sister Kathleen's class either. Mrs. Green asked us all to introduce ourselves and assigned seats alphabetically. That put me in the back of the room, which was good. I didn't want to stand out more than I already did. Ms. Green talked about the daily schedule, and the rules, and how important it was that we put things back where they belonged. There was a house area, a place to build with blocks, an art table and a reading corner.

That first day Mrs. Green let us pick a place to play and then one by one she called us up to her desk to read from a little book. Most of the girls in the class rushed to the house area and immediately began to argue. I was the only one who chose the art table. I picked up a black stubby pencil and a clean piece of paper and, as I drew, I watched Mrs. Green. She smiled when the children read out loud to her and encouraged them so sweetly that I was eager for my turn. When my name was finally called I modestly took my place. I wanted so much for her to like me. I took the book she handed me and when I started to read she became silent. I read the first page and turned to the second. Mrs. Green stopped me before I got to the third. "You read very well," she said with a smile. "Thank you" I said. I stood and went back to the art table, still aglow from

her praise. Later that day when Mrs. Green announced the reading groups I found that I was in a group by myself. Mrs. Green handed me a book from the shelf of readers at the back of the class. "Start with this one." She said kindly and showed me where to sit in the back of the room. The title was 'Fun with Dick and Jane'. The book was worn; the green cover was shabby and scuffed. I finished the book, and went on to read three more in the series that year, looking up periodically to watch my classmates sitting happily with Mrs. Green as she taught them phonics and lead exciting word games. As she smiled approvingly at the children, they smiled in return, basking in the glow of their accomplishments, while I sat in my solitary little lonely reading group. At no time in that entire school year did Mrs. Green never explain my isolation to me, or anyone else in the class. Without an explanation, I was left to conclude that I was in the group for little nigger girls who knew how to read.

Mrs. Green wasn't a bad teacher. It probably wasn't her intention to marginalize me. She was solving a mixed-level reading problem, and likely thought that she was doing the right thing by not making a big fuss about why I was separated from everyone else. I doubt, however, that any of the children in the class understood that we were divided by reading level, and by not explaining why the only Black student was in a group alone, Mrs. Green inaccurately presumed that all of the children in her class, including myself, were colorblind, which left us to draw our own conclusions about why we were divided.

A similar situation would be problematic in any classroom, and in any year, but it wasn't just any year. It was 1961 when most Whites were very deluded about racial

equality. Recent opinion polls indicate that things haven't changed much. When asked if Blacks in your community are treated less fairly than Whites in public schools, 73% of Whites said no and 12% were unsure, while over half of Blacks (51%) reported that they believed that Blacks were treated less fairly (Pew, 2013). Segregating the only Black student in that kindergarten classroom for any reason, particularly as the nation was struggling with issues of segregation and equal access, subtly legitimized government sanctioned Jim Crow educational inequities and established a baseline for race-based differential education for every student in that room.

Now that I am a teacher I have often wondered if Ms. Green would have made the same choice had I not been Black. If I had been a White student would she have proudly introduced me to the class as a reader to be emulated? Would she have given me a reading buddy? To ensure I continued to progress, would she have allowed me to go to the school library and pick out my own books? Would she have suggested I skip kindergarten and go to the first grade? Sitting alone, with no ability to explain my isolation to my wondering classmates and without my Mrs. Green's clarification, I felt ashamed of my marginalized status, but not my reading ability. That was one of the things I liked best about myself. Reading well became the beginning of the fortification I built to protect myself from those that believed I wasn't as intelligent as my White counterparts. If Mrs. Green had been more aware of the unintended consequences of her colorblind response, it is possible that she could have transformed this uncomfortable and confusing racial divide that she created into a teachable moment that could have established a starting point for racial equity for everyone in that classroom.

These early memories serve as a touchstone for me as I have conducted this research on racism, academic struggle and persistence in the lives of several Black students in higher education. My memories are most likely similar memories to the participants of this study, and for all Black students serve as reminders of the structural inequalities in the education system and the historic and continuing challenge of attitudes and perspectives toward Black academic achievement.

Race matters in every level of education for Black students from preschool to post grad because it is bound inextricably to the racism deeply rooted in the American culture. Black students at every level of education experience racism embedded within an education system that is far from colorblind, creating challenges to success that these students likely must learn to recognize to overcome.

Race-specific challenges begin the moment Black children enter preschool, just as fragile academic self-concepts are beginning to emerge, affecting the way in which these students see themselves as students and learners throughout their educational experiences. Well-meaning early childhood teachers unaware of their hidden biases, camouflaged by a colorblind perspective, may ignore the structural inequalities and racism these children face and are likely ill-equipped or prepared to support Black academic self-confidence. This is precisely why Black ECE teachers are needed.

As the field of early childhood education continues to expand structural changes to improve the quality of instruction, diversity of a highly trained workforce must be maintained to support Black students, and to exemplify a model of Black academic success for everyone in the field of education.

The purpose of the study is to explore the persistence strategies of Black early childhood education students. This interview research uses Critical Theory to examine the experiences of Black students enrolled in early childhood education courses at San Francisco State University. This study asks: How do Black early childhood education (ECE) students successfully navigate a university system?

This research is personal for me for three reasons. First, I wanted to learn more about why so few Black students graduate from a university that has such powerful emphasis on social justice. As an undergraduate student I experienced the pressure of intellectual stereotypes from instructors and classmates, but my determination to persist outweighed my anxiety in feeling like an out-of-place impostor-student. As an adult re-entry student in my forties I was already an oddity, often older than the instructors themselves. Perhaps mature Black students are less affected by the anxiety of seeing themselves as undervalued intellectually and therefore less vulnerable to the threat of stereotypes.

Secondly, although the College of Education focuses some portion of course content on social justice, through my doctoral coursework I witnessed first-hand the racial tensions that developed as lectures and discussions focused on the overwhelming percentage of studies that detailed the unilateral underperformance of Black students from preschool to post-graduate study. I, and the four other Black members of my cohort, defended the intellectual capacity of Black people in response to the pathologizing of their educational experiences in discussions with classmates and instructors who had not considered that the study of underperformance may never lead to academic success.

These difficult conversations led to a greater understanding and appreciation for the necessity and value of diversity at every level of the education system. What could have been a crisis within our doctoral cohort became a safe place to have meaningful dialog about race and education, supported by a diverse team of professors committed to a critical examination of social justice and equity.

Lastly, as an early childhood educator and an instructor for pre-service ECE teachers, I have studied the ways in which the field of early childhood education has evolved as a new starting point for children entering formalized instruction and the impact early childhood educational experiences can have on long term academic outcomes. Improving the quality of early childhood instruction is a critical first step in improving academic achievement for an increasingly diverse student population, which requires a diverse teacher workforce. As the field of early childhood education moves to increase the minimum threshold of ECE teachers to a four-year degree, it is imperative that the diversity of the workforce is included as a measure of quality, which means that institutions of higher learning, like SF State, must find ways to improve completion rates for underrepresented students of color.

The following chapter will examine the landscape of early childhood education, the ECE teacher workforce, changes in public policy within the field of early education, Black students in higher education, and the undergraduate ECE student population of SF State University.

Chapter 2 – ECE Workforce Demand and Research Site Demographics

As the demand for and public understanding of the significant impact of early childhood education has grown, professionalizing the field has uncovered challenges in affordability, universal quality and workforce training. In 1965 only 27% of children between 3 and 5 years old were enrolled in some child care program (NCES, 2014). The US Census reported that the number of children enrolled in early childcare programs more than doubled by 2011 to 61% (2012). The cost of care for families has also increased dramatically, more than doubling since 1985 from \$84 dollars per week (adjusted for inflation) to a national average of \$179 dollars per week for preschoolers in 2011. Since the 1970s childcare costs have become a significant percentage of the family budget and the field of early childhood education has grown to accommodate larger numbers of the nation's children. Policymakers and academics within the field have proposed and supported increased government funding and state regulations to insure system wide quality controls (Karoly & Bigelow, 2005). Nationally as K-12 education reform efforts were expanded to include early childhood classrooms, policymakers began to evaluate the training and preparation of the early childhood teacher workforce (Kagen et.al., 2008). Unfortunately, when asked to define a high quality preschool teacher, experts, scholars and policymakers begin with a colorblind landscape (Whitebook, 2012).

ECE Teacher Workforce

The preeminent scholars in the field of early care have recommend increasing the minimum levels of education for the early childhood education workforce to improve

teacher quality and professionalization (Barnett, 2003; Jacobson, 2009; Burchinal, Cryer, Clifford & Howes, 2002; Burchinal, Clarke-Stewart, O'Brien, McCartney & Vandell, 2002; Howes, 1997; Howes & Weaver, 2002; Phillips & Whitebook, 1992; Whitebook, 2003). Unfortunately increasing the minimum requirements for ECE teachers may have no effect on teacher salaries (Barnett, 2003; Kagen, Kaurez & Tarrant, 2008; Whitebook, 2012). Support for early childhood programs at the federal and state level is increasing as legislators work to find ways to allocate more funding, as 60% of child care costs are paid directly by families (Child Care Aware, 2013). The US Department of Health and Human Services has recommended that child care costs should represent only 10% of a family's monthly budget (Child Care Development Fund, 2013).

California parents, however, are struggling to pay, on average, one third of their monthly income for childcare. It is unlikely, therefore, that families will be able to shoulder the cost that these recommended increases in early childhood teacher credentials would demand. In-service ECE teachers who are pursuing their bachelor degrees feel the pressure to complete expensive coursework just so that they can continue to work the same jobs for the same pay.

Indeed, the Bureau of Labor Statistics reports that early childhood teachers are among the lowest paid of the nation's workers with a median pay of less than \$30,000 a year (BLS 2014, Child Care Aware 2013). In states with no minimum wage or in states that allow waivers for workers in training, early childhood teachers are paid at wages that are below poverty levels. In a 2009 Michigan child care workforce study the median pay for assistant teachers was \$2.00 an hour (Early Childhood Investment Corporation, 2009).

In California, conditions are not this dire, however, early childhood teacher wages have remained consistently lower than workers with similar levels of education (Whitebook, 2014). In fact, Whitebook's most recent examination of child care worker compensation reports that child care worker wages "hover just above the poverty line and fall at the same level as wages for those who take care of our pets and dry cleaning"(p.39).

Overall, increasing the workforce qualifications without increasing salaries of child care teachers and assistants will likely fail to improve program quality because teachers with four-year degrees will have no financial incentive to stay in early childhood classrooms. Worst of all, Black early childhood education teachers already in the workforce will either have to return to school and complete their degrees, or be reduced to lower level assistant teacher positions, removing them from positions as lead teachers and directors.

ECE Teacher Qualifications

The precedent that established the minimum standard for early childhood teacher qualifications came from a 30-year court battle in New Jersey's Abbott preschools (Kipnis, 2013). Forced to provide fair and adequate early childhood instruction to the state's poorest children, New Jersey turned to the National Institute for Early Education Research (NIEER) at Rutgers University to help define quality preschool. Using the landmark studies of Perry Preschool and the Abecedarian Project, NIEER has consistently recommended that preschool teachers hold four-year degrees in early childhood education (NIEER, 2005-2012).

Advocates for increasing preschool teacher education requirements argue that increasing minimum degree requirements will improve academic outcomes for Black and Latino children, (Whitebook, 2012). These studies suggest that teacher diversity is insignificant, as long as preschool classrooms are staffed with assistants who are representative of classroom demographics, thus minimizing cultural and linguistic mismatches (Whitebook, 2012). What may require further study is the effect on identity formation and academic achievement in a racially stratified preschool classroom where 62% of the children are likely to be Latino and Black, while 72% of the directors and lead teachers are likely to be White and Asian (Chang, 2006; Whitebook, 2008). This racial division of power will not go unnoticed by the children and their families and could have a lasting negative impact on the overall growth and development of Latino and Black children at a critical stage of their development (Chang, 2006; Gonzalez-Mena, 2008) further entrenching cultural inequities and perceptions of White and Asian intellectual superiority for all students within the classroom.

Blacks in Higher Education

Nationally 19% of Blacks and 34% of Whites hold BA degrees; however, these percentages are based on the representative total of each population group. The total number of non-institutionalized Americans (prison or mental hospitals) with BA degrees aggregated by race reveals a stunning disparity in BA attainment, disproportional to the population. Whites represent 66% of the adult population and 75% of those currently holding BA degrees. Thus, if the field of early childhood education requires teachers to

hold a BA, these patterns of BA attainment will mean that the field will soon see large disparities within the teacher workforce with Blacks and Latinos even further underrepresented as teachers, an underrepresentation that begins on college campuses.

Unwelcome on College Campuses

The passage of California proposition 209 in 1996, prohibiting state government institutions, including state colleges and universities, from considering race, sex or ethnicity in public education, resulted in a 15% decrease in Black enrollment in the CSUs and a 21.3% decreased enrollment at UCs (Arcidiacono, et al., 2011). Proponents of Proposition 209 argue that although enrollments have declined, graduation rates have improved, which they did, but only slightly narrowing the gap in degree attainment between Blacks and Whites by 1% (Campaign for College Opportunity, 2013).

Black student enrollment in higher education has dropped perceptibly since the passage of Proposition 209. California college campuses have become less diverse and racial tensions have begun to rise. In February of 2014 a group of Black law students created a video entitled “The 33,” referring to the 33 Black students enrolled in a class of 1000. These activist students made this video to raise awareness about the lived experiences of Black law students and the openly hostile campus environment that they struggle to endure. After the video release, UCLA Chancellor Gene Block issued this statement:

Too often, many of our students of color feel isolated, as strangers in their own house. Others feel targeted, mocked or marginalized, rather than recognized and valued. At UCLA, our students are bold, confident and

among the sharpest anywhere. We are proud when they convey their thoughts, experiences and feelings — as they have done recently in several now-viral videos and by organizing town halls and rallies.

Anyone still unconvinced by the true impact of Proposition 209 need only listen to our students' powerful first-hand accounts. Their words, of course, are much bigger than UCLA — and it's not surprising that they have found a national audience. We need only to look at the remarkable and numerous accomplishments of alumni from now-underrepresented groups who attended UCLA before Proposition 209 to fully recognize the disservice we do to California and our nation when other talented and deserving students are absent from our Bruin family (Chancellor Block, 2014).

In this February 2014 public statement Chancellor Block also suggests creating an undergraduate general education requirement focused on diversity at UCLA to enrich the experiences of White and Asian students who will one day live and work in a society they may not be prepared to accept or understand. In a recent decision by the Supreme Court, the justices ruled against the use of race as a consideration for acceptance in higher education in a decision that Justice Sotomayor said, “ignores the importance of diversity in institutions of higher education and reveals how little my colleagues understand about the reality of race in America” (p. 56, *Michigan v. Coalition to Defend Affirmative Action*, 2013). Since the passage of Prop 209 and other anti-affirmative action legislation at the state and federal level, California's post-secondary institutions have become increasingly White and Asian, while California's K-12 public schools have become increasingly Latino. Rather than increase the non-resident and international student enrollment to maintain desirable tuition revenue in UCs and CSUs, perhaps a greater effort to retain underrepresented populations could have a significant impact on

completion rates, which ultimately would increase tuition revenues of underrepresented students.

Persistence to Graduation

In a recent study of SF State's attrition of underrepresented students, a familiar collection of barriers to success, including remedial coursework, lack of financial resources, and problems navigating the complexity the postsecondary universe is revealed (SFSU, 2012). Specifically, this study of the full-time freshmen cohort of 2005 found:

- 27% Black students, 30% Latino, 46% White and 52% Asians graduate
- No real difference in graduation rates between students were the first generation to college as compared to those with parents who had college
- EOP enrollment made an insignificant difference
- 62% of students with GPA 2.5 – 3.5 graduate
- 59% of all students enrolled needed remedial coursework in both math and English
- 42% of Blacks and 33% of Latinos who graduated had taken remedial classes
- Bay Area students needed remediation more than students from all other areas
- 56% non-graduates left to go to 2 year colleges, 32% to 4 year public colleges, 11% 4 year private colleges

Many of the findings from this study place the burden of attrition on the student with a heavy emphasis on remediation; however, remediation may have not been a significant factor in persistence since only 42% of Black students who completed remedial coursework graduated. While examining the 73% of Black students who don't persist to graduation is unquestionably critical, this study has shown that there may be some benefit in examining the lived experiences of the 27% of SF State Black students who do complete degree coursework. The strategies to persist and succeed used by the Black ECE students in this study could help the university reduce attrition for all Black students, which may also increase the number of Black ECE teachers in the workforce.

Four-Year Degrees in Early Childhood Education

Presently the only university within the CSU system that offers an Early Childhood Studies BA degree is Channel Islands. The closest alternative at SF State is a degree in Child and Adolescent Development (CAD). Between 2004 and 2012 San Francisco State University awarded 387 undergraduate degrees in CAD majors with the Young Child and Family emphasis. Only 32 of those degrees were awarded to Black students (SF State Office of Academic Institutional Research). The California Commission for Teacher Credentialing (CTC) has not as yet required early childhood teachers to hold bachelor's degrees in ECE; however, the California Department of Education's Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS) supports the minimum four-year degree for early childhood teachers. The current pool of early childhood teachers with degrees may be in any subject area, provided that they also have a

minimum of 24 units in ECE, which satisfies the current Child Development Matrix. This certifying matrix requires 24 units of ECE course work and 16 units of General Education (GE) units for a teacher level permit, although these milestones can currently be reached without holding any degree. If, however, the minimum education requirement for a teacher level permit is increased to a four-year degree, inequalities embedded within the education system may undermine the states' best efforts to maintain a diverse ECE workforce. There is a colossal leap between the current minimum requirement of 24 units of ECE coursework and 16 units of general education coursework and the proposed increase to a four-year degree. For many students of color the financial barriers alone will make this BA requirement unattainable. The current estimates of student costs for a full time student attending SF State is \$17,000 a year, which comes to a total of just about \$80,000 to earn a four year degree (SFSU, 2014) For students who are aiming to teach in early childhood education, they would be earning this degree for a job that pays just a little more than poverty level.

Black Students at SF State

In 2011 enrollment of Black students at San Francisco State dropped to its lowest point since 2000. In that same time period, enrollment for White and Asian students has increased 5%, and Latino student enrollment has increased 14%. There are so few Black students on campus it is possible that there are courses taught without one single Black student in the class. When there is just one Black student enrolled in a course, the strain experienced by that student of being the only one is a distraction to academic

performance that doesn't fit within the narrow constructs of an attrition study that addresses only quantitative data sets (Steele, 2010). In what is likely a reaction to feeling singled out or racially alone, 20% of Black students major in Ethnic Studies, despite the lack of demand for such expertise in the general workforce. Black instructors are also underrepresented on campus (5%) when compared to the general population of California. There are so few Black professors and adjuncts on campus that it is possible for a significant majority of full time students to complete their coursework and graduate without ever having had a Black instructor.

Table 1: Enrollment of students at SF State by race from 2000-2012. Figures retrieved from SFSU Office of Academic Institutional Research – Totals listed are comprised of all enrolled students. All Asian includes Filipino and Pacific Islanders; All Latino includes Chicano, Mexican American and Other Latino.

Year	White	%	Black	%	A Asian	%	A Latino	%	Total Enrollment
2000	8111	27%	1509	5%	7573	25%	3051	10%	30500
2001	7703	26%	1529	5%	7678	26%	3068	10%	29541
2002	8250	28%	1593	5%	7937	27%	3189	11%	29718
2003	8795	29%	1685	6%	8118	27%	3445	11%	30469
2004	8674	29%	1614	5%	8035	27%	3512	12%	30014
2005	8903	30%	1650	5%	8139	27%	3740	12%	30125
2006	9168	31%	1650	6%	8316	28%	4121	14%	29628
2007	9358	32%	1662	6%	8478	29%	4304	15%	28950
2008	9369	33%	1646	6%	8294	29%	4443	15%	28804
2009	9614	32%	1618	5%	8055	27%	5030	17%	29686
2010	9043	32%	1453	5%	7689	27%	5296	19%	28378
2011	8716	32%	1408	5%	7698	29%	5739	21%	26866
2012	8678	32%	1450	5%	8088	30%	6416	24%	26826

Most of the students who leave SF State don't drop out of college altogether. The 2005 Attrition study reports that 71% of Black students enroll in community colleges.

Unfortunately, leaving SF State to attend a community college requires students to reapply as transfer students if they wish to return to the CSUs. Coming from a California community college, these former SF State students must have the required 60 transferable units. Despite improved articulation agreements between California community colleges and CSUs, elongated pathways through multiple layers of remedial English and math courses can easily add between 2 and 4 semesters to a student's transfer plans, making a two year stint into a six year ordeal, just to qualify for transfer to a four year school. Black students who enroll at SF State directly from high school have a better chance of graduating within 6 years than if they transferred to a community college with plans to return.

Summary

Black students don't leave SF State because they have given up on higher education. But something does happen, and it happens disproportionately to Black students, contributing to their attrition. While attrition studies are useful in determining which students need more support, what may be more significant to improving completion rates for Black students at SF State is the careful and respectful examination of those who stayed.

The path to persistence for Black students must be through the reality of educational inequities, rather than by ignoring them. Students construct knowledge from their cultural experiences (Gay, 2000). Educators, at every level, can improve student outcomes by understanding the lived experiences, the dreams, and the language of their

students so that they can fully defend themselves from the inequities they face (Frerie, 1970). University faculty committed to training the next generation of teachers can benefit from the acceptance that Black people in America move through their lives cautiously, with histories and experiences that their White teachers and classmates are unlikely to know.

The purpose of this study is to provide a counter narrative to the mountain of deficit-model education research by documenting and examining the strategies of persistence and resilience used by high performing Black early childhood education students and to illuminate their path of breadcrumbs for others to follow.

While the concepts presented may be familiar, I contend that race matters, even in early childhood education and that a model of best practices and program quality must also include a diverse teacher workforce.

As I earn my terminal degree I can close my eyes and still see the faces of the fallen, those Black college students who disappeared before midterms, final exams and graduations, and I must acknowledge how I got here; what choices I made; what skills I developed; what strategies I used to survive; and how valuable this information might be to those who follow me. I wanted to find out more about the participant's experiences and perspectives. I wanted to know more about the obstacles they faced and how they overcame them, the resources they had and used on campus and the nature of their persistence.

Chapter 3 – A Student Centered Perspective of Black Persistence

Between 1970 and 1973 incidents of anti-Black bullying in my San Francisco middle school were routine. When we walked down the stairwells, White boys threw lit matches in our afros, stuck Black girls with pins in crowded hallways and threw balloons filled with paint from third floor windows when the school busses arrived with students enrolled to desegregate the school's student population.

In the eighth grade I was placed in an algebra class, a gateway course for college preparation. I was excited when I went to school that morning. I never thought of myself as particularly good at math, but my counselor told me that I scored very high in language, science and math on the standardized test. "Very few girls scored as high!" She bubbled, proudly. She forgot to say very few Black girls because as soon as I sat down in my new algebra class, I knew I was in trouble. Nearly every seat was taken, so I had to sit in the first row. The class was filled with white boys who instantly started whispering and laughing when I entered. I know the teacher had to have heard them, but he began his lesson as if nothing of consequence was happening. I made it through the first day and that night when I went home my dad asked me how the class went. I didn't want to tell him that I felt uncomfortable in there. He was so proud of my commitment to learning and doing my best in school. For a week I wanted to tell him that they were whispering and making rude noises when I came in, that they were throwing balled up paper at the back of my head. I wanted to tell him that the teacher never saw a thing or said a word about what was happening. By the end of the first week the boys were chanting in unison, "Token! Token! Token!" They were sure I didn't belong there and

they wanted me to know it. These White boys had incorrectly deduced that I wasn't there because of my test scores, but instead that the school district needed to integrate the math classes, and I was the pseudo Jackie Robinson. Finally I couldn't take it anymore. I told my dad what was happening. He offered to go down to the school and talk to my math teacher, but I was afraid that would only make the situation worse, so I asked for a transfer to typing. My dad was disappointed, but he let me transfer. It would take me more than twenty years to have the courage to take algebra again.

There wasn't a class in middle school that taught these White boys that their Black peers were inferior, but that doesn't mean that they didn't learn that Black people were inferior at school, and at home, and just about everywhere else. The belief in Black inferiority is an example of how past political ideologies becomes part of American culture (Winfield, 2007). The fundamental acceptance of white supremacy has been protected, in part, by an American education system that continues to teach a sanitized version of history that insists that America is a colorblind meritocracy (Wise, 2010).

In this chapter, I rely on the research on race specific challenges ignored by recent education reform policies rooted in a history of inequality, the effect of racial dynamics of classroom teachers on student academic outcomes, the role of Black teachers in the cycle of Black student achievement and the value of the lived experiences of Black early childhood education students to improving persistence.

No One is Racially Colorblind

Through the lens of a colorblind society, the academic progress of Black people in America is bewildering. Many non-Black students and teachers can identify shared experiences and challenges easily, stressing the value of personal responsibility and hard work required for academic success. While students of the privileged group quickly point out that they have to work hard to get a four year degree, disparities such as underrepresentation in university enrollment and abysmal completion rates for Black students in higher education are immediately attributed to a lack of effort and ability (Ravitch, 2010).

Some of the challenges that Black students face are similar to other students, however, there is a history of institutional and intellectual racism that is unique to the Black experience which a colorblind perspective attempts to make irrelevant (Wise, 2010). Without recognizing race-specific challenges, well-intentioned colorblind teachers (like Mrs. Green and my middle school algebra teacher) simply cannot address the obstacles to success which are atypical of the dominant majority. Moreover, a colorblind approach gives non-Black students no other recourse but to draw their own conclusions about the racially skewed statistics of academic performance while leaving Black students to question their sanity when faced with everyday racial micro-aggressions that seemingly only they can see or feel (Delpit, 2012; Steele, 2010; Sue, 2007).

Counter Narrative to the Deficit Perspective of Black Students

Studies that begin with the question: Why don't Black students graduate, focus the attention of researchers on problematic pre-college preparation and cultural behaviors of Black students, perpetuating the stereotype of student originated deficit, allowing education institutions to remain un-culpable and fundamentally unchanged. In contrast, the purpose of this study is to provide a portrait of Black students in higher education who succeed, utilizing a student centered perspective to examine the successful strategies of Black student retention. Through one-on-one interviews, the participants of this study reveal their efforts to navigate an education system that is seldom welcoming, often foreign and sometimes covertly hostile to Black students.

This study was conducted using both personal interviews of pre-service early childhood educators and my own personal reflections constructing counter narratives to the deficit perspective approach often found in attrition studies focusing on Black student failure. The participant narratives and personal reflections became threads of the same cloth with unmistakable patterns of shared experiences that would have been unrecognized without the use of interviews as primary source data.

The So Called Achievement Gap

In 1983 the Regan administration's publication of *A Nation At Risk* convinced politicians, policy makers and the public of the need for education reform (Ravitch, 2010). Since 1983 annual comparisons of US test scores to other nations have consistently revealed disappointingly low rankings of American students in reading,

math, and science when compared to other nations (National Center for Education Statistics, 2013), resulting a desperate collection of test-driven public school reforms, which have likely contributed to the re-segregation of public schools (Rothstein, 2013). Diane Ravitch, Bush administration education policy expert and proponent of *No Child Left Behind* (NCLB) legislation, which specifically required the use of standardized tests as a measure of school performance disaggregated in racial categories, now suggests that neoliberals and conservatives elevated the significance of test scores as a measurement of academic ability to:

- decrease public resistance to outsourcing low-skill manufacturing jobs through a more rigorous academic curriculum designed for a 21st century workforce
- require business model accountability for schools receiving public funding as a strategy to insure improved student outcomes
- reorganize limited public funding to include private schools, reducing per pupil spending for disadvantaged students effectively defunding Brown
- justify separate and unequal educational advantages for middle and upper income students
- re-establish the myth of American meritocracy by redefining disadvantaged population groups as undeserving, lazy, social loafers
- reduce the power of teachers unions

When *The National Research Council's Committee on Appropriate Test Use* recommended in 1999 that no decisions on education reform should be made on the basis

of test scores, which were described as fallible and misleading, those making educational policy for the nation were not listening, and so a flawed vision of the intellectual ability of Black students was re-institutionalized in the education system. This move eliminated the necessity to address pervasive racial disadvantages of Black students.

Decontextualizing the racial differences in test scores allowed not only the establishment of White and Asian scores as normative benchmarks, it allowed schools and districts to blame low-ranking American students' scores on Black students, reviving this nation's long history of ignoring differential access to education with the support of the pseudo-science of the eugenics movement of the early 20th century and reinvigorated the popular belief in the genetic intellectual inferiority of Blacks (Howard, 2010; Rothstein, 2013). This was a concept that even the unsophisticated White boys in my algebra class had already learned by middle school.

The disaggregation of test scores has revealed that Black students underperform in comparison to White and Asian students in every category, even when socioeconomic status is the same (Fryer & Levitt, 2004; Howard 2010). Not only does the twenty years of test score data prove that race still matters, the reported persistent discrepancy in educational outcomes has resulted in an unprecedented focus on the comparative underperformance of Black students, shifting the responsibility for the gap in achievement to teachers, parents and communities, and away from the structural inequities embedded in the education system. Studies examining everything from family practices and cultural influences to teacher training and preparation have been considered as possible contributing factors (Coleman, 1966; Darling-Hammond, 2002; Delpit, 2012;

Dworkin & Bomer, 2008; Moynihan Report, 1965; Rushton & Jensen, 2010; Sleeter, 2010; Whitebook, Gomby, Bellum, Sakai & Kipnis, 2009). With such a widely varied array of explanations hypothesizing the cause of Black student underperformance, a pervasive deficit-based perception of Black people hints that the achievement gap cannot be resolved with any amount of education reform (Fryer & Levitt, 2004; Howard 2010). In *America's Next Achievement Test*, Christopher Jencks and Meredith Phillips (1998) postulated that using hereditarianism to explain the achievement gap as an "inescapable fact of nature." is likely to have especially negative consequences for Black children.

Figure 1 - Cycle of Black Student Academic Failure

The Cycle of Black Student Failure

In this climate of accountability and race-based assessments the negative consequences of a deficit perspective in research intended to understand the problem of Black student failure begins with vulnerable preschool aged children. Researchers studying early childhood care and education and the effects on racial gaps in school readiness find that while Black children were more likely to attend preschool than White or Latino children, they were also more likely experience low-quality care (Bassok, 2010; Magnuson & Waldfogel, 2005). When researchers claim that many Black students enter preschool as much as eight months behind their White and Asian counterparts (Fryer & Levitt, 2007), they perpetuate the theory of Social Darwinism, allowing preschool teachers to justify harsh, punitive, and developmentally inappropriate instruction for “at risk” Black children as young as three years old (Dworin, Bomer & Semiingson, 2008; Lee & Burkam, 2002).

Black preschoolers entering elementary school may not be fully aware of the public perception of their inferior academic abilities, but differential instruction reinforced by an over representation in remedial drill-and-kill teacher directed curriculum and no-frills academic instruction in low performing schools, often with the least experienced teachers and poorly maintained or equipped facilities, perpetuates diminished expectations for Black students (Dworin, et al., 2008). Carol Brunson Day, president of the National Black Child Development Institute and member of the Governing Board for the National Association for the Education of Young Children

wrote, “Being labeled ‘at risk’ is like being voted least likely to succeed. For where there is no faith in your future success, there is no real effort to prepare you for it” (p. 11, 2013)

The Race and Ethnicity of the Teacher Does Matter

Racial dynamics within classrooms has a significant effect on student academic outcomes (Aronson, 2004; Dee, 2005; Decker, et.al., 2007; Brunson Day, 2013; Delpit, 2012; Dworin, 2008; Rosenthal & Jacobson, 1968). In a comparative analysis of teachers and students using Early Childhood Longitudinal Study data, White teachers were significantly more likely to have negative views of Black students than Black teachers. Further, Black students performed dramatically worse on tests when the teacher's views of them were negative (Dee, 2005; Rosenthal & Jacobson, 1968).

There is an overwhelming Whiteness in the teacher workforce. White pre-service teachers are typically unprepared for the diversity of the classrooms as a result of teacher training programs that provide only a superficial understanding of diversity and multicultural pedagogy (Sleeter, 2001). With very little awareness and understanding of institutionalized racism, White pre-service teachers may use a colorblind ideology to mask their stereotypical perceptions of Black students, which has become so engrained in the White cultural experience that long histories of racial inequalities are forgotten (Lewis, 2000). Opinion polls since 1920 show that a majority of White Americans maintain anti-Black biases (Aronson, 2004, Banaji & Greenwald, 2013), and sadly, the most thoroughly engrained of these is about genetic intellectual inferiority (Ryan, 1971; Stoskopf, 2008). Lewis Terman, a firm believer in eugenics, used his standardized tests

as evidence of the intellectual inferiority of "Indians, Mexicans and Negroes" (Stoskopf, 2008). The disturbingly familiar arguments and theories of eugenics are the foundation of the mythology that supports racial stereotypes and present day deficit model paradigms. Rarely do educators overtly suggest that heredity hinders academic ability, however, cultural pathologies abound uninhibited. It is fairly common to hear educators, policymakers, and the media suggesting that Black students don't try hard enough, or are culturally conditioned to under value education, often comparing Black students to their Asian counterparts (Ladson-Billings, 2007). Black Americans aware of the negative stereotypes about their intellectual inferiority may feel an increased pressure to succeed, which also may contribute to the underperformance (Aronson, 2004).

Teacher Bias and Black Student Underperformance

Since the adoption of No Child Left Behind legislation in 2001, American educators have been vilified for the academic underperformance of the nation's public school children, and more specifically, the gaps in achievement defined and reported in racial categories. In her book *Multiplication is for White People*, Lisa Delpit suggests that there is no genetic or cultural reason for Black students to underperform, and that educators and researchers looking for answers should remember the law of parsimony: "When looking to find the most likely cause, the simplest explanation tends to be true: Black students are doing poorly in school simply because they are not being taught" (Delpit, 2012, p. 8).

In the hundreds of studies conducted hoping to find the cause of Black student underperformance, only a small percentage have specifically considered the lack of racial diversity in the teacher workforce as a contributing factor. Ellen Frede, co-director of National Institute of Early Education Research found that 74.5 percent of ECE teachers were White (similar to the over representation of White teachers in public schools and higher education) – and that the data suggested that it would be surprising to find a close match between caregivers and children (2011). In an earlier study Tettengah, (1997) found that cultural mismatch affected teachers' attitudes and the children's identity development. This researcher concluded that children who never have teachers of their own ethnic background might come to believe intuitively that the groups to which the teachers belong have superior intellect and power. In a classic study, Heath (1989) found that white teachers use discourse patterns dissimilar to those from Black parents, leading to misunderstandings between teachers and children. Similarly, Geneva Gay (2000) found that White teachers consistently misunderstood Black children in their classrooms and without adopting specific teacher training that included culturally responsive pedagogy; Black children across the nation would find it more difficult to close gaps in measurable academic outcomes between themselves and their White classmates.

The Pygmalion Effect

In 1968 Robert Rosenthal and Lenore Jacobson published *Pygmalion in the Classroom* - the findings of an experiment to test the power of teacher expectations on

student performance. By identifying a random sample of Black and Mexican students as intellectual “growth spurters” through a fictitious intelligence test for their classroom teachers, these researchers found significant gains in IQ tests for these identified students at the end of the school year, with the largest gains reported for the first graders in the experiment who more than doubled the test scores of the control group. When classroom teachers expected certain students to succeed, those children showed greater gains in intellectual development. The Pygmalion Effect describes the expectancy advantage conferred by teachers to students whom they feel can succeed.

This expectancy advantage is inconsistent with the prevailing cultural messaging of Black inferiority. Researchers have found that White teachers are more likely to have negative perceptions of Black students (Dee, 2005; Tettengah, 1997). In a meta-analysis, Tennenbaum & Ruck (2007) found that teachers had higher expectations for Asian students and more positive attitudes about White students than Black or Latino students. The researchers’ observational data revealed that teachers directed more positive speech to White and Asian students and favored White students in sixteen studies and displayed bias by, (1) expecting all students to perform at the same level regardless of past performance, (2) submitting grades influenced by ethnic background, and (3) demonstrating differential expectations of academic potential creating the Pygmalion effect. As Delpit theorized, research in which the hypothesis supposes the source of academic under performance will be found in the students themselves encourages and perpetuates the pathologizing of children of color (2012).

White teachers with no multicultural experience or culturally responsive training may perceive that young Black children, operating with culturally normative behavior by seeking closer relationships with their teachers, are inadequately prepared because they don't understand the significance of the teacher-child relationship for Black children (Decker, 2007; Gay, 2000). Christine Sleeter (2001) found that White pre-service teachers were naïve, maintaining stereotypic beliefs about Black children and had very little awareness or understanding of structural inequities imbedded in education or the cultural inequities that make up our collective history. Consistent with a colorblind perspective of equality in educational opportunities and access, Sleeter (2001) also found that pre-service teachers perceived that programs designed to remedy racial discrimination were unfair to White students rather than resolving their own fear and ignorance of systemic and historic inequities. She went on to suggest that more students of color within pre-service teacher training programs would bring richer experiences and perspectives to multicultural teaching for White students and White college professors with limited cross cultural backgrounds.

Teacher Relationships and Implicit Bias

The Pygmalion effect has been supported by recent research which suggests that learning occurs through interactions between teachers and students in early childhood classrooms and that high-quality emotional instructional interactions between teachers and children may have a greater influence on academic outcomes than the degree attainment of the teacher or the class size (Early, Maxwell, Burchinal, Bender, Ebanks,

Henry, Iriondo-Perez, Mashburn, Pianta, Alva, Bryant, Cai, Clifford, Griffin, Howes, Jeon, Peisner-Feinberg, Vanderfrift & Zill, 2007).

While most of the studies previously presented have targeted school-aged children, younger children are not protected from teacher bias. In 2005 Walter Gillian studied preschool expulsion rates and found that Black preschoolers were expelled at twice the rate of White preschoolers and that 90% of the Black preschoolers expelled are boys. Gillian found that although school based preschool teachers were less likely than Head Start teachers to expel, the rate of expulsion in school based early childhood programs is still three times higher than in K-12. Carol Brunson Day wrote that she was disturbed by Gillian's acceptance of such an alarming statistic, which suggested "that the overrepresentation of Black boys expelled ...fit within the researchers expectations" (p.8, 2013). Strangely, Gillian's 2005 study of preschool expulsion included demographic data of the teachers and preschoolers, but no comparisons were made between the race of the teacher and the preschooler expelled.

The Unintended Findings in Jane Elliot's Experiment

Perhaps one of the most memorable visual pieces of evidence demonstrating the power of the Pygmalion Effect on student outcomes was found as an unintended consequence of Jane Elliot's historic "A Class Divided" experiment, which demonstrated just how easily and how quickly a teacher can influence the academic performance of her students:

On a Friday morning in 1968 in Riceville, Iowa Community Elementary School, a few days after Martin Luther King was murdered, Jane Elliot asked her third grade all White class if there were any people in America that were not treated as equals. Without hesitation the third graders not only identified Blacks (and other non-whites) as likely targets of denigration, they were able to articulate a common American cultural bias that specifically devalues the intellectual capacity of Black people. Although the children said they knew that to judge people by the color of their skin was wrong, Elliot believed that her class needed to experience discrimination to appreciate what it really felt like to be Black in America (www.pbs.org). The social experiment was reenacted for public television and those that watched were shocked and disturbed at how quickly these very typical White third grade children were transformed into merciless bullies with enhanced academic performance or disheartened, dejected under achievers influenced entirely by Elliot's autocratic pronouncement that supremacy was determined by eye color.

While the abuse and violence directed toward the inferior group was disturbing, Elliot demonstrated that perceived group status and oppressive authority had a surprising and significant impact on the children's academic abilities. Specifically, when Elliot reproached and demoralized the inferior group, the children's academic performance plummeted. Conversely, when Elliot praised the dominant group for their phonetic awareness and superior intellect, their performance improved, significantly beyond previous performance levels. Although Jane Elliot intended to teach her students about the pain of discrimination, she also exposed the negative effect of teacher bias on

individual student performance, and outcome that is often overlooked by proponents and critics of Elliot's experiment.

Teaching the Teachers

As an instructor of pre-service early childhood teachers I am often asked by students to explain the achievement gap. Students have proudly proclaimed that they are colorblind and that the race of the student doesn't matter, but they wonder why Black students underperform. For example, one of my undergraduate students openly stated that Black children only read text messages at home, a suggestion that is both racist and untrue. The Nation Institute of Educational Statistics reported that 78.5% of Black children are read to by a parent at home at least three times a week, only 5% less than Asian and 13% less than White children (NCES, 2013) This is a noteworthy accomplishment since more than 40% of Black children live in poverty (Kids Count, 2014), more than double the percentage of White and Asian children to which they are routinely compared. Another common misconception is that Black parents don't care enough about their child's education to show up for parent night functions. Rarely do these students consider that nearly 70% of Black children live in single parent families (Kids Count, 2014). With no one to stay with younger siblings, or divide the domestic workload, parent night activities may be impossible.

According to The National Assessment of Educational Progress Trends in Academic Progress Report 2012 the achievement gap between Black and White students in reading has narrowed, from 32 points to 26 since 1990. Pre-service teachers are

challenged by education professors to consider cultural perspectives that are barely on the fringe of their awareness, exposing big holes in their understanding of children from other cultures, which are often filled with half-truths and folklore (Delpit, 2012; Ryan, 1968; Sleeter, 2001).

Although this study found that the majority of Black ECE students reported that the focus of faculty on the value of social justice and equity supported and encouraged their appreciation for culturally responsive pedagogy, elective multicultural curriculum courses consistently enroll a surprising number of Black and Latino students and reduced numbers of White and Asian students. This enrollment pattern suggests an undervaluing of integrating culturally responsive curriculum and anti-bias instruction for White and Asian pre-service teachers who are working in ECE classrooms.

Teacher Expectations and Student Success

Researchers at the Center for American Progress have found that teacher expectations were powerful predictors of student success (Wilhelm, Boser & Hanna, 2014). Further, teacher expectations have been linked to reinforced stereotype threat (Steele, 2010), wherein researchers increased the likelihood of diminished results for high achieving Black students in high stakes academic situations simply by reminding the students of anti-intellectual racial stereotypes.

Several studies have found that teacher expectations of Black student's academic ability were more a reflection of racial stereotypes than actual student potential (Decker, Dona, & Christenson, 2007; Gillian, 2005; Hamre & Pianta, 2001; Hyland, 2005;

Ladson-Billings, 2007; Pigott, 1999; Tettegah, 1996 ; Temembam & Ruck, 2007, Wildhagen, 2012). Although the pervasiveness of racial stereotyping by teachers is not well documented, Tattengah's study reported that more than 90% of the White pre-service teachers surveyed rated Black cognitive ability and autonomous motivation as the lowest when compared to White, Asian, and Latino students. Similarly, a more recent national survey of teachers revealed that only 13% believed that low income students, who statistically tend to be Black and Latino, were motivated to succeed academically (Met Life, 2009). This problem of skewed perception of cognitive ability and motivation based on racial group membership has a significant impact on teacher expectations, which in turn, becomes the single greatest influence on the academic outcomes of students. In California, where 71% of the teachers are White and 75% of the students are of color, teacher expectations and the power of diminished expectations can have a devastating effect on academic outcomes for Black students (Boser, 2011).

With an ECE workforce that matches the lack of diversity found in the public school teaching pool, three out of four Black preschool children will be more likely to experience a cultural mismatch in their classrooms and the chance of facing a teacher who has anti- Black biases, hindering the possibility of reducing the achievement gap (Bakari, 2003; Gilliam, 2005; Harry & Klingner, 2007).

Culturally responsive and respectful pre-service teacher training has been recommended by the National Association for the Education of Young Children for several decades (NAYEC, 1993); however, training for early childhood education pre-service teachers serving a diverse student population will need to include more than one

optional course in multiculturalism (Silverman, 2010). Black children require a well trained workforce that reflects and understands their cultural worldview (Chang, 2005; Downey & Pribesh, 2004). The recruitment and retention of a diverse early childhood workforce could activate the cycle of Black student success as well as contribute to improving cross-cultural understanding within the field of education. Unfortunately, according to *The Journal of Blacks in Higher Education*, the national completion rate for Black undergraduate students in all majors is 43% (jbhe, 2014), and even worse, - the California Postsecondary Education Commission has recorded that only 27% of all Black students who enroll at SF State University, the site of this study, are awarded an undergraduate degree.

Black Teacher Recruitment and Black Student Retention

Some studies suggest that the recruitment and retention of more Black teachers could improve the academic outcomes of Black students (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 1997; Dee, 2004; Irvine, 1989; Sleeter, 2001). Several researchers have found that Black teachers are more likely to develop a pedagogy that supports equality and social justice (Dixson, 2003, Gay, 2000) and are more likely to consider the context in which Black students must find opportunities to learn (Quirocho & Rios, 2000).

Regrettably, retention and completion rates for Black undergraduate education students provide little hope that young Black children are likely to have a Black teacher (Hudson & Holmes, 1994). The shortage of Black teachers linked to state-mandated competency tests (Farrell, 1990) have even caused researchers to question the Brown

decision and the tyranny of a majority-controlled school system on minority student achievement (Kelly, 2009; Milner & Howard, 2004; Weiher, 2000). In another unfortunate turn of policy the Praxis Pre-Professional Skills Test (PPST) has become a screening device that weeds out potential Black teachers with inadequate pre-college preparation, despite the fact that PPST scores have not been predictive of success in teacher education programs (Alvarado, 2013; Mikitovics & Crehan, 2002). In California, the CSET, a similar test required for all applicants to teacher preparation programs is likely to be having the same effects on limiting the diversity of the K-12 workforce.

In the face of centuries of systemic inequities intended to preserve White supremacy, Black students have persevered and in 2012, the US Census reported that 87% of Blacks were high school graduates, surprisingly similar to White high school graduation rates. Four-year college completion rates however, are not as promising. Nationally 39% of the Black students who enter 4 year colleges graduate, which is a full twenty percentage points lower than Whites and Asians (NCES, 2014). The completion rate at SF State was even lower than the national average, with only one in four Black undergraduates surviving to graduation (air.sfsu, 2012).

Americans want to believe that everyone has an equal chance at success, which they cite as a founding principal of the nation; however, Lisa Delpit writes, “There is probably no group of people in the world whose intellectual capacity and innate morality have been so maligned as African Americans” (2012, p. 12).

The Role of Black Teachers

In her classic study, Jacqueline Irvine (1989) found that Black teachers were often hired as role models or authority figures for Black students and were seldom celebrated for their ability as culturally responsive educators for a diverse student population. Additionally, Irvine suggested that Black teacher mentors were needed to help Black students navigate an education system that is often hostile and unwelcoming, and that for Black students, Black teachers are more than authority figures (Lathan, 2014). Irvine reported that teaching style, delivery, performance, culturally familiar speech and perspective are all valuable pedagogical nuances that Black teachers use to enhance the learning of all students.

Sadly, Black teachers are rare. The higher the educational level of teachers, the less ethnically and linguistically diverse the group becomes (Whitebook, 2008). Without a critical mass of Black teachers, or an acceptance of the importance of culturally responsive pedagogy, studies have found that there are many Black teachers who carry the same racialized baggage about achievement. These Black teachers in the teacher workforce, (similar to those described by one study participant who observed in a Head Start classroom) have adopted the racial bias of their White counterparts by reporting a higher percentage of Black students as unprepared, attributing more stereotypically negative qualities, greater adjustment problems and lower expected educational outcomes than they reported for White students (Pigott, 1999).

Low College Completion Rates Limits Black Teachers in the Workforce

Although Blacks have achieved significant progress in education since the Brown decision (NCES, 2014), low college completion rates suggest that despite retention programs, Black college students are still struggling (State of Blacks in Higher Education in California, 2013). Indeed, completing a college degree is a difficult endeavor for everyone, which is exacerbated by race and gender (Guiffreda & Douthit, 2010; Phinney & Haas, 2003). Attrition studies are designed to catalogue the percentage of students who fail, suggesting that a diagnostic analysis of Black college student drop-outs will reveal some proactive recommendations for student success. Empirical studies which focus on Black student failure, divorced from the context of the education system rife with institutionalized inequities, however, ignores the racialized differential experiences with the same colorblind perspective that disregards the impact of classroom and campus micro-aggressions on student performance.

College Retention Research

In 1973, Vincent Tinto and John Cullen were commissioned by the Office of Education, Planning, Budgeting and Evaluation to provide the first comprehensive analysis of college dropouts. The purpose of their study was to determine which measures of individual ability and social status were accurate predictors of student success, if and how the completion rates had changed since the Civil Rights Act of 1965, and to develop a theoretical model of a dropout, which would not only permit a synthesis of the previous research, but also help

explain the reasons for student failure. For this report, the researchers defined dropout as a voluntary withdrawal, (separate from those who were dismissed for conduct or poor grades, or those who transferred to other colleges or universities) and found that half of all students who left college voluntarily did so in their first year. Tinto and Cullen proposed that students went to college with background characteristics such as family, friends, skills, abilities, and prior schooling, which shaped their level of commitment when they arrived, but that social and academic integration within the institution, made them want to stay until graduation.

To examine freshmen experiences, Tinto and Cullen, building on prior attrition research, referenced Durkheim's 1961 study of suicide to understand college dropouts. These researchers reasoned that dropout behavior (and suicides as Durkheim found) was largely the result of a lack of integration into the common society. These researchers concluded that maladjustment and the inability to integrate into the social system of higher education led to a lower commitment to complete coursework and an increased possibility of academic failure. Since positive social and academic integration was grounded in the individual student's family background, students who were middle to high income and with father's who had completed college were found to be more likely to succeed. Let us not forget that these students were also more likely to be White male graduates from college preparatory high schools. If privileged White males could not successfully integrate into the common college society, they had to be maladjusted, the researchers concluded (Tinto & Cullen, 1973).

The expectation that students outside of the mainstream culture, regardless of socio-economic class could integrate just as easily clearly suggests that Tinto and Cullen had no experience with or understanding of minority cultures on college campuses (Guiffrida, 2006). For Tinto and Cullen, the template college student was White, male, from an upper middle to high-income family, lived on campus, more likely normative to the culture and social class of the college and university faculty and administration. The researcher's generalized colorblind recommendation for all students to distance themselves from family and friends back home so that they could more fully integrate (assimilate) within the college society, would not have presented the normative White student with any cultural discomfort, arguably may have been harmful and counterproductive to students of color (Guiffrida, 2006).

Research examining the variables of Black undergraduate attrition often includes recommendations and interventions rooted in the seminal work of Tinto on retention in higher education. Unfortunately many of these interventions are only minimally successful because Tinto's original research did not consider the multi-dimensional array of obstacles Black college students encounter, any one of which could derail an individual student's education plans. In contrast, Claude Steele's work on stereotype threat suggests that university faculty can improve completion rates for Black students by abandoning colorblind pedagogy for a more culturally relevant approach that respects the students lived realities of social injustice. Studies conducted by Steele and Aronson (1998; 2010) found that by simply providing students with the space and time to identify

their individual talents and to examine critically the stereotypes hidden by a colorblind perspective, Black students were able to improve their academic performance. Black students who survive to graduation are more than just lucky or talented, and to classify them as exceptional is an enormous injustice and disadvantage to those who could benefit from the strategies they used to succeed (Steel, 2010).

Figure 2 - Cycle of Black Student Academic Success

The Cycle of Black Student Academic Success

The cycle of Black student achievement is an interconnected circle of academic successes that work together to support student outcomes. In this model, Black early childhood educators are not only role models and mentors within a diverse teacher workforce, they are examples of intellectual excellence for children and families of every racial group, destroying the myth of genetic inferiority, and creating a culture of equity within preschool classrooms. Black preschoolers emerging from these classrooms are

better prepared for elementary school by teachers who believe they can learn by taking advantage of culturally relevant pedagogy to scaffold student learning. When these Black students move on to secondary school, they are not two or three years behind their White and Asian counterparts. They have developed the cognitive skills required to engage in increasingly advanced intellectual explorations as confident critical thinkers, ready and eager to learn. Then these motivated young adults enter postsecondary education prepared to emerge into a society that has historically been hostile and unwelcoming by standing on the shoulders of educators who believed and encouraged their goal of degree attainment. While not all of them will become teachers, those that do are likely to be better able continue to support young Black learners, perpetuating the cycle of success. A national education system that maintains the continuation of student academic potential defined by racial membership undermines the cycle of Black student success at every level.

Black Student Perspectives

Without more Black graduates from four year colleges and universities, California will continue to experience a shortage of Black ECE teachers. These would be exactly the teachers who are critical in the cycle of Black Academic success and improved academic outcomes for Black preschool students. For that reason this study was conducted to focus on the experiences of Black students within the ECE courses and the methods they have employed to persist to graduation. A more diverse population of students and faculty in teacher preparation programs would create a varied cultural perspective within programs

and could lead to a new understanding of the structural inequalities embedded within the one dimensional reporting of test scores and attrition rates. An innovative approach to understanding the lived experiences of Black students, which include the experiences and perspectives of disadvantaged students, may give the academic world critical feedback on the effectiveness of their efforts to reduce achievement gaps and increase equity, and graduation rates in higher education.

Black students have had limited opportunities to communicate their lived experiences on college campuses. In a recent study, Dr. Richard Seltzer of Howard University collected 939 essays about racial experiences from a diverse pool of participants attending 11 colleges and universities across the nation (Seltzer & Johnson, 2009). These researchers coded and analyzed 217 essays in an attempt to understand the lived experiences of racism and discrimination from the perspective of college students. In these essays, college students described the ways in which race and racism impacted their academic achievement, very similar to those described by this study's participants. These student perspectives contribute texture and dimension to the categorical data collected in quantitative studies that attempt to describe their experiences.

Technology has also provided students with a new platform for their counter narratives via social media and the web. In January 2014 Black students enrolled in UCLA School of Law posted a video on YouTube entitled "33'" where they described the feelings of isolation and dehumanization in a public institution that prides itself on its diversity. Administrators within UCLA School of Law have expressed their frustration and disappointment with the low numbers of Black students enrolled, but fail to explain

why the university isn't more openly embracing, encouraging and extolling the few Black students they do have (UCLA News, 2014).

Undergraduates at this same university also released a video entitled "Black Bruins" a spoken word performance by Sy Stokes in which he described the experience of "feeling like Rosa Parks" in a university with only 1082 total Black undergraduates in a pool of more than 42 thousand; however, enrollment percentages were only part of their message. The negative feelings and experiences of being Black students at UCLA should be a concern for the university regardless of their percentage of the student population. While it may be useful to study the factors that contribute to the large numbers of Black undergraduates who don't receive degrees, it may be more beneficial to study those who have successfully completed their coursework as well as those on track for graduation to understand the strategies these graduating Black students used to persist.

Lifting As We Climb

This researcher and the participants in this study are familiar with the tradition within Black culture, "to lift as we climb," which was described by Mary Church Terrell in her address to the National Association of University Women in 1902. Terrell, one of the founders and president of the National Association for Colored Women and one of first women to be appointed to the Board of Education for public schools in Washington, DC said:

The real solution of the race problem lies in the children, both so far as we who are oppressed and those who are oppress us are concerned [...] And so lifting as we climb, onward and upward we go, struggling and striving

and hoping that the buds and blossoms of our desires will burst into glorious fruition ere long. With courage born of success achieved in the past, with a keen sense of responsibility, which we must continue to assume, we look forward to the future, large with promise and hope. Seeking no favors because of our color or patronage because of our needs, we knock at the bar of justice and ask for [and demand] an equal chance.
(Clup, D.W., 1902)

Summary

Black children just beginning to develop their sense of identity are in jeopardy when placed in early childhood education classrooms with teachers who expect them to underperform. Most of the empirical research on teacher expectations has found that a deficit perspective by teachers has a detrimental, possibly irreversible, impact on children's sense of their identity, value and capabilities (Dee, 2005; Tennenbaum & Ruck, 2007; Tettengah, 1997).

Researchers looking for the locus of academic underperformance in Black children often ignore the relationship between the students and the nearly all White teacher workforce. In a public opinion poll conducted by Stanford, the University of Michigan and the University of Chicago, researchers found that more than half (51%) of Americans expressed explicit anti-Black attitudes and another 6% harbored implicit anti-Black bias (Pasek, Kronsnick & Tompson, 2012). With nearly six out of ten Americans either explicitly or implicitly sustaining racial bias against Blacks, it is reasonable to conclude that teachers focusing on the symptoms and not the cause of racial disparities in student outcomes may have unknowingly accepted the stereotypes of Black intellectual

inferiority in what Beverly Tatum describes as “part of the racism smog in our nations’ culture which Americans have grown to accept as breathable air”(1997, p. 6).

Improving academic outcomes for Black preschool students by increasing the number of Black graduates in early childhood education programs is an integral component in the cycle of Black student academic success because Black teachers are not only role models and mentors, they are examples of intellectual excellence for children and families of every racial group, creating a culture of equity through diversity within preschool classrooms.

Chapter 4 – Study Design and Methodology

The purpose of the study is to explore the persistence strategies of Black early childhood education students. This interview research uses Critical Theory to examine the experiences of Black students enrolled in early childhood education courses at San Francisco State University. This study asks: How do Black early childhood education (ECE) students successfully navigate a university system?

This chapter will begin with a description of the study design, the role of the researcher, and a description of the research questions. The context of this study will be revealed in the demographic data of the university (discussed in Chapter 5). The participant selection and data collection process will be described. The chapter concludes with a description of the way in which critical theory was used in the data analysis.

Design

This dissertation was designed to be a combination of personal narrative and in-depth interviews with Black early childhood education students and recent graduates. The weaving together of the narratives, demographic data, and qualitative analysis developed through cycles of coding may provide valuable information on the lived experiences of Black students attending this university. Digital recordings of the face-to-face and telephone interviews were transcribed. These were combined with email responses and the full dataset was coded. Data excerpts were recorded in a table for comparison and thematic organization. Through the process of analysis and recoding, the thirteen original

themes were condensed into three conceptual themes: (1) Social Integration, (2) Micro-aggressions and Academic Integration, (3) Strategies Used by Students to Persevere.

Research Questions and Sub-Questions

This study asks: How do Black early childhood education (ECE) students successfully navigate the university system? Through a series of questions specifically related to pre-college preparation, family support, academic planning, social and academic integration and post-graduation goals, students' responses were recorded and transcribed.

Rationale for Methodology

Many studies of Black college student persistence are survivor narratives, documenting a struggle to overcome academic barriers experienced by Black students. While these studies acknowledge the likely challenges for Black students in higher education, most fail to provide insight on the strategies they will need to overcome them (Harper, 2009). Black students face the same challenges and difficulties in transition into the university and navigating their path to graduation as any student would face, but they also carry with them the burden of being Black in a culture that devalues their contributions and discourages their progress. Attrition studies often assume that Black students leave the university because they were underprepared, a deficit perspective that does little to support and encourage completion.

Studies of high performing Black college students may have provided the best insight on the psychological, social and physiological challenges Black students endure. Recognizing the stigmatized educational experiences of Black students and their vulnerability to stereotypes, researchers have identified protective strategies that can minimize the effect of the self-fulfilling prophecy on Black student academic achievement (Steele, 1992).

Young Black students looking for breadcrumbs to follow through the academic forest need to be connected to the strategies and solutions found by those who discovered a pathway. The pathway to success is found in the study of those who succeeded. These success stories are seldom heard by students on college campuses where a large percentage of the students commute to school. Black early childhood education students, burdened with a full course load are also required to complete typically unpaid field study hours and an internship in early childhood classrooms. These activities limit social interaction between students and the ability to share useful strategies for success.

As a graduate of SF State's master's program in Early Childhood Education I have had the privilege of studying with a team of professors that encouraged and supported teacher research, reflective practice and the use of memoir to create a space that allowed me to improve my practice as an educator of small children and later as an early childhood pre-service teacher educator (Perry, Henderson and Meier, 2012). Henderson states that the courses in this program have a sociocultural perspective that values the diversity of the student's culture and home language that allow students to "bring their whole selves to their writing and their academic studies" (p. 141). The

influence of my experience in this early childhood education program is evident throughout this study and continues to be a guiding force in my teaching practice with young children and adult learners.

I have many shared experiences with the participants of this study, examined within a broader context of my own personal history. This study is an attempt to fill the gaps of the Black student experience by further exploring the intersectionality of education, persistence, and the Black experience in America.

The purpose of this study is to document and examine the strategies of persistence and resilience used by high performing Black early childhood education students, to illuminate a path for others to follow.

Figure 3 – Phases of the Research

This qualitative interview study began with the construction of the research questions for data collection and analysis inspired by conversations and interactions with the Black students enrolled in early childhood education courses I teach, which were used

to develop a question bank for face-to-face interviews. As a member of the faculty at this university, it was critically important that confidentiality of the participants was paramount. (Bogdan and Biklen, 2007). It was also important to ensure that participants were given the space and time to participate at their leisure to ensure that in the process of collecting the data for the study didn't unintentionally trigger stereotype vulnerability (Steele & Aronson, 1995).

Participant Selection

Participants were selected from the small numbers of Black students enrolled in fifteen undergraduate courses in the fall semester of 2011, and recent graduates of the ECE master's degree program. All of the participants were female because there were no male ECE students enrolled at the time of this study. Participants were recruited through face-to-face meetings and email. Personal history data was collected to provide demographic data and to develop qualitative, open ended questions for face-to-face interviews. Participants were asked to provide follow up information, when necessary through email or by phone.

Ethics and Protection of Human Subjects

The protection of the participants' confidentiality was a paramount concern throughout this study because as a member of the faculty, as an early childhood educator, and as a Black woman I know that the voices of these students are rarely heard. The

research data was kept in a secure and locked cabinet in my office and I was the only person to have access to that data. Electronic transcripts, notes and other supporting data were all password protected and all identifying information was removed. At the conclusion of the study, the data, audio tapes and notes will be stored for one year following the completion of the study and then will be destroyed. There is a risk of loss of privacy, in that these students are so few in number that even if the names and identities are changed for final publication of the research, those students who have not graduated may still be identified. Participants were informed that there was a risk of discomfort or anxiety due to the nature of the questions and discussions, but that they were free to participate or leave the study if they choose. All participants returned signed informed consent forms

Data Collection

Participant interview responses and descriptive quantitative data from the institution on graduation and degree completion was collected and analyzed for this study. Because the university does not offer a four year degree in early childhood education, it was also necessary to collect data on the various majors of the students in these undergraduate classes along with descriptive data which included the number of courses taken, if the student was native to SF State or a transfer student, if students were first generation college students and if they were receiving financial aid. Participants were also asked about the level of their first college courses in English and Math, possible concurrent employment, and family status and family support. Each participant interview lasted for about 90 minutes.

Figure 4 - Data Collection Process

Data Analysis

All of the qualitative data including personal history, interviews, descriptive data and follow up emails were coded and indexed using EXCEL. Data analysis of these codes and themes included common responses and significant outlier data (Bogdan and Biklen, 2007). As part of the study design, I reviewed the demographic data of the university prior to the face-to-face interviews to assist in the development of the interview questions.

Although the findings of this study are not generalizable, they may be transferable in a developing an awareness of how Black early childhood education students (or Black female students in any major) navigate degree attainment. The validity of these findings is supported by the researcher's personal history, interview responses, member checking

and examination by critical colleagues. There are a large number of studies that have attempted to identify the characteristics and circumstances of Black student underperformance in postsecondary institutions, but the significance of this study is found in the limited research on the strategies and supports Black pre-service ECE teachers utilize to complete the coursework necessary to earn bachelor's degrees.

Role of the Researcher

The National Center for Education Statistics reports that 41.5% of Black students complete a bachelor's degree within six years (nces.ed.gov, 2014). Graduation rates for Black students starting college in 2001 at San Francisco State University was, however only 23.3% (cpec.ca.gov). For Black education majors the numbers are even grimmer. Less than three percent of graduate degrees (MA) in education awarded between 2004 and 2009 were earned by Black students, roughly six students out of 195 (sfsu.edu). I was one of those six students.

As a graduate of this university, I am fully aware of my bias in researching this topic. As an instructor in undergraduate early childhood education courses, I typically begin each semester with a handful of Black students however, for the past several years their numbers are fewer and fewer. Dwindling enrollment and statistics that suggest that only one in four Black students will graduate with a bachelor's degree explains their underrepresentation. However, these statistics, while informative, can't explain the experiences of these students, or the barriers they face in completing coursework at SF State, or why such a small fraction persist and earn degrees.

Summary

This chapter has provided an overview of the way this study of 12 participating students was conducted. These participant interviews describe the real lived experiences of Black students in a way that doesn't happen in studies that focus simply on the rates of graduation or persistence. The portraits (which appear in Chapter 5) begin to open up the reader to an understanding of the complexities of these women's lives.

My method used interviews with the students that were candid, comfortable and often became deep conversations. Within many interviews, I had to stop the tape to provide students with links to resources on campus to support them to succeed in their coursework and to be able to graduate. These conversations reawakened in many of the participants the reasons that they wanted to be teachers. They had forgotten or failed to conceptualize their talents and what had brought them to higher education, and specifically, to a teaching program in the first place. I was there to listen, to prompt memories, and to support their thinking. My identity as a Black student who has been where they have been allowed this to unfold in a way that was poignant, profound and seared into my memory.

The next chapter will provide the Findings of this study, which will explore: (1) social integration, (2) micro-aggressions, academic integration and stereotype threat, Chapter 6 will present the participants' strategies for academic persistence, and Chapter 7 will provide my conclusion, recommendations and implications to my teaching practice.

Chapter 5 – Lived Experiences of Black ECE Students and College Student Retention Research

It wasn't that long ago that all it took to trigger an internal wave of anxiety was for someone to question my writing skill or intelligence. I'd hear it, rumbling then roaring in my ears. I feel my legs and hands tremble. My face and neck got hot and red. My thoughts were a blur. It became difficult to focus on what they were saying. I tried to freeze whatever facial expression I could hold that didn't reveal my distress. I feared that protective fortifications built from my own accomplishments and resentments for social inequities would fail, and if I crumbled under the pressure, I will lose the battle to reach my highest potential.

All of my experiences are defined by my Blackness. Other's perceptions of what and who I am are initially (and maybe always) based on skin color. I rarely walk into a room without checking to see how many brown people are there. In higher education as I move in circles with fewer and fewer brown faces, I began to expect professors or classmates to silently question my qualifications for being in the room. In one meeting with state education officials to discuss public policy in ECE for a fellowship paper, I was assumed to be the secretary of my White classmate, even after being introduced as the co-author. While taking graduate level courses I can remember looking at the door and just waiting for someone to walk in and ask, "What are you doing here?" That feeling of being out-of-place got stronger and stronger with each academic milestone.

Biographies of Participants

For this study 12 Black female students completing coursework in early childhood education courses for the purpose of becoming preschool teachers were interviewed. I selected these particular students because they were on track for graduation. In part, they reminded me of my own educational trajectory as I navigated a path to an undergraduate degree through shared experiences such as surviving the transfer process from community college to SF State and managing difficult personal relationships and experiences that threatened to derail my educational goals.

These student biographies were included because their life stories provide a background for understanding both the challenges and strategies these students developed to succeed. These biographies contain a significant portion of the interview data. The first question the participants were asked was to describe their background and what brought them to SF State University. This question seemed to naturally lead to a description of family. When the participants seemed to run of things to say about their family, they were prompted with specific questions about their parents such as highest level of education, family support and how they balanced home responsibilities with schoolwork. After answering these questions the participants were asked a follow up question to help them get back on track with their descriptions of themselves. Verbatim excerpts of specific responses to interview questions that were analyzed and compared to the research on college persistence, stereotype threat, and micro-aggressions, which have been included in this chapter.

Laisha was a sophomore Liberal Studies major who plans to continue her education after graduation to become an elementary school teacher. She entered SFSU as a freshman after attending elementary and secondary schools in the East Bay, with student populations that were disproportionally Black and Latino. Unlike her friends and siblings, Laisha was eager to attend college, sure that a degree was the best chance for her to secure a career that would keep her out of a life of poverty. Neither of her parents attended college and her parents separated while she was still in elementary school. She lives with her mother, her older brother who is out of school and working part-time and a younger brother still in elementary school. Laisha would have liked to go to a college further away from her family, where she could live on campus and really immerse herself in her education, but her mother needed her help to care for her little brother and shoulder some of the household responsibilities while she was working. Her older brother was antagonistic, making it difficult for her to study at home. He would occasionally accuse her of attempting to make herself superior by going to college, suggesting that her decision to earn a degree was an indictment of failure and contempt for their family, their economic status, and their culture. Laisha had a boyfriend at the beginning of her freshman year, but he became demanding of her time, insisting that she abandon her studies to devote herself to him. Disturbed that he might be attempting to sabotage her college plans, she ended the relationship, disturbed that female college students should have to fight sexism and racism at the same time. During her interviews, Laisha expressed her concern about her own ability to continue her studies and complete her

educational plan due to her uneasiness in college, her family responsibilities, a lack of support from family and friends and increasing financial concerns.

Tanya was also a sophomore and her major is Child and Adolescent Development. She was also a first generation college student, but her older sister had already graduated from college and was attending graduate school to earn a master's degree in psychology.

Tanya called herself a nerd in high school, also attending secondary school in the East Bay. Tanya worked hard to get good grades in high school, motivated by her older sister's academic success. Unlike Laisha, Tanya's family was very supportive of her academic work, which she believed would ultimately become the key to achieving her goals. With her older sister's help, Tanya was able to make the transition to post-secondary study maintaining a better than average college GPA. Her sister helped her develop a plan, select her courses by reading the bulletin carefully, organize her work, write academic papers and adapt to a university where Black students were the minority. Tanya was fully aware of the micro-aggressions she experiences in class and on campus, which she believes are evidence of the implicit racism in education. She worked in an afterschool program as part of her commitment to field work experience in the CAD program and where she developed a dissatisfaction for the difference between the theoretical concepts of good teaching practice she learned in her coursework and the real experiences of the Black students she worked with in elementary schools in the East Bay. Tanya believed that these low performing schools are not only far from ideal, but seem to be almost purposefully dedicated to ensuring a lifetime of disadvantage for the students

who attend them. Tanya wanted to be a teacher because she wanted to help Black students feel the same excitement and accomplishment that she experienced in her studies, and the same economic opportunities she hoped to find after graduation.

Akeela was a junior, already finished with her general education courses and fully focused on her major coursework in Child and Adolescent Development. Not only is Akeela the first in her family to attend college, her mother's ambivalence about post-secondary education was an underlying stressor at home. Akeela was perhaps the most alone in her pursuit of a college degree, with only one high school teacher who believed that she could succeed.

Abandoning her high school friends who didn't decide to attend college was difficult for her, but once on campus she made a few new friends and joined a Black Sorority. Akeela felt the sorority girls partied a little too much, but they also formed useful study groups. Akeela spoke often about feeling out of place in college, choosing to enroll Ethnic Studies courses so that she could experience a cultural connection to academic study. Her eyes sparked with delight when she spoke about some of her coursework on campus, and what may have pleased her most were assignments that allowed her to work with students different from herself. Akeela's previous pre-tertiary experiences had been in East Bay schools with predominately Black and Latino students. Finding acceptance and mutual respect from peers of other races and cultures was a welcome surprise, but she did feel out of place in some of her courses and with some of the faculty whom she felt often decided quickly that she was underprepared for college.

Akeela worked in retail to help meet her expenses while in school, which included paying rent at home. Although Akeela was a Child and Adolescent Development major, she wasn't sure she wanted to become a teacher because she had learned after choosing her major that the field doesn't pay very well.

Nakia was a senior at the time of her interviews, but since has graduated and begun her post graduate study in Early Childhood Education. Nakia's mother continues to be her greatest supporter, encouraging her daughter to achieve a level of academic success that she had to abandon herself to raise and support a family. It was difficult for Nakia and her family after her mother divorced her father, and financial hardships made it impossible for her mother to continue school. After her mother remarried, Nakia's financial contributions to the family were no longer necessary, which was good because the cost of books and tuition increased dramatically year after year. Nakia worked in a preschool in the North Bay, in a school that was predominately White and affluent. Working at this school was an eye-opening experience for her and the children she worked with. The cultural exchanges and exposure to diverse perspectives at work and in her college courses gave Nakia hope that the barriers and ignorance Blacks face can be overcome as more Blacks graduate college and move into the professional workforce.

Susan is a transfer student and part of a pathway program between City College of San Francisco and SF State. Susan, a Family and Child Studies major, was very popular in high school, a social atmosphere she missed when she began college. Her

mother supported her coursework, but would rather that she earned a degree in a field that pays better, such as medicine or the law. Still, she reported that her mother was constantly bragging about her to the relatives and was genuinely grateful that she was in college. Susan enrolled in child development courses in community college, which she felt were too easy. During her interviews Susan talked about being intimidated by the coursework at SFSU and several times during the interview I found it necessary to give her information about resources within the college that would help her succeed. Susan had a great deal of experience working with young children; however, since most of that occurred before she began a serious course of study in child development, there seemed to be a disconnection between her work and the theoretical concepts she was learning.

While Susan readily understood the obstacles she faced in trying to succeed in school, such as low expectations of faculty and financial hardships for Black students, when asked about her own persistence, she had no idea what skills she possessed that allowed her to advance toward graduation, but she was certain that other Black students who didn't succeed failed because they were lazy students who didn't try hard enough and spent too much time socializing. When asked if it was possible that she had developed skills to help her succeed that these students had yet to discover, she was surprised by the possibility. This lack of awareness of her own skills and talents did not allow Susan to access her academic successes to support her self-confidence as she advanced to degree attainment. Without a conscious awareness of her own strengths and accomplishments Susan maintained common anti-intellectual stereotypes about Black

students which, if left unchanged, will likely be carried into her work as an early childhood educator.

Jamaica was also a City College of San Francisco transfer student and part of the pathway program. Although technically a junior, Jamaica describes herself as a sophomore because she has still a few courses in general education to complete before focusing on her major of sociology. During her interviews Jamaica talked about the difficulties she faced in coursework that is becoming more dependent on digital platforms and on-line interactions between classmates and faculty for a student who does not own a computer. Jamaica, like many of the other participants in this study, was not interested in taking on student loan debt, and made do with financial aid and part time work. Jamaica was waiting to get into the impacted CAD program, and worked with the Jumpstart program before entering SF State. During that work experience Jamaica adopted the idea that Black parents don't do enough to encourage their children in school, a stereotypical view that may have been supported by her own family's lack of support for her educational goals. Jamaica was working to overcome her feelings of being out of place by taking ethnic studies courses and by maintaining a group of friends on campus, although she was concerned that her socializing was getting in the way of her academic progress.

Jamaica was surprised by the new information she was learning in child development, even though that was her major in community college. Unfortunately, Jamaica was unknowingly perpetuating anti-intellectual Black stereotypes when she

suggested that academic success was influenced by skin color and that the darker students performed poorly when compared to lighter skinned peers. With two years to left in her academic study there is hope that a broader understanding and a more enlightened perspective of Black intelligence will emerge before she enters the field as a teacher of young children.

Michelle was a senior and a Liberal Studies major, who planned to continue in the credential program to become an elementary school special education teacher. She is the vanguard in her family, the first to attend college and lay a path for her younger siblings to follow. She confessed that her mother had sacrificed a great deal to help her continue in college, and that after graduation it was critical that she get a good job so that she could help her mother, and younger brother and sisters follow her to college.

Michelle's motivation for persistence in special education was inspired by her little brother, a special needs student, whom she felt didn't get the kind of instruction, respect, or support he need to succeed. Occasionally at odds with coursework that didn't fit with her fieldwork experiences in special needs classrooms, Michelle had some difficulty adapting assignments, especially with instructors that remain inflexible and unfamiliar with special needs instruction. Frustrated, Michelle continued to move through courses to graduation, but felt that she might be at a disadvantage in some of her coursework because she could not always apply what she is learning directly to her field work. Several instructors asked Michelle to add additional hours of observation to classrooms with younger children to complete assignments. These non-paid volunteer

hours increased her financial burden and limited resources. Faced with the need to cover her expenses while in college, and her desire to keep her part-time job in an elementary school special needs classroom, Michelle was struggling to add the required observation hours to her already impossible schedule.

Jennifer was and a Child and Adolescent Development major, although she mentioned that she might decide to change her major to business because she felt the field paid better than early childhood education. Vague about her family support, Jennifer said that she used some of her financial aid money to help support the family while she was in college. Jennifer began as a CAD major, before the program was impacted, but she works in retail to supplement her financial aid. Rather than hang out with friends at home or on campus, Jennifer uses social media to keep connected, which she believed took a lot less time and allowed her to study rather than meet face-to-face with friends. Less optimistic that her younger cousins would be able to follow her example and work hard to get to college, Jennifer understood as a CAD major, the importance of early childhood preparation and was troubled that her young cousins were not taking their education seriously enough. She was also very cognizant of the low percentage of Black students and faculty on campus and reported feeling that many of the instructors had little faith that she would persist until graduation.

Frances is a junior and transferred from City College of San Francisco as a Liberal Studies major. One of the few participants who came from a two parent family,

Francis was a second generation college student, and although neither of her parents held four year degrees, both were very supportive of her academic goals. Frances worked part-time and received financial aid to support her in college, and, although grateful for the opportunity to continue to live with her parents as she finishes her degree work, she struggled to pay for books and tuition. Frances studied with a few friends who didn't attend the same college and who were not Liberal Studies majors. These students got together to support each other and offer help and encouragement to each other. Without an education Frances fears that Black children will have difficult lives, filled with economic uncertainty. She is doubtful, however, that she could have the kind of real impact on student achievement as a public school educator if she is forced to teach a curriculum that may not support Black student success. Frances also took courses in Ethnic Studies to support her academic integration and questioned the university's lack of faculty diversity outside of ethnic studies courses.

Helen was a junior and a Psychology major, planning to continue to the credential program to become an elementary school teacher, like her mother. Helen became a psychology major because when she transferred from City College of San Francisco she found that many of the child development courses she took would have to be retaken as upper division coursework. Rather than repeat courses, and because the Child Development major was already impacted, Helen chose to major in Psychology with an emphasis on developmental psychology. This choice of major would allow her to satisfy more lower division course requirements with classes already taken in community

college while she continued her study with courses that would support her ultimate goal of becoming a teacher. Although she talked about how much she wanted to emulate her mother, and that she was preparing herself to become a teacher, she wasn't really sure that teaching was a financially viable career. When asked about recommendations for the university, Helen suggested that students should have more opportunities to meet professionals in their field of study, to help them make career decisions before they locked themselves into years of study for careers that were unsustainable.

Trisha was the only participant interviewed who was not a current student. A former classmate in the master's program, Trisha was a role model who inspired me to persist when I felt out of place in graduate school. Trisha's parents both graduated from college and although separated, supported their daughter's academic goals. Like many of the other participants, Trisha transferred from City College of San Francisco and had a difficult time there transitioning through the sequence of remedial and required English courses. After enrolling at SF State Trisha reported that she continued to struggle with her written work, but did not want to ask instructors for help, feeling the pressure to perform to the level she believed all the other students did easily. Trisha worked in the on-campus preschool program, which encouraged her to continue to graduate school. Working nearly full time in a preschool program did allow Trisha to make direct connections with her academic study and her work with young children, but her feelings of inadequacy as a writer became more pronounced in graduate courses that were writing intensive. As the coursework became increasingly complex, Trisha's enthusiasm for the

work and passion for the field of early care and education could not buoy her confidence in her ability to persist. Although her family support had encouraged her to the final semester of graduate study, she struggled to complete the field study and dropped out of the program.

Trisha's enthusiasm for the field was so mesmerizing that it distracted those of us who studied with her, and I suspect the faculty as well, from her obvious physical limitations as a handicapped student. Had she been less skilled in her ability to adapt within a program designed for non-disabled students, strategies would certainly have been made available to insure her completion. Sadly, it was her reluctance to confirm the stereotypes for Black and special needs students that prevented her from asking for assistance.

Valerie was a junior and a Liberal Studies major. She began her post-secondary studies at the Art Institute, but soon realized that she had no desire for a career as an artist, despite her natural artistic talents. She transferred to City College of San Francisco to finish her lower division coursework and found that the English courses she took in high school had not prepared her for college level writing, despite her excellent grades and high scores on the SAT. She found that the majority of her English teachers were terrible because they created assignments that should have been interesting, but instead were tedious, discouraging creativity and critical thinking. Upon transfer to SF State Valerie decided that she wanted to become an English teacher and after talking with several teachers currently working in middle school and high school in San Francisco

Unified School District, she decided to become a Liberal Studies major with an emphasis in English. Valerie has enormous support from her parents and her older brother who graduated from UC Santa Barbara and is now completing graduate work at NYU. Since high school, Valerie has worked with young children in a mixed-aged family child care, which allowed her the experience of working with both preschool and school aged children. By helping young children find the magic in a storybooks and assisting older students to develop a deeper understanding of required reading, Valerie decided that teaching high school English was the best way she could contribute to the field of education. As one of the few students who attended public schools with a very diverse student population, Valerie was familiar with the experience of being one of the few Black students in her classes and had developed an identity that allowed her to navigate within classrooms that aspired to be colorblind, but she remained prepared for the implicit bias and micro-aggressions that she reportedly experienced daily.

Shared Experiences

These biographies illustrate the complicated social and educational lives of the 12 study participants as well as the cultural nuances of Black females that typically are not considered in traditional college retention studies. While some of the experiences of the participants in this study may be universal to all college undergraduates at the university, there is a noticeable element of interdependence and out-of-place feeling for all of the interviewees. These two themes will be discussed and compared to the seminal studies of social integration. These themes are also pertinent to my own story of educational

challenges and success within the P-20 system, and the interviews gave me a new sense of communality and solidarity with fellow Black educators.

I was accepted to SF State right out of high school. It was 1975 and most of my friends were looking forward to two things: going to college and moving out on our own. We were naive. My parents were supportive of my academic goals, but my mother was pretty clear that I needed to find my own place, despite my father's insistence that working to support myself would reduce my chances to graduate. He was right. I had two jobs and a full load of classes that first year. It was hard and my grades began to suffer. In my second year my mother was diagnosed with breast cancer. I tried to continue to attend classes, but I couldn't focus and I dropped out. My mother had a radical mastectomy, reconstruction surgery and chemotherapy and I got a job working as a fast food restaurant manager. The pay was good, but the hours were horrible. Working 60 or more hours a week, often the late shifts gave me very little time to visit with family. College became a distant dream. My mother died a year later in October. She was 46. I moved back into the family home with my grieving father, who had two heart attacks a month later. It took about two years, but we gradually recovered. My father, needing to get away from his memories, got a job with a big technology company and moved to New Hampshire, leaving the house in the care of my brother and myself. We found some roommates, made the mortgage payments and went back to school. I couldn't go back to SF State, so I enrolled at City College of San Francisco. I reconnected with a bunch of my old high school friends still there.

I found myself focusing on my coursework with an intensity that I hadn't felt since high school. I was committed to completing the 60 units I needed to return to SF State and finish what I started. I worked hard, taking only required classes, with very little difficulty, with the exception of the English courses. I was given a D in my first attempt in a college level English class. Like Valerie, one of this study's participants, I found myself at odds with an instructor that, admitted my writing was sufficient, but insisted I didn't understand *Dante's Inferno* because I didn't agree with her interpretation of the work. I didn't know at the time I could appeal the unfair grade, so I took the course again. On my second attempt the instructor chose five novels, three of which contained the word nigger so many times that I raised my hand to complain. The teacher immediately dismissed my objections, telling the class that the books were literary classics. In my final paper I argued that there were many books that were literary classics that didn't degrade and devalue the Black characters as his course texts did, even suggesting a few titles where the word nigger was used to illustrate the ugliness of the word, such as in *To Kill a Mockingbird*. I barely passed.

As I worked my way through the required general education courses I found that arguing with instructors was futile. The Humanities teacher was never going to accept that civilization wasn't created in Greece. The US history professor was unmoved by the suggestion that his one day lecture on the 250 year enslavement of my ancestors was insufficient. It wasn't until I took an art course and the class went to the theatre to look at the mural painted by Diego Rivera called *Pan American Unity* that I remembered the value of a single brown voice. That mural helped me complete my 60 units to transfer.

Like most of this study's participants, I was working full time while attending classes so my social integration consisted of a casual conversation with whoever I was sitting next to in class that needed to know last week's assignment. I didn't make any friends or join any clubs. I saw my assigned counselor only once. I showed him my schedule; he nodded his approval and signed my form. My only connection to the campus outside of the classrooms was the library, vending machines and the bathrooms.

Similarly, I was also a first generation college student. My father had to drop out of college when my mother got pregnant with my older sister. Recently I started to try to piece together my ancestry. It ended with a four-time grandfather named Tom Sullivan, a 10 year-old, sold to a farmer in North Carolina in 1850. Through this search I learned that I wasn't just a first generation college student. I was the first in a long line of Sullivans to earn a degree. Just as the participants describe in the section to follow, when I was an undergraduate I didn't look for or expect any help from the university. I forged my own way. I felt out-of-place, dropped all my friends who weren't also in college, struggled financially, and found a way to cope with living and learning in the margins.

Social Integration

The Black female participants in this study were not the normative college students described by Tinto and Cullen, for which their theories of integration were developed; however, the influence or interference of family and friends proved to be a consistent theme in the participant interviews when asked about family and friends. All but four of the twelve participants were first generation college students.

Akila, a junior, described the transition to college and the difficulty and confusion she experienced in trying to navigate without the guidance and support of friends or family that attended college before her. She said:

It's hard to be the first one because no one was there to help me figure out what to do. I feel like I'm making a lot of mistakes. I ask the friends I've made here to help me figure things out.

Akila, like many of the other first generation participants, entered the university without any idea of how to move through her new academic environment or deal with the often conflicting demands placed on undergraduate students. Using the bulletin as her guide, Akila tried to map out her courses from freshman year to graduation, and immediately found difficulties in scheduling, course cut backs, academic precollege preparation and instructors who seemed to be culturally non-responsive. Like many of the participants, Akila assumed that she was the problem and made decisions based on her lack of awareness that her feelings of out-of-place were fairly common for undergraduates, regardless of ethnicity. Fortunately, Akila found friends on campus and strategies to help herself understand the university's expectations.

Jennifer, another junior, when asked about how she came to SF State, made responses suggesting that she wasn't completely sure she was even supposed to be in college:

Where I come from nobody went to college. I went cuz I couldn't get a job. I mean, I didn't have nothin' else to do, ya know?

Jennifer's casual explanation of her presence on campus conceals her enormous effort to take the SATs, maintain her high school GPA, and complete the application process. Jennifer wanted to expand her opportunities beyond what she surmised would be

available with a high school diploma. Underplaying the effort it took to make herself eligible, and the courageous decision she made to become her neighborhood's postsecondary vanguard, protected her from the implicit recurring unwelcoming messages that Black students, like herself, experience in higher education. Jennifer's casual attitude concealed her obvious desire to succeed in college, which may be misunderstood by university faculty unfamiliar with the protective strategy of downplaying one's talent and desire which has been found to be an appropriate adaptation to the hostile environment (DeGruy, 2012).

For these two SF State native students, feelings of being out-of-place have persisted well beyond what Tinto described as the vulnerable freshman year, and yet, despite their lack of perceived social acceptance within the university, they quietly reported that they were on track for graduation, a pattern found in similar research on Black persistence in college (Bennett and Okinia, 1999).

White students with an expectation of going to college report immediately feeling welcomed and accepted in the university culture and their sense of belonging encourages a quick and successful transition (Tinto, 2005). At the same time underrepresented students experience enormous self-doubt and feelings of being out-of-place that most suffer through alone, unaware of just how universal these feelings are amongst their non-White peers. Black families provide cultural connections and strategies for dealing with prejudice and oppression and strong encouragement and inspiration to succeed for Black students (Guffrida, 2006). This family validation empowers and reaffirms their commitment to graduate (Terenzini et al., 1994). For most of this study's interviewees,

the commitment to earn their degree is motivated by an almost desperate determination to escape the occupational dead ends, disproportional poverty and unrealized potential that will potentially consume them if they fail.

Family and Finances

Even an institution as dedicated to social justice and diversity as San Francisco State University isn't immune to the pervasive normalization of White cultural perspectives pervasive in higher education, unconsciously reinforced by the over representative White (and Asian) faculty, administrators and student population. Adopting student learning objectives that include social justice and respect for a culturally pluralistic worldview by all university faculty could help facilitate social integration by providing opportunities for an awareness that the fundamental academic supplies commonly thought to be necessary academic supports are regrettably not available to everyone.

Jamaica's statement reveals one of the difficult challenges low income students face within a university that has become increasingly integrated with digital platforms:

I don't have a computer at home so I do all my studying at school. My mom understands why I'm never at home anymore.

Jamaica is a typical member of the millennial generation, as socially dependent on technology as boomers were to cars. Instructors often happy to see a sprinkling of students in their classrooms who aren't absently gazing into laptop, notebooks or smart phone screens may not have considered that what they're really looking at is an income

disparity. Imagine the uncomfortable out-of-place feeling for low-income students surrounded by a sea of electronics they can't afford. While the university moves more course content to the digital platform it is important to remember that many low-income students are spending hours in computer labs.

The participants of this study were commuter students. Tinto's theories of social integration were developed for students who lived in college dormitories. Commuter students must find the time, energy and space to study, which can prove to be an enormous challenge without the support of family, as Laisha discovered:

My brother tries to make it hard for me to study. He keeps telling me I'm not all that just because I'm going to college...He makes a lot of noise when I'm trying to study and bangs on my [bedroom] door. I have to go to the library or study when he isn't home.

Laisha's brother's attempts to sabotage her academic success added an extra level of difficulty to her ability to study at home. More than just a distraction, Laisha's brother seems to be motivated by his desire to keep his sister limited to a role defined by his own internalized racism.

Regrettably, the undermining of their academic success was experienced by several of this study's participants who are still living with their families. Interviewees described their relationships with their single-parent mothers, who want to support their child's obvious academic aptitude, but are themselves struggling within an economic situation that makes it difficult to justify the financial support of adult children capable of contributing to the family income:

I live at home and help my mom pay for things... My mom isn't really supportive. She keeps telling me that school is a waste of time. She didn't

go and she's making a lot of money, why do I need a degree? Teachers don't make that much anyway. (Akeela)

My mom says I can stay at home, but I have to pay rent. It's kind of hard with stuff going up every semester. (Laisha)

[My mom] lets me live there, I guess that's support. I don't spend a lot of time at home anyway. (Jamaica)

My mom will kill me if I don't graduate. She's sacrificed a lot to help me get to college. I have to get a good job when I finish so I can help her. (Michelle)

Overall, eight of the twelve participants were living in single parent homes, with their mother as head of household, which is consistent with the national percentages of Blacks in single family homes (Data Book, 2014). None of the interviewees were only children. Although there were no questions about income in the interviews, most of the participants reported that they were receiving financial aid and had some reoccurring financial obligation to their family. Clearly the decision for these adult students to live at home with a parent and siblings while attending college is a burden to their low-income families. This is the kind of situation that sets the stage for conflict or hard choices, which could easily result in a student's decision to leave school.

Fortunately, several of the interviewees reported that their parents were their best cheerleaders:

[My mom] is always bragging to the relatives about me going to college! It's embarrassing! (Susan)

[My parents] think it's cool that I'm going [to college] and I kick them down some money, when I can. I guess that's support, right? (Jennifer)

My parents are real supportive. They always tell me how important it is that I graduate. (Frances)

My mom talks about me all the time to the family. I have to graduate!
(Helen)

These interviewees glowingly talked about how proud their families were that they were attending the university. Smiling embarrassingly they giggled when they talked about family dinners and long distance phone calls with seldom seen relatives who were overjoyed at their academic progress. The participants who were first generation college students in particular, felt the responsibility of taking advantage of an opportunity that was unavailable to their parents, grandparents, and great grandparents. This feeling of responsibility to the family and ancestors was not a consideration in the early studies of college persistence.

In Tinto and Cullen's classic study (1973), students likely to persist came from families that tended to be open, democratic, supportive, and more mainstream-traditional in their relationships with their children. They had parents who expressed an interest in the college experience, gave advice on how to handle college life, and had greater expectations for further education. In contrast to that privilege-laced set of family supports, the Black female participants of this study described more of an interdependent relationship with their family, with shared resources and responsibilities that tethered them to family and home in a ways that were both encouraging and distracting. All of the participants in this study expressed an obligation to financially help their families after graduation, a common sentiment found in collectivist cultures (Guiffreda, 2006). In 1973, Tinto and Cullen may have rightly found that White students were more likely to persist

if they were able to distance themselves from family to concentrate on their studies; however, for minority students, it is likely that mutual support, encouragement and commitment to a more prosperous future for themselves and their families describes a more culturally accurate kind of persistence for Black students (Tinto, 2005; Terenzini et al, 1994).

Friends at Home and Social Integration on Campus

Going to college provides White students with an opportunity to reinvent themselves (Tinto 1973). Breaking ties with friends and establishing new social relationships in dorm rooms, classrooms and through college activities and campus group memberships, accelerating their social integration into the new tribe. Tinto found that the more students were involved on campus socially, the more likely these students were to persist.

For the Black participants of this study, the transition to a predominately White (and Asian) college pushed them into potentially dangerous and hostile territory (Strayhorn & Terrell, 2010). The feelings of being out-of-place were created, in part, by the relatively small numbers of Black students on campus, which diminish even further as students move upward from freshmen to seniors. When participants in this study were asked about their social relationships and connections to old and new friends, they immediately reported feelings of loneliness and alienation:

I used to be real popular in high school. College is a little lonely. (Susan)

I got a group of friends I hang with on campus. We have some classes together. I'm not doin too much of that as I used to...It's fun, but I need to get serious. (Jamaica)

I joined an LGBT group on campus. We get together a couple of times a semester, but we don't study together or anything. (Michelle)

I don't hang out too much. I don't have too much time for that anyway... I mostly text or Facebook when I want to connect with people. (Jennifer)

For most of the participants in this study, the campus persona they developed is one of an outsider, a reasonable accommodation developed to manage their feelings of being out-of-place, which serves to insulate them from negative interactions. For these commuter students, the positive influence of social connection to the university is diminished by their distance within an institution that they perceived as unwelcoming. Although several of the participants of this study remarked on the wonderful campus diversity, Black students come to campus expecting challenges to their academic qualifications for attendance. Thus, socializing with friends and classmates was limited, for the most part, to non-academic activities, which became necessarily brief and infrequent to make time for responsibilities at home, commuting to and from school, homework, and part-time jobs.

Comparing Participant Responses on Social Integration to Retention Research

Tinto's research on social integration was intended to capture the experiences of students living on campus; however, commuter students have also been found to benefit from campus social activities as a motivation to persist (Habley et al., 2012). The

increasingly popular use of social media to connect with friends and family throughout the day may also help Black students stay connected to supportive relationships allowing the students to carry their cultural connections in their pockets.

While researchers studying persistence and retention have consistently supported social integration as a positive influence on completion, they also warned that too much involvement in social activities often becomes a distraction which results in academic or voluntary withdrawal (Bennett & Okinaka, 1990; Terenzini et al., 1994 Tinto & Cullen, 1973).

This study's interviewees were more focused on graduating than socializing, often despite their friends. Here are three of them commenting on this tension between friendship and academic success:

I don't really have time to hang out too much. I go out with my brother and his friends sometimes, but it's not really something I need to do, you know? (Nakia)

I don't go out as much as I did in high school. I've got too much homework plus my job and the commute! By the time I get home it's too late to do anything except talk on the phone. Sometimes I go online. It's a lot easier than trying to find someplace to go and I actually talk to my friends more often. (Tanya)

When I first started college I had a boyfriend. He had a job and didn't want to go to school anymore. He kept callin me when I was tryin to study...my friend told me he might be tryin to get me pregnant so I wouldn't leave him...we broke up. I can't be getting pregnant now! (Laisha)

For these three students, friends and social interactions posed a significant threat to their academic goals. Friends and social activities are a potential disaster for undergraduates of any group, but for these students who were already burdened with

family responsibilities, ambivalent family support, and the distractions of commuting and working while attending college full-time, friends and social activities could easily become the tipping point that pushed them to quit school. Rather than risk the possibility of academic failure, these students chose to end potentially distracting relationships, or to limit their out of school social contacts to more distant forms of communication through telephone calls and social media. In contrast, Akeela joined a Black sorority so that she could relax in an academic Black space on campus. Yet for most of this study's participants, finding a place to be themselves, with other students who wouldn't judge their hair or their clothes or the way they talked, gave them a place to relax and be themselves.

For Black students, assimilation to the university culture often requires that they create a persona that is foreign, adopted from their interpretation of White culture. Researchers have found that students who had assimilated and adopted conventional mainstream values, attitudes and interests were more likely to establish close relationships with a wider range of peers and faculty, but Black students were more likely to persist if they were validated by family and friends. Tinto and Cullen found that students with friends that were underachievers were more likely not to persist, as were students with too many extracurricular activities – like fraternities who have the reputation of being more focused on recreation experiences than academic achievement. The Black women interviewed for this study had come to the same conclusion and most chose to terminate those relationships and activities to prevent the possibility of interference to their goal of completion. Akeela said:

I had to stop talkin to all those people from high school that didn't go to college...they were trying to get me in trouble...I joined a Black sorority. I know it sounds stupid, but they've really helped me a lot...they party a little too much too, but at least we all have homework! (Akeela)

Interestingly, the interviewees didn't choose to abandon their cultural identities and assimilate, to create a more mainstream persona on campus. Nearly all of the participants of this study lived in Contra Costa County, in predominately Black neighborhoods. There was no need to struggle to hold onto their familiar culture while at home, but on campus these students found themselves more strongly committed to their cultural roots.

Unlike most White students, Black students who venture into spaces that are traditionally non-Black find themselves struggling to maintain or create a positive identity. The psychological dissonance they feel can be resolved either by abandoning the familiar home culture for one that more closely resembles those around them (Tinto, 1973), or an increased commitment to their home culture and ancestry. In 1990, Bennett and Okinaka studied college student persistence and compared White, Asian, Black, and Hispanic students at an Indiana university, Black students who persisted were found to feel significantly less favorable about their college instructors, less open to interracial dating, experienced more personal discomfort, expressing negative opinions about multicultural interactions in general. In a similar study, Strayhorn and Terrell (2010) found Black persisters to be the most socially alienated of all the groups tested, with the lowest scores for positive interracial contact on campus. In fact, this research found that the longer Black students remained on campus, the more alienated and dissatisfied with

their college experience they became, resulting in a gradual reduction in GPAs from freshman to senior year.

Black students who joined predominately Black organizations on campus did score higher on satisfaction measures, but they were also less likely to persist. Although studies have found that friends on campus can predict successful social and academic integration (Strayhorn and Terrell, 2010). Bennett and Okinaka (1990) concluded that freshmen at PWIs who joined Black student organizations became less open to equity policies. Bennett and Okinaka were unsure if the Black students became less open minded the longer they stayed on campus as a result of their social interactions or academic experiences. Unfortunately the researchers didn't ask why these students seemed to be less open minded, however several of the participants of the study who had formerly attended nearly all Black schools reported that they were offended by the routine and implicit bias they encountered on campus. These negative interactions caused the participants to be more aware of their difference and more protective of their cultural identity.

Family support and social integration for Black undergraduates is far more complicated than the model suggested by Tinto and Cullen in 1973. Culture does matter and systems of inequality based on race have to be considered relevant. Black students face daily challenges to their intellectual capacity, which they are expected to overcome through hard work and a determination to succeed. When researchers study Black student retention, it is almost always compared to a White students as normative, which fails to capture the Black student experience.

By 2005 Tinto had reversed his position about the importance of separating from friends and family back home and concluded that Black students fared better in higher education when they maintained these close connections, even suggesting that Black students who are given funds to attend university orientations; be permitted to bring family along to help and support them through the transition.

Tinto and Cullen reviewed several studies that described college dropouts as disinterested; unable to see their college experience as a process of intellectual growth and self-realization. College grads, they found, were more creative and able to master abstract reasoning, while dropouts failed to develop the capacity for self-analytic, critical thinking and even the appreciation for vocational development (1993). Although these descriptions may accurately capture the mindset of the privileged class, they simply fail to describe the psycho-social juggling act that the Black female students in this study described.

Protecting Cultural Identity and Creating Safe Black Spaces on Campus

The Black participants in this study described out-of-place experiences that match what has been described in a number of earlier studies of Black and Latino college students (Anderson et al., 2005; Fries-Britt & Turner, 2002; Guiffrida and Douthit, 2010; Johnson and Seltzer, 2009; Lewis, 2000; Palmer et al., 2011; Solorzano et al., 2000; Thompson et al., 2005). Specifically, Black students pushing boundaries of the education envelope will, at some point, go a step too far, finding that invisible line drawn to keep them in their historically defined proper place. Beyond White-designated Black spaces, it

is a hostile and dangerous world and Blacks from preschoolers to the President learn to recognize their boundaries. There are no special allowances made for Blacks who unintentionally transgress in any forum, and a failure to act prudently could end tragically.

Without a critical mass, Blacks are vulnerable to all those who condescendingly question their right to be on college campuses (Wise, 2005). No matter how inappropriate and unfair, spoken or unspoken, Black students in higher education expend extra psychic energy to fortify themselves against ignorance and bias; regardless of the exhaustion and distraction this vigilance demands (Steele, 1997 & 2010, Sue, 2010). Tinto's research on student attrition and retention in higher education was criticized for failing to capture these every-day-micro-aggressions for students of color and to address how they may contribute to attrition (Guiffrida, 2006). Thus, while Tinto addressed academic integration, for a study of Black students, academic integration without mention of race-specific experiences such as micro-aggressions and stereotype threat makes no sense because those both experiences were described by the participants of this study in one way or another.

Micro-aggressions: A Thousand Little Cuts

Researcher Darald Wing Sue (2007) and his team from Columbia University found that racial micro-aggressions appear on the surface to be innocent and harmless but contain demeaning meta-communications and hidden messages (Sue, Capodilupo, Torino, Bucceri, Holder, Nadal and Esquilin; 2007). Sue's research continues the work of

psychiatrist Chester Pierce who first used the term micro-aggressions to describe how many well-intentioned Whites, who although consciously support equity, unconsciously communicate racist stereotype messages in ambiguous situations (Griffith, 1998). These brief and everyday slights, insults, indignities and denigrating messages sent to people of color may be verbal, nonverbal or environmental and usually so normalized as to be outside the level of conscious awareness of the perpetrators.

Sometimes they act like they don't see me, especially if my grades aren't as good [as the others in my class]. (Jamaica)

All of the interviewees of this study Black described similar micro-aggression experiences and several were surprised and somewhat unsure of what happened, feeling confused, asking themselves if they had imagined it, if the act of subtle racism was the result of simple ignorance, or if something even more nefarious had been left unsaid. "They just don't know what to say to us, so they say something stereotypical," Jennifer said when asked about her experiences.

Micro-aggressions are evidence that racism has become more abstract. Sheet wearing, noose holding, church bombing, in-your-face racism is no longer socially acceptable, (unless it can be kept out of the media). The use of Martin Luther King quotes in the modern racism narrative confuses young Black students who want to believe the battle for equity is over, and yet can't ignore instructors who roll their eyes when they walk into their classrooms and non-Black classmates who question their qualifications for admission (Delpit, 2012; Steele, 2010).

Participants in this study reported feeling foolish when racially biased slights disturbed them and so remained silent, no matter how often they occurred in a day. It is only when they were in the company of other Black students that they learned that their experiences were fairly universal and routine. Learning to recognize that these micro-insults are not all in their head, and are much too frequent and pervasive to be random helped the students mitigate potential damage (Steele, 2010). Black parents who include micro-aggressions in “The Talk” they have to prepare their children to enter an American society that places them at the greatest disadvantage may need to find ways to inoculate their children from the damaging effects of the modern racism. Kimiko Matsuda-Lawrence, writer and director of *I, Too, Am Harvard*, said, “It’s important to have the vocabulary to be able to describe your lived experiences in order to feel justified because people are always trying to dismiss them....the bubbling up of greater racial tensions is underlying this whole post-racial surface” (Vega, 2014).

Sue and his team explored the manifestation, dynamics and impact of micro-aggressions on people of color who receive these everyday psychological assaults and found an erosion of mental health, job performance, classroom learning and social experience. The researchers found that micro-aggressions contributed to the perpetuation of stereotype threat and ultimately diminished standard of living for minority students. Since micro-aggressions are subtext to the interaction between people of different cultures, they become background, easily explained as unintentional. Black students have two choices: say something only to be accused of oversensitivity and paranoia, or

internalize it, allowing the incident to wound their psyche, adding to the already overburdened mental processes for students of color.

Micro-aggressions were a part of the day-to-day interactions for this study's participants. Interviewees reported that they were routinely asked to explain the Black perspective in courses where faculty felt less comfortable with that re-telling, especially with a Black student present. "It was kind of messed up that I was only asked to give opinions about things that had to do with Black folks," Frances said, disturbed that explaining the Black perspective was the only time her opinions were solicited. The participants in this study reported that speaking for the race made them feel awkward, a sentiment echoed in micro-aggression blogs created by students at Harvard, UCLA, USF, Brown, and Fordham. Black students know that they are being watched with suspicion in classrooms and that any behavior that confirms the negative stereotypes will adversely impact themselves and every person of color who follows them, pressuring individuals on campus and in classrooms, to represent Black people in a positive way, effectively trapping them within the stereotype (Steele, 2010). The burden of this kind of constant vigilance drains Black students' psychological and spiritual energies, and contributes to chronic stress, fatigue, frustration, and anger (Steele, 2010; Sue et al., 2007; Vega, 2014)

Academic Integration

Black students in higher education are presumed to lack the precollege academic preparation necessary to succeed; a commonly held belief supported by K -12 research on the differential quality of pre-college education provided for students of color (California

P-16 Council; Kozol, 1999 & 2005; Ravitch, 2010 & 2008; Rothstein, 2013).

Unfortunately, many Black students are unaware that their precollege preparation may have been inadequate until after they enroll and begin their classes. A rigorous academic workload and the learning strategies that develop from a demanding workload are foundational to academic integration in college but may be unavailable to students of color (Tinto, 2005; Rothstein, 2013).

This study's interviewees reflected on the bewilderment they experienced between high school and college. For example, Laisha said:

My high school classes were really easy. I didn't even have to write a paper in high school. (Laisha)

Similarly, Tanya commented:

I had a high GPA, but when I got here I was really surprised that it was so hard to keep up! (Tanya)

In fact, many of this study's participants who entered directly from high school were struggling with college level writing skills. Once enrolled in remedial English classes, these students found that their high school preparation was insufficient. The participants who transferred from community colleges found that they were caught in a series of remedial English courses that not only prolonged their coursework by as much as two years, but were also reminders of the stereotype of Black intellectual inferiority. Tinto (2005) suggested that these courses should be renamed and embedded within the coursework of the student's major to ensure that students taking these intensive writing courses retain their focus on their major course of study.

That lack of rigor in high school has a ripple effect. Black students are the most underrepresented group in advanced placement classrooms, with 79.7% of Black students who could have done well on the AP exam for an AP course they were enrolled in, but chose not to take the test (College Board, 2014). Yet, most low-income schools in California don't even offer advanced placement courses (Smith, 2012). Further, The College Board reports that income advantage is the most likely a factor in successfully achieving passing scores in advance placement tests (Smith, 2012).

Incoming freshmen are not required to take AP exams, but they are required to take SAT tests. Fair Test reports that income is also directly related to SAT scores, suggesting that those who could afford expensive SAT test preparation coaching have an advantage (fairtest.org.). San Francisco State University is listed as one of the 150 California test optional schools that have de-emphasized the use of standardized tests when making admission decisions to maintain diversity, giving emphasis to high school performance rather than test performance (fairtest.org). While systemic inequities in California's public school education adds to the challenges Black students face, suggesting that inadequate academic preparation is the cause of attrition reinforces Black students' feelings of being out of place in higher education, and ignores all of the other roadblocks they confront in pursuit of a degree.

Stereotype Threat and Academic Performance

The anti-intellectual myth of Black people has been around for centuries, used to justify every injustice from slavery and substandard education (Delpit, 2012; Stoskopf,

2008; Winfield, 2007), to the achievement gap (Delpit, 2012; Wise, 2010). The inferior intellectual capacity of Black people is firmly embedded in the nation's systemic invalidation of Blacks, and, with few scientific exceptions, remains largely unchallenged (Delpit, 2012, Wise, 2010). Black student achievement when measured in comparison to White and Asian student achievement trivializes the historical disparities in educational access and economic opportunities. Black students who have earned their place in higher education have already endured incalculable challenges to their academic qualifications and the value of their contributions to society after graduation (Seltzer and Johnson, 2009).

Academic writing was one area where nearly all the participants in this study felt was the greatest challenge and their greatest fear of confirming the stereotype of Black intellectual inferiority. Several of the students who entered as freshmen were surprised by the inadequate precollege writing skills they received. Those who transferred from community colleges found the journey to a four year school drawn-out with remedial English courses that increased their pre-transfer coursework by as much as two years and left them with doubts about their academic abilities:

It was hard to get through the English classes. I am not a very good writer. I barely got through the classes at City [College of San Francisco].
(Trisha)

Even though I did well on my SATs, I still didn't test into [college level English] at City [College of San Francisco]. I wish they told us what we needed to work on instead if, 'You failed and you need to take remedial English classes.' I don't know what I did wrong. (Helen)

Clearly placement tests could include more meaningful diagnostic information than the score. Students like Helen would benefit from knowing her strengths and weaknesses, well beyond her coursework in college. Additionally if students taking the placement test were given some idea of the number of students that passed the test, perhaps even from their public school district, they would have the opportunity to augment their precollege preparation with out-of-school academic supports, similar to those utilized by more affluent families. Without this information, students take the tests blind and when told the results typically feel themselves teetering on the edge of anti-intellectual stereotype vulnerability. Susan's reluctance to ask for help from either the instructor or the writing lab seemed to have been based on her fear of exposure as an academically challenged Black student. Susan described the situation this way:

I don't like writing papers. Sometimes the whole grade depends on just one or two papers! I'm not a good writer. These classes are really hard for me...I don't ask for help with writing. I just try to get the assignments done.

Steele found that Black students highly motivated to succeed will often study alone, and twice as hard as their classmates, hindering their own academic success through their reluctance to ask for help (Steele, 2010). As Trisha my one graduate student interviewees described:

The writing in grad school was really hard for me. I tried to keep up, but I knew it wasn't good enough. Sometimes I had great ideas but just couldn't get them down on paper... I felt real awkward talking to the professors about my work. It was like admitting there was something wrong with it...They would write comments on my papers and I just didn't want to read them. I knew my writing was bad.

Once she believed that she was incapable, Trisha's struggles overcame her and she dropped out. Sadly if she had been encouraged to work with a partner or a writing coach in her final semester she could have produced a field study that she and the university would have been proud of. Trisha's success in writing short papers, and her infectious enthusiasm for her work with young children did not reveal the difficulty that must have been present throughout her college coursework as a physically impaired Black student who may have been typing all her papers with one hand. The pressure of confirming the myth of Black intellectual inferiority and the "othering" physically impaired individuals experience in every aspect of their daily lives may have proved to be too many negative stereotypes for Trisha to deal with all at once.

Students experiencing academic challenges that seem to confirm anti-intellectual stereotypes expended finite cognitive energies to reconcile their ability to persevere. In 1995, Claude Steele and Joshua Aronson concluded that the result of this cognitive energy drain triggered by negative stereotypes had a negative effect of academic performance. Through a series of experiments that examined the role of negative stereotypes on intellectual capacity in intellectual tasks, such as standardized tests, the researchers found that student performance was diminished when intellectual attention was redirected as concerns about possibly validating negative stereotypes interfered with their cognitive functioning (Steele & Aronson, 1995).

Stereotype threat experiments have been replicated more than 100 times in countries all over the world. Stereotype threat theory has empirically proven itself as a viable contributor to the underperformance of Black students in post-secondary

coursework who have become fatigued by the persistent presence of negative stereotypes that suggest they are unqualified and unwelcome. From questions of their qualifications for admission to relentless micro-aggressions, Black students may find it difficult to experience social or academic integration.

The Positive Effect of Supportive Faculty

Tinto (2012) suggests that what happens in the university classroom is critical to student success and retention, and although pedagogy has been linked to student retention, universities and college faculty are not typically trained to teach students. In his 2012 study Tinto found that faculty was hired for their expertise in their subject disciplines. In contrast, education instructors are trained experts in the field of education and therefore practice pedagogy in college classrooms.

I was in a class last semester where the professor gave me the opportunity to pick my own topics and to write about and make up my own activities. I really appreciate being able to work on my assignments in my [preschool] classroom and go back [to class] and tell everybody how it went. (Nakia)

Although Tinto (2012) found a large number of postsecondary instructors didn't see student retention as part of their job, or student success as a goal, the participants in this study reported that many of the faculty they encountered in ECE coursework were supportive and encouraging. As Trisha said:

[The instructors] were great. They really made me feel good about my experience and how it connected to my grad work.

The traditional model of instructor-student relationship is typically a one-way interaction where faculty members explain what they have spent their academic careers studying, and students mutely absorb the information. Through focus groups and interviews of successful Black students attending a predominately White institution (PWI) that included diversity as one of the universities core values, Guiffrida (2005) found that student-centered relationships with faculty who, (1) assisted in the resolution of student learning challenges, (2) mentored students interested in the fields of which they were experts, and (3) communicated their belief that the student sitting on the other side of the desk could succeed, significantly influenced Black student success. This concept of relationship-based teaching pedagogy, also called “Othermothering” (Guiffrida, 2005), or student-centered instruction has been one of the core principals of early childhood education pedagogy for decades. The idea of creating a foundation for relationship based instruction for young children is commonly supported by the field, for example as found in the literature and mission statements of the National Association for the Education of Young Children, the California Department of Education and WestEd.

There were also reports by the study participants that some of the faculty were unapproachable, hard to understand, and biased. Disturbingly, nearly half of the interviewees reported that they had experienced micro-insults that came directly from college faculty, who implied that these Black students were intellectually inferior, despite the fact that they were enrolled using the same admissions standards as the other students in their classes.

I like to write and I had some pretty terrible English teachers in high school and at City [College of San Francisco.] That's why I want to be an English teacher. I think you can teach English in a way that doesn't make everyone else feel stupid. (Valerie)

Valerie was an avid reader and a talented writer who often found herself at odds with English teachers that disagreed with her critical analyses of assigned reading. Rather than focusing on her writing skills, Valerie found herself in battles of subjective interpretation of literature. While English teachers include critical thinking skills as one of the student learning objectives for English coursework, these instructors must also be aware of their place within the general education coursework. As gatekeepers, English teachers can not only prolong a student's college coursework with failing grades, they are also in the position to diminish their student's confidence in academic writing, which is likely to have significant negative impact on all other university coursework where writing is required.

Several of the interviewees talked about implicit messages they were receiving from instructors that reawakened their feelings of being out-of-place:

I can tell which teachers I can talk to right away. Some of them don't want to be bothered...I know I can ask questions or get some help when they look at me, in my eyes. (Laisha)

Some of them are cool, but some just see me and say, 'Here we go!' and I know that I need to stay on top of things in that class or drop....They already made up their mind about me. (Tanya)

Implicit bias studies suggest that people are seldom aware of deeply ingrained bias that operates beneath their conscious awareness (Harvard, 1998). Laisha and Tanya were using non-verbal social cues and body language to predict which classroom instructors

were likely to be supportive, protecting themselves from the possibility of a negative face-to-face interaction.

Faculty assumptions that Black students are inherently underprepared for college level coursework are based, almost entirely, on categorical quantitative studies, such as the SF State Attrition Study. While attrition studies can describe a collection of variables that are shared by Black students who fail to graduate, these studies can't provide the backstory of the Black student's lived precollege preparation and post-enrollment classroom experiences. An understanding of the themes that emerge from these student backstories could be a critical dimension for improved graduation rates.

In 1999, researchers examining the role that perceptions of prejudice and discrimination play in the adjustment and retention of students in higher education focused on Tinto's theories of the social and academic integration of Black and White students using data collected from the National Survey of Student Learning (NSSL), a longitudinal investigation of the factors that influence student learning (Cabrera et al, 1999). The study consisted of 1454 participants, (1139 White, 315 Black) attending and enrolled in 18 four year colleges. These researchers began with the following assertions to test Tinto's theory:

- Academic preparedness for college was one of the main factors accounting for the differences in persistence;
- Successful adjustment involves severing ties with family and communities;

- Perceptions of prejudice and discrimination are unique to minority students and persistence decisions for minority students are shaped by their exposure to discrimination;
- Current models of college adjustment fail to capture minority college experiences;

The researchers assumed that of all the assertions, precollege preparation would have the greatest impact on academic performance and retention, especially for Black students. They also suspected that Tinto's assertion that successful adjustment for incoming college students was incorrect, suspecting that parental encouragement would have a more positive influence on social and academic integration for both Black and White students than Tinto envisioned. When considering discrimination and prejudice, the researchers expected that students experiencing discrimination or prejudice would be less involved with other students, faculty or the college community. Discrimination in this study was measured by students as (1) negative words about minorities while attending classes, (2) belief that students were prejudiced against minorities, (3) observed discrimination, (4) belief that instructors don't treat all students the same. The results were surprising. These researchers found:

- Academic precollege preparation had the smallest impact on attrition
- Family support was important factor for both Black and White students
- Exposure to prejudice and discrimination had an effect on both groups, but dominated Black students' commitment to the institution

- Prejudice and discrimination were not as important as interactions with faculty for Black students

Tinto's original theory of social and academic integration wasn't just focused on White students at residential colleges, it was focused on a specific generation of White students attending colleges and universities, just eight years after the passage of the Civil Rights Act at a time when only a sprinkling of minority students were enrolled. The participants Cabrera's more recent study have had several decades more experience with diversity, even if it was only as social observers through television and organized sports. Both Black and White students reported similar levels of discrimination and prejudice in classrooms (targeting minorities), personally witnessed discrimination and believed that instructors weren't fair in their treatment.

A study on the effect of watching discrimination in the classroom on White students bearing witness found "a moral disengagement," which enabled them to rationalize the discrimination and ignore their own White privilege (Feagin and Thompson-Miller, 2007), providing fuel for implicit bias (Lewis, 2000). Perhaps the biggest surprise in the 1999 study was that discrimination and prejudice were not as important as the interactions Black students had with faculty.

There were many variables to Black student retention Tinto had not considered in 1973. Although many retention programs have been instituted in colleges and universities since his early analysis, more recently Tinto found that many good program ideas, such as culturally responsive faculty development, were not well or fully implemented, remaining marginal and with limited success. Without formative and summative program

assessments to provide empirical evidence that the resources allocated for these programs were worth the investment, Tinto argues, there could be no guarantee of long term funding (2012).

The quality of the college or university faculty, therefore, is extremely important to student retention, but Tinto found that many of the first year courses were taught by adjuncts, typically the lowest paid and with the least experience. Tinto (2005) suggested that these typically large classes taught in the critical first year required more experienced educators. In fact, faculty and staff development is the one area where Tinto advocates for institutional investments that could have a significant positive influence on student retention

Summary

Most of the faculty in Tinto's national study (2005), believed that the root of successful student retention was to admit only qualified students, and lingering questions of a Black student's intellectual capacity by undergraduate instructors, spoken or unspoken, are communicated surreptitiously through micro-aggressions, reaffirming racial stereotypes in the minds of non-Black students who are likely to have come from schools that provided them with very little diversity (Rothstein, 2013).

Successful academic integration requires that all students find positive connections to their coursework and to the faculty, not just those students who are predicted to succeed. Certainly more could be done to promote Black intellectual excellence, beginning with convincing classroom instructors that it exists.

Similar to other Black students across the nation enrolled in predominately White institutions (PWIs) or predominately White and Asian intuitions (PW&AIs), the participants of this study were attempting to learn in classrooms with faculty instructors and classmates who routinely questioned their academic merit. They heard the questions of their intellectual ability but were only vaguely aware that they are rooted in the persistent belief in genetic inferiority (Stoskopf, 2008) and supported by a common American mythology of meritocracy (Delpit, 2012; Sue et al., 2007; Wise, 2010).

Through micro-aggressions these Black students experienced a modern, more abstract version of racism that may seem trivial when examining individual instances, but when added together as every day, routine racism, reveals an ever present implicit invalidation which increased the stress they endured as they persisted, creating a strain which resulted in both intellectual distraction (Mosley & Rosenberg, 2007; Solorzano et al., 2000) and psychological risk for depression (Torres et al., 2010).

In the following section I will describe how the interviewee's were able to activate persistence strategies that included an awareness of how micro-aggressions trigger stereotype vulnerability simply by participating in this study. The interviewees found that they could reduce the stress and distraction of discrimination and potentially increase academic performance simply by learning that the micro-aggressions they feel but don't talk about are daily occurrences for a lot of people, and not just Blacks (Steele, 2010; Torres et al., 2010). These students also needed to be reminded that they didn't sneak into SF State though some open side door. They were admitted, just like everyone else, and their precollege academic preparation didn't matter anymore. Their current

GPA and positive interactions with dedicated and supportive faculty were likely to have the greatest influence on their persistence (Cokley, 2000; Fries-Britt & Turner, 2002; Guiffrida and Douthit, 2010; Terenzini et al., 1994).

Chapter 6 – Strategies for Persistence

My father told me never to expect an education to be handed to me – I was going to have to go into school and take it. Teachers might not help me; some may in fact hold me back, insuring that their narrow definitions of Black academic achievement remain unchallenged. My brother enjoyed challenging the teachers, pushing them beyond their assigned texts and prepared class notes, and his grades suffered for it. I preferred a more subtle approach, exploring the limited curriculum on my own, revealing my radical perspective only in my writing. My grades also suffered. My sister took the other path – she was also miserable in classes that ignored all but the dominant culture's values and contributions, where she was invisible to the teacher and a target of her white classmates. She asked her counselor to place her in classes with more Black students. My father objected, knowing that these students were grouped by tracking, and therefore were likely to be receiving a remedial education. However, having come from a school system in rural Michigan where the schools were segregated, he could appreciate my sister's desire to be protected by a critical mass of students that shared her culture and experience. Rather than risk the chance that my sister would drop out of school, he allowed her to join her Black classmates in less challenging coursework.

Using the protective factor of culture and kinship my sister chose to accept the limited expectations of white teachers in tracks with less than challenging curriculum and soon her test scores reflected the drop in rigorous coursework. None of us talked about what happened in class with friends at lunchtime. We kept it to ourselves, like our own shameful secret. Had we known how common our experiences were, we would have been

better prepared to deal with the anti-Black bullying we experienced in school. I would probably have graduated college in twenty years earlier, and I probably wouldn't be the only member of my family to earn a degree.

Some of the most surprising findings in this study were the ways in which these 12 Black women found ways to create comfortable Black spaces for themselves in an unwelcoming academic environment. They developed a deep intrinsic motivation to persist inspired by their family, their communities, and their cultural heritage. They cultivated social relationships that would help them succeed, abandoning those that would not. They discovered ways to navigate through the confusing unfamiliar territory with a combination of strategic course taking and gut-busting determination. They experienced linguistic challenges, particularly in academic writing, triggering stereotype vulnerability, which they carried as shame. They purposefully sought out and enrolled in Ethnic Studies courses to inspire their resistance to the educational inequities they felt but didn't discuss. Unknowingly, these students had accessed all of the strategies found to create cultural capital for students of color in education (Yosso, 2005).

Inspiration from Family, Friends, Community and Cultural Heritage

The participants of this study were motivated by family, friends and their deep commitment to their communities and appreciation for the historic and continuing social struggles of Black people in America and their place in that continuum. Family and friends that supported their choice to venture out of narrowly defined Black spaces provided inspiration that was used to fuel their intrinsic motivation. Conversely, those

close personal relationships that were not supportive and presented a danger to the interviewee's goals of completion were blocked by either restructuring their study habits, as Tanya found necessary, by using financial aid money to help with family finances as described by Laisha, or by abandoning relationships that were perceived as toxic to their goals as described by Laisha and Akeela. Tanya, Nakia, Susan, Helen, and Jennifer all reduced the time spent in social relationships to focus on schoolwork, but of this group only Tanya and Jennifer reported that they stayed connected to friends through social media. Nakia, Susan and Helen had reduced their social relationships, but fortunately were well supported by their families.

Cultural connections to the Black community were maintained through family connections and by enrollment in Ethnic studies courses for all of the participants of this study. These courses provided a renewed appreciation and cultural pride that inspired Tanya, Akeela, Nakia, Jennifer, Trisha and Valerie to complete their coursework so that they could teach and support the learning of young Black children. Laisha was the only participant that joined a Black sorority and Michelle joined a LGBT campus club.

Yosso (2005) suggests that supportive family and social relationships help students of color cultivate their cultural wealth, inspiring an aspirational capital which provides them with the ability to "hold on to hope in the face of structured inequality" (p. 77). It is this aspirational capital that allows them to maintain their resilience despite the challenges they face and allows them to hope, dream and work for a better future than has historically been accessible.

Navigating in Higher Education

Most of my classes have been fun. I drop the ones that are a little too hard so I don't mess up my grade point. Once I was in this math class and I didn't like the teacher so I dropped. The next semester I had to take the class, and finish. When I waked into the room and saw the same teacher again I almost walked out...but then I just went to my seat. I studied my ass off for that class. I didn't get a great grade, but I passed. (Laisha)

Laisha described a situation that many students of all ethnicities face in college classrooms, but for Black students, negative interactions with faculty can create attributional ambiguity (Aronson and Inzliech, 2004), leading to a loss of confidence in academic ability and stereotype vulnerability. Students like Laisha are unwilling to risk challenging themselves in courses that seem difficult, but must eventually complete the required classes if they intend to graduate. Planning coursework to prevent an overload of challenging courses within the same semester is a strategy that most college students adopt, however without guidance, Black students may perceive that challenging coursework is a validation of the stereotypes of intellectual inferiority, and find ways to avoid these courses altogether. Laisha's willingness to gratefully accept a passing grade threatens her academic integration, her ability to retain course content and weakens her academic self-concept. Fortunately through her interactions with classmates Laisha learned that her experiences were not unique to Black students, which allowed her to stabilize her self-confidence.

I was in EOP at city. I went to a counselor who helped me with the transfer to state. (Jamaica)

It wasn't surprising that most of the participants in this study didn't utilize university supports to help them move through the coursework to graduation. Claude Steele (2010) found that most Black students go-it-alone, some studying twice as hard as other students who form study groups, make appointments with advisors and counselors. Or who talk privately with instructors.

Fearing that the stereotypes about their intellectual inferiority will be proven, the interviewees shouldered the burden of completion individually by studying the bulletin, enrolling in gateway courses in community colleges during summer break and focusing their efforts to pass classes, a greater concern than maintaining a high GPA. During the interviews, several of the participants asked questions about graduation requirements, university supports and course recommendations. Rather than utilizing academic advisors, who they felt would lack the ability to respond to their culturally nuanced academic challenges in a positive and helpful way; they sought advice from classmates and the occasional supportive instructor. When asked what kinds of supports they would like to see implemented many of the participants suggested a mentor program, with students like themselves, who had succeeded and were reaching back to help them find their way. These students felt that mentors who shared or empathized with their cultural experiences would be more likely to provide the encouragement they needed to keep going.

Although the participants of this study were all finding their way through a challenging and occasionally hostile campus experiences, they were unaware that they were expending an enormous amount of effort to forge their own path. When

opportunities emerged for support and guidance from a successful and experienced member of the campus community who they felt understood their race-specific experiences, most of the participants took full advantage. Sadly, these unstructured, sporadic interactions provided inconsistent guidance. I believe this explains why I found myself answering so many questions about university graduation requirements while conducting these interviews.

Ethnic Studies as Inspiration and Resistance

All of the Black students participating in this study purposefully took coursework in Ethnic Studies as respite from required coursework that they felt did not adequately address ethnic diversity. These students said that they felt more “themselves” in classes that specifically addressed ethnic or cultural perspectives, even in courses that were not rooted in the Black experience. The most frequent comment was that they wished they could take more Ethnic Studies courses, but since they were not required, enrolling in these classes only prolonged their stay at the university. When they could, the interviewees added Ethnic Studies courses to fill out holes in their schedules or to maintain a full course load.

Many of the participants talked about how Ethnic Studies courses enabled them to carve out Black spaces within the university. These students actively chose these courses to enable them to connect to higher education through Black culture and other Black students:

I've taken a bunch of ethnic studies classes...only a few counted for general ed...I just liked the teacher and the stuff they talked about in there was stuff I understand. (Laisha)

I took some Black history classes with my friends...We all have different majors so that was the only classes we could take together. (Tanya)

I took a couple when I first got here...you know, so I could find a place to fit in...I wanted to take more but it just doesn't fit my schedule anymore. I'm a senior now and working on my internship. (Nakia)

I took Black history and a Black families class. It was nice to be in a class where I felt like an expert! (Frances)

Akeela talked about an Ethnic Studies course that gave her a new appreciation of the value of Black history to non-Black students. This small affirmation of the value of Black culture became a significant memory that sustained her cultural capital and her hope aspirations for a future with improved social equity:

I had a partner once in my Ethnic Studies class...a white dude. I was thinking, oh no, I'm gonna have to hold this fool's hand all through the project and the presentation, but when we sat down and talked he already knew a lot...maybe more than me about Black history and stuff. He showed me how to do the research and we got an A on that presentation. That's what I like about this school...I like working with different kinds of people.

Students move through university often unable to take Ethnic Studies courses unless they fulfil a graduation requirement. I took only one course in Ethnic Studies at SF State. It was American Indian Studies and there I learned how important not only Ethnic Studies is to our understanding of cultural identity but how little I knew about the history that traditional history books leave out. This was one of the last courses I took as an undergraduate and one of the most memorable. I found myself looking forward to class meetings, unaware until that

semester that the in class discussions and course texts had provided me with one of the only opportunities to fully be myself, open and unguarded, on campus.

As an instructor in early childhood education I have taught an upper division elective course in multicultural curriculum for several years. The students in this course are typically non-White. When asked what they hope to learn, these students often talk about their experiences with teachers that devalue their academic abilities, pushing them out of gateway courses, particularly in math and English. As pre-service teachers searching for a model of best practices of culturally responsive curriculum in ECE, they also develop a new perspective on their own classroom experiences. As Steele (2010) and Sue (2007) suggested, understanding the context of their uneasiness in their pursuit of a degree can become a protective factor against stereotype vulnerability, giving Black students the opportunity to more accurately evaluate their academic abilities (Aronson & Inzlicht, 2004).

Stereotype Vulnerability and Academic Confidence

Perhaps not a strategy before their participation in this study, through the process of retelling their life experiences and the re-examination of the challenges overcome, these 12 Black women allowed themselves to evaluate the skills and talents they used to succeed, not through comparisons to White and Asian students, but instead an accurate self-assessment of their academic abilities. For Black students, this kind of academic self-confidence is difficult to maintain, especially in classrooms where they feel their intellectual competency is in question. Every class, every test and every paper becomes

another opportunity to fail, and prove that the stereotypes are accurate. As Steel recommended (2010), by reminding these women of their hard work and commitment to their academic goals, they were able to appreciate themselves as students and learners.

When the question of the skills and talents they used to succeed all of the participants initially had a little trouble:

Researcher: So what skills or talents do you have that you think helped you succeed?

Nakia: Wow...Uh, I don't know....I like going to school, is that a talent?

Researcher: Maybe, but what about some skill that you use to help you get through your classes.

Nakia: Do you mean like study skills?

Researcher: Ok, like study skills. Tell me about those.

Nakia: Well.....uh.....I take notes in class. It helps me to remember what the teacher said in class.

Researcher: Tell me about the notes. How do you do it?

Nakia: I used to try and write every word the teacher said, but if I got lost or behind, I couldn't make any sense of what I wrote. Now I just write the key points...and it helps if I read the stuff we were supposed to read before class.

Researcher: Wow, that's a really important skill. Not only do you have to know how to sift through all the stuff the instructor is saying, you have to remember what you read and make some decisions about if the information is important and if it's something that was covered in the reading or if it's new information. That's pretty complicated. Not everyone can do that, you know.

Nakia: Yeah, I guess not. I couldn't do it a couple of years ago. I guess that is a skill. I never thought about it that way.

Researcher: What about the reading? You said that it helped to do the required reading before class. How does it help?

Nakia: Sometimes the teachers go over the reading in class and we talk about the books....you know, like asking questions about what we read and what it means, and stuff. But sometimes the teachers just talk about

general stuff.

Researcher: And then you make the connections?

Nakia: Yeah, like when you talk about making lesson plans and using more than one domain. I know that's part of multiple intelligences....Gardner.

Researcher: Not everyone can do that either! You've got a lot of skills!

Nakia: Yeah, I guess I do!

Surprisingly, it was fairly difficult for all of the participants to think of the skills they were using to complete their coursework. Somewhat disturbed by this phenomenon, I also asked two of my upper division classes the same question. These classes were comprised of a diverse group of female students who also couldn't readily identify their academic skills. Although clearly, the participants were employing these skills successfully, without a clear and accurate assessment of their skills, these student's academic confidence was unsupported and unappreciated. This one question became a transformative experience for the participants, giving them the opportunity to look inward rather than outward for an assessment of their academic ability reduced their stereotype vulnerability and improved their chances of graduating and joining the early childhood education workforce with bachelor's degrees.

Summary

Through the course of the interview process, participants revealed the strategies they used to succeed. First, in a theme that Tinto (1973) called social integration; the interviewees received financial and emotional support from their families. These adult

students lived with their mothers and siblings, contributing to household expenses when they could. The mothers of these 12 participants were making an investment in their daughter's futures, which several of the interviewees acknowledged and intended to repay. In addition, the participants cultivated positive student friendships with peers they connected with on campus and through campus clubs. Conversely, several of the participants discussed problematic relationships with family and friends had to be managed by either reorganizing their home study habits, making monetary contributions to the family budget, and terminating relationships that threatened to derail their academic goals.

Secondly, the participants developed a method of navigating often confusing and unwelcoming transition through higher education alone, plotting their course of study by checking the university bulletin and asking empathetic classmates and faculty for advice. This is part of a strategy that Tinto described as academic integration, however routine exposure to micro-aggressions on campus (Sue, et al., 2007) seemed to have caused most of the interviewees to avoid university academic support programs or to seek counsel with classroom instructors and faculty in an attempt to protect themselves from negative interactions they felt would confirm stereotypes of Black intellectual inferiority (Steele, 2010).

Thirdly, although feeling out-of-place was a common experience, all of the interviewees purposefully enrolled in Ethnic Studies courses, as respite safe Black spaces on campus. Finally, in a strategy that developed through participation in this study, when asked to reflect on the skills and talents they used to successfully complete coursework,

the interviewees began to see themselves as competent learners. By acknowledging and appreciating their skills, talents and accomplishments, these students were able to fortify their academic self-efficacy and confidence, decreasing their stereotype vulnerability and fueling the intrinsic motivation they would need to persist and ultimately earn their four-year degrees (Aronson and Inzlieht, 2004).

This study's participants were interviewed during the 2011-2012 academic year. When asked what recommendations they had to improve the academic performance for black students the students' replies were visionary:

I wish we could have some people like you to talk to – people that made it.
– (Laisha)

Professors need to remember that we're doing a lot just to be here. (Tanya)

Black students need mentors – maybe all students need them.” (Nakia)

When I presented my findings to a class of early childhood education graduate students at SF State they immediately recognized the participant's struggle to persist in an academic strata that is part of the larger American education system riddled with inequities and disadvantage for students of color. They began to tell of their experiences and the experiences of others they knew that had to forge their own pathways, struggling with unstable efficacy and fluctuating academic self-confidence caused by centuries of social injustice. These graduate students had successfully endured, living proof that underrepresented students in higher education could achieve their academic goals. I realized at that moment that this diverse group of graduate level students seldom, if ever, came in contact with the undergraduates that needed to know they were there. When

asked, these early childhood education graduate students were supportive of establishing a way to interact with the undergraduate ECE students in my study who unanimously recommended a mentor program. As alum of the early childhood education master's program, this is a role I fill with Black undergraduates who enroll in the upper division courses I teach at SF State. Fortunately, the university now offers an innovative structural support program for early childhood education undergraduates, guiding them through the hard work of degree attainment, and into ECE classrooms to teach California's diverse child population that desperately needs a diverse teacher workforce.

SF State University Innovative Structural Support Programs for ECE

In the fall semester of 2012, San Francisco State, in partnership with City College of San Francisco, transitioned an off campus community college pathways program that offered upper division ECE courses taught by San Francisco State instructors into a new program designed to better transition ECE transfer students from bay area community colleges to San Francisco State. The PATH program (Paving the Way for Early Educator Degree Attainment), formalized support for ECE students beyond the articulation agreements, creating a structured pipeline of supportive services that embedded academic integration and social learning theory in its design.

In the final interview for this study, the associate director of EDvance and the coordinator of PATH described the ambitious program:

All of the students were recruited to PATH program from local community colleges and the bay area ECE workforce. Some of the

students, finding it difficult to make the transition from community colleges, have successfully navigated the carefully constructed pathway to graduation and completion that PATH considers to be foundational to student success.

In addition, the cohort design, modeled from the cohort structure of the doctoral program at SF State, allows students to minimize the impact of full time student status on their careers in the field through condensed scheduling while maximizing their class meetings with group projects and coursework designed for working professionals. It is not the intention of this program to hand-hold students and walk them to commencement. These students have what it takes to succeed, but too often there is a deliberate weeding out in higher education and underrepresented students struggling with the confusion and disorientation often found in a university “big school” environment are overwhelmed and fail to finish.

Two of the participants of this study were transfer students from Metro Academy to San Francisco State’s PATH program. When asked about the transition, Jamaica said:

I like the cohort model. It helps us work together and support each other through the transition. I think it will help us all graduate on time.

Through this cohort model, the PATH program can fill an entire classroom with PATH students, which allows instructors to participate and support the program goals of degree attainment by becoming a part of an instructional team. In addition, the PATH program works to keep the focus of the program on the students and their ability to succeed:

PATH has reduced the size and scope of the university by creating the cohort model, maintaining name-face recognition with the students. Knowing their histories, work and family status and enough about the student’s ability to manage and complete coursework allows the coordinator, and the other instructors to push for deadlines when necessary and to give support when it’s required. PATH students begin the program as juniors who have fully committed to continue to work in the field for 20 hours per week while completing their four semesters in PATH.

This student centered approach is unique in undergraduate programs and supports the underrepresented students in the classroom, where Tinto believed the supports would do the most good. Classroom instructors who are actively supporting student success create positive challenges and learning experiences, providing the space for all students to feel welcome and safe.

The PATH program provides students with the opportunity to complete a four year degree in four years, to work within a cohort of supportive peers in student centered classes that are dedicated specifically for PATH students, mentored by instructors and program faculty that believes they are capable, intelligent students who can succeed. (M. Ramzel)

Early childhood education students can enter the PATH program either as Child and Adolescent Development majors in their junior year or as transfers from the Metro Academy of Child and Adolescent Development program, collaboration between City College of San Francisco Child and Family Development Department and the Child and Adolescent Development Department at San Francisco State. Through the learning communities model (Imel, 2002) students enrolled in Metro Academy are guided through the transition from community college to San Francisco State, better prepared academically and emotionally for the challenges of degree goals.

In May of 2014 PATH celebrated its first cohort graduation. The coordinator of PATH and the director of EDvance (and coordinator of Metro Academy) proudly reported that 100% of the students who transferred from City College of San Francisco

through the Metro Academy program and continued through PATH's first learning community graduated (EDvance, 2014)

Summary

After forty years of intense examination, and the creation of an impressive variety of college retention programs, persistence and graduation rates in higher education have remained virtually the same (Tinto, 2005). The first wave of research on retention and persistence focused primarily on student variables, such as academic preparation, socioeconomic class, parental education levels, motivation, and social adaptation (Habley et al., 2012). Actually, a modicum of attrition was part of the plan for colleges and universities (California Master Plan 1960). American institutions of higher learning were designed, in part, to weed out those who lacked the intellectual and interpersonal skills to persevere. Colleges and universities are ranked and accredited based on a number of institutional attributes, among which are its selection processes. The more selective and exclusive the admission criteria for prospective students, the more valuable degrees become to its elite alums, and future donors.

Until very recently higher education could afford to be selective and exclusive as long as the 75% of the US population that didn't graduate from college could find work in manufacturing, public service, or private enterprise. However, demographic changes in the nation's minority population may require the very institutions that spent centuries excluding students of color to rethink

their recruitment and retention strategies so that they can find ways to ensure that the growing percentage of America's minority students enroll and complete degree coursework (Cabera, 1999). For the first time in our nation's history, completing a college degree has become the minimum level of education required to secure sustainable employment opportunities (Chan, 2014).

Attrition in higher education has been seen as a reflection of individual student attributes, skills, and motivations. Students who didn't persist were thought to be less able, less motivated and less willing to sacrifice their time and energy for the benefits that a degree would provide (Tinto, 1973; 1998; 2005). Students failed, not the institutions they attended, a position that ignores the systemic inequities built into America's education system. The solution to improving graduation rates for Black students in early childhood education may be to increase recruitment and pre-college preparation, but I propose that the university also try to find ways to keep more of the 75% of Black students that enroll at SF State and then disappear before graduation.

The 12 Black participants of this study were utilizing some, but not all of Tinto's recommendations for student persistence because his recommendations do not address the race-specific challenges that Black students face of micro-aggressions, stereotype threat and stereotype vulnerability, all of which decreases self-efficacy and student confidence. Those that persist have struggled, and suffered through to earn their degrees. For Black people in America the preschool to prison pipeline is a familiar, well used superhighway, with very few exits. Through this study I am suggesting that classroom

instructors and professors understand that faculty support of underrepresented students remains the greatest contributor to persistence and retention.

Figure 5 – Findings of Black Early Childhood Education Students Strategies for Persistence

Chapter 7: Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to explore the strategies used by successful San Francisco State Black early childhood education students completing coursework toward degree attainment through intensive face-to-face interviews with 12 Black female participants and my own personal narrative as a Black graduate of the undergraduate and graduate early childhood education program at SF State.

I began this study with a personal reflection of a four year old and the impact that race-specific inequities can have on the educational experiences of Black children in America. I examined how the myth of meritocracy through the misguided use of a colorblind perspective, conceals both the obstacles Black students face and the hard work and strategies they employ to reach their educational goals.

Through the exploration of Black student success, I have suggested that the superficial analysis of enrollment and degree attainment data does not fully illuminate the lived experiences of Black students or describe a discernible pathway for success which other Black students could follow. Attrition studies don't tell the whole story, or even close to the whole story. They don't tell us why students leave, which gives the university no idea how to hold on to 75% of the Black students admitted and enrolled.

I have also suggested that race matters in the cycle of Black academic achievement. By encouraging and supporting the retention of Black early childhood education students at San Francisco State, these students can diversify the ECE workforce. As teachers, they can then provide the necessary culturally responsive teacher-child relationships critical to better academic outcomes for Black preschool

children, giving our next generation a better start to elementary school, and improving the opportunities for equity for all students.

The findings of this study and the biographies of the participants add a tangible humanity to the problem of Black student attrition by providing the student's lived experiences, becoming a transformative experience for both the participants and the researcher.

My father died just three months before I earned my bachelor's degree. He wanted to attend my graduation, but I knew he was too sick. I was just grateful that he was there to hear that I was nearing the finish line. He was not surprised. He remembered the little four year old girl who loved to read. I think he would have been impressed that I also earned a master's degree and he would have been blown away with the prospect of a doctorate in the family.

Just about fifty years have passed since that little girl entered the kindergarten eager and ready to learn. It hasn't been an easy journey. Devalued, disrespected, and discouraged by teachers, administrators and classmates, there have been many, many times I wanted to quit. When I think about what kept me focused on sticking it out to graduation I remember how much my father wanted to go back to college and earn his degree. When I walked across that stage the first time, I did it for him, and for all those others that didn't make it. Near the end of the interviews, several of the participants asked me how I did it. I told them I did it one class at a time, looking backward at how far I had gone and not too far forward so that I wouldn't be discouraged.

Through the course of the interview process, participants revealed the strategies they used to succeed which included, social integration through family support, friendships, and campus clubs. Several of the participants discussed problematic relationships with family and friends had to be managed by either reorganizing their home study habits, giving financial aid money to family and terminating relationships that threatened to derail their academic goals. This study's participants developed a method of navigating often confusing and unwelcoming transition through higher education alone, by checking the university bulletin and asking empathetic classmates and faculty for advice. Feeling out-of-place was a common experience and all of the interviewees enrolled in Ethnic Studies courses as respite safe Black spaces on campus.

When I asked this study's participants the skills they used to persist and succeed, they began by saying that they didn't know. When pressed with specific questions about study habits and coursework, nearly all of the participants were able to identify very specific skills they used to support their learning. Rather than internalize centuries of social history that devalues Black intelligence, these students discovered through their participation in this study that they could decrease their stereotype vulnerability and increase their academic self-confidence through realistic self-assessments of their skills and talents. Without really identifying their own strategies for success, these students were missing the story of their own triumph, internalizing the idea that it is possible to live in a colorblind society; that America has entered a post-racial era; that racism, micro-aggressions, stereotype threat and their lived experiences in higher education don't matter. Now they know they couldn't have been more wrong.

Sources

Anderson, G., Daugherty, E. & Corrigan, D. (2005). The search for a critical mass of minority students: Affirmative action and diversity at highly selective universities and colleges. *The Good Society*; 14(3), pp. 51-57. Penn State University Press

AP Report to the Nation. College Board 2014

Arcidiacono, P., Aucejo, E., Coate, P., & Hotz, J. (2011). The effects of proposition 209 on college enrollment and graduation rates in California. Unpublished paper, Duke University

Aronson, J. & Inzlicht, M. (2004). The ups and downs of attributional ambiguity: Stereotype vulnerability and the academic self-knowledge of African American college students. *American Psychological Society*, 15(12), 829-836

Aronson, J. (2004). The threat of stereotype. *Educational Leadership*, 62(3), 14-20

Barnett, W.S., (2003). Low wages = low quality: Solving the real preschool teacher crisis. *Preschool Policy Matters*, 3.

Barnett, W.S., Hustedt, J. (2003). Preschool: The most important grade. *Educational Leadership*, April, 54-57

Bennett, C. & Okinaka, A. (1990). Factors related to persistence among Asian, Black, Hispanic and White undergraduates at a predominately White university: Comparison between first and fourth year cohorts. *The Urban Review*, 22(1), 33 – 59

Bodgan, R. C. & Biklen, S. K. (2007). *Qualitative research for education: An introduction to theories and methods*. NY, Pearson

Boser, U. , Wilhelm, M. & Hanna, R. (2014). The power of the Pygmalion effect: Expectations have a deep influence on student performance. Center for American Progress, retrieved on October 10, 2014

Bowen, W. & Bok, D. (1998). *The shape of the river: Long term consequences of considering race in college and university admissions*. VA. University of Virginia Press

Bowen, W., Kurzweil, M., & Tobin, E. (2005). *Equity and excellence in American higher education*. VA. University of Virginia Press

Bracey, G. (1995). The assessor assessed: A “revisionist” looks at a critique of the Sandia report. *The journal of educational research*, 88(3). 136-144.

- Cabrera, A., Nora, A., Terenzini, P., Pascarella, E & Hagedorn, L. (1999). Campus Racial Climate and the adjustment of students to college: A comparison between White students and African American Students. *The Journal of Higher Education*, 134-160
- California Master Plan 1960 – 1975 Published by California State Department of Education 1960 retrieved from www.ucop.edu
- California P-16 Council,(2008). Closing the Achievement Gap. Sacramento, CA: California Department of Education. Retrieved from www.collegeboard.org
- California Postsecondary Education Clearinghouse - www.cpec.ca.gov
- Chan, R., Brown, G. & Ludlow, L (2014). What is the purpose of higher education? A comparison of institutional and student perspectives on the goals and purposes of completing a bachelor's degree in the 21st century. Paper to be presented at the annual American Education Research Association conference, Philadelphia, PA: April 2014
- Chang, H. (2006). Getting ready for quality: The critical importance of developing and supporting a skilled , ethnically and linguistically diverse early childhood workforce. *California Tomorrow*. Retrieved from Californiatomorrow.org 03/08/2014
- Cokley, K. (2000). An investigation of academic self-concept and its relationship to academic achievement for African American college students. *Journal of Black Psychology*; 26(148), 149-164
- Coleman, J. (1966). Equality of Educational Opportunity. National Center for Educational Statistics. Retrieved from www.scribd.com
- Culp, D.W., (Ed) (1902). Retrieved from womenshistory.about.com
- Darling-Hammond, L. (2002). Defining “highly qualified teachers”: What does scientifically-based research” actually tell us? *Educational Researcher* 31(13)
- Decker, D., Dona, D. & Christenson, S. (2007) Behaviorally at-risk African American students: The importance of student-teacher relationships for student outcomes. *Journal of School Psychology*, 45(1) February p.83-109
- Dee, T.S. (2005). A teacher like me: Does race, ethnicity or gender matter? *American Economic Review*, 158-165
- DeGruy, J. (2012). Cracking the Codes: The System of Racial Inequality. World Trust.
- Delpit, L.(2012). *Multiplication is for White People: Raising Expectations for Other People's Children*. New York, NY: The New Press
- Downey, D. B., & Pribesh, S. (2004). When race matters: Teachers' evaluations of students' classroom behavior. *Sociology of Education*, 77(4), 267-282

- Dworin, J., Bomer, R., May, L., & Semingson, P. (2008). Miseducating teachers about the poor: A critical analysis of Ruby Payne's claims about poverty. *The Teachers College Record*, 110(12), 2497-2531.
- Early, D. & Winton, P. (Autum 2001). *Preparing the workforce: early childhood teacher preparation at 2-and 4-year institutions of higher education*, *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, 16(3) pp.285-306
- Early, D., Bryant, D., Pianta, R., Clifford, R., Burchinal, M., Ritchie, S., Howes, C., & Barbarin, O. (2006). Are teachers' education, major and credentials related to classroom quality and children's academic gains in pre-kindergarten? *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, 21(2) pp.174-195
- Early, D., Maxwell, K., Burchinal, M., Bender, R., Ebanks, C., Henry, G., ... Zill, N. (2007). Teachers' Education, Classroom Quality, and Young Children's Academic Skills: Results from Seven Studies of Preschool Programs. *Child Development*, 78(2), 558-580. Retrieved January 15, 2012.
- Ed Source (2009). Resource cards on California schools. www.edsource.org
- Fair Test (2014). Fair Test List of Schools that have de-emphasized SAT scores. Retrieved from www.fairtest.org.
- Fries-Britt, S. & Turner, B. (2002). Uneven stories: Successful Black collegians at a Black and White campus. *Review of Higher Education*; 25(3), 315-330. Johns Hopkins University Press
- Fryer, R. & Levitt, S. (2004). Falling behind: As children move through school, the black-white achievement gap expands. *Education Next*, 4(4). Retrieved from <http://educationnext.org> on 8/14/2011
- Gay, G. (2000). *Culturally responsive teaching: Theory, research & practice*. NY, Teachers College Press
- Gillian, W. (2005). Prekindergarteners left behind: Expulsion rates in state prekindergarten systems. *Yale University Study for the National Insititute for Early Education Research*.
- Guffrida, D. (2006). To Break Away or Strengthen the Ties to Home: A Complex Issue for African American College Students Attending Predominately White Institution. *Equity and Excellence in Education*, 38:1. 49-60
- Guiffrida, D. & Douthit, K. (2010). The Black student experience at predominately white colleges: Implications for school and college counselors. *Journal of Counseling & Development*, 88, 311-319

- Guiffrida, D. (2005). Othermothering as a framework for understanding African American student's definitions of student-centered faculty. *The Journal of Higher Education*, 76(6), Nov – Dec 2005, p. 701-723
- Guiffrida, D. (2006). Toward a cultural advancement of Tinto's theory. *The Review of Higher Education*, Summer 2006, Vol 29(4) 451-472
- Hable, W., Bloom, J. & Robbins, S. (2012). *Increasing persistence: Researched-based strategies for college student success*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass
- Imel, S. (2002). *Adult learning in cohort groups. Center on Education and Training for Employment, College of Education*. OH. Ohio State University.
- Irvine, J. I. (1989). *In search of wholeness: African American teachers and their culturally specific classroom practices*. NY, Palgrave.
- Jacobson, L. (2007). *Scholars Split on Pre-K Teachers with B.A.s*. Education Week, 26(29).
- Jencks, C. & Phillips, M. (1998). America's next achievement test: Closing the Black-White test score gap. *The American Prospect*, September 1, 1998. Retrieved from <http://prospect.org> on 8/14/2011.
- Kagan, S., Kauerz, K., & Tarrant, K. (2008). *The Early Care and Education Teaching Workforce at the Fulcrum: An Agenda for Reform*, New York, NY: Teachers College Press
- Kipnis, F., Whitebook M., Austin L., & Sakai L. (2013). Assessing the Quality of New Jersey's professional preparation and professional development system for the early learning workforce.
- Knoll, C. (2009). Brown, blue, and it opened many eyes to the meaning of race. *Los Angeles Times*, March 26, 2009.
- Kozol, J. (1999). *Savage Inequalities: Children in America's Schools*. New York, NY: Crown
- Kozol, J. (2005). *Shame of the Nation: The Restoration of Apartheid Schooling in America*. New York, NY: Crown
- Ladson-Billings, G. (2007). Pushing past the achievement gap: An essay on the language of deficit. *The Journal of Negro Education*, 76 (3), pp. 316-323
- Lathan, C. (2014) Dear White Teacher....*Rethinking Schools*, Vol 29 issue 1
- Lee, V.E., & Burkan, D.T. (2002). Inequality at the starting gate: Social Background Differences in Achievement as Children Begin School. The Economic Policy Institute
- Lewis, A. (2000). The impact of "colorblind" ideologies on students of color: Intergroup relations at a predominately white university. *The Journal of Negro Education*, 69(1/2)

- Lim, C., Maxwell, K., Able-Boone, H. & Zimmer, C. (2008). Cultural and linguistic diversity in early childhood teacher preparation: The impact of contextual characteristics on coursework and practica. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, 24(1) p. 64-76
- Michigan v. Coalition to Defend Affirmative Action, Integration and Immigration Rights and Fight for Equality By Any Means Necessary (BAMN) et al. October Term , 2013, Decided April 22, 2014
- Mikitovics, A. & Crehan, K.D. (2002). Pre-Professional Skills Test Scores as college of education admission criteria. *The Journal of Educational Research*, 95(4), 215-223
- Miller, B. (2007). Assessing organizational performance in higher education. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass
- Mosley, T. & Rosenberg, J. (2007). Stigma consciousness and perceived stereotype threat and their effects on academic performance. *The University of Alabama McNair Journal*. Retrieved from ua.edu 8/7/2011
- National Academy of Sciences, (2011). *The Early childhood care and education workforce: Challenges and opportunities: A Workshop report*. Retrieved from The National Academies Press, www.nap.edu/catalog on 3/12/2012
- National Center for Education Statistics - www.nces.ed.gov
- National Center for Education Statistics (2013). *The Nation's Report Card: Trends in Academic Progress*
- National Institute of Early Education Research, (2008) The state of preschool 2012, *Rutgers Graduate School of Education*
- Pasek, J., Krosnick, J. & Tompson, T. (2012). The impact of anti-Black racism on approval of Barack Obama's job performance and on voting in the 2012 presidential election
- Perry, G., Henderson, B. & Meier, D. R. (2012). *Our inquiry, our practice: Undertaking, supporting, and learning from early childhood research(ers)*. NY, NAEYC.
- Perry, T., Steele, C. & Hilliard III, A. (2003). *Young, gifted and Black: Promoting high achievement among African-American students*. NY. Beacon.
- Pigott, (1999). Teacher race, child race, racial congruence, and teacher ratings of school adjustment. *Journal of School Psychology*, 36(2). 177-195.
- Ravitch, D. (2010). *Death and life of the great American school system: How testing and choice are undermining education*. New York, NY: Basic Books
- Rosenthal, R. & Jacobson, L. (1968). Pygmalion in the Classroom, *The Urban Review*, 3(1), 16-20

- Rothstein, R. (2013). For Public Schools, Segregation Then, Segregation Since: Education and the Unfinished March. *Economic Policy Institute*
- Rushton, J. P. & Jensen, A. (2010). Race and IQ: A theory-based review of the research in Richard Nesbit's intelligence and how to get it. *The Open Psychology Journal*, 3, 9-35
- Ryan, R. (1971). *Blaming the victim*, NY, Pantheon Books,
- San Francisco State University (2012). SF State Attrition Study. Academic Planning and Development. Academic Institutional Research. Air.sfsu.edu
- Seltzer, R. & Johnson, N. (2009). *Experiencing Racism: Exploring Discrimination through the Eyes of College Students*. Landham, MD: Lexington Books
- Sleeter, C. (2001). Preparing teachers for culturally diverse schools: Research and the overwhelming presence of whiteness. *Journal of Teacher Education*, 52(94)
- Smith, M. (2012). Diverse questions about AP. *Inside Higher Ed*, February 9, 2012.
- Solorzano, D., Ceja, M. & Yosso, T. (2000). Critical race theory, racial microaggressions, and campus racial climate: The experiences of African American college students. *The Journal of Negro Education*, 60-73
- Stedman, L. (1994). The Sandia report and US achievement: An assessment. *The journal of educational research*, 87(3). 133-146
- Steele, C. & Aronson, J. (1995). Stereotype threat and the intellectual test performance of African Americans. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 69 (5). 797-811
- Steele, C. (2010). *Whistling Vivaldi and other clues to how stereotypes affect Us*. NY: W.W. Norton
- Stoskopf, A. (2008). Echoes of a forgotten past: Eugenics, testing, and education reform. *The Education Forum*, 66(2), pp. 126-133
- Strayhorn, T. & Terrell, M. (2010). *The Evolving challenges of Black college students: New insights for practice and research*. Sterling, VA: Stylus
- Sue, D., Capodilupo, C., Torino, G., Bucceri, J., Holder, A., Madal, K. & Esquilin, M. (2007). Racial microraggrssions in everyday life: Implications for clinical practice. *American Psychologist*, 62(4), pp. 271-286
- Tatum, B. D., (1997). *Why are all the Black kids sitting together in the cafeteria? And other conversations about race*. NY. Basic Books.
- Terenzini, P., Rendon, L., Upcraft, M., Millar, S., Allison, K., Gregg, P. & Jalomo, R. (1994). The transition to college: Diverse students, diverse stories. *Research in Higher Education*, 35(1), 57-73

The Bureau of Labor Statistics - www.bls.us.gov

Thompson, G. & Louque, A. (2005). Exposing the “culture of arrogance” in the academy: A blueprint for increasing Black faculty in higher education. Sterling, VA: Stylus Publishing

Thompson-Miller, R. & Feagin, J. (2007). Continuing injuries of racism: Counseling in a racist context. *The Counseling Psychologist*; 35, 106-113

Tinto, V. & Cullen, J. (1973) Dropout in higher education: A review and theoretical synthesis of recent research. New York, NY: Teachers College

Tinto, V. (1998) Colleges as communities: Taking research on student persistence seriously. *The Review of Higher Education*, 21.2, 167-177

Tinto, V. (2005). Research and Practice of Student Retention: What’s Next? *J. College Student Retention*, Vol 8(1) 1-19, 2006-2007

Tinto, V. (2012). *Completing College: Rethinking Institutional Action*. University of Chicago Press

Torres, L., Driscoll, M. & Burrow, A. (2010). Microaggressions and Psychological Functioning among High Achieving African-Americans: A mixed methods approach. *Journal of Social and Clinical Psychology*; 29(10);1074- 1099

Vega, T. (2014). Students see many slights as racial microaggressions. *NYT*, March 21, 2014.

Whitebook, M. (2012). *The Early Childhood Care and Education Workforce: Challenges and Opportunities: A Workshop Report*

Whitebook, M., Gombay, D., Bellm, D., Sakai, L., & Kipnis, F. (2009). *Preparing teachers of young children: The current state of knowledge, and a blueprint for the future. Executive Summary*. Berkeley, CA: Center for the Study of Child Care Employment, Institute for Research on Labor and Employment, University of California at Berkeley

Whitebook, M., Gombay, D., Bellm, D., Sakai, L., & Kipnis, F. (2006). *California Early Care and Education Workforce Study: Licensed Child Care Centers and Family Child Care Providers, San Francisco County Highlights, August 2006*

Whitebook, M., Kipnis, F. & Bellm, D. (2008). *Diversity and stratification in California’s early care and education workforce*. Berkeley, CA: Center for the Study of Child Care Employment, University of California at Berkeley.

Whitebook, M., Kipnis, F., & Bellum, D. (2007). *Disparities in California’s child care subsidy system: A look at teacher education, stability and diversity*. Berkeley, CA: Center for the Study of Child Care Employment, Institute for Research on Labor and Employment, University of California at Berkeley

- Whitebook, M., Phillips, D., & Howes, C. (2014). *Worthy work, STILL unlivable wages: The early childhood workforce 25 years after the National Child Care Staffing Study*. Berkeley, CA: Center for the Study of Child Care Employment, University of California, Berkeley
- Winfield, A. (2007). *Eugenics and Education in America: Institutionalized Racism and the Implications of History, Ideology and Memory*. New York:NY. Peter Lang
- Wise, T. (2005). *Affirmative Action: Racial Preference in Black and White*. New York. NY:Routledge
- Yosso, T. (2005). Whose culture has capital? A critical race theory discussion of community cultural wealth. *Race Ethnicity and Education*, 8(1), 69 – 91