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The Impact of Diversity on Student Engagement and Academic Success

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The Impact of Diversity on Student Engagement and Academic Success

by

LaTosha C. Thomas

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Curriculum and Instruction with a concentration in Counselor Education Department of Leadership, Counseling, Adult, Career, Higher Education College of Education University of South Florida

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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my amazingly wonderful parents, Linda Pearl and Willie Thomas. You were my first role models in life and you have set an exemplary example for me to follow. You have been my biggest cheerleaders throughout every challenge I have ever faced and have given me the confidence and work ethic to pursue my doctorate degree. Thank you for supporting me through every challenge I have ever faced throughout my life. The best parts of me are from you, and I am truly blessed with the best parents an independent, strong-willed girl like myself could ever have. I thank God for you every day, and I love you dearly.

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this study is to examine the impact of diversity on student engagement and academic success within a university setting. Understanding the impact of diversity at postsecondary institutions is important because the population of the United States is becoming increasingly diverse, a trend that is also reflected in educational institutions. Previous research has largely focused on diversity among the study body (i.e. admissions) and in the classroom (i.e. curriculum). However, the current study focuses on student experiences with diversity outside of the classroom. Student interactions with peers from diverse backgrounds were measured using the Experiences With Diversity Index (EWDI) subscale of the College Student Experiences Questionnaire (CSEQ). An ANOVA was conducted to compare group differences on experiences with diversity based on gender, race/ethnicity, and generational status. The results found Hispanic college students reported more frequent experiences with diversity than did their Black or White peers. A moderated regression was conducted to examine the relationship between experiences with diversity and academic success (GPA). The results found no significant relationship between diversity experiences and GPA, regardless of gender, race/ethnicity, or generational status. Recommendations for future practice and research are discussed.
Chapter One

Introduction

This chapter offers a brief history of the topic, provide an overview of the key concepts, and discuss areas of concern that are addressed in the study. This chapter addresses the underlying assumptions and theoretical framework that guided the study, and provides a discussion of its purpose and significance. This chapter ends with a definition of key terms and introduces the research questions that will be examined in this study.

Background: Diverse Perspectives

The United States is becoming an increasingly diverse society across all facets of its population (Garcia & Hoelscher, 2008; Hu & Kuh, 2003). Since the landmark Supreme Court ruling in Brown v. Board of Education (1954), which helped provide equal access to education for all Americans, the number of students from diverse backgrounds have increased across college campuses. According to Hu and Kuh (2003), “American college campuses are now much more diverse in terms of student race and ethnicity, country of origin, and political and religious experiences and beliefs” (p. 320). This trend in higher education is a reflection of the larger patterns in our increasingly diverse society. As such, there is a need for institutions of higher learning to respond to this trend in how it prepares students to live and work in a diverse atmosphere. According to Pike, Kuh, and Gonyea (2007):
“It is imperative that colleges and universities prepare students to function effectively in a diverse society (Association of American Colleges and Universities, 1995; Bikson & Law, 1994; Bowen & Bok, 1998; Knefelkamp, 1998). One commonly endorsed approach to addressing this critical need is to imbue learning environments with different forms of human diversity” (p. 1).

Diversity is a term that relates to differences between people, including gender, race/ethnicity, and socioeconomic status. According to Delgado and Stefancic (2012), diversity is “the policy founded on the belief that individuals of different races and ethnicities can contribute to workplaces, schools, and other settings” (p. 161). When viewed from a strengths-based perspective rather than the traditional deficit model of culture, diversity can contribute to positive learning outcomes and enhanced social interactions in higher education settings.

Counselors and counselor educators have an important role to play in advocating for positive learning outcomes and enhanced social interactions for a more diverse population historically not afforded the benefit of a strengths-based perspective. According to Dermer, Smith, and Barto (2010):

“The role of a professional counselor goes beyond being a sympathetic ear for an individual client. The standards of the profession compel a counselor to understand oppression, develop her or his own cultural awareness, promote social justice, advocate for the elimination of bias and prejudice, struggle against intentional and unintentional discrimination, and advocate for the overall wellness of clients” (p. 325).
Hence, the insight of professional counselors, particularly those who specialize in the unique developmental and interpersonal needs of adolescents and young adults, can be used to help examine the impact that experiences with diversity have on student engagement and academic outcomes at traditional postsecondary institutions.

The ultimate goal for personnel in higher education is ensuring positive outcomes in learning experiences for all students, including students from diverse racial, ethnic, country of origin, socioeconomic, political and religious backgrounds. The ever-increasing diversity of thought and experience among 21st century college students, however, provides unique challenges to personnel unprepared to reach this goal. Three predominant challenges are related understandings of how student experience is challenged by issues of privilege and power associated with gender, race/ethnicity, and generational status.

There is an increasing gender and racial gap in higher education (Garibaldi, 2014). Across all racial groups, there are more women than men enrolled in postsecondary institutions in the United States. Some researchers have referred to this phenomenon as a “feminization” of higher education (Leathwood & Read, 2009). From a feminist theory perspective, most social and institutional structures in the United States are based on a patriarchal view of lived experience. This patriarchal system privileges the experiences of men, and gives men more power and authority in the social, political, and economic structures of society. In this way, the issues of women are often ignored or marginalized. Given the historic trend of prioritizing the experiences of men, it is imperative for college personnel to better understand ways in which social and academic outcomes can be enhanced for students across gender identities – with
particular attention paid to the needs of college women who now comprise the majority of most student bodies at postsecondary institutions.

As the doors of admission to postsecondary institutions continue to open, more attention needs to be paid to the unique academic and social needs of first-generation college students (Ward, Siegel, & Davenport, 2012). Engle and Tinto (2008) reported that there are over 4.5 million first-generation students enrolled in college in the United States. Yet, this is a group of students whose needs are often ignored or misunderstood. As Hand and Payne (2008) noted, “First-generation students are an often overlooked, marginalized group. However, because they don’t look different from other marginalized groups, such as Hispanics or African-Americans, they often aren’t perceived as needing help and so don’t get it” (p. 12). Students whose parents did not attend or complete college are often considered at risk for low rates of persistence and retention (Hand & Payne, 2008; Ward, Siegel, & Davenport, 2012). First-generation students are a heterogeneous group among themselves, including students from diverse gender, racial/ethnic, socioeconomic, religious, and academic backgrounds. However, first generation college students share some similar characteristics that differ from their non-first-generation student peers. Some of the unique characteristics of first-generation college students include: feeling less prepared for college than other students, fearing failure in college, worrying about finances, and worrying about knowing less than other students about the social environment on campus (Ward, Siegel, & Davenport, 2012). Hence, first-generation college students tend to have fears and worries related to academic, social, and financial issues.
In sum, as college campuses become increasingly diverse it is important to pay attention to the unique characteristics and needs of groups typically marginalized in our society. Such groups include women, racial/ethnic minorities, and first-generation college students. Consequently,

“Given the pressure to remain competitive in the global knowledge economy, it is in the shared national interest to act to increase the number of students who not only enter college, but more importantly, earn their degrees. Changing national demographics requires a refocus of efforts on improving postsecondary access and success among populations who have previously been underrepresented in higher education” (Engle & Tinto, 2008, p. 2).

College personnel need to address the needs and experiences of all students, including students from diverse, marginalized, and/or underrepresented backgrounds. The aim of this study was to centralize the experiences of diverse groups of college students in order to better understand patterns of student engagement and academic success.

**Statement of the Problem**

Gurin (2004) has argued that postsecondary institutions have typically addressed diversity issues as one of three forms: 1) structural diversity – attending to demographic characteristics of the student body; 2) classroom diversity – incorporating cultural issues into the academic curriculum; 3) interactional diversity – increasing the extent to which students from diverse backgrounds come into contact with each other in meaningful ways that enhance learning opportunities.
Many institutions utilize structural and classroom approaches to attend to diversity issues. Less is known about the ways in which interactional diversity impacts student engagement and the learning environment at postsecondary institutions. This study aims to contribute to knowledge on the impact of interactional diversity by exploring the ways in which social engagement among diverse groups of students promotes positive academic outcomes. For this study, academic outcomes include improved grade point averages. This study also explores the unique ways in which diverse groups of college students engage interact with their peers, which includes examining how they form acquaintance-level relationships with peers from diverse backgrounds and which topics of conversations they discuss with peers from diverse backgrounds.

**Assumptions**

The proposed study is based upon four primary assumptions.

1. Students from different gender and racial/ethnic backgrounds have different patterns of diverse interactional experiences.

2. First-generation college students have unique needs that can present additional challenges to universities supporting their college persistence and retention.

3. Positive experiences with peers from diverse backgrounds is directly related to success in and out of the classroom and leads to student engagement; therefore, students who have more positive diverse interactional experiences are more successful academically and have an increased likelihood of persisting to the second year of college.
4. Grade point average and rate of persistence are reasonable and customary measurements of student success.

**Conceptual Framework: Cultural Capital through the Lens of Critical Race Theory Feminist Theory, and Multiculturalism**

Bourdieu (1977) originally coined the term *cultural capital* to refer to the non-material assets students of diverse backgrounds possess in education settings. “According to Bourdieu, the education systems of industrialised societies function in such a way as to legitimate class inequalities” (Sullivan, 2002, p. 144). Bourdieu’s view of cultural capital originally emphasized class-based stratification within educational settings and discussed ways in which class reproduction helped maintain the status quo. Expanding the concept of cultural capital to include a critical race theory perspective provides further insight (Yosso, 2005).

Critical Race Theory (CRT) is a perspective that critiques the salience of race and racism in American society that addresses a diversity of topics and issues. However, there are core themes that connect this diverse area of scholarship (Crenshaw, Gotanda, Peller, & Thomas, 1995; Dixson & Rousseau, 2006; Lynn & Parker, 2006; Parker & Villalpando, 2007; Powers, 2007; Saddler, 2005). Critical Race Theory is a theory that is grounded in social reality (rather than idealism), while also offering hope (rather than despair) for social transformation. It also provides a theoretical context, which challenges the experiences of Whites as the normative standard and grounds its conceptual framework in the distinctive experiences of people of color (Taylor, 1998).
CRT embraces the subjective nature of knowledge, truth, and justice as based on the unique worldview of the subject. Originating from the legal studies field, CRT has since been applied to fields such as education, counseling, sociology, and women’s studies (Carter, 2008; Powers, 2007; Solórzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000; Taylor, 1998). Yosso (2005) expanded Bourdieu’s view of cultural capital by including a CRT perspective. Yosso posits:

“CRT shifts the research lens away from a deficit view of Communities of Color as places full of cultural poverty disadvantages, and instead focuses on and learns from the array of cultural knowledge, skills, abilities and contacts possessed by socially marginalized groups that often go unrecognized and unacknowledged” (p. 69).

Within CRT, students of color are often marginalized in school settings due to the interaction between race and racism in students’ lives. Using the model of Yosso’s (2005) cultural community wealth may provide insight into ways diverse students counteract this marginalization.

Yosso (2005) hypothesized six types of cultural community wealth that individuals may possess to varying degrees: aspirational capital, linguistic capital, familial capital, social capital, navigational capital, and resistant capital. Aspirational capital relates to resiliency and it refers to the ability of individuals from oppressed backgrounds to maintain hopes and dreams for the future, despite real and perceived barriers. Linguistic capital refers to the social and intellectual abilities gained through communication experiences in more than one language and/or styles. Familial capital relates to kinship and includes cultural knowledge that relates to community history,
memory, norms, and institutions. Social capital includes a network of people and community resources that provide pragmatic and emotional support. Navigational capital refers to an individual's ability to effectively maneuver within social institutions, with the recognition that many social institutions were not created with People of Color in mind. A feminist view may also assert that many social institutions were also not created with women in mind as well. Resistant capital relates to the legacy of resistance in Communities of Color and includes skills and knowledge that reflect oppositional behavior in response to oppressive structures. In Yosso’s (2005) model, each type of cultural capital represents an element of community cultural wealth that can act as a resource for individuals to achieve personal and academic/professional success.

A feminist theory and multicultural feminist framework will also be used in the current study in order to examine the unique ways in which women’s experiences with diversity in college may differ from those of men. This framework will allow this study to examine the data in a more nuanced way that centralizes the subjective reality of the female college student experience.

Understanding the unique perspective of women in college is especially important given their higher numbers of enrollment in postsecondary institutions. Hence, the current study will examine patterns of interactional diversity from a gendered perspective so that key feminist theoretical concepts can be considered in interpreting the results. Employing feminist theory as a key part of the theoretical analysis may allow a more nuanced understanding of the ways in which women and men engage in diverse interactional experiences while in college.
Using Yosso’s expanded (2005) view of cultural capital conceptualizes marginalized students – women, students of color, and first-generation students as resilient and in possession of strengths and assets that can prove beneficial in educational settings. Diverse college students may derive strength from multiple elements of their lives, including family and community. The strengths and resources that diverse students bring to their college experience can also be utilized in a variety of ways, including in and out of the classroom. This study aims to explore the ways in which interactional diversity patterns can be explained using this theoretical framework.

**Multiculturalism.** A central role of counselors and counselor educators is to advocate for marginalized and underserved populations (Neukrug, 2014; Sue & Sue, 2013); such populations include, but are not limited to: individuals with mental illness (mental health and community counselors); individuals experiencing chronic unemployment (career counselors); and students from diverse backgrounds (school and college counselors).

Counseling professionals are charged with empowering and advocating for marginalized groups as part of their social justice mission. In U.S. society, traditionally marginalized groups include women and people of color. First-generation college students are also a group who has been traditionally marginalized and misunderstood. As our society becomes increasingly diverse, it is important to better understand the ways in which diverse experiences impact campus life and academic success in college.

Employing an emic perspective of multiculturalism (Sue & Sue, 2013) allows this study to consider additional diverse factors that may impact school achievement. An
emic view of multiculturalism considers diversity from a pluralistic perspective that includes gender, race/ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and sexual orientation. When using an emic view of multiculturalism (Sue & Sue, 2013), one can discover multiple identities within individuals enrolled in postsecondary institutions.

The emic perspective of multicultural counseling invokes an inclusive view of diversity, wherein multiple identities can be situated within the phenomenological and holistic contexts of human experience. For the current study, identity factors will include gender, race, and first-generation status. The intersection of these variables will also be examined in order to explore the impact of intersectional identities on student engagement and academic success. Figure 1 provides an overview of the conceptual model that guides this study.
Figure 1. Theoretical Framework
Purpose of the Study

The current study hopes to extend knowledge in multicultural education by employing a comprehensive theoretical framework that includes cultural capital, critical race theory, and feminist theory to interpret the data. In particular, the current study examines experiences with diversity (i.e. interactional diversity experiences) as a form of student engagement at a postsecondary institution in a large urban city in the Southeast of the U.S.

Patterns of interactional diversity experiences among African American, Asian American, Latino/a, and White female and male students will be analyzed in order to better understand the ways in which intersecting identities – gender, race, and first-generation status in the current study – correlate to this aspect of student engagement. This study will also examine the impact of interactional diversity experiences on academic success outcomes. The data related to undergraduate students’ college grade point average will measure academic outcomes. An examination of these variables will provide insight into the potential educational benefits of interactional diversity.

Significance of Study

The current study strives to enhance understanding of the modern college student by examining the relationship of intersecting identities (gender, race, generational status) on student’s experiences with diversity. The study will explore the psychosocial development of diverse groups of college students by examining the patterns of diverse interactions students engage in outside of the classroom. A gendered and racialized worldview will be considered when interpreting the data through a feminist and critical race theoretical perspective. Using this theoretical
framework allows for a postmodern, existential and humanistic exploration of college student development among diverse college student populations. Developing a more nuanced understanding of the ways in which diverse experiences impact student engagement and academic success is a key way in which policy-makers and stakeholders can enhance social and academic outcomes for an increasingly diverse student population. This study will contribute to the fields of counseling, student affairs, higher education, and multicultural education.

**Research Questions**

A guiding thesis of the current study is that increased numbers of students from diverse backgrounds provide more opportunity for diverse social interactions among students. “As researchers parse out the different layers of interracial interaction and their predictors, these findings can inform practitioners and policymakers’ efforts to strengthen the overall campus climate for diversity, which in turn should yield benefits for student learning and development” (Bowman & Park, 2014). The current research posits that understanding the ways in which undergraduate students interact with peers from diverse backgrounds -- including different genders, races/ethnicities, and parental education level -- will provide insight into strategies that may effectively enhance campus climate (student engagement) and improve educational outcomes (academic success).

**Effect of personal identity characteristics of students on diversity experiences.** This research question is intended to explore the relationship between student characteristics and interactional diversity experiences among college students. This study will explore the main effects of gender, race/ethnicity, and generational
status on interactional diversity experiences. The two-way interaction effects of gender, race, and generational status on diversity experiences will also be explored.

**Question 1.** How does gender, race/ethnicity, and generational status affect undergraduate college students’ interactions with peers from diverse backgrounds (interactional diversity experiences)?

**Impact of diversity experiences on academic success.** This research question examines the impact of diversity experiences on academic outcomes. Academic outcomes will be measured by the students' college grade point average. This question will examine diverse experiences and the main effects and the interaction effects of gender, race/ethnicity, and generational status on academic outcomes.

**Question 2.** What is the relationship between experiences with diversity, academic success, and gender, race/ethnicity, and generational status among undergraduate college students?

**Scope and Delimitation of the Study**

The primary data source used in this study will be the results from the College Student Experiences Questionnaire (CSEQ) collected at one large, research extensive university in the southeastern U.S. during the spring of 2010. This data set was chosen because it offered a comprehensive picture of students’ experiences with diversity. Also, a large number of students reported a university identification number, which linked students’ CSEQ to their academic records. This study only included those students who, in addition to completing the CSEQ during the spring 2010 semester, also offered their university identification numbers, thus permitting the researcher to associate responses with their institution student records. The study was delimited to students
from only one university campus. Accordingly, the results are not generalizable to students at other institutions.

Definition of Key Terms

The following terms are defined for clarity throughout use in this study:

1. **College Student Experiences Questionnaire (CSEQ).** This 151-item instrument provides self-reported student data regarding the experiences of college students. Used in whole, the CSEQ measures the quality of student experiences, perceptions of the campus environment, and progress toward important educational goals. The Experiences With Diversity Index is a subscale of the CSEQ.

2. **Critical Race Theory (CRT).** This theoretical perspective centralizes the salience of race and racism in U.S. society. It is a particularly useful theoretical framework for examining the daily experiences of people of color. This theory highlights the ways in which people of color are marginalized and oppressed in society through a variety of mechanism. It represents one of the three parts of the conceptual framework for this study.

3. **Cultural Capital.** The current study employs Yosso’s (2005) model of community cultural wealth to signify the resources that students from diverse backgrounds possess in order to contribute to positive social and intellectual gains. Yosso outlines six types of cultural capital: aspirational, linguistic, familial, social, navigational, and resistant. Each type of cultural capital contributes to an individual’s community cultural wealth. Cultural capital comprises one of the three parts of the conceptual framework for this study.
4. **Experiences With Diversity Index (EWDI).** This 10-item subscale of the CSEQ is a student self-report survey with Likert-type responses. The EWDI measures students’ experiences with diversity in a college setting. Individual scores from the 10 items will be summed to provide a composite measure of student experiences with diversity.

5. **Feminist theory.** This theoretical perspective encompasses broad strands of feminist thought. This theory centralizes the differential power dynamics between women and men in societal structures, such as postsecondary institutions. This theory highlights the ways in which women are marginalized and oppressed in society through a variety of mechanisms. It comprises one of three parts of the conceptual framework used for this study.

6. **First-generation college student (FGS).** This variable relates to students’ self-reported parental education level on the CSEQ. The CSEQ asks students whether or not their parents graduated from college. Hence, for this study FGS will refer to students’ whose parents did not graduate from college. This variable is also referred to as *generational status*.

7. **Gender.** Students’ self-reported identity as female or male as reported on the CSEQ.

8. **Interactional diversity.** This study variable refers to interactions between college students from diverse backgrounds. Specifically, the term refers to students who interact with peers from a different background than their own. Also referred to as diverse interactional experiences.
9. **Intersectional or intersecting identity.** This study variable relates to the multiple diverse identities that modern college students possess. This concept offers a more nuanced way of viewing college student development by allowing comparison of within group differences. The intersecting identities of gender and race/ethnicity are common examples of this term and will be used in this study.

10. **Race/Ethnicity.** This study variable is self-reported on the CSEQ and refers to the racial/ethnic background of college students. The CSEQ instrument asks, “What is your racial or ethnic identification?” The provided answer choices include: “American Indian or Other Native American; Asian or Pacific Islander; Black or African American; Caucasian (other than Hispanic); Mexican-American; Puerto Rican; Other Hispanic; Other: What?” (CSEQ, p. 2). A box is provided for open-ended response to Other.

**Summary**

This chapter has provided an introduction to the study. Its purpose is to increase understanding of diverse interactional experiences and examine ways in which interactional diversity enhances academic outcomes. In order to better understand interactional diversity, gender, race/ethnicity, and generational status will be examined for potential patterns. The impact of interactional diversity on academic outcomes also will be examined, using GPA as a dependent variable.

The remaining chapters of this work will discuss the literature related to this research (chapter 2) and the methods that will be used to answer the research questions (chapter 3). Chapter 4 will discuss the results of the data analysis and Chapter 5 will discuss the study conclusions and implications.
CHAPTER TWO
LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter will discuss the literature related to experiences with diversity among college students. It will begin with a broad discussion about diversity in higher education. This discussion will then move into a more specific discussion of gender, race/ethnicity, and generational status in postsecondary institutions. The chapter will then discuss the impact of diversity on student success and end with a discussion of interactional diversity and student engagement. A summary of these topics will conclude this chapter.

Diversity in Higher Education

As the general population of the United States increasingly becomes diversified with people of different backgrounds, the student population at higher education institutions is also becoming more diverse (Clauss-Ehlers & Parham, 2014; Smith, 2009). Young (2011) reported a 60% increase in fall college enrollment between 1998 and 2008 among minority women and a 50% increase during the same time period for minority men. This trend signifies more attention needs to be paid to the college experiences of an increasing amount of diverse groups of students.

Most postsecondary institutions have addressed this increase in diversity among the student population in two ways: 1) at a structural level, such as admitting more students from diverse backgrounds, and/or 2) at a curriculum level, such as [through] required classes related to diversity (Gurin, Dey, Hurtado, & Gurin, 2002; Hu & Kuh, 2003). Yet, less is known about the ways in which diverse groups of students interact
outside the classroom, particularly in social spaces. As students from increasingly diverse backgrounds pursue higher education in greater numbers, it is imperative for postsecondary personnel to form a better understanding of the ways in which diverse groups of students interact within the college campus environment.

Better understanding of students’ experiences with diversity and the impact of these interactions on student engagement and academic success can provide insight for policy-makers interested in maximizing the strengths of a diverse student body. The diverse backgrounds of college students provide an opportunity for college personnel – including counselors, advisors, faculty, administrators, and policy-makers – to engage in serious reflection and dialogue regarding the impact of diverse student bodies on the positive learning outcomes desired by all stakeholders within higher education.

According to Delgado and Stefancic (2012), diversity is “the policy founded on the belief that individuals of different races and ethnicities can contribute to workplaces, schools, and other settings” (p. 161). When viewed from a strengths-based perspective rather than the traditional deficit model of culture, diversity can contribute to positive learning outcomes and enhanced social interactions in higher education settings. The insight of professional counselors, particularly those who specialize in the unique developmental and interpersonal needs of adolescents and young adults, can be used to help examine the impact that experiences with diversity have on student engagement and academic outcomes at traditional postsecondary institutions.

The next subsections will discuss literature related to specific types of diversity within higher education settings. These subsections will discuss gender, race/ethnicity,
and first-generation status in higher education. These specific types of diversity are
discussed as they relate to the research questions of the current study.

**Gender in Higher Education.** There is an increasing gender and racial gap in
higher education (Garibaldi, 2014). Across all racial groups, there are more women than
men enrolled in postsecondary institutions in the United States. Some researchers have
referred to this phenomenon as a “feminization” of higher education (Leathwood &
Read, 2009). For some, this trend appears to suggest that women now hold more
power as exercised through political, economic, and social means. Yet, these data
could also be interpreted to mean that women remain under-represented in key power
structures within our society. This is evidenced by the lack of women in leadership roles
in the government, private sector, and higher education (Glazer-Raymo, 2008). It would
appear then that the higher number of women attaining postsecondary and graduate
degrees (Garibaldi, 2014) is not translating to overall improved outcomes later in the
lives of women.

Perhaps a more nuanced understanding of the ways in which women negotiate
the spaces of higher learning would lead to a better understanding of how overall
outcomes can be improved for women. Once such nuanced approach involves viewing
women’s issues through multiple lenses so that a clearer picture of female college
students may emerge (ASHE Higher Education Report, 2011). One such lens in which
to view the issues of women in college is feminist theory, which is a broad and
multifaceted way of viewing women’s issues.

Broadly speaking, “A feminist approach to inquiry, however, more specifically
describes research that seeks social change while also emphasizing women and
gender as key analytic categories” (ASHE Higher Education Report, 2011, p. 18). In this researcher’s conceptualization of feminist theory as applied to education research, feminist theory offers a framework within which to view the different ways in which social interactions impact women and men enrolled in college. In this way, the current study seeks to foreground the unique ways in which women and men may engage in social experiences with diversity.

Multicultural feminist theory (ASHE Higher Education Report, 2011), in particular, provides a unique lens through which to view the increasing number of diverse women attending universities. This third-wave feminist theoretical viewpoint emphasizes the diversity of identity and experience among women. Multicultural feminism pays special attention to the intersectionality of identities that impact the lives of women (Crethar, Rivera, & Nash, 2008; hooks, 2000; Lorde, 2009; Cho, Crenshaw, & McCall, 2013). These multiple identities may include race, class, sexual orientation, religion, and dis/ability status among other factors. For the current study, gender and race will be central to the analysis of collected data such that the unique experiences of diverse groups of women can be examined and compared to similar experiences with diversity among men enrolled in college.

Race/Ethnicity in Higher Education. Despite abundant research that demonstrates the social construction of race as opposed to the traditional view of innate racial differences, race/ethnicity continues to be a salient, centralizing, and defining feature of life in the United States (Banks & Banks, 2007; Delgado & Stefancic, 2012; Yosso, 2005). Racial disparities continue to persist across numerous aspects of daily life, including areas such as education, economics, and criminal justice. For example,
the American Council on Education (2013) reported that individuals graduating with undergraduate degrees in 2007-08 were not nearly as racially diverse as the overall undergraduate student body. Hence, while postsecondary institutions may be experiencing an increase in enrollment of diverse students the data also suggests that these students are not persisting to college graduation at the same rate as their white peers.

Many postsecondary institutions typically address diversity issues via structural and curriculum approaches (Gurin, 2002; Hu & Kuh, 2003). While these approaches have yielded some success, they do not appear to maximize positive learning outcomes that lead to improved graduation rates among students from racial minority backgrounds. Hence, a better understanding of experiences with diversity in college is needed in order to improve learning outcomes for all students.

Banks and Banks (2007) presented a model of multicultural education that includes curricular and co-curricular components. These components include: 1) integration of content – infusing various cultures and groups into coursework; 2) construction of knowledge – professors helping students examine implicit assumptions and biases present in disciplines of study; 3) reduction of prejudice – course lessons and activities that help students develop positive attitudes toward diverse groups of people by promoting intercultural contact; 4) pedagogy of equity – professors modifying teaching styles and methods in order to ensure the academic achievement of diverse groups of students; and 5) empowering social structure and school culture – creating a campus climate that promotes equity for diverse students of all gender groups.
Banks and Banks (2007) posited that when students have positive experiences within one component of multicultural education, other components are also positively affected. The Banks and Banks model of multicultural education provides insight into the ways in which college students’ attitudes, thoughts, and behaviors can be changed in order to gain benefit from interactions with diverse peers and faculty. From this view, positive experiences with diversity through social interactions present an opportunity for students to also integrate content learned in their coursework and help students reduce prejudiced attitudes. The Banks and Banks model serves as a comprehensive framework from which to view the impact of diversity on college students’ social engagement and academic outcomes.

While the Banks and Banks (2007) model of multicultural education includes student experiences inside and outside the classroom, less attention has been paid to the ways that diversity impacts student experiences outside the classroom (Gurin, Dey, Hurtado, & Gurin, 2002; Hu & Kuh, 2003). Perhaps a better understanding of students’ experiences with diversity during social interactions will provide insight into the ways in which diverse groups of students interact in college settings. Understanding these interactions can help stakeholders design more effective programs and policies that yield positive learning outcomes and increased graduation rates for all students.

**Generational status.** As the doors of admission to postsecondary institutions continue to open, more attention needs to be paid to the unique academic and social needs of first-generation college students (Ward, Siegel, & Davenport, 2012). This study will define first-generation college students as individuals whose parents did not attain a college degree. This is the original definition of first-generation college students used by
the federally-funded TRIO programs. It should be noted that the TRIO term does not represent an acronym, but rather represents the three original programs that were funded under the War on Poverty programs: Educational Talent Search, Student Support Services, and Upward Bound.

The TRIO programs were created in the 1960s as part of the War on Poverty initiative of the Johnson administration. The TRIO programs are designed to provide services and support to underserved student populations in order to increase their access to postsecondary education. An emphasis on college degree attainment is the focus of these programs. Thus, it seems fitting to define first-generation college students in relation to their parent’s degree attainment.

**Characteristics of first-generation college students.** First-generation college students have enrolled in postsecondary institutions since the beginning of educational systems, yet this group of students typically remains largely invisible to college faculty and staff unless they self-identify or complete surveys collected for institutional, state or federal purposes (Ward, Siegel, & Davenport, 2012). According to Ward et al. (2012):

“First-generation students, especially those in their first year of college, may feel like they are on a road trip that never stops; that every day is full of potential barriers to success that are the price of being the first in their family to attend college” (p. 13).

With the aim of helping all students achieve success, increased attention to the needs of first-generation college students is warranted. Ward et al. (2012) outlined several of the basic differences between contemporary first-generation college students and non-
first generation college students. Accordingly to Ward et al. in general, first-generation college students tend to be from minority backgrounds, lower socioeconomic status, and women with children (p. 14).

Consequently, contemporary first-generation college students may face additional barriers in the degree attainment process due their unique composite characteristics and including their unfamiliarity with the distinctive environment of a college campus. Although all college students experience developmental challenges in adjusting to college life; these challenges may be especially pronounced for first-generation students with limited or no prior knowledge of college experiences (Ward, Siegel, & Davenport, 2012). Increasing our knowledge of the unique ways in which first-generation college students engage the campus environment can help us better serve this population of students.

Given the characteristics of many first-generation college students, an examination of gender, race, and the intersection of gender and race may further highlight ways of helping this population succeed in higher education. To further understand the experiences of diverse groups of students examining social interactions among diverse groups on college campuses can provide insight into the plight of diverse groups of first-generation students as well.

**The unique challenges of first-generation college students.** The added pressure of family dynamics for many first-generation college students adds to the particular psychosocial and developmental needs of first-generation college students (Covarrubias & Fryberg, 2015). As first-generation college students often come from working class backgrounds, they are faced with uncertainty and conflict when navigating
the middle-class world of colleges and universities. These economic and social discrepancies between home life and college life contribute to the unique needs of this population and the need for postsecondary institutions to better understand ways to help this group achieve success.

Covarrubias and Fryberg (2015) found that conducting relatively brief interventions – such as having a first-generation college student reflect on a time when they helped their family – could help reduce the guilt these students often feel for their achievement while leaving their family behind. Hence, understanding the social dynamics at work in the lives of diverse students’ lives can enhance policies and programs intending to help all students succeed in higher education.

The current research posits that the diverse backgrounds of college students can provide a positive impact on student engagement and academic success. Hence, examining diverse groups of first-generation college students may provide insight into the idiosyncratic ways different groups experience and benefit from experiences with diversity in campus life.

**Diversity and Student Success**

According to the ASHE Higher Education Report on *The Future of Institutional Diversity Research and Practice* (2013b), “the trends and responses to market pressures often encourage institutions to engage in isomorphic tendencies that lead to increased homogenization and a decline in institutional diversity” (p. 84). As colleges and universities navigated the Great Recession and the associated reduced public funding for education, many institutions adapted a market-based approach to education (ASHE Higher Education Report, 2013b). This approach often focuses myopically on
elite measures of success to determine the distribution of funding. This trend tends to lead to a less diverse student body at postsecondary institutions.

The pull of market forces on higher education can also create a contradiction to a key purpose of higher education – providing opportunities for upward economic and social mobility. According to the ASHE Higher Education Report (2013a, p. 49), “the economic context of the country demands that higher education provide an opportunity for social mobility and the ability to improve one’s economic and social status”. Providing such opportunities for the increasingly diverse student population of the United States has become more challenging as institutions navigate the terrain of reduced state and federal funding. Hence, relying solely on market-based factors to define higher education policies can also have the unintended consequence of reducing the numbers of diverse students in higher education. Policy-makers must be careful not to implicitly assume that equity and excellence are mutually exclusive (Whitefore, Shah, & Nair, 2013).

Policies that intentionally or unintentionally reduce the numbers of diverse students enrolled in college can have negative effects on the outcomes of all students. There is ample research that indicates that more diverse student bodies in higher education lead to improved outcomes (ASHE Higher Education Report, 2013a; 2013b; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). For example, Cole and Zhou (2014) conducted a three-year longitudinal study at one institution that examined the extent to which experiences with diversity improved college students’ orientation toward civic-minded activities. Using a sample of 447 undergraduate senior students, including 144 ethnic minorities, Cole and Zhou conducted a regression analysis and found that students with higher
levels of experiences with diversity, (e.g., interracial social interactions, student-faculty interactions, and service learning), had significantly higher levels of civic-mindedness. These findings suggest that students with higher levels of diversity experiences gain positive benefits, such as increased civic awareness and participation.

Hurtado (2001) examined the impact of diversity on educational outcomes. Hurtado’s (2001) sample included longitudinal data from student surveys taken between 1987 and 1991, from 4,253 students representing 309 predominantly White postsecondary institutions. Controlling for college selectivity, student abilities, and academic habits, Hurtado (2001) conducted a partial correlational analysis on the self-reported student data to examine the relationship between diversity-related activities and educational outcomes. Hurtado’s (2001) findings indicated student experiences with diversity fostered positive civic outcomes, such as increased tolerance for individuals from diverse backgrounds. The author also found a significant positive relationship in self-reported gains in job-related skills when students had frequent opportunities to engage in interactions with diverse peers, such as studying with a classmate from a different racial/ethnic background. These findings provide additional support for the positive benefits of student interactions among diverse groups.

Gurin, Dey, Hurtado, and Gurin (2002) also conducted an analysis on the impact of diversity on the academic and social growth of college students. They used both single- and multi- institutional longitudinal data from self-reported student surveys to examine the impact of informal interactional diversity on educational and social outcomes. The sample from the single-institution data included 1,129 White students, 187 African American students, and 266 Asian American students. Data was collected
from the students when they entered the institution in 1990 and again four years later with a follow-up survey.

The national multi-institutional data included 383 students from 184 institutions who were surveyed upon entering college in 1985 and surveyed again four years later. The national sample included 216 African American, 496 Asian American, 206 Latino/a, and 10,465 White students attending predominantly White, four-year institutions. The researchers chose not to include Native American students due to their small sample size. Gurin et al. (2002) conducted a multiple regression analysis to examine the impact of informal interactional diversity on the social and academic outcomes of college students, and conceptualized informal interactional diversity as the frequency and quality of social interactions with peers from diverse backgrounds. Informal interactional diversity experiences can occur inside or outside the classroom setting; however, Gurin et al. (2002) noted that these types of interactions typically occur outside the classroom. Informal interaction diversity experiences may include discussions held at residence halls, dining halls, and campus events.

The theoretical foundation of the Gurin et al. (2002) examination of the effects of diversity included Piaget’s (1971) theory of cognitive development and Erikson’s (1946; 1956) psychological theory of social development. According to Gurin et al. (2002), “both sets of analyses show that diversity experiences had robust effects on educational outcomes for all groups of students, although to varying degrees” (p. 351). Their study provides support for the claim that diversity has a positive impact in educational settings.
First, diversity experiences were shown to have positive effects on learning outcomes for both sets of data. Furthermore, data from the national sample showed that interactions with diverse peers yielded significant positive effects on intellectual engagement and self-reported academic skills for all groups of students. Second, results from the national data showed interactional diversity experiences had greater impact on educational outcomes than did classroom diversity (i.e. enrolling in multicultural classes). This finding is tentative given the measure for interactional diversity experiences included three questions, while the measure for classroom diversity only included one question. However, this finding suggests more study is needed to better understand the effects of interactional diversity experiences on the learning outcomes of college students. In sum, the Gurin et al. (2002) study provides evidence that informal interactional diversity experiences outside the classroom can yield positive outcomes for college students academically and socially. More research is needed to better understand this phenomena and how it can be used to help all students achieve success at postsecondary institutions.

As reviewed previously, the current demographic trends and the positive benefits of diversity in educational settings suggest a central challenge for postsecondary institutions is finding a balance between addressing market-based economic factors and providing opportunities for all students to succeed in college. One way to address this tension is to move beyond the traditional structural (i.e. admissions) and curriculum (i.e. diversity coursework) methods and to examine ways that social interactions outside the classroom can be used to help improve experiences with diversity that may then lead to
improved overall outcomes, as well. Toward this end, examining the impact of experiences with diversity outside the classroom is the focus of the current study.

**Interactional Diversity and Student Engagement**

Diverse interactions have been connected to positive student development in a variety of domains (Chang, Astin, & Kim, 2004; Jones, 2015; Pike & Kuh, 2006). According to Jones (2015), “higher levels of interactional diversity have been correlated with increased cultural knowledge, greater cognitive and affective development, more positive intergroup attitudes, increased critical thinking skills, increased intellectual and social self-confidence, and greater student satisfaction with the college experience” (p. 2). Given the benefits of interactions between diverse students, more attention needs to be paid quantity and quality of these interactions.

Chang, Astin, and Kim (2004) examined cross-racial interactions among undergraduate students by conducting a longitudinal study with data from a national sample of college students enrolled in the 1990s. The sample included multiple postsecondary institutions with diverse student populations to explore the effects of interactional diversity on a broad range of educational outcomes, including cognitive, affective, psychological, and behavioral measures. Different types of interactional diversity were studied in order to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the effects on student’s academic lives. Student survey data from the Cooperative Institutional Research Program (CIRP) was collected in order to assess the ways in which students interacted with diverse peers, such as when studying or eating in the dining hall. The CIRP is administered by the Higher Education Research Institute
(HERI) at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) Graduate School of Education and Information Studies.

Responses from several items related to experiences with diversity were combined to form a composite score for interactional diversity. There were 237,777 sample students from 461 colleges and universities who completed the survey upon entering college and again four years later. A form of hierarchal linear multiple regression was used to analyze the data. The results found diverse experiences between students yielded positive effects on the development of civic-mindedness, intellectual ability, and social abilities. White students appeared to gain the most from interactional diversity experiences, and students of color received some benefit but to a lesser extent. The Chang et al. (2004) study provides evidence that interactional diversity experiences have a positive effect on student outcomes. An updated exploration of the effect of interactional diversity could enhance our understanding of this form of student engagement for the modern-day college student.

Pike and Kuh (2006) examined informal peer interactions and the relationship between structural diversity and perceptions of the campus environment. Institutions have typically addressed structural diversity through admissions policies that provide opportunities for diverse students to pursue higher education. Pike and Kuh reported that institutions with larger numbers of diverse students provide more opportunities for diverse interactional experiences to occur. Such interactions have been found to improve student success in both academic and social ways, such as enhanced critical thinking skills and an increase in civic-mindedness. Yet, Pike and Kuh noted that research findings regarding the impact of interactional diversity on student outcomes is
not fully understood because the results using data from different instruments has yielded somewhat conflicting results. For instance, Pike and Kuh noted that studies using the Cooperative Institutional Research Program (CIRP) instrument have found positive effects for structural diversity. While studies using the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) have produced results that question the uniformly positive effects of structural diversity. Hence, the Pike and Kuh study aimed to further clarify the effects of structural diversity on students’ perceptions of campus climate as facilitated by interactional diversity experiences.

Pike and Kuh (2006) examined the statistical significance as well as the educational significance of structural diversity. This study also broadened the definition of interactional diversity by including students from diverse backgrounds and student who held diverse viewpoints (attitudes, beliefs, values). The Pike and Kuh (2006) conceptual model assumes that “the amount of interaction among diverse groups at an institution (i.e., informal interactional diversity) is related to the characteristics of the institution and the diversity of the student population” (p. 432). Carnegie classification, institutional control, size, and urbanicity were included as characteristics of the institution.

Pike and Kuh (2006) defined “campus environment” as the extent to which students’ believed their institutions are vested in their success and students’ reports of positive working and social relationships among diverse groups on campus. The Pike and Kuh conceptual model relies on previous research that suggests institutional characteristics and informal interactional diversity are related. The model also assumes that perceived campus environment is indirectly and directly related to structural
diversity. The model also assumes that structural diversity and interactional diversity are related. This conceptual model and its associated assumptions are key to the Pike and Kuh study. Their sample included 305 postsecondary institutions as the unit of analysis. Data regarding students’ experiences with interactional diversity and perceptions of the campus environment came from the NSSE student surveys administered in Spring 2001. Data from the responses of senior-level students were used because the researchers hypothesized older students would have had more opportunities for experiences with interactional diversity. Data regarding institutional characteristics and diversity among the student body were collected from the National Center for Education Statistics’ Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS). Data for the Pike and Kuh (2006) study were analyzed using the Lisrel 8.72 computer program in order to compare five models that examined the relationship between interactional diversity, structural diversity, and perceptions of the campus environment. Goodness-of-fit tests were used to analyze whether the model were statistically significant enough to provide insight into the research questions. Chi-square tests were used to provide goodness-of-fit analysis. Variance measures (i.e. squared multiple correlations) were also used in order to provide insight into the educational significance of the models.

The results from the structural equations found that 39% of the variance accounted for interactional diversity and 53% of the variance accounted for institutional characteristics. Although the model was a perfect fit, the results also indicated that classification as a doctoral/research university or a master’s university, as opposed to a baccalaureate general college, was not significantly related to informal interactional diversity. In addition, neither urbanicity nor size (i.e., FTE enrollment) was related to
informal interactional diversity. Finally, classification as a liberal arts college, as opposed to a baccalaureate general college, was not significantly related to perceptions of a supportive campus environment.

The data from Pike and Kuh (2006) suggest that certain institutional characteristics have little or no impact on the relationship between interactional diversity, structural diversity, and perceived campus climate. In sum, the results indicated a diverse student population is related to increased levels of interactional diversity. Informal interactional diversity was more strongly related to structural diversity than any other institutional factor. Experiences with diversity increased as the study body composition increased in heterogeneity.

The results also indicated that positive perceptions of the campus environment were not related to the level of diversity in the student body nor was it related to the number of diverse interactions. However, Pike and Kuh (2006) noted that their findings do not suggest that perceptions of the campus environment are unrelated to diverse interactions because their study did not examine the tone of those interactions. The Pike and Kuh study also found that certain institutional characteristics – specifically, institutional control, institutional mission, and size – are strongly related to students’ perceptions of the campus environment. Hence, Pike and Kuh provides further evidence that interactional diversity experiences are related to structural diversity and certain traits of the institution itself. However, their study did not offer additional findings related to the impact of interactional diversity on specific student outcomes.

According to Bowman and Park (2014), “Research on diversity in higher education has evolved to consider the nature of interracial contact and campus climate
as well as the factors that may foster meaningful interactions” (p. 660). Recent research on diversity in higher education has evolved to include comparisons between different racial/ethnic groups and examinations beyond race. For their study, Bowman and Park examined two types of interracial contact on college campuses: cross-racial interaction (CRI) and interracial friendship (IRF). Their examination focused on Allport’s (1954) seminal work The Nature of Prejudice, which defined interracial contact as a variety of diverse interactions between people from different backgrounds, such as race/ethnicity and socioeconomic status.

The purpose of the Bowman and Park (2014) study was to better understand the behavioral dimensions of students’ experiences with diversity. Bowman and Park noted previous research findings that suggest CRI and IRF types of student engagement occur in different ways for students of different gender and racial/ethnic backgrounds. For instance, Bowman and Park reported that membership in a fraternity/sorority has been found to have a negative effect on IRF for White students, but a positive effect on IRF for students of color.

Similarly, Bowman and Park (2014) reported that female college students tend to engage in CRI more frequently than male college students. Hence, a key purpose of the Bowman and Park study was to compare and contrast the significant predictors of CRI and IRF. The Bowman and Park study analyzed data from the National Longitudinal Survey of Freshmen (NLSF) from 28 academically selective institutions with diverse student populations. Students were oversampled in order to attain roughly equal numbers of students from diverse backgrounds, including 736 Asian American, 766 Black, 673 Hispanic, and 757 White students. A qualitative method of data collection
was used (i.e. interview), however the questions asked were closed-ended and coded such that quantitative methods of analysis were used. Senior-level students responses were measured for the frequency of contact with peers from diverse racial backgrounds other than their own in order to measure CRI. Participants were also asked to identify the racial background of their four closest college friends in order to measure IRF. These measures were the dependent variables.

The predictor independent variables were selected based on previous research and included items such as institution type (i.e. public, liberal arts), structural diversity (representation of diverse students on campus), and demographic variables (i.e. race/ethnicity, gender, parental education level, and living on campus). Hierarchical linear modeling was used to analyze the data in order to partition the variance within and between groups.

Overall, the results indicated that students of color engaged in CRI and IRF at greater frequency than did White students. The Bowman and Park study found a greater disparity between these two groups’ interactional diversity experiences than did previous studies, perhaps due to their statistical controlling of mediating factors such as high school GPA. Another key finding from Bowman and Park (2014) relates to the significant difference in predicting CRI versus IRF. For instance, religiosity, female, and participation in an ethnic student organization were three variables that were significantly and negatively related to IRF, but were also significantly and positively related to CRI.

In sum, the Bowman and Park (2014) models were more effective at predicting IRF than CRI. When examining the results based on race/ethnicity, they found that
exposure to diversity in high school and structural racial diversity in college had a more positive effect on CRI for White students than for any other group. The results also found a relationship between CRI and undergraduate major that differed based on race/ethnicity of the student. For example, Hispanic students majoring in the arts and humanities had more frequent CRI than did Hispanic students majoring in the social sciences. Similarly, Asian American students who majored in a professional field had lower CRI than did Asian American students who majored in the social sciences.

Bowman and Park (2014) noted that racial/ethnic underrepresentation in certain majors does not account for all of the variation found in this domain. In addition, significant differences across racial groups was found to be much higher for IRF than for CRI. For instance, the relationship between structural racial diversity and IRF was more positive among White students than for any other group; in addition, this relationship was found to be negative for Asian American and Hispanic students in the Bowman and Park study. The reason for this difference based on racial background remains unclear.

In sum, Bowman and Park (2014) “highlights the differences and similarities that exist within and between racial/ethnic groups, further demonstrating the need to consider how different experiences affect specific populations on campus” (p. 683-4). Likewise, this study proposes to examine interactional diversity experiences and compare and contrast the within and between group differences based on students’ gender, race, and parental education level (i.e. generational status).

Summary

This chapter discussed the literature related to experiences with diversity among college students. Examining the impact of experiences with diversity outside the classroom is the focus of the current study. As the general U.S. population experiences
increased diversity, so too do institutions of higher learning. In particular relevance to the current study, postsecondary institutions are experiencing an increase in gender, ethnic/minority, and generational status diversity. Given these trends, this study foregrounds the unique ways in which women and men may engage in social experiences with diversity. In addition, the intersection of gender and race is central to the analysis of collected data such that the unique experiences of diverse groups of women can be examined and compared to similar experiences with diversity among men enrolled in college. In addition, the impact of generational status and student's experiences with diversity are also examined in this study. The aim is to increase understanding of the impact of diversity on student success and student engagement.
CHAPTER THREE

METHODS

This study aims to further the research knowledge of student engagement and academic success. It enhances understanding of the modern college student by examining the relationship of intersecting identities (gender, race, generational status) on student’s experiences with diversity. Furthermore, it extends knowledge in this area by employing a comprehensive theoretical framework that includes cultural capital, critical race theory, and feminist theory to interpret the data. In particular, this study examines experiences with diversity (i.e. interactional diversity experiences) as a form of student engagement at a postsecondary institution in a large urban city in the Southeast of the U.S.

The Experiences With Diversity Index (a 10-item subscale of the College Student Experiences Questionnaire) was used in order to measure students’ experiences with diversity. This index is a student self-report survey that uses Likert-type responses to measure the frequency of student’s social experiences with peers outside the classroom. The impact of interactional diversity experiences on academic outcomes – grade point average (GPA) in the current study – was also examined in order to assess the potential educational benefits of interactional diversity. Data from the CSEQ and for student’s GPA was collected from the Director of Student Affairs Planning, Evaluation & Assessment.
This chapter provides a description of the methods used in this study. This chapter will discuss population sample, research design, instruments, variables, data collection procedures, and data analysis. It will end with a discussion of the research questions as related to the data analysis methods.

**Research Design**

This study used quantitative archived survey data from The College Student Experiences Questionnaire (CSEQ). One advantage of secondary data is that it allows for an increased sample size and improved data quality (McMillan & Schumacher, 2009). A survey design is a useful method for conducting this study because questionnaires provide a numeric description of attitudes, feelings, beliefs, trends, and behaviors of a large group of people (Creswell, 2009; Johnson & Christensen, 2008). A survey design is a simple design in which the researcher identifies the participants; poses relevant questions; summarizes responses with statistical measures, and draws inferences from the responses (Leedy & Ormrod, 2005). Generally, the advantages of using survey questionnaires for research include: a) efficiency – allows measurement of a large number of variables in a short time period; b) reduced bias – use of the same set of survey questions reduces researcher bias; and c) reliability – the collected data is considered reliable since the same questions were asked of every participant.

A relational research design is used to explore the relationship between the study variables. Relational design is used to assess the degree of association between multiple variables (Creswell, 2009), which makes it the appropriate design for this study. Because more than one variable is examined in this study, a multivariate analysis is conducted to examine the variance of the relationships between variables. Multivariate
analysis is typically utilized when predicting a single independent variable and more than one dependent variable is examined (Mertler & Vannatta, 2013).

**Population and Sample**

The University of South Florida is a large metropolitan predominantly White institution in the south consisting of approximately 40,000 undergraduate students. Based on preliminary exploration of the data set, the sample size is 404 records which is sufficient to achieve population validity. Frankel and Wallen (2006) suggested that researchers should try to get a large enough sample for generalizability or “study the entire population of interest” (p. 92). The participants selected for this study will be limited to traditional aged students.

**Variables**

The variables in this study include demographic descriptors of the study participants. These variables include gender, race/ethnicity, and generational status as self-reported by the respondents on the CSEQ. The independent variables -- generational status, gender, and race – are nominal level measurements representing categorized responses. A fourth study variable includes outcomes related to academic success and will be measured by the students’ college grade point average. A fifth variable is measured by the responses to the selected 10 questions of the CSEQ, which comprise the Experiences With Diversity Index (EWDI; Hu & Kuh, 2003). This variable will be measured with a total score of the Likert-type responses to the EWDI items on the CSEQ. The dependent variables that will measure academic success (grade point average) are continuous variables with ordinal levels of measurement. The dependent variable that reflects the respondents’ score on the EWDI and reflect the students’ self-
reported experiences with diversity outside of the classroom are continuous variables with ordinal levels of measurements. Academic success is measured by the student’s grade point average in college. Academic success data and the students’ responses on relevant items of the CSEQ were provided by the Office of Student Affairs.

**Instruments and Measures**

**College Student Experiences Questionnaire (CSEQ).** Robert Pace developed The College Student Experiences Questionnaire (CSEQ) in at the University of California, Los Angeles. The CSEQ is currently housed at The Center for Postsecondary Research at Indiana University (College Student Experiences Questionnaire Assessment Program, 2007). The CSEQ is a “long-standing and influential” tool in its fourth edition and has been used for many over 36 years with thousands of students attending hundreds of institutions (College Student Experiences Questionnaire Assessment Program, 2007).

The CSEQ is a self-report survey that “measures the quality of student experiences, perceptions of the campus environment, and progress toward important educational goals” (College Student Experiences Questionnaire Assessment Program, 2007). The CSEQ’s large-scale administration program ended after the Spring of 2014. However, the large amount of archival data that exists allows the opportunity for researchers to continue examining pertinent data for insights that may lead to improved student outcomes for postsecondary students.

The CSEQ uses self-reported data based upon the participants’ responses to the items on the questionnaire. To demonstrate validity there are five criteria that self-reported data should meet:

1. the respondents can provide the information requested;
2. the questions are phrased explicitly and clearly;
3. the questions relate to recent activities;
4. the respondents believe the questions warrant serious and thoughtful consideration; and
5. responding to the questions does not make the respondent feel a violation of their privacy, embarrassed, insecure or cause the respondent to answer the questions for the benefit of the researcher (Hu & Kuh, 2003; Hu, Kuh, Li, 2008).

According to Hu and Kuh (2003), the CSEQ items satisfy all of these criteria for validity. The questions are well-defined, plainly worded, have high face validity, and ask students to reflect on their efforts related to the college experience in and out of the classroom. The questions use simple prompts to refer to activities students have done during the current school year. The format of most response options is a simple rating scale that helps students to accurately recall and record the information requested on the questionnaire.

The CSEQ is reported to have excellent psychometric properties (Ewell & Jones, 1996; Kuh, Vesper, Connolly & Pace, 1997; Kuh, Gonyea, Kish, Muthiah & Thomas, 2003). Kuh and Vesper (1997) reported that the CSEQ strong potential for assessing student behavior associated with desired outcomes. Pace and Kuh (2002) asserted that the CSEQ has been observed to have high reliability in assessing the types of activities that contribute to gains in general academic and learning skills.

**The Experiences With Diversity Index (EWDI).** The Experiences With Diversity Index (EWDI) subscale of the CSEQ is designed to quantify the interactional diversity experiences of college students. Interactional diversity experiences are broadly defined as “student contact with peers from different backgrounds” (Hu & Kuh, 2008). The
Experiences With Diversity Index (EWDI) is a 10-item subscale of the CSEQ (Hu & Kuh, 2003). The 10 items comprising the EWDI are culled from 3 subsections of the CSEQ, including College Activities: Student Acquaintances; Conversations: Topics of Conversations, and Estimate of Gains. The ten relevant questions on interactional diversity experiences from the CSEQ are scored as follows: 1 (never), 2 (occasionally), 3 (often), and 4 (very often). Summated scale scores are used for a total score on the EWDI with higher scores representing a higher frequency of interactional diversity experiences. Appendix A lists the 10 items from the EWDI. Sample items include:

- Became acquainted with students whose race or ethnic background was different from yours
- Had serious discussions with students whose race or ethnic background was different from yours

According to Huh and Kuh (2003), the interactional diversity experiences scale is highly reliable (Cronbach’s alpha = .893). The diversity items are moderately correlated with one another (ranging from .368 to .716) as well as with the interactional diversity experiences scale score (all greater than .70). Therefore, the EWDI should accurately depict the self-reported out-of-classroom experiences students had with peers from backgrounds different than their own. With this in mind, the CSEQ items related to the EWDI were chosen as the most appropriate instrument to measure the self-reported interactional diversity experiences of college students.

**Data Collection Procedures**

As stated earlier in this chapter, I used secondary data for this study. The CSEQ data were collected by student affairs administrators at the university and the
researcher for this study. For the data collection procedures by student affairs administrators at the university, students were invited via email by the Vice-President of Student Affairs to participate in the assessment. Campus-wide invitations were sent to students to participate in the assessment, including students who lived in residence halls, off-campus, involved in student organizations, and in undergraduate course class sessions. The invitation stated that the survey would take approximately 30 minutes to complete and that it would aid the Division of Student Affairs to better the campus environment and to help in the development of students. The invitation also stated that by completing the survey, there would be an opportunity to win a $100 gift card.

Each student who participated in the assessment had the option of completing the questionnaire in a quiet room or pick up the survey and return it. The participants were asked to show identification and to provide their school identification number. This identifying information was needed in the event the participant was randomly selected to win the $100 gift card and to ensure the participant would not be contacted to participate in similar surveys.

The surveys were collected and submitted to the Director of Student Affairs Planning, Evaluation & Assessment. The survey data results from the Background Information and 10-item Experiences With Diversity Index (EWDI) of the CSEQ completed by the participants in the target population for this study and overall grade point averages and college enrollment during second year (academic success) of the participants was provided by the Director of Student Affairs Planning, Evaluation & Assessment. The information was not identifiable per participant. The process ensured that the participants’ records were protected in an ethically sound manner.
Data Analysis

A statistical analysis will be conducted on the survey data. A theoretical framework that includes a discussion of cultural capital, critical race theory, and feminist theory will be utilized to discuss the implications and future directions of the study results. The data for this study will be analyzed using SPSS software. Descriptive statistics, such as applicable measures of standard deviation, central tendency, skewness, and kurtosis will be calculated and reported for all variables in this study. Cronbach’s Alpha will be conducted to measure internal consistency and reliability of the self-reported interactional diversity experiences scores. Overall, inferential statistics will be used to test the relationship among all variables. Analysis of Variance (ANOVA), Multiple Regression, and Pearson’s correlation will be used to understand the relationship among all variables. Below is an overview of the analysis procedure that will be applied to each research question in addition to the descriptive statistics referred to above.

Effect of personal identity characteristics of students on diversity experiences. This research question is intended to explore the relationship between student characteristics and interactional diversity experiences among college students. This study will explore the main effects of gender, race/ethnicity, and generational status on interactional diversity experiences. The two-way interaction effects of gender, race, and generational status on diversity experiences will also be explored.

Question 1. How does gender, race/ethnicity, and generational status affect undergraduate college students’ interactions with peers from diverse backgrounds (interactional diversity experiences)?
A factorial analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted with the Experiences With Diversity Index (EWDI) serving as the dependent variable and gender, race/ethnicity, generational status and their two-way interactions serving as the independent variable. This data was culled from the archived CSEQ instrument. The dependent variable was summated scale scores from the EWDI, which is a factor related to student engagement as measured by the CSEQ. This statistical analysis was used to determine if differences exist between two or more groups on multiple independent and dependent variables.

**Question 2.** What is the relationship between experiences with diversity, academic success, and gender, race/ethnicity, and generational status among undergraduate college students?

A moderated multiple regression will be used to analyze this research question, where grade point average is the dependent variable and the independent variables include: experiences with diversity (EWDI), gender, race/ethnicity, and generational status. To provide a more nuanced view of the data, main effects and interaction effects of the independent variables will be examined. This independent variable data will be culled from the archived CSEQ instrument. The EWDI dependent variable will be summated scale scores from the experiences with diversity index, a factor related to student engagement as measured by the CSEQ. This statistical analysis will be used because it will offer an analysis of the different ways academic success is impacted by experiences with diversity for different subgroups within the sample (i.e. female versus male; first generation versus non-first generation, etc.).
About the Researcher

I am a Black woman and a second-generation college student. I have earned a Master’s degree, and am in the process of completing my doctorate degree. My counseling orientation is an integration of person-centered, cognitive-behavioral, existential, and feminist theoretical underpinnings within a multicultural context. I am currently employed with the TRIO Student Support Services program and was previously employed by the sister TRIO Upward Bound program and the related state-funded College Reach-Out Program. The TRIO programs are designed to provide services and support to underserved student populations in order to increase their access to postsecondary education. An emphasis on college degree attainment is the focus of these programs. Thus, it seems fitting to define first-generation college students in relation to their parent’s degree attainment. In addition, I have served first-generation students as a counselor. In this role, I have helped students and their families navigate the educational process through personal, academic, and career counseling interventions for several years. In this way, I have developed first-hand insight into the unique needs of this student population.

Summary

Chapter Three discussed the research design, population and sample, instruments, data collection procedures, and analytical procedures that will be used in this study. These methods will allow the researcher to assess the academic impact of self-reported experiences with diversity and to explore the group differences that may exist among diverse groups of college students enrolled at a large metropolitan institution in the Southeastern U.S. Chapter Four will present the results, and Chapter
Five will present the discussion and conclusions of the study as well as the implications for future research.
CHAPTER FOUR

RESULTS

This chapter reports the results of the current study. The chapter will include details of the research sample and descriptive statistics. In addition, the chapter will discuss the results from the statistical analysis and provide a summary of the results.

Research Sample

The data used for this study was provided by the Director of Student Affairs Planning, Evaluation & Assessment at the University of South Florida (USF). The College Student Experiences Questionnaire (CSEQ) Assessment Program data used for this study included a sample population of college students enrolled at USF. The survey administration period was conducted from Spring 2009 through Fall 2009 and ended during Spring 2010. The collected data included a total of 504 responses.

Descriptive Statistics

Table 1 provides descriptive statistics to describe the CSEQ data set. The descriptive statistics provide an understanding of the sample population who participated in the CSEQ survey. Analysis of the racial/ethnic composition of the sample indicate the study sample is racially diverse, with the majority comprised of Caucasian (37%), Black or African American (32%), and Other Hispanic (12%) students, a survey category that does not include Mexican American (2%) or Puerto Rican (5%) participants. Hence, participants who self-identified as Caucasian, Black or African American, and Hispanic were the only three groups with frequencies greater than five percent of the sample population. The remaining analysis focused on these three
racial/ethnic groups in order to achieve statistical power. After removing data of participants from other racial/ethnic groups, the resulting sample population size was 404.

TABLE 1

Descriptive Statistics of CSEQ Survey Participants (N = 504)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Demographic Category</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Race/Ethnicity</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American Indian or Native American</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian or Pacific Islander</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*Black or African American</td>
<td>161</td>
<td>32%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*Caucasian</td>
<td>185</td>
<td>37%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*Mexican American</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*Puerto Rican</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*Other Hispanic</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multiracial</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Categories included in remaining analysis

Table 2 provides descriptive statistics to describe the study data set on which further analysis was conducted (N = 404). In addition to race/ethnicity (Table 1), the variables measured in this study are self-reported sex and parent education level. Respondents’ experiences with diversity is measured using scores from the Experiences With Diversity Index (EWDI) subscale of the CSEQ. Frequency scores for each question in the EWDI subscale is provided in Table 3. Frequency scores for the EWDI subscale show clear distinctions in the range of frequency scores for most of the questions asked.
### TABLE 2

*Descriptive Statistics of Sample Participants (N = 404)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Demographic Category</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Gender</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>177</td>
<td>44%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>227</td>
<td>56%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Generational Status</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First Generation</td>
<td>222</td>
<td>55%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non First Generation</td>
<td>167</td>
<td>41%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don't Know</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Response</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>&lt;1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Students more frequently reported experiences with diversity “very often” and “often” in the areas of student acquaintances, topics of conversation, and estimate of gains. Additionally, students less frequently reported “never” having had experiences with diversity in Table 3.

### TABLE 3

*Frequency Scores for Experiences With Diversity Index (EWDI) Subscale Items*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student Acquaintances</th>
<th>Very Often</th>
<th>Often</th>
<th>Occasionally</th>
<th>Never</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>Became acquainted with students whose family background (economic, social) was different than yours.</em></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very Often</td>
<td>16</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Often</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Occasionally</td>
<td>14</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Never</td>
<td>9</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>83</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><em>Became acquainted with students whose race or ethnic background was different than yours.</em></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Very Often</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Often</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Occasionally</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Never</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### TABLE 3 (Continued)

*Frequency Scores for Experiences With Diversity Index (EWDI) Subscale Items*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Experience</th>
<th>Very Often</th>
<th>Often</th>
<th>Occasionally</th>
<th>Never</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Became acquainted with students from another country.</td>
<td>124</td>
<td>115</td>
<td>137</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Had serious discussions with students whose religious beliefs were very different from yours.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Experience</th>
<th>Very Often</th>
<th>Often</th>
<th>Occasionally</th>
<th>Never</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>108</td>
<td>116</td>
<td>124</td>
<td>52</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Had serious discussions with students whose race or ethnic background was different from yours.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Experience</th>
<th>Very Often</th>
<th>Often</th>
<th>Occasionally</th>
<th>Never</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>120</td>
<td>123</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>37</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Had serious discussions with students from a country different from yours.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Experience</th>
<th>Very Often</th>
<th>Often</th>
<th>Occasionally</th>
<th>Never</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>100</td>
<td>104</td>
<td>128</td>
<td>69</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Topics of Conversation**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Very Often</th>
<th>Often</th>
<th>Occasionally</th>
<th>Never</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Different lifestyles, customs, and religions.</td>
<td>110</td>
<td>131</td>
<td>136</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Estimate of Gains**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Very Often</th>
<th>Often</th>
<th>Occasionally</th>
<th>Never</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Different lifestyles, customs, and religions.</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>121</td>
<td>155</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**TABLE 3 (Continued)**

_Frequency Scores for Experiences With Diversity Index (EWDI) Subscale Items_

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Very Often</th>
<th>Often</th>
<th>Occasionally</th>
<th>Never</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Becoming aware of different philosophies, cultures, and ways of life.</td>
<td>102</td>
<td>156</td>
<td>122</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Developing the ability to get along with different kinds of people.</td>
<td>189</td>
<td>139</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4 shows the academic success scores as measured by grade point average (GPA). Academic success scores (i.e. participants’ cumulative spring 2010 grade point averages) were provided by the Director of Student Affairs Planning, Evaluation and Assessment at USF. The academic success variable does not account for previous academic ability in college or high school, such as GPA or standardized test scores.

The CSEQ survey instrument from which the EWDI is culled also does not account for previous intellectual ability or academic performance. The frequency of academic success reported in Table 4 shows that 35% of students earned a cumulative spring 2010 grade point average between 3.0 -3.49.

Cronbach’s coefficient alpha was computed to measure the internal consistency of the EWDI subscale. The goal of this analysis was to establish the consistency of the self-reported items on the CSEQ. This analysis also allows assessment of potential scoring errors and random guessing made by participants.
TABLE 4

Frequency Scores for Academic Success

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Academic Success (GPA)</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0.0 – 1.99</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.00 – 2.49</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.50 – 2.74</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.75 – 2.99</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.00 – 3.49</td>
<td>141</td>
<td>35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.50 – 4.00</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N = 404

Reliability coefficients range from .00 to 1.00, which indicates no reliability to perfect reliability (Cronk, 2012). Acceptable reliability coefficients are considered acceptable at scores of approximately .80 or higher. Cronbach’s alpha was found to be .863 for the EWDI subscale, indicating internal consistency.

The descriptive statistics and minimum and maximum scores for all participants on the EWDI summated score variable is included in Table 5. The descriptive statistics in Table 5 include the means, standard deviation, skewness, and kurtosis for the EWDI summated scores. Higher summated scores on the EWDI indicate more frequent experiences with diversity as reported on the CSEQ.

TABLE 5

Descriptive Statistics of the Summated EWDI Scores

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>Ku</th>
<th>Sk</th>
<th>Min</th>
<th>Max</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>EWDI</td>
<td>28.53</td>
<td>6.30</td>
<td>-.34</td>
<td>-.21</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N = 404
Results of Analysis

Research Question One. How does gender, race/ethnicity, and generational status affect undergraduate college students’ interactions with peers from diverse backgrounds (interactional diversity experiences)?

A factorial analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted with the Experiences With Diversity Index (EWDI) serving as the dependent variable, and gender, race/ethnicity, generational status and their two-way interactions serving as the independent variable. The dependent variable was summated scale scores from the EWDI, which is a factor related to student engagement as measured by the CSEQ. This statistical analysis was used to determine the effect of experiences with diversity on students from different racial/ethnic, gender, and generational status backgrounds.

In order to conduct the ANOVA statistical test, the researcher first examined the assumptions of the ANOVA, which are tests for normality and homogeneity of variance. To test for normality, the skewness and kurtosis of the dependent variable, EWDI, were examined for each level of the independent variable gender, as shown in Table 6.

TABLE 6

Distribution of Normality for Gender

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>Sk</th>
<th>Ku</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>EWDI</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>177</td>
<td>31.97</td>
<td>6.559</td>
<td>-.391</td>
<td>.201</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>227</td>
<td>33.02</td>
<td>6.423</td>
<td>-.074</td>
<td>-.762</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N = 404

The results show that both skewness and kurtosis for each dependent variable based on gender is approximately normal. However, the skewness for the gender variables is negative, which indicates that there are more scores above the means for the EWDI
independent variable. Also, a negative kurtosis for EWDI in the female category indicates that this score is platykurtic, containing few outliers and extreme values that fall outside of the normal distribution. This data shows the normality assumption has not been violated.

To test for normality, the skewness and kurtosis of the dependent variable, EWDI, were examined for each level of the independent variable race/ethnicity, as shown in Table 7.

**TABLE 7**

*Distribution of Normality for Race/Ethnicity*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Race/Ethnicity</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>Sk</th>
<th>Ku</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>EWDI</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>161</td>
<td>31.20</td>
<td>6.515</td>
<td>-.276</td>
<td>.035</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>185</td>
<td>32.61</td>
<td>6.325</td>
<td>-.156</td>
<td>-.710</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>36.17</td>
<td>5.617</td>
<td>-.012</td>
<td>-.652</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*N = 404*

The results show that both skewness and kurtosis for each dependent variable based on race/ethnicity is approximately normal, with the exception of the kurtosis for respondents who self-identified as Black or African American. However, the skewness for the race/ethnicity variables is negative, which indicates that there are more scores above the means for the EWDI independent variable. This data shows the normality assumption has not been violated.

To test for normality, the skewness and kurtosis of the dependent variable, EWDI, were examined for each level of the independent variable generational status, as shown in Table 8.
TABLE 8

Distribution of Normality for Generational Status

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Generational Status</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>Sk</th>
<th>Ku</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>EWDI</td>
<td>First Generation</td>
<td>222</td>
<td>32.95</td>
<td>6.588</td>
<td>-.239</td>
<td>-.309</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Non First Generation</td>
<td>167</td>
<td>32.13</td>
<td>6.451</td>
<td>-.199</td>
<td>-.270</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* N = 389, excludes “Don’t Know” responses

The results show that both skewness and kurtosis for each dependent variable based on generational status is approximately normal. The negative skewness indicates that there are more scores above the means for the EWDI independent variable. This data shows the normality assumption has not been violated.

Levene’s test of equality of variances was conducted within the ANOVA analysis, as shown in Table 9. The results indicate homogeneity of variance within the independent variable groups included in the model. The ANOVA model includes an examination of main effects and two-way interaction effects for gender, race/ethnicity, and generational status.

TABLE 9

Levene’s Test of Equality of Error Variances

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dependent Variable: EWDI</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.451</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* N = 404

The ANOVA analysis was conducted using an alpha of .05. A summary of results is presented in Table 10.
Main effect results indicate that EWDI scores were significantly different among racial/ethnic groups, $F(2, 373) = 6.135$, $p < .01$, partial $\eta^2 = .108$. The Tukey HSD procedure was used as a post hoc test to further examine racial/ethnic group differences between Caucasian, Black, and Hispanic students' experiences with diversity, as shown in Table 11.

Post hoc results are shown in Table 12. Results reveal that Hispanic students had statistically significant higher scores on the EWDI ($36.17 \pm 5.617$) compared to Black ($31.20 \pm 6.515$) or Caucasian ($32.61 \pm 6.325$) students at $p < .05$. There were no statistically significant differences found between groups based on gender or based on generational status.
Table 11

Tukey HSD Multiple Comparisons

Dependent Variable: EWDI

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>(I) race_EQ</th>
<th>(J) race_EQ</th>
<th>Mean Difference</th>
<th>Std. Error</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
<th>95% Confidence Interval</th>
<th>95% Confidence Interval</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>-1.41</td>
<td>.689</td>
<td>.102</td>
<td>-3.04</td>
<td>.21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>7</td>
<td>-4.97*</td>
<td>.977</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>-7.27</td>
<td>-2.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1.41</td>
<td>.689</td>
<td>.102</td>
<td>-.21</td>
<td>3.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>7</td>
<td>-3.55*</td>
<td>.960</td>
<td>.001</td>
<td>-5.81</td>
<td>-1.29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4.97*</td>
<td>.977</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>2.67</td>
<td>7.27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3.55*</td>
<td>.960</td>
<td>.001</td>
<td>1.29</td>
<td>5.81</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* The mean difference is significant at the .05 level.

Table 12

Post Hoc Test for ANOVA

Dependent Variable: EWDI

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
<th>Std. Error</th>
<th>95% Confidence Interval for Mean</th>
<th>95% Confidence Interval for Mean</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>161</td>
<td>31.20</td>
<td>6.515</td>
<td>.513</td>
<td>30.19</td>
<td>32.22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>185</td>
<td>32.61</td>
<td>6.325</td>
<td>.465</td>
<td>31.69</td>
<td>33.53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>36.17</td>
<td>5.617</td>
<td>.738</td>
<td>34.70</td>
<td>37.65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>404</td>
<td>32.56</td>
<td>6.496</td>
<td>.323</td>
<td>31.93</td>
<td>33.20</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Min</th>
<th>Max</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Research Question Two. What is the relationship between experiences with diversity, academic success, and gender, race/ethnicity, and generational status among undergraduate college students?
A moderated linear regression analysis was conducted to determine if academic success could be predicted from the self-reported experiences with diversity of different groups of students based on their gender, race/ethnicity, and generational status. The data was screened for violations of regression assumptions prior to analysis (Cronk, 2012). The assumptions include linearity, normality, independence, and homogeneity of variance.

**Linearity.** The scatterplot of the independent variable (EWDI scores) and the dependent variable (academic success) indicates the assumption of linearity is reasonable. As shown in Figure 2, as self-reported experiences with diversity scores increases, academic success generally increase as well.

**Normality.** To check for normal distribution of the residuals The Normal P-Plot of Regression Standardized Residuals was completed. The Normal P-Plot of Regression Standardized Residual concludes that the residuals are normally distributed, as shown in Figure 2.

**Independence.** Independence refers to residuals that are not correlated from one case to the next. The size of the residual is independent for one case because it has no impact on the size of the residual for the next case. A preliminary review of the sample data suggests that the assumption of independent errors has been sufficiently met.
**Correlation Graph for Self-Reported Experiences With Diversity and Academic Success (GPA).**

**FIGURE 2.** Correlation Graph for Self-Reported Experiences With Diversity and Academic Success.
FIGURE 3. Normal P-Plot of Regression Standardized Residual for Dependent Variable Academic Success (GPA).

Homogeneity of variance. A relatively random display of points provides evidence of homogeneity of variance. The spread of residuals appears fairly constant over the range of values of self-reported experiences with diversity.

A moderated multiple regression was conducted to analyze the research question. This form of analysis includes an examination of the interaction effects along with examining the main effects. A multiple regression was calculated to predict academic success based on students’ self-reported experiences with diversity as
moderated by student background, including gender, race/ethnicity, and generational status.

The Moderated Multiple Regression analyses suggest that a non-statistically significant proportion of the total variation in academic success was predicted by self-reported experiences with diversity (Table 13). This result holds true across students of all backgrounds considered in this study, including gender, race/ethnicity, and generational status. These results suggest that a student’s self-reported experiences with diversity score is not a good predictor of their academic success, $F(9, 392)= 5.67, p > .05$, with an $R^2$ of .115. These results hold true for main effects and interaction effects regardless of the students’ gender, race/ethnicity, or generational status, as shown in Table 13.

Summary

Chapter Four presents the data analysis for this research study. Results were provided for research questions one and two using ANOVA and multiple regression analyses respectively. Chapter Five will provide the principle findings of the research questions, discussion of results, recommendations for practice, and suggestions for future research.
### TABLE 13

**Summary of Moderated Multiple Regression Analyses (Self-Reported Experiences With Diversity Predicting Academic Success)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Model</th>
<th>Unstandardized Coefficients</th>
<th>Standardized Coefficients</th>
<th>95.0% Confidence Interval for B</th>
<th>Collinearity Statistics</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>B</td>
<td>Std. Error</td>
<td>Beta</td>
<td>t</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 (Constant)</td>
<td>3.765</td>
<td>.599</td>
<td></td>
<td>6.283</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EWDI Scores</td>
<td>-.027</td>
<td>.018</td>
<td>-.359</td>
<td>-1.537</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>-.197</td>
<td>.241</td>
<td>-.200</td>
<td>-.816</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Race/Ethnicity (Black, dummy coded)</td>
<td>-.538</td>
<td>.446</td>
<td>-.539</td>
<td>-1.208</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Race/Ethnicity (White, dummy coded)</td>
<td>-.647</td>
<td>.444</td>
<td>-.659</td>
<td>-1.457</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Generational Status</td>
<td>-.030</td>
<td>.100</td>
<td>-.074</td>
<td>-.296</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EWDI scores x Gender</td>
<td>.009</td>
<td>.007</td>
<td>.378</td>
<td>1.269</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EWDI scores x Race/Ethnicity (Black, dummy coded)</td>
<td>.009</td>
<td>.013</td>
<td>.283</td>
<td>.699</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EWDI scores x Race/Ethnicity (White, dummy coded)</td>
<td>.022</td>
<td>.012</td>
<td>.752</td>
<td>1.770</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EWDI scores x Generational Status</td>
<td>.001</td>
<td>.003</td>
<td>.060</td>
<td>.233</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

a. Dependent Variable: GPA
CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This chapter discusses key findings of the research questions and the conclusion of the study. A discussion of results, suggestions for practice, and recommendations for future research are also outlined in this chapter.

Introduction

The purpose of current study was to examine the role of diversity in higher education. The impact of diversity on student engagement and academic success was analyzed in order to provide critical insight into the lives of modern college students from diverse backgrounds. As the student population of postsecondary institutions becomes increasingly diverse, it is important to pay attention to the unique social, psychological, and academic needs of students from diverse backgrounds (Ward, Siegel, & Davenport, 2012). As an interpretive lens, Critical Race Theory (CRT; Ladson-Billings & Tate IV, 1995; Savas, 2014), Yosso’s (2005) cultural community wealth model, and racial/cultural identity development models as applied in multicultural education may offer a nuanced way of viewing the results of this study. When applied in education, CRT offers a unique analytical perspective that centralizes the experiences of students of color and seeks to offer analyses based on a more comprehensive view of race relations in American society (Ladson-Billings & Tate IV, 1995). Yosso’s model of cultural capital provides a positive strengths-based perspective of cultural differences and has the potential to offer insight into the counter-narratives of students of color.
Multicultural education models, such as that proposed by Banks and Banks (2007), attend to the academic and social needs of diverse groups of students. Racial/cultural identity development models may be included in the broad domain of multicultural education as a way to attend to the psychological and social needs of diverse groups of students. Given the lack of gender differences found in the results, feminist theory does not seem relevant in the context of this study; however, future studies may use different methods of data collection, such as qualitative, that may offer clearer insight into potentially different gendered experiences with diversity among college students.

The current study examined a diverse group of 404 undergraduate college students attending a large, public, research-intensive university in an urban center of the southeast United States. To answer the research questions, student experiences with diversity were measured using the Experiences With Diversity Index (EWDI), a subscale of the College Student Experiences Questionnaire (CSEQ). The CSEQ data was collected at a large, public predominantly white institution located in an urban center in the southeast United States. Likert-type responses were used to measure the frequency of student experiences with diversity. The EWDI responses were summated for a total score, with higher scores indicating a higher frequency of experiences with diversity.

The study sample (N = 404) is a racially diverse mix of students who self-identified as Caucasian (37%), Black or African American (32%), and Other Hispanic (12%) on the CSEQ. The sample also included female (56%) and male (44%) students. The sample was also composed of students who were first-generation (56%) college
students and those who were not (41%). Hence, the study sample represents a mix of students from diverse backgrounds.

The summated scores on the EWDI ranged from a minimum score of 8 to a maximum score of 40, with a mean score of 29 (SD = 6.3). Higher scores on the EWDI signify students’ reported more frequent experiences with peers from diverse backgrounds while outside the classroom, such as through student acquaintances and topics of conversation. It should be noted for this study sample, students were more likely to report experiences with diversity “often” or “very often” and very few reported “never” having experiences with diversity. Hence, the study sample includes students who reported a range of frequencies in experiences with diversity, yet the sample is skewed towards more frequent diverse interaction among this group of students. In sum, the sample for the current study includes a diverse group of students who completed the CSEQ at a large, urban public university between the 2009-2010 school year.

**Principle Findings and Discussion of Results**

This study examined two research questions to explore the impact of college student experiences with diversity. The first research question examined group differences in frequency of experiences with diversity. The examined groups were based on self-reported gender, race/ethnicity, and generational status. The second research question examined the relationship between the self-reported frequency of experiences with diversity and academic success, as measured by GPA, based on gender, race/ethnicity, and generational status.
Findings for Research Question One. To answer this question, an ANOVA analysis was conducted to examine group differences on experiences with diversity. Within a multiculturalism framework, group differences were examined to provide a deeper understanding of the experiences of diverse groups of college students using students’ self-reported experiences with diversity outside of the classroom. Previous research on the impact of diversity in higher education has typically focused on structural factors (i.e. student population demographics) and classroom diversity (i.e. multicultural curriculum) (Gurin, 2004). Instead, the current study focuses on student experiences with diversity outside the classroom, such as through student acquaintances and topics of conversation. Group differences were examined based on students’ self-reported gender, race/ethnicity, and generational status.

While no group differences were found based on gender or generational status, the results suggest group differences in experiences with diversity based on race/ethnicity. Post hoc analysis revealed Hispanic students reported significantly more frequent experiences with diversity outside the classroom than did their African-American/Black or Caucasian peers. The data suggests race/ethnicity plays a role in student perceptions of their college experience. From a CRT perspective, this result may be related to pervasive, yet often invisible, ways that race plays a role in the daily experiences of diverse groups of Americans – including students in higher education settings (Ladson-Billings & Tate IV, 1995; Savas, 2014). For example, Hurtado (1992) found Hispanic students who had social support from their peers and strong family relations managed the difficulties of transitioning into college during their first year more effectively than Hispanic students without this social and familial support. The presence
of social support from friends appears to help Hispanic college students adjust to the psychological challenges of adjusting to college life. Experiences with diversity outside of the classroom – through conversations with acquaintances – may prove to be a valuable resource in aiding the successful transition of students from diverse backgrounds into the collegiate atmosphere. The findings of the current study suggest this may be especially true for Hispanic students, who report more frequent experiences with diversity outside the classroom. These results may offer support for an inclusive and comprehensive approach to diversity efforts at postsecondary institutions. In addition to outreach efforts in admissions and incorporating multicultural curricular elements into the college experience, institutions of higher learning may also benefit from enhancing outside-the-classroom opportunities for diverse groups of students to engage with peers of different backgrounds. Such efforts may occur through student affairs programming, counseling center groups, and extracurricular student organizations. These efforts can be aided through comprehensive training in critical issues of diversity of key college personnel, such as counselors, resident assistants, and program directors, coordinators, and advisors (Constantine, 2005).

Within the CRT framework, Savas (2014) notes a “one-size-fits all” (p. 516) approach to education does not effectively address the unique worldview and holistic needs of diverse groups of students. The CRT lens offers a tool in which the idiosyncratic worldview of diverse students can be centralized and counter-narratives produced. One such counter-narrative is the understanding that students from diverse backgrounds experience pressures and challenges during their college years that differ from the issues of students from the dominant group (Ladson-Billings & Tate IV, 1995;
Such pressures include stereotype threat, differential treatment, family obligations, and financial strain. The unique pressures faced by students from diverse backgrounds can be addressed through extracurricular experiences, both informal (such as spontaneous conversations with acquaintances from diverse backgrounds) and formal (such as programming and safe spaces designed for multicultural populations). College personnel in position to facilitate these experiences – such as counselors and student affairs practitioners – should receive training related to critical race perspectives as a way to develop deeper understanding of the social, political, and economic context of the racialized experiences of diverse groups of college students (Constantine, 2005).

For instance, the collectivist orientation of some individuals from diverse backgrounds (Sue & Sue, 2013), such as Hispanic students, may help explain the psychological benefits that can be gained through social support networks that includes interactions with diverse others. While other cultural groups also display a collectivist orientation, such as people of African descent, it is possible that Hispanic students experience or perceive more benefit from exercising a collectivist orientation in college spaces than do other groups. In this context, postsecondary institutions with diverse student bodies can enhance diversity initiatives by expanding opportunities for outside-the-classroom interactions between students, so that students with collectivist orientations are able to express their strengths through social support networking. Expanded outreach through student affairs, counseling, and multicultural programming can help students develop holistically into successful college students.

An interesting finding from the current study relates to a lack of significant differences in frequency of experiences with diversity for African-American/Black and
Caucasian students. This finding suggests students from these groups remain more isolated from their diverse peers than do Hispanic students. From a CRT perspective, negative race relations have historically occurred more often between White Americans and Black Americans (Ladson-Billings & Tate IV, 1995; Savas, 2014). Perhaps these lingering racial tensions help explain results from the current study that suggest Black and White students as a group interact less with peers from backgrounds different than their own. While additional research is needed, this finding offers preliminary support for expanded outreach to help all students engage with their college campus community in more meaningful ways.

Key findings of the current study and the potential benefits of expanded outreach to diverse groups of students may be illustrated through Yosso’s (2005) model of cultural community capital. Yosso hypothesized six types of cultural community wealth that individuals may possess to varying degrees: aspirational capital, linguistic capital, familial capital, social capital, navigational capital, and resistant capital. **Aspirational capital** is a type of resilience that relates to the ability of people from oppressed backgrounds to continue hoping and dreaming for a better future, even in the face of real and perceived barriers to success. **Linguistic capital** references the social and intellectual capabilities gained from communicating in more than one language and/or styles. **Familial capital** relates to family relationships and includes knowledge that relates to cultural history, memory, norms, and institutions. **Social capital** refers to a network of social support and community resources that offer practical and emotional support. **Navigational capital** refers to a person’s ability to effectively maneuver within social institutions, with the recognition that many social institutions were not created
with diverse people in mind. *Resistant capital* relates to the legacy of struggle and resistance in Communities of Color, including skills and knowledge that reflect oppositional behavior in response to oppressive structures.

In Yosso’s (2005) model, each type of cultural capital represents a type of community cultural wealth that can serve as a resource for individuals to achieve personal and academic/professional success. In the context of the current study, such capital may act as a mechanism through which students of color are able to develop holistically into successful college students. For example, the current study results indicate Hispanic students report more frequent experiences with diversity outside the classroom. Perhaps these students seek interactions with diverse peers more frequently because it increases their navigational capital, their ability to maneuver the college student experience. Navigational capital is a useful strategy for students of color as it “acknowledges individual agency within institutional constraints, but it also connects to social networks that facilitate community navigation through places and spaces including schools, the job market and the health care and judicial systems” (p. 80). In a similar way, Hispanic students may also utilize social capital, which are networks of peers and social acquaintances who share pragmatic and emotional support in navigating social institutions. Through the use of both navigational and social capital Hispanic students who participated in this study may find that informal interpersonal interactions with peers from different backgrounds offer support and resources that enhance the college experience.

The current research also found that African-American/Black and Caucasian students report significantly less frequent experiences with diversity outside of the
classroom. Perhaps these students perceive or experience less gain in their navigational capital from interactions with diverse peers as compared to their Hispanic counterparts. In support of this view, there is research that suggests Black college students derive less benefit from interactions with diverse peers than do their counterparts from other racial/ethnic groups (Solórzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000; Sue, 2004). Further research may examine the perceived emotional cost – such as encountering racial microaggressions – some Black students experience when interacting with peers from diverse backgrounds. This emotional cost may help explain why Black students interact less frequently with peers from diverse backgrounds; some Black students may conduct a cost-benefit type of analysis and conclude potential gain in navigational capital does not outweigh the perceived or real emotional toll of diverse interactions. Additional research is needed to better understand the unique ways in which different groups of students experience diverse interactions with their peers and how cultural capital may contribute to these racialized experiences outside the classroom.

In addition, Black students may engage in less frequent experiences with diversity as a type of resistance capital (Yosso, 2005). Resistance capital relates to the skills and knowledge that develop from an oppositional standpoint. This form of capital is grounded in the historical legacy of resistance to oppressive entities that exist in Communities of Color. College students may experience an increase in awareness about oppressive forces through exposure to curricular and extracurricular activities. This increased race awareness may then propel Students of Color through the stages of
the racial identity models proposed as an extension of Erik Erikson’s (1946; 1956) developmental view of ego development.

The influential Nigrescence model of Black identity development was proposed by Cross in the 1970s and later refined to explain the psychological changes Black individuals undergo as race consciousness develops (Worrell, Cross, & Vandiver, 2001). The four stages of the Cross model include: Pre-Encounter, Encounter, Immersion-Emersion, and Internalization. The Immersion-Emersion stage includes sub-stages in which the individual may experience anti-White sentiment and/or heavy involvement with elements of Black culture. In the context of the current study, it is possible that Black students in Immersion-Emersion stage of racial development may actively avoid interactions with diverse peers as a form of resistance. As Black racial identity continues to develop towards internalization, a multiculturally inclusive identity may form. Black students in the Internalization stage would thus be more likely to interact more frequently with peers from diverse backgrounds than would students in the Immersion-Emersion stage. Hence, black identity development models may offer insight into the findings of this study in relation to Black students reporting less frequent interactions with their diverse peers. In this way, Black students may create and maintain connections with other Black students as a form of identity development and as a form of resistance capital.

The current study also found White students reported less frequent experiences with diverse peers than their Hispanic classmates. Navigational capital as discussed in Yosso’s (2005) model may be used to explain this finding as well. From this perspective, it is possible that White students perceive less gain in navigational capital
from diverse interactions. A CRT lens offers support for this view, in that, institutions of higher learning were initially created and designed for White student populations (Ladson-Billings & Tate IV, 1995). Consequently, it is likely that many White students arrive at college campuses with a higher level of navigational capital – an understanding of how to effectively maneuver within the college space – since these spaces were originally created for the purpose of educating students from the dominant (White) group. Hence, White students who already understand the college system may see less benefit from interacting with diverse peers as a way to enhance their navigational capital.

In a related vein of study, Smith (2006) used a regression model analysis to examine a sample of 293 diverse college students at a predominantly White postsecondary institution. Smith found that White and Asian junior-year students were generally more opposed to diverse initiatives in and out of the classroom, perhaps as a “reactionary racism ideology, which is a negative, reactionary sentiment that social changes to Blacks’ demands have ‘gone too far’ (p. 589). The Smith study potentially provides additional explanation of the results from the current study. Namely, White students may hold feelings of resentment and anxiety relating to the perceived social and educational gains of non-White students. These negative feelings may then lead to a decrease in the frequency with which White students seek out experiences with their diverse peers.

Smith’s (2006) findings also suggest that White student opposition to curriculum-based diversity initiatives were related to already held negative beliefs about Black students, namely a perception that Black students’ work ethic and values were
incompatible with American values. It seems likely that students who hold such negative beliefs about their peers from diverse backgrounds would then be less likely to seek out experiences with their diverse classmates. Further research would be useful in improving our understanding of the underlying beliefs and mechanisms that contribute to some students experiencing more frequent interactions with peers from diverse backgrounds in contrast to students who experience less frequent diverse interactions.

The current study did not find any significant differences in the frequency of experiences with diversity related to students’ gender or generational status. Replicating this study using other quantitative methods of data collection, such as a different self-report survey, may provide additional insights. Further research using qualitative methods may also be helpful in better understanding more subtle differences in the types of diverse interactions different groups of students are experiencing outside of the college classroom.

**Findings for Research Question Two.** For this question, a regression model analysis was conducted to see whether increased experiences with diversity outside the classroom could predict academic success for diverse groups of college students. The results indicated no significant differences in academic success based on frequency of experiences with diversity regardless of gender, race/ethnicity, or generational status. The current study found differences in academic success based on race – with White students achieving higher mean GPAs as a group than their African-American and Hispanic peers. However, the current research did not find these group differences to be attributed to more frequent experiences with diversity (i.e. higher EWDI scores). In sum, the regression model used in this study did not find any significant group
differences based on gender, race/ethnicity, or generational status on the impact of diversity on academic success.

Within a CRT and multicultural education framework, this finding is surprising. The CRT perspective centralizes the experience of race and racism in American life, including college campuses. A CRT lens would presuppose racialized differences in academic success based on more frequent interactions with diverse others. This view is supported by research that suggests diversity initiatives provide positive academic and social benefits for students of all backgrounds (Shaw, 2005; Smith, 2006). However, the findings of the current study do not support this view. One reason for this finding may be related to the quality of diversity interactions, rather than the quantity as measured by the EWDI. Students who experience more frequent negative diverse interactions – such as racial microaggressions – may suffer from negative outcomes (i.e. anxiety, depression, lack of motivation, decreased academic success). Future research that considers the impact of both the quantity and quality of diverse interactions may help to further explain this finding.

In addition, the Banks and Banks (2007) model of multicultural education posits curricular and extracurricular exposure to diversity can provide educational benefit as well. Diverse interactions – such as student acquaintances and topics of conversation -- with peers outside the classroom were measured in this study. Yet, the study regression model was unable to find a relationship between experiences with diversity and academic success (as measured by GPA). Neither gender, race/ethnicity, nor generational status produced significant effects on academic success for students with
higher frequency of diverse experiences. Suggestions for future practice and research will be discussed below.

**Recommendations for Practice**

The results of the current study suggest some groups of college students have varying rates of frequency with diverse experiences outside the classroom. Hispanic students had more frequent experiences with diversity than their Black or White counterparts. Differences in students’ cultural capital and racial identity development may help explain group differences in students’ experiences with diversity. College/University personnel who work with student development – such as counselors, student affairs practitioners, and mentors – can help students develop strategies that maximize cultural capital and promote positive racial identity development. Such strategies might include referrals to student cultural organizations on campus, conducting counseling support groups geared toward the issues of students from diverse backgrounds, and/or discussions about college student identity development, including racial/cultural models of development.

Key college/university personnel can be offered comprehensive training that includes the knowledge, skills, and awareness of culturally competent practice (Sue & Sue, 2013). Comprehensive training to work effectively and ethically with modern diverse students would include theories outside of the dominant canon, such as critical race perspectives, racial/cultural identity models, and multicultural education models. Counselor education training programs usually include theories and practice from diverse perspectives. Counselor educators are also trained as social justice advocates who work to help marginalized people and address oppression in our society. Hence,
counselor educators and counselors are uniquely trained and well-positioned to help develop and implement training curriculums that enhance diversity initiatives.

**Recommendations for Future Research**

The findings of this study suggest critical race theory, cultural community wealth, and multicultural education models can be useful tools for deepening understanding of college students from diverse backgrounds. The CRT framework of analysis positions storytelling as a central tool for examining the experiences of people of color (Ladson-Billings & Tate IV, 1995; Savas, 2014). A phenomenological approach to the research questions might include ethnography, interviews, and narratives. Additional research that combines quantitative and qualitative methods of analysis in examining the impact of diverse experiences outside the classroom may prove useful.

More research into Yosso’s (2005) model of cultural community wealth would also be a useful line of inquiry. A future study might explore the cultural capital strategies students use to achieve success in college. A related study might explore counseling interventions – in individual and group settings – that promote the beneficial use of cultural capital for college success. In this way, future research can help discover ways of empowering students through the effective use of cultural capital.

Future research into the relationship between racial/cultural identity development, experiences with diversity, and academic success may also prove beneficial. College students at differing stages of racial/cultural identity development may engage in diverse experiences in different ways, which may then impact academic outcomes in differing ways. A better understanding of these underlying mechanisms may help guide
counseling and student affairs professionals toward interventions and outreach that more effectively reach underserved populations of students.

**Limitations**

There are limitations to this study that should be considered when interpreting the results. Archival data reduces the ability of the researcher to control data collection methods and can limit the ability of researchers to conduct follow-up study. Self-reported data has the potential to be skewed toward more positive self-attributions, wherein students may report engaging in pro-social behaviors more frequently than is actually the case. In addition, the language of the CSEQ instrument was utilized for this study in order to remain consistent with the archived data collection methods. The survey prompt asked respondents, “What is your racial or ethnic identification? (Fill in all that apply)” (CSEQ Assessment Program, 2007, p. 3). This prompt suggests race and ethnicity are combined into one homogenous category, though individuals with multiple identities may experience overlap within their racial and ethnic identity. For example, Hispanic (ethnicity) students may also identify as Black (race). The confounding of these identity variables may have impacted the study results in ways that suggest further research is warranted. Additionally, the study sample included students who largely answered “often” or “very often” in terms of frequency of diverse interactions. Hence, the study sample is skewed towards students who more frequently engage in diverse interactions and this skewedness may have impacted the study results. Lastly, the study uses grade point average to measure academic success; however, other milestones could also be used to measure academic success, such as persistence and graduation rates.
Summary

An increasing number of students in the United States are from diverse backgrounds. The 21st century has seen more women, minority, and first-generation students enroll at postsecondary institutions than ever in our nation’s history. There is a wealth of research literature supporting the benefits of diversity on educational outcomes. To help all students experience personal and academic success educational institutions must take steps to understand the unique goals, strengths, challenges, and issues that impact the modern student. This study reflects a positive and strengths-based view of diversity by examining its impact on student engagement and academic success. Findings of this study indicate Hispanic college students report more frequent experiences with diversity outside the classroom when compared to their Black and White peers. The study findings did not indicate a relationship between experiences with diversity and academic success. Critical Race Theory, Cultural Capital, and Multicultural Education served as a framework for interpreting the study results. Suggestions for future research and practice were discussed.

Conclusion

The research presented here adds to our understanding of diverse groups of college students and how they interact with each other in informal social spaces. Developing deeper, more nuanced ways of understanding students from diverse backgrounds can help ensure educators, administrators, and policy-makers tailor their approach to the needs of all students as a way of promoting successful outcomes. An increasing number of students in the United States are from diverse backgrounds. There is a wealth of research literature supporting the benefits of diversity on
psychological and educational outcomes. The 21st century has seen more women, minority, and first-generation students enroll at postsecondary institutions than ever in our nation’s history. Postsecondary institutions have a responsibility to ensure all students are provided the opportunity to achieve. Beyond the basic humanistic principle that all students deserve the right to benefit from positive educational experiences, there are also social and economic reasons to promote the growth and development of diverse groups of students in the U.S. education system. Developing productive citizens and an active workforce is central to the fulfillment of the American Dream. From early learning initiatives to higher education objectives, all stakeholders – educators, administrators, counselors, advisors, and mentors – must seek ways to close the educational achievement gap so that are increasingly diverse student population is able to achieve success.

To help students experience personal and academic success educational institutions must take steps to understand the unique goals, strengths, challenges, and issues that impact the modern student. In higher education settings, services and resources that are tailored for students from diverse backgrounds are a necessary adjunct to traditional systems of educational experiences. An example would be the federally-funded TRIO programs in operation across the country since the 1960s as part of the “War on Poverty”. National studies have found programs such as Upward Bound, Talent Search, and Student Support Services” have been highly successful in increasing college enrollment and graduation among low-income, first-generation students and students with disabilities (Pell Institute, 2009). The TRIO programs offer services, support, and resources to diverse groups of students and TRIO personnel are
able to develop specialized skills and knowledge to help students achieve success. The TRIO framework includes professional development opportunities at the state, regional, and national levels through organizations that advocate for these student populations, such as The Council for Opportunity in Education (COE). The ability of TRIO programs to provide specialized services for diverse student populations, combined with collaborative efforts with traditional institutional resources, has proven to be an effective model for helping students from diverse backgrounds achieve educational success. The publicly-funded education system is experiencing a period of increasingly intense scrutiny as state budgets tighten and federal dollars fluctuate. Given this dynamic, developing and investing in research, training, programs, and partnerships that enhance the success of students from diverse backgrounds would seem to be a wise approach for stakeholders who are interested in helping all students reach their full potential.
REFERENCES


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APPENDIX A

Experiences with Diversity Index (CSEQ Norms for the 4th Edition)

STACQ2 Became acquainted with students whose family background (economic, social) was different from yours

STACQ4 Became acquainted with students whose race or ethnic background was different from yours

STACQ5 Became acquainted with students from another country

STACQ8 Had serious discussions with students whose religious beliefs were very different from yours

STACQ9 Had serious discussions with students whose race or ethnic background was different from yours

STACQ10 Had serious discussions with students from a country different from yours

CONTPS3 Conversations about different lifestyles, customs, and religions with students, family members, co-workers, etc.)

GNOTHERS Developing the ability to get along with different kinds of people

GNWORLD Gaining knowledge about other parts of the world and other people (Asia, Africa, South America, etc.)

GNPHILS Becoming aware of different philosophies, cultures, and ways of life