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Academically High-Achieving Students of Color Attending a Low Resource School and Their
Academic Resiliency: A Qualitative Inquiry

by

DIEP DOAN
DISSERTATION

Submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

in

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in the

OFFICE OF GRADUATE STUDIES

of the

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA

DAVIS

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2021

i

Academically High-Achieving Students of Color Attending a Low Resource School and Their
Academic Resiliency: A Qualitative Inquiry

ABSTRACT

Students of color who attend low resource schools face more obstacles because of the

systemic barriers toward students of color and toward students who attend low resource schools.

This qualitative study aims to explore how academically high achieving students of color

overcome obstacles and how these students perceive in-school support. This population was

chosen because they provide a unique perspective on the obstacles students with similar

demographic backgrounds must overcome to achieve academic success. These participants are

considered success stories; however, this does not diminish the obstacles they overcame,

especially if the obstacles are systemic. Learning how these students perceive in-school support

is informative of how schools can support students of color who attend low resource schools in

ways that they feel supported and cared for. Seven semi-structured interviews were conducted

(via Zoom, due to the COVID pandemic) to learn about the participants' lived experiences and

insights into how they overcome their obstacles. They also shared their experiences with in-

school support such as teachers, counselors, and college preparatory programs.

Phenomenological variant ecological systems theory (PVEST; Spencer et al., 1997) was used to

understand the participants' lived experiences and how they perceived in-school support. This

framework provided a way to understand how participants made sense of their experiences with

in-school support and used that as the foundation for how they utilize in-school support with

future obstacles. Four themes emerged from the findings during the data analysis: systemic

discriminations, the academic resilience narrative, types of in-school support participants

utilized, and meaning-making of in-school support. These findings showed that the education

ii

system needs to remove systemic barriers that hinder students' academic success, and the narrative of academic resilience is still extant in the education system. Most of the barriers listed by the participants can be remedied within the education system to create a more inclusive and supportive education system for students regardless of race or socioeconomic status.

Keywords: students of color, in-school support, phenomenological variant ecological systems theory, academic resilience

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my parents. I can't think of a better way honor both of you for your unconditional support, your teaching, and your selflessness for your children. This dissertation is also dedicated to students of color, and I hope that students of color in the future will have less barriers to overcome.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF FIGURES

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Background

When no one even cared

The rose it grew from concrete

Keepin all these dreams

Provin nature's laws wrong

It learned how to walk without havin feet

It came from concrete

The Rose that Grew from Concrete – Tupac Shakur

The lines above are an excerpt from the late rapper Tupac Shakur's 1999 poem from *The Rose that Grew from Concrete* (Shakur, 1999). This poem is representative of people who have thrived under conditions that are not supportive of their growth. It also illustrates students of color who excel academically while living in poverty. These students thrive in an environment that is not supportive to them, but they have dreams and prove the system wrong. However, while celebrating the roses that grew from concrete, The education system must also strive to change to turn the concrete into fertile soil so that all roses can prosper. Unfortunately, research reveals that students of color disproportionately attend lower resource schools and experience institutional and structural discrimination (Fahle et al., 2020; Gorski, 2013; Wiener, 2006).

Students of color are disproportionately living in poverty and attending schools with limited resources (NCES, 2013.; Fahle et al., 2020; Gorski, 2013; McFarland et al., 2019; Owens et al., 2016; Reardon, 2016; Rumberger, 2006; National Equity Atlas, 2018; Wiener, 2006). Nationally, the percentage of Black (30%) and Latinx (24%) children living in poverty is higher than the national average (16%), while the percentage of White children (9%) living in poverty is

below the national average (Children's Defense Fund, 2020a). In California, the percentage of

Black (28%) and Latinx (23%) children living in poverty is once again higher than the state

average (17%), while the percentage of White (9%) children living in poverty is lower than the

state average (Children's Defense Fund, 2020b). Even though Asian Pacific Islander (API)

students are living in poverty at a lower rate than Black and Latinx students at 11%, they still

represent a higher percentage than White students (Children's Defense Fund, 2019; National

Center for Children in Poverty, 2016). Students of color who live in poverty tend to attend low

resource schools since they are the students' residential schools (Fahle et al., 2020; National

Equity Atlas, 2018; Owens et al., 2016; Rasinski, 2014; Reardon, 2016; Rumberger, 2006). The

National Center for Education Statistics defined low resource schools as schools where 75.1% or

higher of the student body qualifies for the free or reduced price lunch (FRPL) program

(McFarland et al., 2019). Attending low resource schools comes with disadvantages such as

dilapidated physical infrastructure, a shortage of qualified teachers, a watered-down curriculum,

lack of access to advanced placement classes, and limited access to Advanced Placement (AP)

preparation courses (Conchas, 2006; Fahle et al., 2020; Gorski, 2013; Rumberger, 2006; Wiener,

2006).

Compounding inequitable education due to structural inequities that emerge in housing

and neighborhood schools, these students also face systemic discrimination in an educational

system that has been designed to keep the dominant group in power (Love, 2019). The

educational system frames students of color and students who attend low resource schools from a

deficit model by blaming the students and their families for the opportunity gap (Gorski, 2013;

Tabron & Venzant Chambers, 2019; Valencia, 2010). Some examples of deficit thinking are

teachers' low expectations toward African American students or that students of color lack the

motivation to do well in school (Tabron & Venzant Chambers, 2019). The school system mirrors the culture of middle-class White Americans and uses it as the standard when measuring all its students and families (Yosso, 2005). Many students of color are holders of knowledge and engage in knowledge production when the education system is reflective of their culture instead of middle-class White American culture. In fact, policies and practices are geared toward teaching middle-class White values and assimilating students of color with these values. However, the education system should reflect and value the cultures of students of color (Love, 2019).

Research has also revealed how the deficit framing of students' academic identities has resulted in an opportunity gap that illustrates disparate test scores for students attending public schools. For example, the reading scores of 85% of Black and 80% of Latinx 8th graders in U.S. public schools suggest students are not reading at grade level compared to 54% of White students (Children's Defense Fund, 2017). Additionally, only 75% of Black and 78% of Latinx students graduated from public high school during the 2014–2015 school year compared to 88% of White students who obtained a diploma. Furthermore, national public schools suspend Black and Latinx students at rates of 23% and 11%, respectively—a higher rate than White students at 7%. Students of color are suspended at a higher rate but experience less academic success due to the structural inequities that are foundational to the U.S. educational system.

One way of understanding these assessments and the academic success journey of students of color has been by exploring students' academic resilience (Morales & Trotman, 2004). Academic resilience has been conceptualized as a process of understanding the stories of individuals who are academically successful despite obstacles that prevent most others with the same backgrounds from succeeding (Morales, 2010; Morales & Trotman, 2010). Academic

resilience acknowledges that students of color living in poverty must know how to leverage protective and risk factors in their lives to be academically successful. Perceived risk and protective factors stem from Garmezy's (1991) triadic characteristics of a person: disposition, family, and environment. Each of these components can either be a source of risk or protective factors. The risk and protective factors are distinct and unique to each person's life experiences and the nuanced ways they make meaning of their experiences (Morales, 2008; Morales & Trotman, 2004, 2010). However, academic resilience puts the burden on the students to be the drivers in their academic success instead of naming and addressing the systemic barriers that are in place that create an inequitable learning environment for students of color attending low resource schools. In other words, this deficit framing puts the blame and the responsibility on the students to overcome systemic barriers in an inequitable environment. This study explores the systemic barriers that students of color attending low resource schools endure to achieve academic excellence. I employed the framework of phenomenological variant of ecological systems theory (PVEST) to understand the meaning-making process behind students' in-school experiences. The outcome of the students' meaning-making process ultimately determines which resources and staff students are willing to seek out versus the ones that they avoid.

Understanding how students perceive in-school support could inform leadership practices and future policies that allow students to thrive and create pathways to graduation and postsecondary educational opportunities. This study provides insight into how students of color living in poverty perceive negative and protective encounters within their in-school experiences. This knowledge can help schools form guidance on how to approach students in ways that students feel safe and valuable. Supportive programs can benefit from this knowledge in recruiting a wider range of students who may not have been recruited before. They can also

4

reflect on practices that students perceive to be risk factors to prevent students from disengaging from school. This study can help guide policy making to include the students' perspectives in creating policies that will reduce structural barriers and increase access for all students.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative study is to understand how high-achieving academic students of color attending low resource public schools negotiate obstacles and perceive in-school support and make meaning of their P-12 educational experiences. The purpose of this study is to center students' voices and learn about their experiences in P-12 systems. This study also highlights structures and practices that may marginalize this group of students.

Research Questions

1. *In what ways do academically high achieving students of color attending a low resource school overcome challenges?*
2. *How do academically high achieving students of color attending a low resource school perceive in-school support?*

CHAPTER 2: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Phenomenological Variant Ecological Systems Theory

This chapter discusses a theoretical framework that helps in understanding how students overcome obstacles and perceive in-school support. This framework, PVEST, was conceptualized by Margaret Beale Spencer in 1995 to create an alternative way of understanding the developmental process of students of color. The chapter begins by providing an overview of PVEST, a theoretical framework that combines Bronfenbrenner's ecological system theory with phenomenology. I then dive deeply into PVEST's five domains and how these are operationalized. Lastly, I connect how PVEST provides a framework for understanding how students utilize in-school support programs and how they make meaning of their interactions with these programs.

PVEST is a developmental framework that integrates Bronfenbrenner's ecological framework and phenomenology to understand a person's development (Bronfenbrenner, 1981; Spencer, 1995; Spencer et al., 1997, 2001). This theory provides a pathway to understanding the complex interactions individuals engage in overtime and acknowledges systemic inequities as foundational to a person's developmental trajectory. Spencer (1995) posits that the dominant theories of development do not consider systemic inequities and ignore the impact of racism on individuals' developmental processes. This results in viewing developmental processes of children of color as pathological because they are different from White middle class children's developmental processes (Spencer, 1995). PVEST considers the phenomenological experiences of youth of color and the impact of historical, environmental, and sociocultural forces and how these interact and influence individuals. Even though Margaret Spencer developed PVEST to gear toward African American youth at the infancy of the theory's development, this model is

6

also applicable to other people of color because of its ability to take into account structural factors, cultural influences, and a person's phenomenological experiences and their perceptions of the ecological system (Swanson et al., 2003). PVEST is also able to capture the uniqueness of each person with the understanding that there is no monolithic group and that there is diversity within each group (Swanson et al., 2003). More importantly, PVEST is equipped to consider the intersectionality of each person because the model emphasizes a person's perception and the person's own meaning-making process (Velez & Spencer, 2018).

PVEST integrates principles from Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory, which is a process-person-context-time framework that seeks to understand how humans develop by examining interactions between the person and their environmental factors (Bronfenbrenner, 1981). Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory posits that multiple systems influence the development of children and young people. These complex systems include the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem, and chronosystem. The interactions between the person and their environment are understood by contextualizing the social and cultural practices at a particular point in time. The microsystem consists of direct relationships and experiences of an individual, which includes the self's immediate social and physical environment such as home, family, and the school settings for a child (Bronfenbrenner, 1981). The mesosystem includes the relationships between the microsystems of the individual such as the relationship between the parents and the child's friends or the relationships between family members (Bronfenbrenner, 1981). The exosystem comprises settings that the individual is not part of but still impact the individual, such as the parents' workplace or the class a sibling attends (Bronfenbrenner, 1981). Lastly, the macrosystem comprises institutions such as the government, and P-20 educational systems (Bronfenbrenner, 1981). Bronfenbrenner's theory provides a model to understand how

the ecological system influences a person's development. PVEST provides a framework to understand how individuals make meanings of their experiences by acknowledging the ways in which ecological factors influence the individuals' development (Spencer, 1995).

Central to the ecological context is understanding the deep-rooted impact discrimination based on race and socioeconomic status has had on students of color (Lee, 2009). Lee (2009) discusses how the use of language, child-rearing practices, and social norms that are associated with White middle-class Americans are social capital considering the norms of child developmental processes (Lee, 2009). Students of color are raised with different social norms that are culturally relevant to their family culture but are viewed as deviant. For example, there is a deficit orientation toward language practices of English learners and students from low socioeconomic status (SES) families (Lee, 2009). Language practices that are used in the education system align with the language practices common in White middle-class families, which penalizes students of color. However, it needs to be noted that there is also diversity within the experiences of Caucasian students that these theories do not consider; there is diversity in each group of people (Spencer, 2006). Each culture may have a different family structure and relationships among family members, and there is also diversity among each culture (Lee, 2009).

Another ecological factor that is impactful to the development of students of color is the school environment. Research and developmental theories tend to blame youth of color who do not succeed academically instead of examining the structural inequities that perpetuate long term economic and social barriers these youth must navigate in school (Spencer, 2006; Spencer et al., 2001). Such analyses reinforce assumptions. The first assumption in this line of inquiry is that youths' experiences are monolithic and follow a similar human development timeline. The

second assumption is a person's race can dictate a person's life experience such as their family structure and culture. However, this is proven to be false when risk factors assigned to students of color are considered deterministic in nature, and the expected result is for students of color to fail. There are students of color who are successful despite the systemic barriers that are in place. This study examines academically high-achieving students of color and how they overcome systemic barriers.

The understanding of the cultures of students of color is also insufficient, which causes misinterpretation of behaviors and intents within the education system. This is important because misinterpretation of behaviors and intents penalize students of color in school with African American and Latinx students being suspended at a higher rate than any other group of students, which results in missed instruction days that cannot be reclaimed (Children's Defense Fund, 2017). If education leaders and school staff have a better understanding of the culture of students of color, less students of color would be suspended from school (Monroe, 2006). The cultures of students of color are often viewed with a deficit framework, and their cultures tend to be framed as risk factors instead of protective factors. In fact, Fordham and Ogbu (1986) asserted that African American culture does not value education because of fictive kinship. Fictive kinship is "a kinship like relationship between persons not related by blood or marriage in a society, but who have some reciprocal social or economic relationship" (Fordham & Ogbu, 1986, p. 183). Fordham and Ogbu (1986) framed loyalty to culture as one of the reasons African Americans do not strive academically at school because the culture believes that striving academically is assimilating to the White culture, "acting white." Fordham and Ogbu (1986) theorized that African American youth learned fictive kinship from their parents, and being viewed as Black is more important to them than their education. However, research has refuted these

9

conceptualizations and focused on culture being a protective factor for African American students (Butler-Barnes et al., 2017; Graves, 2014).

Butler-Barnes et al. (2013) refuted Fordham and Ogbu's (1986) research asserting that African American students who reported higher personal and cultural assets had the highest academic persistence. This study consisted of 220 African American 7th, 8th, and 9th graders from three socioeconomically diverse school districts in a midwestern metropolitan area. The student participants answered a questionnaire that asked them about their perceived school-based racial discrimination, racial pride, self-efficacy beliefs, and self-acceptance beliefs. Butler-Barnes et al. (2013) concluded that students who reported the highest levels of racial pride, self-efficacy, and self-acceptance had the highest academic persistence. Butler-Barnes et al.'s (2003) results refuted Fordham and Ogbu's (1986) claim that African American students must "act white" to achieve academic success. Similarly, in Graves' (2004) study, African American students who acknowledged the existence of racism and stood in solidarity with other oppressed groups were more likely to display academic resilience. Lastly, Spencer et al. (2001) found that African American students valued school and high academic performance. They also found that these students reported high on self-esteem and low on Eurocentric racial attitudes. High Eurocentric value is defined as "White salience attitudes and values and identification with anti-Black stereotypes" (Spencer et al., 2001, p. 26). This study surveyed 562 African American adolescents between the ages of 11–16, attending public middle schools in a metropolitan, southeastern city in the U.S. In three out of the four schools, 80% to 90% of student participants qualified for free or reduced lunch (FRL), and in the fourth school, 58% qualified for FRL (Spencer et al., 2001). In combination, Graves (2004), Butler-Barnes et al. (2003), and Spencer et al. (2001) highlighted the importance of understanding the cultural identities of African

10

American students and asserted that understanding the cultural identities of students of color must be incorporated into developmental processes to support students of color in building healthy selves with educational leaders and teachers.

Another ecological context that is important to consider is students' community and neighborhoods and how socioeconomic status intersects and impacts students' living conditions. To date, a high percentage of students of color are also living in poverty. These youths are facing more stressors in these conditions that need to be considered. Some conditions to consider include attending high poverty schools, access to adequate healthcare, and access to basic needs (Gorski, 2013). The last context factor that is overlooked is the school context. Students of color who are from low-income families often attend schools that have subpar school conditions and an opportunity gap. It is well researched that school can be a source of stress for students of color because of the additional hardships due to the inequitable nature of the education system toward students of color (Love, 2019).

The phenomenological approach encapsulates the whole person with all their identities instead of treating each identity in a silo. Velez and Spencer (2018) argued that identities are not additive, such that a Black African American woman does not have separate experiences of being oppressed as a woman and as an African American. Intersectionality is the unique ways multiple identities of a person interact and result in the unique experiences a person faces (Crenshaw, 1989). Crenshaw (1989) asserted that the experiences of African American women because of their minority status of being women and people of color are greater than the sum of racism and sexism alone. An African American woman's race and gender identities make her prone to face oppressing situations that a White woman or an African American man may not face. The identity of being an African American woman is not an additive part of oppression but

is its own unique experience (Velez & Spencer, 2018). This concept is extended to the

intersectionality of students of color because each student has their own set of unique identities

such as their ethnicity, sexuality, gender, neighborhood, family composition, and many more

(Velez & Spencer, 2018). This aligns with my research because each student has many identities,

and PVEST is able to highlight each student's phenomenological experience. The

phenomenological approach is one way to explore how students who reside and engage in

similar geographical and educational contexts may have different educational outcomes. PVEST

can take into account the differential experiences through its meaning-making process as each

participant has their own intersectionality, and no one participant has the same exact life

experiences. The next section discusses the five domains of PVEST.

Five Domains of Phenomenological Variant of Ecological Systems Theory

PVEST is categorized into five domains: net vulnerability, stress management, reactive

coping strategies, emergent identities, and life-stage outcome (Spencer, 2006). The domains are

continuous and bidirectional as the individuals continue to experience life and cope with life

obstacles. Figure 1 is a presentation of Spencer's PVEST model, which includes five domains

and how they interact with each other and apply to students' P-12 educational journey.

Figure 1

The Phenomenological Variant of Ecological Systems Theory from Spencer (1995)
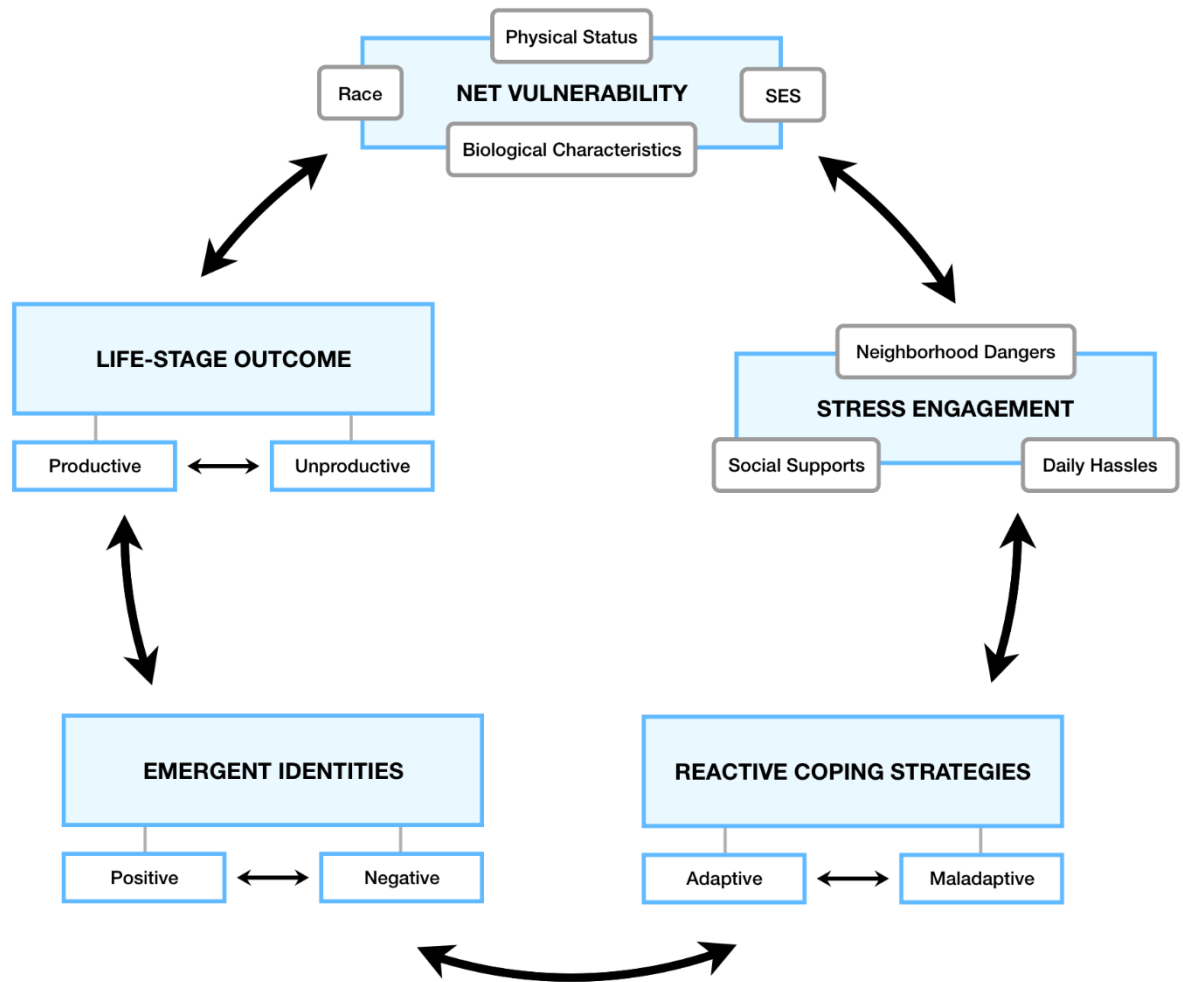
The first domain of the PVEST model is net vulnerability, which was initially referred to as risk contributors (Spencer, 1995; Spencer et al., 1997; Swanson et al., 2002). The focus of this domain are the risk and protective factors a person brings with them. Some risk factors include "socioeconomic conditions such as poverty, imposed expectations regarding race and gender stereotypes, and larger historical processes including racial subordination and discrimination" (Swanson et al., 2002, p. 76). Some protective factors include social support, one's history of cultural socialization, and adult role models (Swanson et al., 2002). Net vulnerability is the

balance between protective and risk factors of an individual. Net vulnerability refers to factors

that can potentially cause challenges in a person's life (Swanson et al., 2002). For example, if a

student is a first-generation student and their parents have never attended higher education

institutions in America, this student could have a harder time navigating the American education

system. The education system can combat this by providing workshops for immigrant parents to

provide them with information regarding the operation of America's education system.

Self-appraisal also occurs in the net vulnerability domain, which is the process by which

a person begins to make meaning of their experiences and begins to form their identities from

their lived experience thus far (Spencer et al., 1997). Self-appraisal is a continuous process

throughout the whole model as a person is continuously reflecting on their experiences and

making sense of these experiences with their personal characteristics. During the beginning stage

of a person's life, cultural values are important because they provide the information needed to

understand the environmental experiences (Swanson et al., 2002). As a person gains more

experiences, the outcome of past experiences in combination with cultural values are important

for development.

The next domain is stress engagement, which is when a person experiences a stressful

situation that they must cope with (Spencer et al., 1997; Velez & Spencer, 2018). In this domain,

the individual is facing challenges that require some sort of a response. This is when protective

factors are actualized and may be physical or symbolic ones. Race, gender, and sexual

orientation are social forces that are also involved in how the individual perceives challenges or

how they respond to the problem. There could also be other ways a student may choose to

resolve the problem depending on their past experiences and what may have resulted in desirable

outcomes. For example, a student who identified as gay may face situations where they are

discriminated for their sexual orientation. Spencer et al. (1997) studied 266 male and female African American students to learn whether support variables help mitigate negative learning attitudes. The study was set up with negative learning attitude as the independent variable, while hardships, perceived support, and coping method were the dependent variables. The hardships these students examined were female headship (the mother is the head of household with no husband or live-in boyfriend present in the home) and whether the student experienced any stressors within the last year. Perceived support was whether the student felt popular or unpopular among their peers for both genders and perceived teacher support for the male participants. The researchers wanted to discover whether a positive general attitude would have an inverse relationship with a negative learning attitude and whether perceived supporting factors are predictors of a negative learning attitude. One of the results from this study was the inverse relationship between a general positive attitude and negative learning attitude. Interestingly, the result also indicated that perceived unpopularity with peers was the most important factor predicting a negative learning attitude for female students. However, for male students, both being perceived as popular and unpopular were significant predictors of a negative learning attitude. For both male and female participants, female headship was not significant in predicting a negative learning attitude. The result of the study highlighted the variations in the same factor that can affect males and females differently while other factors have similar impacts on both genders. This study highlighted the importance of students' gender identities as it may dictate how to help students. How a student responds to this situation is dependent on what he, she or they perceive as risk and protective factors.

The next domain is the reactive coping methods, which is how the person deals with this stress, whether it is adaptive or maladaptive. Originally, Spencer (1995) defined maladaptive

coping methods as responses that are risk-taking, reactive, and behaviors that result in negative

emergent identities. Spencer (1995) defined adaptive responses as solutions that help achieve

social status, build interpersonal competence, and lead to self-acceptance. However, over the

years, whether a solution is adaptive or maladaptive is dependent on the context of the situation.

A reactive method can be adaptive in one context and considered maladaptive in another context

(Spencer et al., 2001; Swanson et al., 2002). Regardless of whether the coping method was

maladaptive or adaptive, if the result of the method is perceived to produce the desired result

through self-appraisal, the person will continue to use this method (Spencer, 1995, 1997, 2006;

Spencer et al., 1997). What society deems as adaptive or maladaptive can also be perplexing

because the same behavior can be deemed as appropriate for one gender and considered

dangerous for another group. When White Caucasian males are engaged in clique-type activities,

it is considered peer group activities. However, when African American males engage in the

same activities, it is conceptualized as gang behaviors (Spencer, 1995). This can influence how

students of color, especially African American males, react to authority figures given how they

have been racialized and experience race and racism in society and in schools (Spencer, 1995).

As individuals face adversities that they must overcome, they will continue to use methods that

give them the most desirable outcome for them, regardless of whether it is deemed as adaptive or

maladaptive by others.

In the emergent identities domain, the individual begins to form as a person begins to

utilize the same coping methods that have resulted in desired outcomes for them regardless of

these methods being adaptive or maladaptive. Interestingly, a coping method that can be deemed

as maladaptive to mainstream society can be perceived as adaptive to an individual. An example

of this is when a student leaves school to work so they can financially support their family. The

16

school system views this as a maladaptive coping method, but to the student, this is an adaptive coping method. This hones in on the importance and the emphasis of the person's perception as the driving force of the PVEST model. The emergent identities become solidified identities as the person continues to go through the domains of PVEST, and these identities determine the last domain of PVEST, which is life stage outcomes.

The last domain of PVEST is the life stage outcome. Even though this is the last domain of the model, it is also the preparation for net vulnerability since this model is continuous (Spencer, 2006). This is the outcome of the cumulative emergent identities at any given time since this cycle is continuous (Spencer et al., 1997). The outcome can be positive or negative depending on how an individual responds to stressors and the emergent identities that arise from these reactive coping methods. This outcome is a snapshot of the individual in the present, but it can be different in the future as the cycle is continuous when life circumstances change and new stressors occur (Spencer, 2006).

PVEST and the Research Questions

This study focuses on learning about the participants and how they made meaning of their educational experiences as a way of learning about students' struggles, how they overcame their struggles, and how they perceived in-school support. Through PVEST, insights into how participants overcome obstacles can lead to better support in place to help students in ways that are most beneficial to them. Similarly, understanding how participants perceive in-school support can be informative on how a school system needs to adapt to ways that students feel cared and supported.

CHAPTER 3: LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

The literature review explores the demographics, scarcity in resources, systematic discrimination, opportunity gaps, and students who have achieved academic success. Through this literature review, the structural and institutional inequities that students of color face in the education system are discussed. I then examine the process of academic resilience to understand how students of color overcome systemic obstacles. I also address the deficit thinking that is associated with academic resilience as it is related to grit, zest, and the burden being placed on the students.

The Condition of Students of Color Attending Low Resource Schools

This section of the literature review explores the demographics, scarcity in resources, systematic discrimination, and opportunity gaps.

Demographics

It is important to understand the conditions of children living in poverty in the United States overall and, in California specifically, to understand the institutional inequities that students of color are facing in P-12 educational systems. The data reveal how race and socioeconomic status intersect and illuminate structural inequalities in P-20 systems (NCES, 2013; McFarland et al., 2019; Wiener, 2006). Figure 2 shows the percentage of children representative of each group in the population and the percentage of children from each group who live in poverty on the national level (Children's Defense Fund, 2020a). Figure 3 displays the same information but specifically pertains to California (Children's Defense Fund, 2020b).

Figure 2

Child Poverty in America
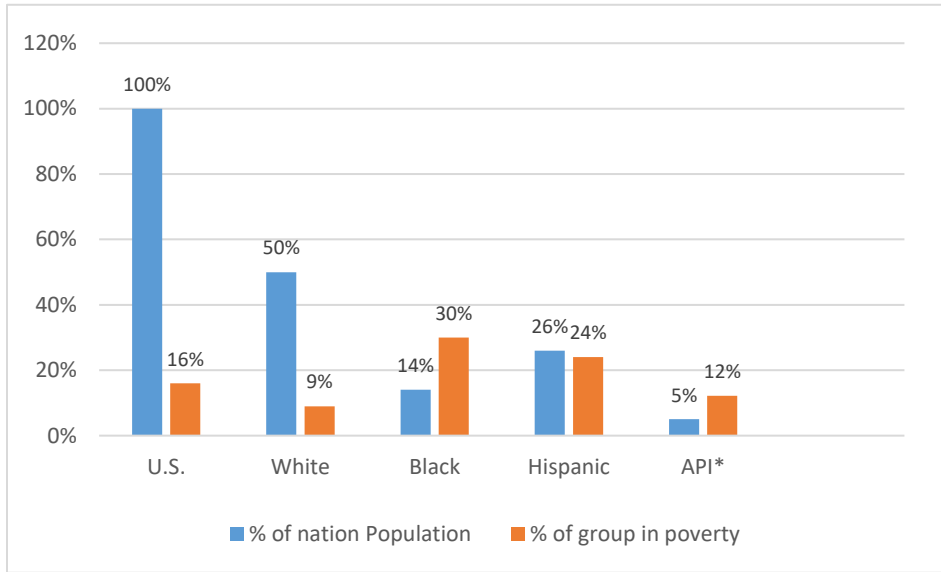
Note. Data were retrieved from Child Poverty in America Children's Defense Fund (2020a), and API data not available in that data set were from the Children's Defense Fund (2019).

Figure 3

Child Poverty in California
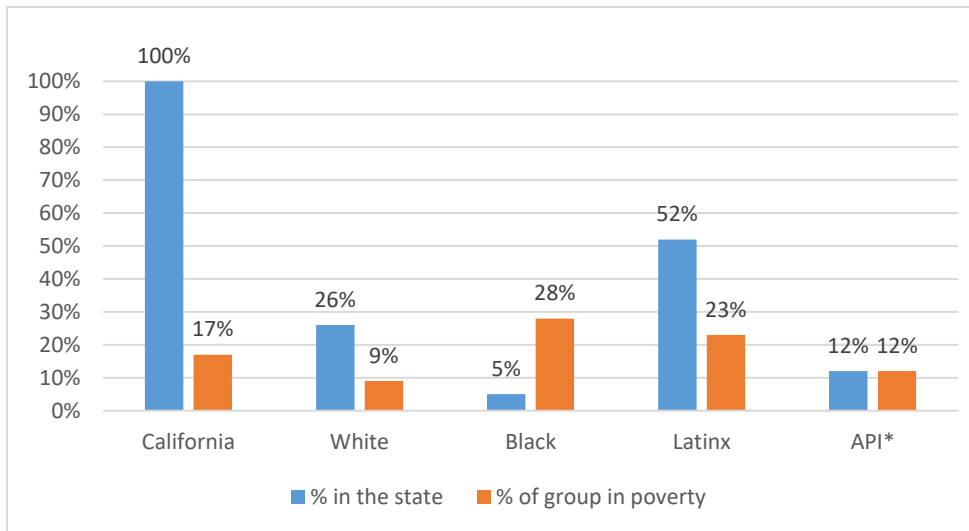
Note. Data were retrieved from Children's Defense Fund (2020b), and API data were pulled from NCCP (2016) because they were not available from the Children's Defense Fund (2020).

The federal government defines poverty as a family of four with an annual income below $26,500 (ASPE, 2021). In Figure 2, the percentage of Black (30%) and Latinx (24%) children living in poverty is higher than the national average (16%), while the percentage of White children (9%) living in poverty is below the national average. More disproportionately, 15.3% of African American youth and 10.5% Latinx youth live in extreme poverty, which is an annual income of $12,642 for a family of four, in comparison to 5% of White children and 4.9% of Asian American children (Children's Defense Fund, 2018). Figure 3 illustrates that the percentages of Black (28%) and Latinxs (23%) children living in poverty are once again higher than the state's average (17%), while the percentage of White (9%) children living in poverty is lower than the state's average. As mentioned earlier, while the percentage of children who identified as API living in poverty is lower than that of Blacks and Latinxs at 12%, it is still higher than that of White children on both federal and state levels. It is important to note that the data also aggregated all Latinx groups into one category and all API groups into one category. In other words, the aggregated data do not provide a detailed look into the specific groups within the API and Latinx communities. One of the API subgroups that is lost and negatively impacted by the aggregated data is the Southeast Asian communities.

Southeast Asian Americans include Vietnamese Americans, Cambodian Americans, Hmong Americans, and Lao Americans (Ngo & Lee, 2007). Most individuals from this group came to America as refugees to escape the communist regimes in their homelands (Ngo & Lee, 2007). However, statistics regarding Southeast Asians are lumped with API data, which encompass all Asian groups. This is problematic because Asian American Pacific Islanders (AAPIs) show bimodal patterns of education achievement with Southeast Asian students on the lower end of the spectrum compared to other API ethnic groups (Chiang et al., 2015; Lee et al.,

2017). API have a lower percentage of children living in poverty than African Americans and Latinx Americans, both in the country and in California (Children's Defense Fund, 2020; National Center for Children in Poverty, n.d.). However, when data for API are disaggregated, the statistics for Southeast Asian Americans paint a much grimmer picture (Chiang et al., 2015; Lee et al., 2017). Figure 4 shows that Hmong Americans are living in poverty more than double the rate of the national average and Asians. Cambodian American, Lao American, and Vietnamese American populations are also living in poverty at a rate higher than that of Asians and the national average.

Figure 4

Poverty Rate Among Southeast Asian Americans
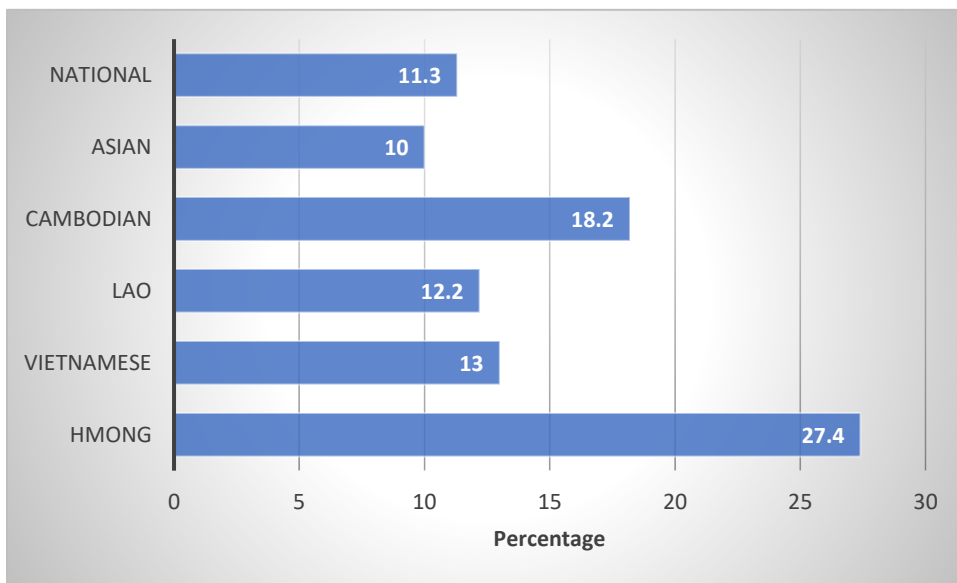
Note. Overview of Southeast Asian Educational Challenges, Southeast Asia Resource Action Center, 2013

Additionally, the rate of Southeast Asian Americans obtaining a high school diploma compared to that of Asians and the national rate is also as grim. Figure 5 shows that more Southeast Asian Americans do not earn a high school diploma by the age of 25 compared to Asians and the national average. This is a starkly different picture than the one that is understood

by model minority stereotypes for all Asian Americans. Model minority is the assumption that all API students do no face academic issues, have experienced success in America through education and hard work, and should be used as a model for other racial minorities (Wing, 2007). Southeast Asian students face similar systemic obstacles as African American and Latinx students.

Figure 5

Adults Aged 25 and Older Without a High School Diploma
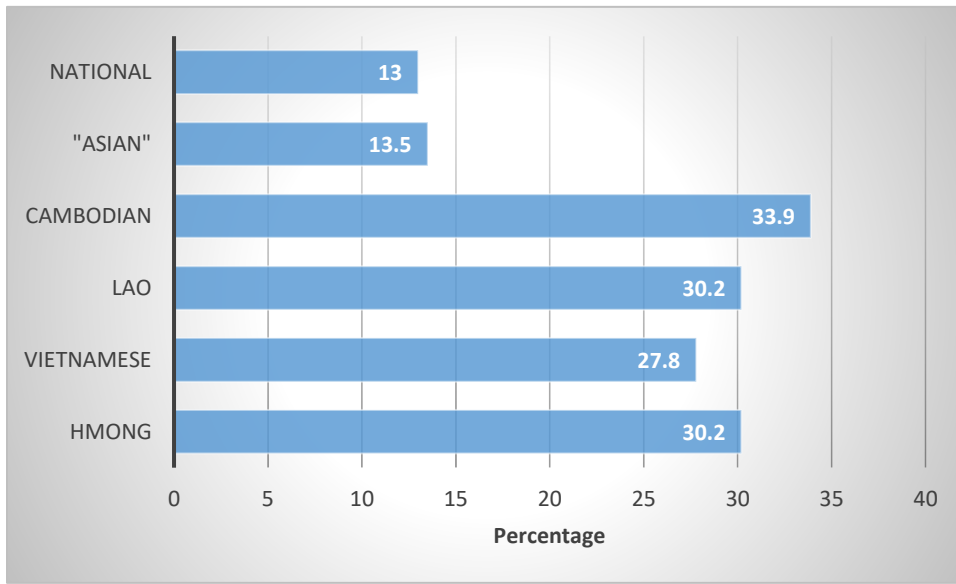
Note. What is Data Segregation, SEARAC, 2019 and NCES, 2019

Students of color disproportionately attend low resource schools (Fahle et al., 2020; National Equity Atlas, 2018; Owens et al., 2016; Rasinski, 2014; Reardon, 2016; Rumberger, 2006). The National Center for Education Statistics defined low resource schools as schools where 75.1% or higher of the student body qualifies for the free or reduced price lunch (FRPL) program (McFarland et al., 2019). According to the California Department of Education (2019), children from a family of four with an annual income of less than $33,475 are eligible for free lunch, while children from a family of four with an annual income of more than $33,475 but less

than $47,639 are eligible for reduced price lunch. Some examples of adversities that these students face at low resource high schools include fewer resources, fewer qualified teachers, a differentiated curriculum, and school segregation (Fahle et al., 2020; Gorski, 2013; Orfield et al., 2016; Owens et al., 2016; Reardon, 2016; Wiener, 2006). Orfield and Lee (2005) assert how students who are segregated in P-20 system by race and income experience double segregation.

Resource Scarcity

Even though many tout education as the engine of social mobility for students of color and/or students from low socioeconomic status (SES) families, it is not designed in a way that promotes such outcomes (Gorski, 2013; Wiener, 2006). According to Gorski (2013) and Wiener (2006), social mobility is less accessible than it was in the nineties or currently in other industrialized countries due to ongoing structural inequities in the U.S. educational system. The inequities in resources are hindering students from achieving academic success, which impedes their ability for upward social mobility. The inequalities in the U.S. education system include dilapidated physical infrastructure in the schools, lack of qualified teachers, a differentiated curriculum, and less access to classes such as AP classes or advanced mathematics classes (Conchas, 2006; Fahle et al., 2020; Gorski, 2013; Rumberger, 2006; Wiener, 2006). For example, dilapidated conditions that are common include inadequate heating, poor ventilation, and inoperable or no AC systems (Fahle et al., 2020). The education system is setting our students up for failure if it does not provide adequate conditions for students to learn by disrupting learning time (Fahle et al., 2020).

Shortage of Qualified Teachers

Another important resource that is inequitable in limited resource schools is the lack of high quality teachers due to the hiring system school districts have in place. Quality teachers is

defined in terms of years of experience and board certifications (Fahle et al., 2020; Wiener, 2006). This leads to a disproportionate number of novice teachers employed at low resource schools (Wiener, 2006). Novice teachers lack professional experience and are the first to be laid off, which causes disruption in students' learning. This causes a lack of continuity in students' learning as each teacher is different in their teaching styles. According to Wiener (2006), two factors that contribute to the teacher inequities are teacher talent distribution and teacher salaries. Due to teacher contracts that favor more senior teachers, teachers who have more years of teaching experience have priority on choosing the schools of their choice, and principals contractually must consider them first. It is also difficult to terminate tenured teachers, but these teachers are moved to low resource schools within the same district due to high turnovers at these schools. The combination of both factors results in many qualified teachers choosing to work in more affluent schools with higher resources. As a result, low resource schools tend to hire inexperienced teachers or teachers who have been transferred from other schools (Wiener, 2006). Unfortunately, low resource schools are twice as likely to recruit and hire teachers with less than three years of experience (Wiener, 2006). Due to institutional inequities extant at low resource schools, they also experience a high turnover of teachers. High turnover of teachers results from novice teachers being the first to be laid off due to reasons such as budget cuts or jobs taken by more senior teachers (Fahle et al., 2020; Wiener, 2006). Salary disparity between low and high resource schools is also a factor in why low resource schools or districts end up with more inexperienced teachers. Salary disparity causes teachers with more experience to work in higher paying districts versus the low resource schools (Wiener, 2006). Students of color attending low resource schools are being educated by less experienced teachers with high turnover rates of teachers, which can be disrupting to their learning.

Curriculum

In addition to substandard teacher quality, students who attend low resource schools face curriculum inequities and limited access to advanced placement courses such as physics, calculus, or advanced placement (AP) classes (Conchas, 2006; Gorski, 2013; Hallett & Venegas, 2011; Wiener, 2006). Students of color are often tracked into remedial courses and/or have limited access to advanced placement courses (Fahle et al., 2020; Hallett & Venegas, 2011; Owens et al., 2016; Tabron & Venzant Chambers, 2019; Valencia, 2010; Wiener, 2006). Researchers have shown that students of color are more likely to be placed in remedial courses or referred for special education testing (Conchas, 2006). Unfortunately, this trend leads to students of color being disproportionately kept out of AP classes in various subjects including mathematics and science. These college preparatory courses increase the chance of students earning admission to colleges and prepare the students for the rigor of college work (Hallett & Venegas, 2011). The lack of access to college preparation courses continues to widen the opportunity gap for students because they are not in classes that are preparing them for college.

Even when students of color access AP courses, they experience under preparedness for the AP tests and low expectations from teachers (Gorski, 2013; Hallett & Venegas, 2011; Wiener, 2006). Students of color often feel that the quality of the courses are subpar, and they are not prepared for the AP end of year tests (Hallett & Venegas, 2011). The end of year test is the test that students enrolled in AP classes take, and if they pass the test with a score of three or higher, they earn college credits. Passing the end of year tests is important because this would help students join competitive colleges (Hallett & Venegas, 2011). Even though there has been an increase in the number of AP classes and in the access to AP tests in low resource high schools, the passing rates and earning a score of three or higher on a scale of one to five for these

students have not increased (Hallett & Venegas, 2011; Tugend, 2017; Zhou, 2018). One factor that may explain why the passing rate of students of color and low income students is not at par with that of other groups is the quality of the AP courses they are taking at their school (Hallett & Venegas, 2011; Zhou, 2018). Hallet and Venegas (2011) interviewed 43 college bound students from low income urban high schools who were participating in a summer writing program before their transition to college. The participants were 60% Latino students and 25% African American students with 90% of all participants being eligible for the free or reduced cost lunch program. These students shared their experience with AP courses at their respective high schools. This group of students are doing their part by participating in AP courses with the intention of earning college credits with the AP tests. However, results have shown that their grades in the class are better than their AP test outcomes, and they reported low quality classroom experiences. Even though some students did well in the class, many students did not pass the AP exam at the end of the year. These students felt that the teachers were unprepared, and the school structure negatively affected the class experience and impacted the test result. Some students expressed that the material they learned in class was at a lower level than the exam questions. Students of color attending low resource schools continue to face inequities in their AP classes even though they overcome obstacles to access these classes (Hallett & Venegas, 2011).

Lastly, the lack of a culturally sustaining curriculum causes many students to disengage in school (Conchas, 2006; Gorski, 2013; Hallett & Venegas, 2011; Wiener, 2006). Conchas (2006) argues that the lack of a culturally relevant curriculum is a factor in students' low academic performance. Students of color do not see themselves or their cultures in the curriculum and textbooks that they learn in school, which can cause them to feel marginalized

26

and unaffirmed (Camangian , 2019; Conchas, 2006). Students feel marginalized and lack a sense of belonging when the curriculum does not relate to their lived experiences (Conchas, 2006). Students look outside the educational system for a sense of belonging and experience academic struggles when they feel invalidated in school (Conchas, 2006). Ladson-Billing's (1995) culturally relevant pedagogy provides a framework that "addresses student achievement but also helps students to accept and affirm their cultural identity while developing critical perspectives that challenge inequities that schools (and other institutions) perpetuate" (p. 469). Ladson-Billings (1995) observed that teachers who were effective with students promoted academic success, cultural competence, and sociopolitical consciousness. Academic success is the intellectual growth that students experience from the teacher's instruction and students' in class encounters (Ladson-Billings, 2014). Competence is when the teachers help students honor and appreciate their cultures of origin while learning about other cultures (Ladson-Billings, 2014). Sociopolitical consciousness is teaching the students the ability to use their knowledge in their classroom and apply this knowledge to solve real-world problems (Ladson-Billings, 2014). These students have positive experiences in their classrooms, which results in academic achievements.

Systematic Discrimination in the Education System

Before discussing how structural discrimination impacts education, it is important to understand the three types of discrimination. According to Pincus (1996), the three types of discrimination are individual, institutional, and structural. Individual discrimination is when an individual of a particular race, gender or ethnicity group is treating a member of a different group differently with the intent of causing a negative or harmful effect (Pincus, 1996). Pincus (1996) defines institutional discrimination as "the policies of the dominant race/ethnic/gender

27

institutions and the behavior of the individuals who control these institutions and implement

policies that are intended to have a differential and/or harmful effect on minority

race/ethnic/gender groups" (p. 186). Similar to the definition of institutional discrimination,

structural discrimination refers to the polices of dominant race institutions and behavior of those

that implement these policies and oversee these institutions with the intent of race or ethnic or

neutrality but cause a differential and/or harmful effect on minority race or ethnic or gender

groups. The difference between institutional discrimination and structural discrimination is the

intent to cause harm; however, both types of discriminations result in harm and/or negative

impacts on minority groups. It is hard to argue that existing inequities are structural

discrimination because data have consistently shown the opportunity gaps between students of

color when compared to White students and students living in poverty and more affluent students

for decades. If the system does not intend to cause differential outcomes for certain groups, then

it would have been rectified already. Instead, students of color are being taught character

education, students and their parents are burdened with the blame for the opportunity gap, and

the voices of students of color are being drowned out.

Students of color are being taught character education with the assumption that it will aid

them to be academically successful because the system does not believe that the characters that

students of color have or bring to the classroom are beneficial (Love, 2019). This is institutional

discrimination because certain group of students who do not have certain characteristics have to

go above and beyond to be able to succeed academically. The educational system idealizes

characteristics such as grit and zest as the winning combination of how to be academically

successful (Love, 2019). Grit is defined as "perseverance and passion for long-term goals" and

zest is defined as "finding and sharing excitement in what you do" (Character Lab, 2020). This

point of view assumes that if students stay persistent and have a good attitude, they will achieve academic success. Persistence and a good attitude will not help students be successful because it is not their attitude that is preventing them from being successful (Love, 2019). Unfortunately, educators do not acknowledge the persistence it takes for students of color living in poverty to get to school every day or the obstacles they overcome to remain in school.

In addition to teaching students of color how to assimilate to the middle-class White culture, U.S. educational systems often blame students and their families for the opportunity gap (Gorski, 2013; Tabron & Venzant Chambers, 2019; Valencia, 2010). Positioning students as the problem results in a deficit ideology. Deficit ideology is "a worldview that explains and justifies outcome inequalities—standardized test scores or levels of educational attainment" (Gorski, 2011, p. 153). Examples of deficit thinking are pathologizing students of color by putting the blame on the students and their families on why these students are not doing well in school (Espinoza-Herold & González-Carriedo, 2017; Gorski, 2013). For example, when parents cannot attend in-school activities, the assumption is they do not care about education instead of considering barriers such as insufficient communication from school, no paid leave, no childcare, and no transportation (Gorksi, 2013). Another example of pathologizing parents of color is when schools do not communicate with parents of color in the language that they understand, and these parents do not feel welcome at the school (Gorski, 2013: Espinoza-Herold & González-Carriedo, 2017).

Along with being pathologized, many of the students of color feel that their voices are not being heard in the school, and their cultures are being pathologized instead of celebrated (Espinoza-Herold & González-Carriedo, 2017). The P-12 educational system often labels students of color and students who attend low resource high schools as "at risk" because of their

demographics such as race, family SES, and immigration status (Valencia, 2010). However, the system believes that if these "at-risk" students can learn to have grit and zest, they can be academically successful. Instead of putting the burden on the students, the system should reflect on what it can do to better address the students' needs and change how the system is punitive toward these students. The system does not recognize the wealth of knowledge that these students and their families bring to school that can enhance the education experience for all students (Moll et al., 1992). Such students do not need to learn good characters that the education system values; instead, the educational system needs to learn how to lift and incorporate the characters that the students already have from their family and culture (Love, 2019). A great deal of research on students of color has been focusing on putting the blame on the student's attitude even though research has shown that students of color aspire to do well in school (Conchas, 2006). Students have expressed that the factors that have kept them from being successful are racial segregation, inequities in funding, politics of school governance, and the structural characteristics of school (Conchas, 2006). The thinking should be shifting from conforming students to the current education system to how the education system can change to create an environment for students to be successful instead.

Opportunity Gap

Students of color in low resource schools are denied access to an equitable education, yet education is touted as the equalizer for disadvantaged students (Gorski, 2013). According to the Children Defense Fund (2017), 85% of Black and 80% of Latinx 8th graders could not read at grade level in the 8th grade public school compared to 54% of White students. Additionally, 75% of Black and 78% of Latinx students graduated high school during the 2014–2015 school year compared to 88% of White students who obtained a diploma. Moreover, P-12 schools suspend

Black and Latinx students at rates of 23% and 11%, respectively—a higher rate than White students at 7%. The disadvantages that students of color who attend low resource schools face are more adverse, and two-thirds of students of color live in poverty (Children of Defense Fund, 2019). Instead of viewing it as the achievement gap, it should be examined as a gap in equitable education quality, gap in funding, gap in teacher quality, and gap in meeting the needs of the students (Clotfelter et al., 2006; Duncan-Andrade, 2009; Espinoza-Herold & González-Carriedo, 2017; Gorski, 2013; Hallett & Venegas, 2011; Valencia, 2010; Wiener, 2006). What we have in our system is not achievement gaps but opportunity gaps because students of color in low resource schools are not given the opportunity to perform to their full potential (Love, 2019).

If the school system does not recognize the systematic discrimination it is imposing on students by insisting students of color must change themselves, then the opportunity gap persists. Better teachers, access to more rigorous curriculums, and access to a culturally sustaining curriculum are what Black and Latinx students need (Conchas, 2006; P. Gorski, 2013; Wiener, 2006). As Gorski (2003) states, "These disparities mark logical, if unjust, outcomes of a society in which access begets access and opportunity begets opportunity, is that advantage and disadvantages compound themselves into ever-widening disparities in access and opportunity" (p. 73). Given opportunities and support, all students can and will achieve to their full potential (Wiener, 2006). What students need are opportunities for education to become the true equalizer and the social mobility engine that it promises to be.

Students Who Achieved Academic Success

Nevertheless, there are students who defy the odds and are successful in this inequitable system and gain access to higher education opportunities. According to Allen et al. (2016), the perception of one's sense of belonging is important for healthy development psychologically and

31

physically. More important than a sense of school belonging is the feeling of being connected to a school within a school social system for developing a sense of purpose of school (Allen et al., 2016). Some students want to achieve in school because of the utilitarian value of schooling; they see schooling as a way of transforming their lives for the better (Gayles, 2005). Students who are academically successful also know how to leverage their cultural capital to survive the system. The students apply the skills they have gained from their experience and culture to help them overcome the obstacles in schools. Students in this group also perceive that they have the academic potential to be successful in school. Perceived academic potential is related to positive attitudes in school and uses reactive coping mechanisms that help with academic achievement (Patall et al., 2014). These students believe that they can do well in school and when struggling, use their problem-solving skills to help them overcome the struggles. The education system needs to do better at supporting students and families to protect students' potential so the system can be better for the students (Love, 2019). These students should not be used as tokens or as exceptions but as examples of how much all students can achieve given the right opportunities.

Academic Resilience

This section of the literature review begins by briefly reviewing the history of resilience. Subsequently, it provides an overview of the literature on academic resilience, operationalization of one model of academic resilience, the deficiencies of this model, and how academic resilience differs for a few marginalized communities.

History of Resilience

Academic resilience stems from the study of psychological resilience that started in the 1970s when psychologists wanted to learn why some children who were exposed to

psychological stressors became "well-adjusted" adults (Garmezy, 1991; Kitano & Lewis, 2005; Morales & Trotman, 2004). Some of the earlier research regarding resilience was about children of parents with mental illnesses who grew up without signs of mental illness or maladaptive behaviors (Waxman et al., 2003). Researchers during this time were curious about the differences between children who were not affected from those who were affected. This was the first major category of resilience research, "studies of individual differences in recovery from trauma" (Waxman et al., 2003, p. 3). The researchers found many children with adverse childhood grew up to be healthy adults.

The term "resilience" is used to better understand this phenomenon as a process, something that can be studied, rather than by happenstance. Before the term resilience was operationalized, youth who overcame adversities were considered "hardy, invulnerable, and invincible," but this did not help researchers understand why these individuals were different from youth who did not grow up as healthy individuals (Wang et al., 1995). Even though researchers began to recognize similarities, such as protective factors, between youth who they considered "invulnerable," they did not understand how these characteristics were developed (Kitano & Lewis, 2005). Werner (1989) and Garmezy (1991) grouped the protective factors into three groups, characteristic triad, that these resilient youth had in common. The characteristic triad were personal attributes that helped them overcome hardships such as positive responsiveness and temperament (disposition), having strong ties to their families (family), and having external supportive systems from the environment available to them (environment) (Garmezy, 1991; Werner, 1989). Garmezy (1991) also elaborated on protective factors to include individuals who had a strong influence on students, such as a kind teacher or presence of an institutional structure (a caring agency or a church that fosters ties to a larger community). The

categorization of the triadic characteristics was the transitioning from recognizing resilient individuals to studying the risk and protective factors that these individuals possess and were identified that have helped them be resilient (Morales, 2000).

Instead of solely looking at protective factors to understand resilience similar to Werner (1989) and Garmezy (1991), Masten (1994) defined resilience as the balance between risk factors and protective factors that lead to successful adaptation despite risk and adversity. Masten (1994) posited that learning about the process of how individuals become resilient will helps schools provide interventions such as increasing resources and reducing systemic barriers to promote protective factors. Masten (1994) included four components for the resilience process that interacted with each other to produce resiliency. The four components are risk factors, assets (compensatory), protective factors, and vulnerabilities (Kitano & Lewis, 2005; Masten, 1994; Morales & Trotman, 2010). Risk factors are defined as factors that increase the probability of adverse outcomes whether the risk is deemed as high or low such as discord in families and substance abuse in the family (Kitano & Lewis, 2005; Masten, 1994). Another risk factor discussed was living in poverty because of the systemic obstacles that are associated with low SES students. Examples of risk factors for the participants of this proposed study were the systemic barriers for students living in poverty, exposure to violence, systematic racism and classism, low resourced schools, and lack of honoring the social capitals of students of color to name a few.

Vulnerability factors are characteristics that decrease their chances of academic resilience development, such as attending a low resource school, and are usually environmental issues (Masten, 1994; Morales & Trotman, 2010). For example, students of color from a low socioeconomic background were aware that their tests scores are related to conditions of the

school they attended. Related, protective factors are dispositional and external characteristics that include both family and environmental contexts that help mitigate risk factors to aid in bringing about better outcomes for people who experience adversity (Masten, 1994). Some examples of protective factors are self-esteem, positive coping strategies, internal locus of control, social skills, supportive family structure, caring adults outside of the family such as school personnel, and supportive community (Garmezy, 1991; Kitano & Lewis, 2005; Wang & Gordon, 1994). Lastly, an individual's compensatory strategies may be used to overcome risk factors and vulnerabilities. Compensatory factors include a supporting family and higher educational aspirations that can help students overcome risk factors with family support or the goal of pursuing high levels of education (Kitano & Lewis, 2005; Morales, 2010). The neighborhood and school factors can be viewed as vulnerabilities and risk factors; however, caring teachers and the availability of tutoring are compensatory and protective factors that counteract the negative factors. As the process of resilience better understood, the field of academic or education resilience emerged to specially study the academic success of students to combat the widening opportunity gap students of color endure (Wang et al., 1995). The foundation of resilience is the building block of understanding a more specific type of resilience, which is academic resilience.

Definitions of Academic Resilience

There are a variety of definitions of academic resilience, and this part of the literature review analyzes each of the definitions. However, the uniformity between all the definitions is the emphasis of overcoming obstacles despite the unfavorable conditions that students of color living in poverty must endure (Gonzalez & Padilla, 1997; Morales & Trotman, 2004; Wang et al., 1995). Nonetheless, each definition differs on whether they emphasize a self-driven or

system driven approach to fostering academic resiliency in students of color living in poverty. However, self-driven ignores the role and influence of structural and institutional racism.

Wang et al. (1995) defined academic resilience as the likelihood of success in school and other aspects of life despite environmental adversities brought about by early traits, conditions, and experiences. Wang et al. (1995) based their definition on the building blocks of past studies that focused on prevention and developmental psychopathology, attributes of resilient children and their environments, and effective environments for children. These researchers analyzed disposition developmental studies of early traits such as interpersonal skills and locus of control in resilient children (Wang et al., 1995). They also analyzed studies on the impact of learning environments, family roles, and peer roles for the conditions of fostering academic resiliency. Finally, Wang et al. (1995) used Bronfenbrenner's ecological framework to understand students' experiences. From this perspective of academic resilience, Wang et al. (1995) focused greatly on the role of schools in nurturing academic resilience. They emphasized the role of teachers, curriculum, school climate, and the relationship between school and family (Wang et al., 1995).

Gonzalez and Padilla (1997) quantitatively studied Mexican American students living in poverty and their academic resilience. Gonzalez and Padilla (1997) operationalized the term academic resilience as students who sustain high levels of achievement motivation and performance despite the presence of stressful events and conditions that place them at risk of performing poorly in school and ultimately dropping out of school in this study (Gonzalez & Padilla, 1997). This definition is related to the high number of Mexican American students living in poverty and their minority status as both of these factors are associated with increased risk in academic failure (Gonzalez & Padilla, 1997). In this study, the researchers surveyed 2,169 self-identified Mexican American students who were attending three different high schools in

36

California. The first high school was in an urban geographical area with 25% of the student population from Mexican descent, another in a rural setting with 60% of its student population from Mexican descent, and the third was on the U.S.-Mexico border with 96% of its population from Mexican descent. At all three schools, Mexican descent made up the highest percentage of the student population. The survey aimed to ask the students about their academic environment, sense of belonging in school, and their cultural loyalty as supporting factors to help facilitate academic resilience. Gonzalez and Padilla (1997) focused on familism, non-assimilation, and cultural pride and awareness to measure cultural loyalty. The study concluded that a supportive academic environment and sense of belonging to school were significant predictors of academic resilience (Gonzalez & Padilla, 1997). Interestingly, the result indicated a negative relationship between cultural loyalty and the homogeneity of a school. Mexican American students who attended more ethnically diverse schools in the study reported higher cultural loyalty. Gonzalez and Padilla's (1997) study showed a relationship between cultural loyalty and academic resilience development, but it was dependent on the demographic of the school students were attending.

Academic resilience can also mean the ability of children to succeed academically despite risk factors that make it difficult for them to succeed (Bryan, 2005). Bryan (2005) proposed a strong partnership between school and family and school and community to help students develop academic resilience. Bryan (2005) reviewed articles that discussed the benefits of involving parents in their children's education such as improving academic achievement and increasing the chance of attending college. These partnerships can be protective factors and resources that students can access. Community-school partnerships were viewed as sharing capital recourses to complement the resources school and community were able to provide to

students (Bryan, 2005). The partnerships between these three entities can remove obstacles and stressors for students of color living in poverty (Bryan, 2005). The findings highlighted the critical role of school counselors in fostering strong relationships between family-school and community-school because of the counselors' unique relationships with each of the parties. Bryan (2005) encouraged P-12 school counseling programs to integrate more school-family-community partnership training since school counselors are placed in a unique position that can foster partnerships among the stakeholders. However, the study did not operationalize family involvement and particularly how effective it is toward families of color living in poverty.

Erik Morales is the first researcher to provide a comprehensive process for understanding academic resiliency development with his study in 2000 and continued to expand on it with Frances Trotman (Morales, 2000, 2010; Morales & Trotman, 2004, 2010). Morales and Trotman expanded Morales' original study by interviewing 10 Dominican American and African American students in their 2004 study and again in 2010 with 50 students (Morales, 2000; Morales & Trotman, 2004, 2010). In both the 2004 and 2010 studies, the academic resiliency cycle was the theoretical framework used to understand how students who came from low SES families developed academic resiliency (Morales & Trotman, 2004, 2010). Through multiple studies, Morales and Trotman (2010) defined academic resilience as a process and results of individuals who have achieved academic success despite obstacles that prevent most others with the same background from succeeding (Morales, 2010; Morales & Trotman, 2010). The definition is rooted in the concept of resilience as they also focused on the ability of some students to achieve academic success despite the expectations for them to fail by society and statistical data due to their disposition and external factors such as systemic barriers (Morales & Trotman, 2004, 2010). Race and intersectionality are taken into account in this theory due to the

consideration of the person's lived experience and their perception of their own risk and protective factors, which encompass all identities of the participants (Morales & Trotman, 2010).

Morales wanted to learn about students who are minorities, have low SES status, and have excelled academically because he felt that they are ignored since most of the focus had been on minority students with low SES who were not excelling academically (Morales, 2000). He used his academic resiliency cycle to understand how a group of academically successful students combated perceived negative factors by negotiating their perceived protective factors (Morales, 2000). Morales (2000) used a phenomenological perspective to understand why two low SES students of color experienced different educational outcomes. He theorized that the presence of protective factors the students who were resilient experienced accounted for the difference in outcomes. Morales (2000) used Garmezy's (1991) characteristic triads of disposition, family, and environment to understand the experiences of these students. Through their research, Morales (2000) and Morales & Trotman (2010) detailed a contextual understanding of a resilience cycle with the student being the hub who goes through five steps/spokes:

1. The student realistically and effectively identifies or recognizes their major risk factors.

2. The student is able to manifest and/or seek out protective factors that have the potential to offset or mitigate the potentially negative effects of the perceived risk factors.

3. The protective factors work in concert to propel the student toward high academic achievement.

39

4. The student is able to recognize the value of the protective factors and continues to refine and implement them.

5. The consistent and continuous refinement and implementation of protective factors, along with the evolving vision of the student's desired destination, sustain the student's academic achievement as new academic challenges present themselves.

The first step is that the student recognizes and is aware of the systemic barriers that are associated with their minority status, low socioeconomic status, attendance of low resource schools, and inequities that are associated with their status. The participants in Morales and Trotman's (2010) study identified being a spokesperson for the racial ethnic group, subpar precollege preparation, accumulative stress, and a need to be bicultural as some of their top psychological stressors. A factor that was considered a family issue was lack of parents who possess the necessary academic knowledge (Morales, 2000). Morales (2000) also pointed out how each of these risk factors affected the individuals in the study differently. The differential impacts were due to how the risk factors fit into the students' other factors. The level of racism and discrimination, exposure to drugs and violence, and other sociocultural risk factors are uniquely different for each individual and how they make meanings of such experiences (Morales & Trotman, 2010). An important key for this first step is that the students must be honest with themselves by having the ability to self-evaluate their life circumstances. This step puts the burden on the student to recognize the barriers instead of calling for the education system to reduce the barriers.

Once the student was aware of and honest about what their risk factors are, they sought out protective factors that would help mitigate their perceived risk factors (Morales, 2000; Morales & Trotman, 2010). If a student perceives that one of their biggest risk factors is lack of a

role model, then they will seek out mentors to provide guidance or join a TRIO, college preparatory programs, because they need guidance on how to prepare for college. Most importantly, for protective factors to be effective, the next step is that all the resources must work together and not in silos to help propel the students toward high academic achievement. For example, school counselors, teachers, access to financial aid, and participation in a TRIO program should work in unison as pieces of a puzzle to help the students. School counselors help students choose the right classes, understand the process, and provide emotional support. Teachers ensure students master the curriculum and provide support when it is needed. The availability of financial aid helps students feel hopeful that college can be affordable and attainable. Participation in a program provides the extra support, exposure to various colleges, and another support system for the students. These three entities work together with the same common goal in helping the students achieve their academic potential.

Morales (2010) identified two clusters of protective factors that worked well together to promote academic resilience. The study consisted of 50 students of color from low SES families who met Morales' criteria of academic resilience. The first cluster centered around the students' wanting a successful future. The second cluster is a combination of both dispositional and family factors. However, upon reviewing the interview protocol, the questions did not specifically ask about school experiences or environmental factors that might have impacted the participants. It is no surprise then that only caring school personnel was mentioned as an environmental factor as these participants credited their success to disposition and family protective factors. This may reflect the scarce resources available to these students or perhaps the questions did not explicitly ask about environmental factors. The study put forth the assumption that as long as students possess the protective factors discussed in the study, they are able to be academically successful.

41

The next step in the resiliency cycle is redefining the protective factors in ways that best fit their needs and give them the most desirable results (Morales, 2000; Morales & Trotman, 2010). A student may rely more on a school counselor if the student finds the experience most rewarding, or they may develop a strong bond with a teacher and that teacher becomes a confidant and a mentor for the student. In the resilience cycle, the student's perspective is the most important, and how the students perceive their experiences will determine which risk factors will be addressed and how to utilize which protective factors. "The awareness and honesty which these students have been able to evaluate their own specific needs has served them well and has often given rise to their particular protective factors" (Morales, 2000, p. 12). Once the student establishes and stabilizes their protective factors, they will continue to utilize these factors to help them achieve their academic goals. The cycle is also bidirectional and continuous as students continue to refine protective factors and potentially face new risk factors along their academic journey.

Ultimately, Morales and Trotman (2004) put the responsibility of academic resilience on both the students and the system. They modified this belief in their 2010 study by asserting that "all are innately able to succeed as long as environmental stress factors are mitigated" (Morales & Trotman, 2010, p. 4). One of the biggest assumptions of this theory is the accessibility to protective factors, and the students must be willing to seek protective factors and social capital. The availability and utilization of protective factors is unique to the students' lived experiences and culture, which engenders research on academic resilience in subpopulations (Morales, 2008). This theory lacks the call for systemic changes in the education system that created barriers to prevent students from reaching their academic potential. The theory also assumes that access to resources is equitable for all students and that all schools have supportive resources available.

Access to resources is one of the barriers discussed earlier in this literature review that students

of color attending low resource schools face.

Overall, this theory is a deficit model even though the theory tries to address the deficit

models from the past. By defining students who achieve academic success as resilient and those

who do not as non-resilient, the theory diminishes the hardships that students of color must

overcome without access to culturally and socially appropriate resources. Students who know

how to maximize their resources are considered successful, but this theory did not address

accessibility to resources.

Marginalized Populations

It is important to understand the development of academic resilience in students of color

with low SES status, but we should also delineate toward the groups that are most negatively

affected such as African American, Latinx, and Southeast Asian students. These three

populations are also the racial ethnicities of the participants in this study. However, it is

important to acknowledge that even when delineating the study into three groups, these do not

represent everything about the three cultures as they are not monolithic or the exact experiences

of these participants.

According to Evans-Winters (2011), "Black children carry the burden of most European

American's indifference and hostility towards African Americans" such as how they are being

treated within the school system (p. 27). They are more likely to be victims of discrimination

within the school, more likely to be placed in remedial or special education courses, and

disproportionately suspended from school (Conchas, 2006; Evans-Winters, 2011). Due to the

racial discrimination compounding with the adversities of living in poverty, African American

students in these situations and their academic resilience would also be unique. The key is

learning about the unique protective factors that the educational system can nourish and promote to help develop academic resilience for these students (Evans-Winters, 2011). One of the consistent protective factors is the belief of educational utility, the belief that education will help African Americans better their lives and mobility in society (Butler-Barnes et al., 2017; Gayles, 2005).

In Gayles (2005), three African American male participants were considered academically high achieving at their school because of their grades, and it was a mean for upward mobility. The three students diminished the degree of their achievement and kept it from their friends. They have expressed that their friends were surprised to learn of their academic achievement. They felt that academic achievement was something they have to do, but it does not necessarily mean it is their whole identity. These students grappled with the conflict of being high academic achieving and concerned about being accused of "acting White" (Gayles, 2005). These students rationalized their academic achievements for utilitarian reasons while still distancing them from their peers.

Another marginalized group includes Latinx students. Learning more about Latinx students' academic resilience and centering on how students persist in school becomes important. Some of the systemic risk factors Latinx students negotiate are their minority status, economic hardship, language barrier, acculturation, and having parents unfamiliar with the education system (Gonzalez & Padilla, 1997). Having to learn a new language, a new education system, and a new culture present unique adversities that prevent these students from achieving academically. Gonzalez and Padilla (1997) found that support from school such as a supportive academic environment, sense of belonging at school, teacher support, and peer support can be protective factors for this group of students. At home, familism and cultural support are reported

to help these students develop academic resilience. Interestingly, the study found that cultural loyalty did not predict a resiliency outcome, and there is a negative relationship between cultural pride and academic resilience if the students attend a homogenous school; 95% of the students were of Mexican descent (Gonzalez & Padilla, 1997).

The last marginalized population important to be considered is Southeast Asian students. They are being oppressed by the myth model minority due to the assumption that Asian students do not need help (Lee, 2007). The statistics discussed at the beginning of this chapter are slashing the model minority myth that Asian Americans are able to be successful without needing assistance (Ngo & Lee, 2007). This model minority message is constructed by the dominant culture or Whites to compare Asian Americans and other people of color in the U.S. and to put the blame on people of color instead of the structural inequalities existing in society (Chiang et al., 2015; Ngo & Lee, 2007). This stereotype is also an additional barrier for Asian Americans, especially Southeast Asians because they do not receive the help they need (Chiang et al., 2015; Lee et al., 2017). Data on Asian American students are typically aggregated and show academic attainment levels of Asian Americans as higher than those of other minority groups (Lee et al., 2017; Ngo & Lee, 2007). This leads to educators and education policy makers assuming that Asian American students are high achieving model minorities (Lee, 2009). However, it is important to acknowledge that Asian Americans and Southeast Asian Americans are not monoliths. The struggle of Hmong American and Lao American students is discussed below.

Hmong American Students

Hmong American students experience problems in school and high dropout rates due to cultural differences, poverty, limited experience with formal education, and limited English

language skills (Ngo & Lee, 2007). There are several cultural differences: oral versus literate culture, learning style, and expectation for girls in the culture (Ngo & Lee, 2007). Limited experience with formal education and English language skills can hinder Hmong American students' achievement as most of their parents are refugees who face linguistic and cultural barriers that prevent them from being able to help their children with regards to school (Ngo & Lee, 2007). Encouragingly, Hmong American parents support their children in their academic achievement, which emphasizes the importance of parental support even if it is not in the form of academics (Chiang et al., 2015). Researchers also showed that Hmong Americans have high education aspirations, spend more time on their homework, and are less likely to drop out of high school than other immigrant students (Ngo & Lee, 2007). Consistent with research, Hmong students who practice their cultures instead of assimilating have more success in the education system (Chiang et al., 2015).

In addition to the discussed impacts, Hmong American students are also negatively impacted by the model minority myth (Chiang et al., 2015). Chiang et al. (2015) conducted qualitative research with focus groups and individual interviews with seven Hmong students in a city in the Midwest to study the implications of the model minority myth on Hmong students. The participants from this study rejected the model minority stereotype because it does not reflect their experiences and struggles (Chiang et al., 2015). They felt that the model minority stereotype has created harmful implications in their education journey and in attaining higher education (Chiang et al., 2015). This is an additional barrier that Hmong American students have to overcome in addition to the others discussed earlier.

Lao American Students

Similar to Hmong American students, most Lao American students are also refugees, but they often struggle more than other Southeast Asian students (Lee, 2009). Research has shown that Lao American students are struggling because of cultural conflicts and challenges in school. Some cultural conflicts include conflicts between the students and their parents, family responsibilities that keep students from having a social life, and the long hours that their parents have to work (Ngo & Lee, 2007). The education system does not have support in place for these students. Teachers were not prepared to address the needs of Laotian American students in school and saw them as stereotypes (Ngo & Lee, 2007). Laotian students are also tracked to remedial courses, and there is a lack of culturally relevant instruction for these students (Ngo & Lee, 2007). However, these students are receiving support from home as Laotian parents and culture support higher education attainment (Ngo & Lee, 2007).

Even though each culture has its own uniqueness, they all share similar protective and risk factors such as family support and facing systemic barriers. Understanding how students overcome obstacles, the barriers they face, and how they perceive in-school support will inform schools to support and care for students better.

CHAPTER 4: METHODOLOGY

Research Design and Overview

This qualitative study explores how academically high-achieving students of color who attend low resource schools overcome challenges and perceive in-school support during high school. A qualitative approach was chosen because the goal of this study was to learn about the participants' lived experiences regarding their struggles and perception of in-school support and how they made sense of these experiences (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). This chapter describes the methods of data collection and analysis to answer two research questions. The research questions are as follows: In what ways do academically high achieving students of color attending a low resource school overcome challenges, and how do these students perceive in-school support? I begin by contextualizing the school's setting by presenting relevant information such as the demographic break down of the student population, unique characteristics regarding the school, and information on the participants. I then discuss the data collection processes I used to conduct the research, which include describing the semi-structured interviews, the platform used for the interviews, and a few difficulties that occurred during the interviews. I then talk about how the data were analyzed using Saldana's coding procedure (Saldaña, 2009, 2013, 2016). Lastly, I go over trustworthiness, reliability, and my positionality.

The Setting

The participants for this study attend Independence[1] High School located in an urban area of northern California with a reported population of over 500,000 residents in 2019 (U.S. Census

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[1] Pseudonym has been used for school

Bureau, 2019). The city's demographic reports 46.3% White, 13.2% Black or African American, 18.9% Asian, 28.9% Latinx, 7.4% two or more races, and 2.4% others (U.S. Census Bureau, 2019). The average income in this city is $62,335 annually, and 16.6% of its population live in poverty (U.S. Census Bureau, 2019). Independence High is an urban public high school serving about 2,000 students and is in an area of the city with one of the highest crime rates, and 25% of the people living in the school's zip code living in poverty (Black Child Legacy, 2017). The school's racial demographic breakdown includes 54.1% Latinx, 18.3% Black, 14.9% Asian, 4.1% White, and 2.9% two or more races as illustrated in Figure 6 (California School Dashboard, 2019). As noted, most of Independence High School's student population are students of color, and 92.8% of students report being from a low socioeconomic status family (California School Dashboard, 2019). At this school, 17.5% of the students were classified as English learners for school year 2018–2019 (California School Dashboard, 2019).

     Independence High School's personnel include many former students and/or current community members who reside in the immediate area. The school prides itself on having a strong alumni association that awards over $50,000 in scholarships every year to students in the graduating class. Independence High is known in its city as a "football school" and prone to violence instead of academic achievements by its students. This school has also formed a strong community within the school among everyone and the neighborhood community. In 2015, the school lost a football player to gun violence while he was driving in a car with his teammates. When this occurred, the school leadership immediately opened the gymnasium to students and community members for all to grieve and process the tragedy. The school served breakfast and offered counseling support to the community. Overnight, Independence High's leadership created a safe space for students, teachers, staff, and community members to support each other.

Figure 6

Racial Demographic Breakdown of Independence High School 2019 (California School Dashboard, 2019)

Racial Demographic

- Asian: 14.90%
- Latinx: 54.10%
- White: 4.10%
- Black: 18.30%
- Two or More races: 2.90%
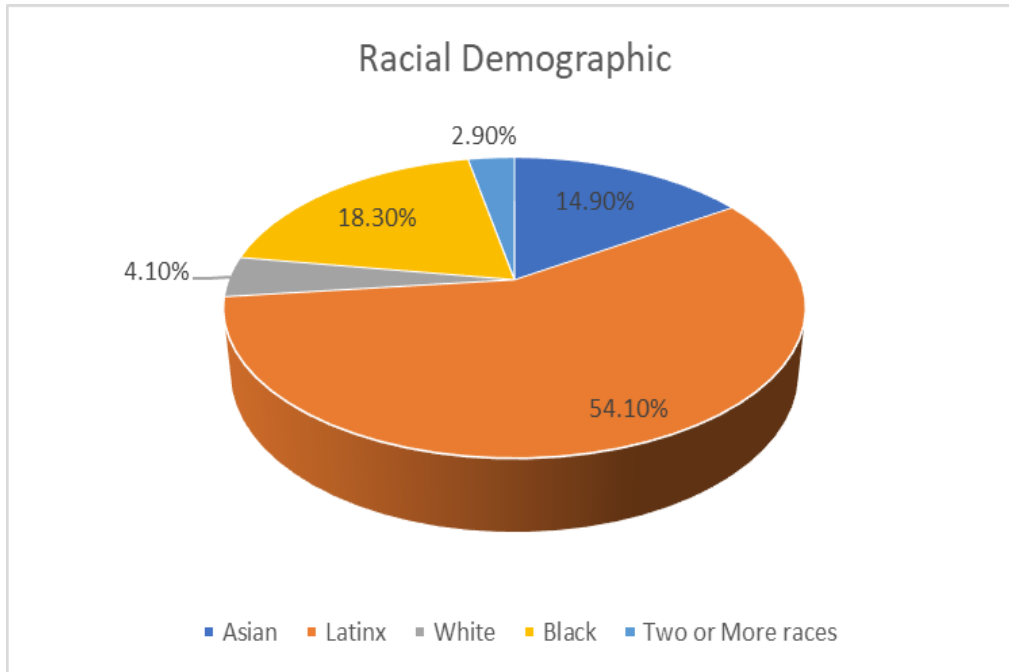
Participants

A total of seven high school seniors who were enrolled at Independence High School participated in the study. All participants met the following criteria:

- 12th grade at the time of data collection (school year 2020–2021)

- attended the high school for at least two consecutive years

- ranked at the top 10% of the graduating class, and

- self-identified as either Black, Indigenous, Latinx, and/or Southeast Asian

The student participants were recruited for this study using convenience sampling technique. Convenience sampling provided an opportunity to identify and recruit students who met the criteria mentioned earlier. This type of sampling also provided an opportunity to select

student participants based on time, location, and availability of sites or respondents (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

All students who met the set criteria, 39 potential participants, were emailed details about the study and the interview process. A disclaimer was included in the email to students detailing how their decision to participate would not impact them in any way. After initial recruitment efforts were completed and students revealed interest in participating in the study, I made special efforts to recruit the five African American students given they did not respond. Other counselors were asked to help with the recruitment process, and another round of recruitment emails were sent out to African American students who met the criteria. Unfortunately, these efforts were not successful. Figure 7 has the breakdown of the racial ethnicity of the potential participant pool and those that participated in the study.

Figure 7

Racial Demographic of Participant Pool
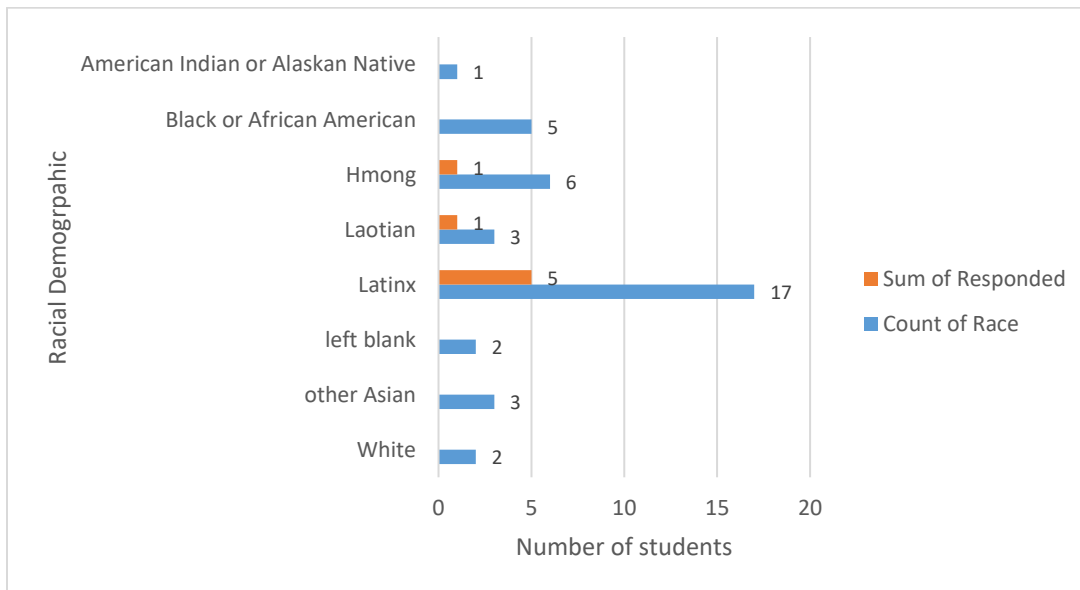
Once students responded with interest in participating in the study, an email that included the consent form was sent to prospective student participants. I also offered to meet and answer

questions about the study with students and/or their parents. Students who are over 18 gave their own consent, and students under 18 had their guardian give consent. The consent form included the purpose of the study and confidentiality and indicated Institutional Review Board (IRB) had approved the study. Once the consent form was received, an hour-long Zoom interview was scheduled. Each participant received an email confirming their participation with the date of their interview and a copy of the interview questions. Providing participants with the interview protocol ahead of time helped ease any anxiety students may have and gave them time to think about the questions. Each participant received a reminder email the day before and the day of the interview. Once the interview was completed, participants received a $10 gift card to Starbucks as a token of appreciation for their participation.

Data Collection

Seven semi-structured interviews were conducted via Zoom, and each lasted about an hour. Interviewing is the most prominent technique used for qualitative research (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). For this study, I used Bevan's (2014) structure of phenomenological interviews to organize my questions into three categories. The first category provides an understanding of the student's background and contextualizes the participant's identity (Bevan, 2014). The second set of questions attempted to apprehend the phenomenon, which included questions that seek to learn about the participants' experiences as they relate to risk and protective factors (Bevan, 2014). The last category attempted to clarify the phenomenon, which was "the use of elements of the experience, while exploring the phenomenon itself" (Bevan, 2014, p. 141). Most of the interview protocol explored the participants' obstacles experienced during P-12, how they negotiated and/or overcame the obstacles, and their perceptions of and experiences with in-

school support (See Appendix A). I also utilized Aeries, a student information system, to obtain relevant information regarding participants such as grade point average and English learner (EL) status.

Due to COVID-19, all the interviews were conducted synchronously via Zoom and audio recorded. Zoom was chosen over other types of online meeting platforms such as Skype or Google Meet because students were familiar with Zoom as it was the platform being used at Independence High School for distance learning. The usage of Zoom as the method of meeting for the interview had advantages and disadvantages. Some advantages of using Zoom included the ability to record and transcribe as well as minimize geographical constraints (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The participants were able to participate in the comfort of their own homes. Some disadvantages of using Zoom included the inability to read body language and challenges with the Internet connection (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Instead of paying attention to body language, I paid close attention to the participants' voices and tones. When there were issues with the Internet connection, I waited for the participant to log back on and repeated the last question. The interviews were recorded and transcribed to maintain accuracy of the interviews and analysis (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Zoom provided a transcription for each interview, and I went through all transcription to ensure accuracy by listening to interviews and edited as needed. To maintain anonymity of participants, pseudonyms were assigned, and participants' identifiable information was kept in a secure location. After each interview, an analytical memo was written to document how I experienced the interview, including my thoughts and feelings of the data collection process (Saldaña, 2016).

Data Analysis

Qualitative data analysis for this study incorporated Saldaña's coding procedures (Saldaña, 2013, 2016). The coding methods that were fitting for this study were open coding, axial coding, and pattern coding with the inclusion of analytic memos. Analytic memos were written after each interview, the end of the initial coding cycle, with a memo for each category identified during coding and anytime that I felt it was needed to make note of a piece of data that I felt was significant. This process was my reflexivity and helped me reflect on the data in meaningful ways (Saldaña, 2013, 2016). Analytic memos provided me with an opportunity to note significant moments during the interview and highlight data that stood out as well as note unanswered questions that need further investigation. This process was essential as it was part of my triangulation data and could be used for coding. A qualitative coding software, Atlas.ti, was used in the coding process to help with organizing the codes and drawing out themes.

The initial cycle of coding allowed for open-ended coding of interview transcripts and notes I took that could potentially be relevant to the research questions (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Preliminary jotting involved creating field notes and highlighting things deemed important during the interview and while transcribing (Saldaña, 2013, 2016). Precoding occurred during transcribing by making notes of passages or quotes that were codable (Saldaña, 2013, 2016). The first-round of coding techniques utilized included in vivo, attribute, structural, descriptive, process, emotion, value, and narrative. These combinations helped sort and organize data for deeper analysis in the second cycle (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Saldaña, 2013, 2016). Attribute coding was helpful to organize the basic demographic information of participants and contextualized participants for better analysis and ability to recognize patterns, especially for a study with multiple participants (Saldaña, 2009). In vivo coding captured students' voices and

used participants' own words to describe their experiences. This method was useful since participants were young and helped deepen understanding of the participants' worldview (Saldaña, 2013). Descriptive coding and structural coding helped categorize data and pull passages from the multiple participants and allowed for deeper analysis in the later cycles of coding (Saldaña, 2013, 2016). To further gain insights into the participants' contexts, emotion coding was used to emphasize the participants' emotions as they experienced their lived stories (Saldaña, 2009). Emotion coding complimented value coding by examining data that reflected the participants' values, attitudes, and beliefs for a glimpse into their worldviews (Saldaña, 2013, 2016). Lastly, narrative coding was applied to examine academic resilience through the participants' stories (Saldaña, 2013, 2016). These first cycle coding procedures helped me categorize data into more manageable categories or themes for further analysis in the following rounds. Axial coding techniques were used to analyze the data by sorting and relabeling data into more conceptual categories (Saldaña, 2013, 2016). These processes were used to make connections between themes for a more cohesive understanding. In short, an iterative process of coding was to code and recode until categories were refined (e.g., such as combining categories, dropping categories, or relabeling categories; Saldaña, 2016).

The second cycle of coding was a way of reorganizing and reanalyzing the data coded from the first round of themes, categories, and concepts from the analysis of the first round (Saldaña, 2013, 2016). Pattern coding was used in this round to combine similar codes from previous cycles into similar themes or categories (Saldaña, 2013, 2016). This process helped organize the data in more meaningful ways and illuminated emerging themes or categories (Saldaña, 2013, 2016). To take the analysis further, axial coding was used to analyze the meanings of the emerging themes and assign meaning to them (Saldaña, 2013, 2016). This

process analyzes the relationships between the emerging categories and themes to help connect the data together (Saldaña, 2013, 2016). This process continued until the four themes emerged to answer the research questions.

Trustworthiness

To address potential issues related to trustworthiness of data analysis, ensuring reliability and consistency, this study made visible the positionality of the researcher and noted any potential biases that may have influenced the study and incorporated member checks, including a statement of researcher positionality and reflexivity (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). These strategies established the needed rigor to safeguard the integrity and the credibility of this study so that the stories of the participants hold true to their meanings.

This study's credibility was determined through internal validity by using iterative data analysis, triangulation, and member checks (Merriam, 1998). I triangulated various qualitative data sources including interviews, researcher memos, and archival documents. Member checking or respondent validation was employed by paraphrasing the participants' answers during the interview and asking for accuracy of interpretation (Creswell, 2018; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). I also followed up with an email to each participant a couple of weeks after their interviews seeking for additional comments and information that they wished to add. Rich and thick description were used to describe quotes that provided context, and themes were highlighted and examined (Creswell, 2018). Lastly, researcher's positionality and reflexivity has been included in this study to address biases, dispositions, and assumptions that may affect the interpretation of the study's findings (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Reliability

External reliability is defined as the ability of the research findings to be replicated, but this is not possible in qualitative research because human behaviors cannot be replicated (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). However, reliability can be demonstrated in qualitative research by documenting the procedures of the study in as detailed a way as possible, consistent with codes and definitions, and keeping the fidelity of participants' stories (Creswell, 2018; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). I recorded and transcribed all interviews to ensure fidelity. I defined all codes and stayed consistent with the meanings throughout the coding process (Creswell, 2018). Lastly, member checks helped the results stay consistent with the data collected (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Participants provided feedback on whether my interpretation of their stories were consistent with their stories.

Positionality

My perspective on academic success has shifted from individuals needing to have grit and willingness to work hard to a more systematic approach. This shift began when I noticed the privileges and advantages, I had that others did not. My K-12 journey as a student was smooth sailing with few bumps on the road, but my college years were transformative. Due to what I viewed as a smooth journey accessing higher education, I believed that anyone could achieve academic success with grit and hard work. However, college exposed the inequities I overcame through experiences with more affluent students and my work with students of color in a high poverty area in East Oakland. I continued to witness the pervasiveness of inequities students of color from low SES schools face when I worked in a group home, a credit recovery school, and a school in a high poverty zip code. I reflected on my experiences and realized that even though I

57

grew up in a low income, first-generation college, and immigrant family, I had a great deal of privileges that many students I encountered did not have in their lives. I attributed my academic success to my hard work, but I would be remiss to not acknowledge my privileges. This realization has helped me with my work as a school counselor.

Throughout my professional experiences as a mentor, tutor, youth program coordinator, and school counselor, I have witnessed students who face many hardships due to a combination of circumstances in which the students are powerless. Throughout my 16 years as a professional, I have had numerous experiences. I met a student who had attended 12 schools by the time she was a junior in high school. I also met a freshman who had decided a high school diploma was not in their future. I have also met students with all the intentions of completing their education but whose ambitions are circumscribed by life's hardships, with school at times becoming another burden instead of a resource. However, I have been amazed at the resilience of these students for being survivors of their circumstances even if it is not in academics. I have met students who achieved academic success despite hardships that can be crippling for others. These students learned how to navigate the educational system and became success stories. I was curious how these students made sense of the educational system and successfully navigated a system that has been insensitive to their circumstances and at times a stressor.

As I dug into this study, I bracketed my biases, assumptions, and beliefs so that I was present and listened to the participants' stories. I did this by writing my positionality to reflect on my biases and respected the participants' perception of their stories by writing a researcher memo at the end of each interview. As a counselor, I am acquainted with listening to students, and I was mindful to only listen to the stories students were sharing as I posed questions instead

of trying to counsel the student. To address the power dynamic between the participants and I, I clearly informed the students that their participation is not associated with the school or their status as students at the school I work at. I explained to the students that through their interviews, I hoped to gain insights into how students make sense of in-school experiences. I assured the students that their interviews would only be used for research purposes, and it would not impact their education in any way. Many of the participants had an existing relationship with me because they were either on my caseload or they were members of the honor society club that I co-advised. The relationships I had with the students enhanced the richness of the interviews and provided comfortability to students since they were not talking to a stranger.

As I listened to these students' stories and analyzed the transcripts, I related to their experiences and their struggles. I related to being a translator for my parents, living up to the Asian model minority stereotypes, and my parents being one of my biggest reasons for doing well in school. However, I did not have the tools to recognize the harmfulness of the model minority stereotypes and the systemic barriers that I overcame to be academically successful. Going to college and being part of the Capital Area North Doctorate in Educational Leadership (CANDEL) program provided me with the knowledge and the tools to recognize the structural barriers that students of color attending low resource schools face. This helped me during my data collection and analyses by using an equity lens instead of a deficit lens. For example, instead of analyzing students' hardships as their own fault, I analyzed how the education system created these hardships. My own experience and my education journey have provided me with the tools to better understand my experiences and recognize the structural inequities that impede the progress of many students of color attending low resource schools.

CHAPTER 5: ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

This chapter begins by providing vignettes of each participant. The vignettes provide a synopsis of participants' demographic information, family composition, overview of in-school resources, and college or university. Through the interviews, the participants discussed the systemic barriers they endured and how they dealt with these challenges. In-school support was part of all participants' support system. However, how each participant negotiated in-school support was unique to each student. Subsequently, I highlight findings that emerged from the interviews. The stories the participants shared during the interviews are about their lives and education goals. The following research questions guided the study:

1. In what ways do academically high achieving students of color attending a low resource school overcome challenges?
2. How do these students perceive in-school support?

Description of Participants

As a collective group, all seven participants identify as students of color, attended the same high school all four years, and were ranked in the top 10 percent of their senior graduating class based on their cumulative grade point averages at the time of recruitment. Participants varied in how they participated in in-school curricular and extracurricular activities. All participants identified as being bilingual and speak either Spanish, Hmong, or Laotian. Six participants were born in the U.S.; six out of the seven participants were labeled as ELs when they first enrolled in kindergarten and reclassified in elementary school. Six out of the seven participants participated in a college preparation program, such as an academy at the high school

or a college preparatory program through a large nearby research-intensive university. This group of students met their goals of gaining admission to multiple four-year institutions in California. In fact, six of the seven participants will be attending a four-year institution next fall, and one student has chosen to attend a local community college. Even though this group of students shared similarities, their stories are unique and insightful.

Sydney[2]

Sydney is a U.S.-born Mexican American student who was born and raised in the same city and lives with her three sisters and both parents. Sydney's parents are immigrants from Mexico and are not fluent in English. Sydney, who is fluent in Spanish and English, shared how being bilingual has been an asset to her and to her parents since she has been able to support her parents as a translator. As a bilingual student, Sydney was labeled as an EL when she first started kindergarten and was reclassified in fifth grade. In junior high, she was invited to participate in AVID and in the Early Academic Outreach Program (EAOP) with a campus within the University of California system. These programs helped her achieve her goal of going to college. Sydney will be attending a University of California campus next year and will be majoring in biology. Sydney aspires to become a pediatrician in the future.

Moua

Moua is a Thailand-born Hmong American student who is living in a multigenerational household with his siblings, parents, grandparents, and two uncles. Moua is the eldest among his siblings and will be the first one in his family to graduate high school. Additionally, Moua speaks both Hmong and English and participates in many Hmong cultural events because his

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[2] Pseudonyms have been used to protect the identity of participants

father is a shaman. Moua began school in the U.S. in second grade as an EL and was reclassified in fourth grade. This participant actively participated in afterschool programs in both elementary school and high school. In high school, he applied and was admitted to an early outreach program, Upward Bound. His participation in this college pathway program helped him meet his goal of going to college and he will be attending a university in the California State University system in the fall. He aspires to be an electronic and electrical engineer so he can help slow global warming using electrical energy-powered products.

Selena

Selena is a U.S. born Mexican American student who is living with her siblings and both parents. Selena is the oldest child to her parents who immigrated from Mexico. Being the oldest, Selena will be the first one in her immediate family to graduate from high school and attend college. Selena is fluent in both Spanish and English. Selena shared how her fluency in Spanish has helped her connect to other people who also speak Spanish. In kindergarten, Selena was labeled as an EL and was reclassified in fifth grade. Selena participated in a college preparation program, EAOP, all four years of high school and attributes these programs to helping her gain admission to her dream school, a University of California campus and majoring in human development.

Marti

Marti is a U.S. born Mexican American student who is living with her siblings and parents. Marti's parents are immigrants from Mexico, and she is the oldest in her family. As the oldest child, Marti is responsible for caring for her siblings and managing their school schedules while both parents are at work. In school, Marti was labeled as an EL in second grade and reclassified in fourth grade. To receive support for school, Marti participated in a college

preparation program, Upward Bound, which provided academic and personal support and insights into the college admission process with the goal of attending a four-year university. Marti is a role model to her younger siblings and will be the first one in her family to graduate high school and attend college. She will be attending a campus within the University of California system in the fall with the aspiration of becoming a medical doctor in the future. She looks forward to being a resource to her community.

Kinnaly

Kinnaly is a U.S. born Chinese Cambodian American student who lives with her brother and mother. Kinnaly does not have any other immediate family in the city, and her immediate family is estranged from other relatives in the family. Consequently, she and her family moved around a lot when she was younger. To cope with the stress involved in frequent moves, Kinnaly focused on her schoolwork as it was a stable force as well as an outlet for her. Kinnaly will be the first one in her family to attend college. She has been selected as the associated student body president and named the valedictorian of her graduating class. She was accepted into numerous four-year institutions in California; however, she has decided to attend a local community college next fall and major in business.

Antonio

Antonio is a U.S. born Mexican American student who is living with his mother and older brothers. Antonio was living with both of his parents up until two years ago when his father left the family. Antonio is inspired by his two older brothers who graduated from four-year universities and are financially supporting Antonio and his mother given the financial hardships the family is experiencing since their father left. He is bilingual in Spanish and English. Antonio was classified as an EL in kindergarten and reclassified in third grade. Antonio has been heavily

involved in Junior Reserve Officer Training Corps (JROTC) all four years of high school. He will be attending a campus in the University of California system, majoring in electrical engineering and aspires to work for a major technology company in the future so he can be financially secure.

Maria

Maria is U.S. born and identifies as Mexican and El Salvadorian American. She lives with a younger sister and her parents. Maria has older siblings who have attended college; she also aspires to attend college. Maria is bilingual in Spanish and English. She was identified as an EL in kindergarten and reclassified in fifth grade. Even though Maria is not the only participant labeled as an EL student, she was the only one that discussed her experience as one. In high school, Maria was a member of the Criminal Justice Magnet Academy, a career pathway she credits for offering her academic support. Maria will be attending one of the California State University schools in the fall and aspires to become a pediatric nurse in the future.

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Overview of Emergent Themes

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Four themes emerged from the analysis of the semi-structured interviews of seven Independence High seniors. The four themes align with Pincus' (1996) types of discrimination, Morales' (2010) academic resilience cycle, and Spencer et. al's (1997) PVEST model. The themes that prominently stood out after coding interview transcripts and field notes include (1) obstacles faced by participants, (2) factors that supported the participants in overcoming their obstacles, (3) in-school support that participants utilized to support them in overcoming obstacles, and (4) how the participants made meaning of their interactions with the in-school support. The obstacles the participants discussed were categorized into systemic and familial.

The factors that helped participants overcome their obstacles were the individual, family, and community support. The in-school support that the participants utilized were teachers, counselors, and college preparatory programs. Lastly, how the participants chose their in-school support was viewed through the PVEST framework.

Emerging Themes

Theme 1: The Systemic and Familial Obstacles

The first theme that emerged when analyzing student interviews centered on the hurdles students experienced while enrolled in school. All participants discussed a range of obstacles that they had to overcome while trying to maintain their grades. I have categorized the obstacles into two groups: systemic and familial obstacles. Systemic obstacles discussed were limited understanding of the educational system, language barrier, balancing school and family responsibilities, lack of resource in the schools, mental and medical health issues, and negative experiences endured in the school setting. Aside from systemic obstacles, some participants also dealt with familial obstacles such as divorce, deaths, and infidelity. Figure 8 provides a visualization of the range of obstacles participants negotiated during high school.

Figure 8

List of Obstacles Identified by Participants

	Sydney	Moua	Selena	Marti	Kinnaly	Antonio	Maria
Balancing family and school	x	x		x			
Family issues					x	x	x
Resource scarcity	x		x	x			
Limited understanding of the education system	x	x	x				
Language barrier	x						x
Medical issues				x			
Mental health issues				x	x		
In-school negative experiences	x		x	x	x		x

Systemic Obstacles

Systemic obstacles within the education system are issues that are caused by inequities in the educational system such as having a limited understanding of the P-12 system, language barrier, balancing family and school duties, resource scarcity, mental health issues, and negative school experiences. For example, limited understanding of the P-12 system has negative impacts on these students because knowledge such as course requirements, the college admission process, and how to access resources would increase the chances of being academically successful. Furthermore, knowing how to access resources such as tutoring and support programs would strengthen students access to college and increase their likelihood for admission. These obstacles students negotiated are considered structural discrimination because they result in harm

and/or negative impacts on minority groups (Pincus, 1996). The obstacles exist because of inadequate support for students and an education culture that does not reflect the diversity of all its students.

As discussed earlier, limited understanding of the P-12 system is an example of how structural inequities impact students. This is an inequity because it discriminates against students and families who are not familiar with the education system. Both Moua and Selena discussed how they had to compensate for their limited knowledge because the education system assumed they would have this knowledge. Moua discussed that he joined Upward Bound because he did not understand the educational system and wanted to attend college when he started high school. He stated, "I didn't really know much about high school model much about like college or the process to get there." Selena also cited similar challenges when she shared, "I didn't really know like the system or how to get a college, what I needed to do to be able to go to college and be a successful college student." These obstacles compelled Selena and Moua to seek support outside of the classroom even though it was a systemic issue.

Another systemic obstacle that is punitive toward students of color is language barrier. This obstacle is spotlighted at the intersection of structural inequities and educational opportunities. The fluency in English language was another challenge that student participants shared that hindered Maria, Selena, and Sydney. Maria, for example, discussed her experiences being identified as an EL when she started school and reclassified in the fifth grade. Her experiences being an EL and how she received help due to her EL status deterred her from seeking help from teachers as often as she needed. This was how she described her experience on how she was receiving help:

I just didn't like going to the back, like getting stepped out from class, like letting the other kids know that I needed more help and that there was something wrong with me. Like I was just scared that they'd like make fun of me.

Maria also said, "It would just feel weird because it would just be in the back of the class which is like everybody else is learning and then it was just like some kids over here." Selena also faced obstacles as an EL and describes how she would have liked to receive instructional support from her school. She described it as follows:

In my household we only speak Spanish and in school it's mostly you know English. So, when I would come home from school or having questions you know about my homework that I didn't understand, my parents weren't able to you know really help me because they didn't understand English. And me being you know, like when I was younger, you know asking my parents, for helping my homework and the homework being in English.

Selena was aware that she needed more instructional support to help her with schoolwork since she was not able to get the help from her parents. She recognized that English is the language that is valued in the education system, and Spanish was not honored nor recognized. Selena points to the need for bilingual resources available to help parents who are only fluent in a language that is not English so they could help their students at home, such as lesson plans and textbooks available in various languages.

Lastly, Sydney reveals how she had to serve as a translator for her parents, which highlighted the need for schools and agencies to offer documents and services in multiple languages. Sydney had to be a translator for her parents at "the doctor, the pharmacy, everywhere…" Even though Sydney credited being a translator for her parents as having helped

her improve her fluency in Spanish; she also recognized the added pressure she experienced when doing this. This is how Sydney discussed about being her parents' translator her whole life:

> So since they don't know no English, it was um it was a lot of pressure on me growing up because you know they expected me to fully you know understand everything you know, be able to represent them, you know…um yeah like represent them with the other person that I was communicating with and like let them know their point of view, but then also having to understand the other party's point of view.

As a young child, Sydney was forced to take on an "adult" role and the enormous pressure she experienced to ensure that her parents' voices were heard. Sydney also stated that being a translator was "normalized" because they could not find any other supporting mechanism. When asked if having access to translators may have supported Sydney and her family, she responded, "That would have lifted that thing off my shoulders having to translate. having to communicate for them. And then I could just focus on myself and then like helping my younger sibling." The city Sydney and her family reside in does not currently provide the necessary resources nor publicize the availability of translators for everyone to ensure that all services are accessible to non-English speakers so that the burden to interpret does not fall on their children. This is an added obstacle that Sydney should not have to face; it is a systemic issue because gaining access to the system is an added burden to families that do not speak English (Pincus, 1996).

Linguistic challenges that the participants navigated were also connected to balancing family responsibilities and schoolwork. Sydney, Moua, and Marti discussed balancing family responsibilities such as caring for younger siblings, translating for parents, and cultural practices with academic work. This group of students explicitly discussed the delicate nature of having to

balance home and school because of their responsibilities outside of school. Sydney and Marti

spoke about being the oldest and the responsibilities that come with that role. Each of these

student participants shared how they had to manage their time effectively to carve out time to do

schoolwork given familial expectations and responsibilities. This is how Sydney described her

struggle between helping her younger sister and getting her schoolwork done on time:

> I really always have to help her because I'm older than her and she needed my help and I
>
> mean, since I realized how hard it was going through school without having someone to
>
> help you, having someone to guide you. I didn't want her to go through that so I also had
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> to help her. But that would always take up some of my time I would have to be like not
>
> stressed, but I had to be like oh like worried that I wasn't able to finish my homework in
>
> time by the next day.

In addition to being her parents' translator, Sydney also felt a responsibility to support

her sister through school because she did not have the guidance when she was younger. Even

though she wanted to help her sister, she acknowledged that it took time away from her studying

time, and Sydney had to juggle all the tasks. She also pointed out that if tutoring was available in

schools, it would have helped tremendously. Sydney stated:

> If tutoring was offered, I wouldn't have to help my younger siblings. They could just go
>
> to tutoring, [and] I could go to tutoring. I wouldn't have to face the struggle of like not
>
> having my parents, be able to help me and like doing it on my own.

Similar to Sydney, Marti also shared how being the oldest sibling was an obstacle she

faced. She took care of her siblings and completed household chores while her parents were at

work. Some of the tasks Marti was responsible for included cooking, cleaning, paying the bills

for the family, and managing the schedule of the sibling's extracurricular activities. This was the

only participant who listed specific household chores. Marti had to be highly efficient with how she utilized the support from Upward Bound before she headed home from school. She went to Upward Bound's tutoring to receive help on her homework or get answers for any questions she might have. Marti described how she utilized the Upward Bound afterschool program:

> I found that those hours during tutoring before COVID and now we're online giving me the opportunity to take those two hours for myself at least a day able to do my homework, ask the questions that I need to be answered by advisors and get what I need to get done my own things answered and just turned during that time.

Different from Marti's and Sydney's struggles, Moua shared the challenges of balancing his obligations of being a shaman's son, familial commitments, and schoolwork. Some of the challenges Moua shared centered on negotiating spiritual practices and responsibility and the familial commitments at relatives' houses during the weekends. At times, he had to diminish his participation in the cultural activities to stay home and complete his homework. Moua stated, "I remember I started off during these activities like when I was small so when they were always when I always had homework, so I always choose homework over the activities." Moua felt that he had to choose between his academics and his responsibilities as a shaman's son. Moua made a difficult decision on his own with his parents' support to decrease participation in activities, which are part of his identity.

The intersectionality of being students of color and attending a low resource school compounded the barriers that these students had to overcome. Sydney and Marti spoke about resource scarcity or limited resources available to support their academic success. Sydney consistently shared throughout her interview the lack of support, including the lack of tutoring. Sydney expressed:

71

I don't remember getting help from anyone, I mean unless I didn't understand a concept

in school, I would ask the teacher but I mean, other than that, like I said I didn't have

tutoring or anything like that I didn't have like a mentor things like that.

Sydney needed and wanted academic support such as tutoring, but it was not available to

her nor her siblings. Marti also echoed the lack of resources in her school and her community. At

school, Marti observed the following:

We don't have the same opportunities and resources as say, for example students in

River[3] or Boulder or I don't know Delta even um… not being offered the same programs,

same classes, not being able to afford the expensive tutors other students have for AP

exams or SAT or ACT. I knew it would be a challenge to be able to study for all this and

be able to pass it.

Marti describes how limited resources impacted her experiences in school. Her statement

also highlighted how schools with more resources provide test taking preparatory courses and

how these inequities in resources impacted students such as Marti. She knew the resources she

needed to be successful in school, and she was aware that these resources do not exist in her

community. In fact, Marti tried to speak up about the lack of resources at her school at a board

meeting and felt unheard and retaliated. Marti described her feelings:

It made me kind of upset to think to realize that. I knew it wasn't the students' fault

because you know they can't control that maybe not even the administrations but I really

didn't know who to be mad at. It just, it made me really upset but I realized that I really

didn't know how I could change it other than be able to help others.

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[3] Pseudonyms have been used for cities.

Trying to achieve academic success in a school with limited resources caused Marti to experience mental health issues during her sophomore year. Marti stated, "The beginning of the semester it really started kind of since the first week of school I instantly felt all the pressure, all the stress both inside and out of school." The lack of resources and support took a toll on Marti mentally. Simultaneously, Marti experienced medical issues with her eyes that required surgery during her senior year of high school. However, Marti endured vision instability throughout high school that made it difficult for her to be in front of a computer screen for a long period because it took three years for her to able to have surgery on her eyes. The medical treatments she received at her local medical clinic were delayed, and her symptoms were dismissed at first. Marti's experience was due to the limited resources of a medical clinic in a low SES neighborhood. This was how Marti described her clinic:

> I wasn't getting I guess the proper attention. Yeah, it was like Oh, it was dismissed easily like oh it's probably this, it will go away and then you have to wait months again for an appointment and our insurance just wouldn't, let us move to a different place, different clinics, so we just kind of had to keep on struggling and I know that it was this way for a lot of families in this community.

At school, the only support Marti received for her medical issue from the school was some teachers were willing to make accommodations for her in the classrooms. Her school experience was marred with lack of resources and inadequate care.

The culmination of barriers in an education system that is not conducive for students of color and their families and lack of resources are obstacles that the participants discussed overcoming. These structural barriers brought on unnecessary hardships to these participants and

their families instead of honoring everyone's culture and accessibility to a more inclusive education system.

Familial Obstacles

Antonio, Maria, and Kinnaly discussed the challenges of negotiating familial issues and school responsibilities. Each of the participant's familial issue and how each of them maintains their academic responsibilities while negotiating familial responsibilities is discussed. Antonio dealt with his father leaving his family toward the end of his sophomore year in high school. He spoke of the situation:

> He [father] left I think sophomore year late in the year and this really took a toll on our family. It really changed a lot of stuff. My mom was now like really busy, and so we have, we have to start taking the bus and a lot of dynamics has changed here at home and emotionally as well. You know I did get that lost the motivation.

The father's departure from the family created financial challenges and a great deal of changes. Antonio, for example, had to start contributing financially to help with food and home expenses. Maria is another student participant who discussed how family dynamics at home impacted her. Maria found out that her father was cheating on her mother. Her father blamed the family conflicts on Maria since she told her mother about her father's infidelity. Maria blamed herself for the conflict between her parents when she stated, "Um I thought I was a blame for it, I kind of blamed myself for what had happened and it made it seem like it was my fault." She also felt invalidated by her father's infidelity when she stated, "Just like blaming myself like am I not good enough, do I not do good?" Maria described her feelings at the time, "I was just hurt and I just didn't really care. I wanted to show my hurt but um there was times, where I would just cry

74

like in class." This was a delicate time for Maria since she was also inspired by her father's work ethic to work hard and do well in school.

While both Maria and Antonio experienced family issues in high school, Kinnaly shared how she has been dealing with family conflicts since she was very young and how these continued to impact her today. At a young age, Kinnaly experienced numerous family members' deaths. Kinnaly's mother isolated herself and Kinnaly from their extended family members. This was how Kinnaly described her mother's state of mind:

> The other reason why we're so isolated because my mom just kind of went into a mode, where she didn't really like to go out. Just you know she wasn't working so we were in like deep poverty and we didn't have a lot of money and we're just like struggling overall.

The early life hardship caused her to be "a very isolated person," felt alone, and not wanting to talk to anyone. This loneliness is reverberated throughout Kinnaly's interview with Kinnaly not trusting many adults and not easily opening up to other people in her life. For Kinnaly, losing people in her life, whether through deaths or the ending of familial relationships, comprised some of the biggest obstacles in her life.

Even though all the participants revealed hardships they overcame or continue to overcome, they each achieved their academic goals and academic excellence. The next section discusses how these participants worked through and overcame these challenging hurdles.

Theme 2: Supportive Factors

The second theme of supporting factors materialized when the participants discussed factors that aided them in overcoming obstacles. This theme helped answer the research question

of how these students navigated through their obstacles and provided insights into how in-school support assists students.

Each participant utilized their support factors in a unique way but also through the combination of individual, family, and community factors. Interestingly, the familial factor is both an obstacle for a few of the participants and a supporting factor. The individual factor is referring to how the student supported themself through personal factors. The family factor consists of family members who supported the students, whether it was their parents, siblings, or extended family members. Lastly, the community factor consists of supporting programs at school or outside of school entities. Each of these factors complemented each other together as a unit to aid the participants in coping with their hurdles and in achieving academic excellence. For example, while Selena's parents were unable to help her with schoolwork, they provided support in multiple ways at home that inspired and encouraged her to pursue an education. At school, she received academic help from teachers and information about applying to college from counselors involved in the college preparatory program. Each resource played a particular role in supporting Selena while complementing each other. The collaborative roles of each supporting factor are similar for all participants, but each participant relied on some factors more than others depending on their experiences. Staff in school and college preparatory programs are all working together to provide insights into going to college. They also provide tools for students to utilize other resources and empower students to persist. For example, the individual in this context consists of the goals the participant has set for themselves, the experience of academic success that has helped built confidence in the participant, and the desire to improve one's current situation and seek help when most needed. The family consists of the participant's immediate and extended family who influenced the participant's academic success. Lastly, community

factors include school or any community programs that have aided the participant in overcoming their obstacles. All three factors intertwined with each other to support the individuals as each obstacle provides the opportunity for the individual to reflect each of the factors to better deal with future obstacles.

The Individual

All the participants in this study shared how they received meaningful academic recognition at a young age, graduated at the top 10% of their class, have a goal of attending college, and strive to obtain a better future. Each student participant shared key actors and relationships that kept them on their academic tracks when they were facing hardships in their lives. Through these relationships, this group of students began to understand at a young age that earning good grades was a way to meet their goal of attending college in the future. Sydney touched on this when she stated, "I started growing my mentality my mentality, you know, like college is important um having good grades so high school is important choosing the correct classes." Moua also stated that one of his biggest goals is going to college. Selena shared:

> I think my good grades, and you know not only my grades well you know the
> extracurricular activities that I have done and that the type of things that I have
> participated in and have helped me get accepted to you know, one of the best universities.
> Similar to everyone else, Marti also had the goal of going to college and believed that

good grades would increase her likelihood of getting into a good school. Kinnaly shared the same goal as other participants of going to college as her "ultimate goal." Antonio witnessed the success of those who went to college and set a goal of going to college for himself. Lastly, Maria also set a goal of going to college, and she also stated that "I know that if I get good grades, it would help me in my future as in college." The goal of attending a college in the future was a

milestone participants strived to obtain. Being recognized for academic achievements along the way helped them build confidence in themselves and their abilities.

Each of the participants discussed being recognized for their academic achievements, affirmed their effort and time spent on schoolwork, and upheld their goal of attending college. Being affirmed for their effort also legitimized their contributions in school. Sydney expressed satisfaction in getting good grades, and getting good grades made her want to go to college. She stated, "I was good at getting the grades. I was good at getting good grades made me want to go into like what makes me want to go to college". She also discussed setting academic goals for herself and setting higher goals as she achieved previously set goals. Sydney explained how she increased rigor to her academic schedule each year by taking more advanced courses, "after I succeeded, um with straight As both semester, I was like okay, maybe what about if senior year I take you know all AP and you know ARC my Community college classes." Her continued academic achievement despite her obstacles helped her build her confidence, her ability to be successful, and strive for more. Similarly, Moua spoke of being proud of himself for earning good grades, and he began to compete with himself to continue to earn better grades. He stated, "having good grades is just like a little competition my head, and also I'm also proud of myself because of that." He also spoke of being accustomed to getting good grades and strived to continue to improve. Likewise, Selena's academic progress is a motivation to strive for better grades. This inspired her and grew her confidence in her ability to be a good student. This was how she described it, "Making progress um… motivated me and made me, you know sure that you know I'm capable of being a good student of earning good grades." Marti recalled getting good grades since kindergarten. Kinnaly experienced academic success in fifth grade, which put her on a path to strive to achieve academic success despite struggles in elementary school. She

stated, "I want to keep consistent; you know it's really satisfying to see all A's." For Kinnaly, school was safety and stability in her life that helped her deal with the chaos that was happening in her personal life. Antonio also discussed having academic success since elementary school, and this helped him focus on being successful when he sees the A's. Lastly, seeing academic growth in herself in junior high school helped Maria believe in herself, and she trajected herself into academic success in high school. Seeing their academic success and progress were important for the participants; receiving meaningful recognition at school was also an important factor.

Sydney, Selena, Marti, Antonio, and Maria all reflected on one special recognition in school that was affirming and legitimized their contributions and how these highlighted the importance of education for them. For Antonio and Marti, the recognition came from major awards where the recognition was more special and grander than the typical certificates they would normally receive. Antonio reflected on a special mathematics award that he received in elementary school and how it inspired him to continue to do well in school from there. This award was meaningful to him because he was the only one at his school who received it. Until this day, he stills remembers the special medal that came with this award, and one could hear the proudness from his voice for being awarded this medal. Marti also experienced something similar in kindergarten when her parents and her received an invitation to join her principal at a local museum to accept an award. At this event, she received encouragement from authors and an autographed book. This marked a special moment in her life because she realized how much she enjoyed the recognition and how proud her parents were of her, and she was very proud of herself. For Maria, Selena, and Sydney, the special moments were not major awards at a major event, but it was recognition from teachers who were important to them. Being recognized by their teachers affirmed to these participants that they are contributing to knowledge production.

Maria reflected the times where she had an ideal connection with her kindergarten teacher, and the teacher continued to compliment and encourage her. This teacher made a deep impact on Maria as she still remembers this teacher 12 years later. A special teacher also stood out for Selena, and his everyday compliments meant more to her than the certificates she was getting before. The daily assurance from him was motivating and important to Selena. For Sydney, it was an elementary teacher who gave her recognition by posting her name on the bulletin board. This recognition was important to her because this allowed others to see her academic achievement. Sydney preferred public recognition similar to this over private ones where she would get coupons or free pizzas. According to Sydney, she prefers public recognition because:

> I'm not acting all that, but I kind of like already knew like oh yeah like I passed my test like I knew it, but then like because you know when other teachers would come in the classroom or like the students themselves, they would be like oh like. You know, like Oh, she passed the test like blah blah and to me, I thought it was more important.

These special recognitions affirmed to the participants that they were closer to achieving their goals and that they were performing at a high level. For Antonio and Marti, the grandiosity and uniqueness of their awards were important to them. However, for Maria, Selena, and Sydney, the recognition from teachers who were special to them were the most impactful. These recognitions bolstered the participants' goal of getting into college and were steppingstones for all of them to secure a better future for themselves.

All the participants cited wanting a better future for themselves as one of the reasons they wanted to achieve academic success. Sydney stated, "what's motivated me through all these years of school is the person is my future I'm being able to get to where I want to be." Similar to Sydney's reason, Selena stated, "I think I'm always thinking about my future and being able to

have like a good job, a good career has motivated me to you know, keep on going." For Marti, wanting a better future means getting into a good college so she will be able to finally have the resources that other kids had "not only that, but being able to be in a community in an environment where I could succeed." Antonio wants a future where he does not have to be struggling financially because he is helping his mother financially with groceries at times. For Kinnaly, her reason is less pragmatic but is toward a future that she feels "more confident in life because it just proves the fact that you know I'm able to change something at least it may not be my whole life search like situation, but I can change some circumstances in my life." Kinnaly wants a future where she has more control and not feeling helpless similar to how she usually feels regarding the circumstances in her life. Regardless of specific reasons, all the participants wanted a better future for themselves. To meet this common goal, most of the participants sought out institutional actors—staff, teachers, and counselors to support them in achieving their goals.

Aside from Kinnaly, who did not discuss needing help or seeking help, all the participants sought help when they needed it. Most importantly, it was the participants who initiated these relationships or joined the support programs. Antonio sought help from his teachers and expressed that his teachers also reached out to him whenever his grades were low. However, it was him who built these relationships with his teachers. This is how he described his method, "Usually I do it by talking to them a lot and asking a lot and getting known by them trying to stand out to them this really helps with building relationships with your teachers." Sydney, Selena, and Maria sought help from teachers even though they all have had negative experiences that would have deterred others from seeking help. Sydney described her process as follows:

81

You know if I really didn't understand something, I would like look through my book or

look out my papers, my past papers or things like that and not for like I really, really,

really did not understand that's when I would go to the teacher.

Selena got around her negative experiences with teachers by, "I always ask for help with the teachers that I know that I can trust." The negative experiences with teachers did not deter Selena from seeking the help she needed. Instead, she strategically sought help from teachers who she knew would help her. Maria also found a way around her concerns regarding seeking help from teachers. The participant was going to seek help if she needed it at the end of the day. Her feelings on this were as follows:

I knew that if I needed help, I had to ask for help, or if I had a question then go ahead,

raise your hand. Even if people think it's a dumb question, don't care it's for me, it's

what I need and I need help you know. So, it's um I guess I grew out from that and

eventually just didn't really or sometimes I would just wait after like after class or and

stuff like that to ask the question.

Maria knew that she could ask for help if needed despite her concerns due to previous experiences. In addition to seeking help from teachers, other participants proactively sought help from support programs. Moua, Marti, and Selena went out of their way to join college preparation programs that promised to provide them with the support they needed. These programs are voluntary and require an application process. Moua stated, "I knew that I knew I knew that I needed help." Even though he was shy, he took a leap and joined Upward Bound that he knew would help him. Selena also took the initiative to join EAOP to help her with her gap in understanding the education system. Similarly, Marti was eager to join Upward Bound when it was introduced to her with the offer for the resources she was longing for. Participants who

82

participated in these programs reaped the benefits in them. Unfortunately, only students who sought out or knew their needs were able to access these programs when many other students could also benefit from these programs. In addition to students finding these programs on their own, teachers and counselors also play a role in recommending students and alerting students on these resources. Even in this group of high achieving students, not all of them joined a college preparation program. This section of the dissertation presented the data on how the individual played a role while in relationships with other people to help them overcome their obstacles and maintain their academic success. Nonetheless, the participants were not in silo, and they were also supported by factors from their family and community.

Family Factors

The familial factors that were instrumental for participants to overcome their obstacles were parents, siblings, and extended family members for some of the participants. The participants cited their parents as being influential in their support system and one of the reasons they want to strive for academic success. Sydney's parents supported her, with her mother being a stay-at-home mum to support her kids and her father providing for the family. Through their actions, they became role models for their children and inspired their children to strive in school. Sydney also cited that her father expressed his support for her education by checking in on her during the weekend when he was not at work and provided her with tips on how to solve mathematics problems. Due to his support and care, Sydney listed him as one of the "really big reasons" she wants to do well in school. He expressed care and encouragement when it came to her education, which was more impactful to Sydney. Even though Sydney's father was not able to help her with English, she valued his support with mathematics and his continued encouragement. He taught her the mentality that as long as she tries, she will be successful. This

is what helped her overcome her negative experiences in school. Her parents' encouragement and support at home are instrumental in helping Sydney overcome her obstacles.

Similar to Sydney, Selena pointed to her parents as a reason she strived to do well in school. She is inspired by their hard work and shared how her father worked to provide for the family while her mother stayed at home and took care of her and her siblings. Her parents' encouragement to strive to be the best at everything they do was influential in Selena's desire to achieve good grades in school. Selena also wanted to be "able to provide that example to my younger siblings." They are one of the reasons she stayed motivated and focused throughout the years.

Marti is another participant who cited her parents' sacrifices and their high expectations for her as reasons she strived to achieve academic success. When asked why earning good grades was so important to her, Marti responded, "high expectations my parents have [for me] after all the sacrifice they made you know, to get here to a point where I'm at." Marti tried hard because of how proud her parents were when they talked about her achievements with other people, and she believed this was also a way for her to repay them for their sacrifices.

Moua also listed his parents as one of the reasons he wanted to do well in school. According to Moua, his parents have talked to him about college throughout the years. He also saw college as an opportunity that his parents did not have and wanted to go to college for them. His parents were supportive and understanding of him having to prioritize schoolwork over his cultural activities. He stated, "I always had homework so I always choose homework over the activities... I would also communicate by telling them [parents] that I had schoolwork and they always understand." Aside from Moua's parents, his uncles were also essential in helping him overcoming his obstacles. They introduced him to the Upward Bound program and to his high

school counselor, both factors that Moua listed as important resources that helped him persist in school. Moua's uncles also served as his mentors whenever he had any questions about school or going to college. Moua stated, "I had my own uncles that helped me. I also joined the Upward Bound program my first year cuz Upward Bound helped my uncles." Moua's uncles introduced him to an important resource, and he saw the success his uncles had.

Kinnaly is similar to the rest of the participants when she mentioned her mother as one of the reasons she wanted to do well in school. Similar to other participants, Kinnaly wanted to make her mother proud and assure her that "she doesn't have to worry about, like you know, me with messing up my life." This was important for Kinnaly because of the adversities that both she and her mother have been through in life.

Similarly, Antonio's mother is one of his reasons for wanting to do well in school because he wants his mother "to be taken care of" and "she won't have to be working old into her age." Antonio's mother was also his inspiration to keep trying after his father left their family which he recalls as extremely difficult times. Antonio stated, "My mom is still working like twice as hard, so I have to work twice as hard as well." Despite Antonio's father leaving the family, he was still an inspiration to do well in school since Antonio felt supported by his father when he still lived with the family.

For Maria, her parents' success was her source of inspiration to do well in school. She witnessed the hardships her parents endured yet still persevered to be able to build a life for themselves. This taught Maria to be persistent and work hard since her parents modeled these behaviors for her. Maria's mother was a great support for her by seeking out academic resources for Maria such as tutoring and the language immersion program that she attended for a few years in elementary school. Her brother was also a role model for her because he studied hard and is

attending college. They also encouraged her to seek help when needed, which helped her overcome her fear of asking for help. For example, Maria explained that she feared asking for help, "when I was in elementary, I would think that asking for help, or asking questions, would make me look dumb." However, her mother helped her overcome this fear by encouraging her to "ask for help, ask questions raise your hand if you need." Maria viewed each family member as role models, and collectively they inspired her to achieve success similar to them. Even though support from family members was crucial, receiving help outside of the family circle was also crucial as the participants strived to overcome their obstacles.

Community Factors

This section discusses community factors along with how they support the student participants. Community factors included any support student participants received outside of the home such as in-school support, friends, or from individuals and/or programs in the neighborhood or community. Participants shared how in-school support such as from teachers, counselors, and college preparatory programs supported them throughout their journey in P-12. In-school support is discussed in depth in the next section. These support entities complemented the students and family factors by providing the resources that the students and their families were not able to provide for the students.

Student participants discussed the importance of friends or networks outside of school as crucial supporting relationships. Community support that the participants discussed were friends and church. Antonio, Selena, and Kinnaly shared how their friends supported them. Antonio described "the group of friends I've made has helped me a lot. I was able to gain a lot of support from them." Selena shared how her long term friends from elementary school have supported her in achieving her goal of going to college. She described her friends as people who "…really

know the type of person that I am. So they really pushed me to be a great student with a great future, and that's something that I really appreciate." Lastly, Kinnaly shared how her best friend was someone she could confide in despite not opening up to many people. She also discussed spirituality as something that helped her through many tough periods in her life and learning about who she is. Likewise, Maria credited her church and going on a "mission" trip as key forms of support when experiencing personal struggles. It was the "mission" trip that provided her space to reflect and make sense of her father's infidelity and how to move forward with her relationships. Maria needed to process issues at home before she could focus on school because this personal struggle caused her to lose her motivation for school.

Each of these participants highlight how key people in their lives—teachers, counselors, and/or friends—supported them during challenging moments. Each key person worked together similar to puzzle pieces as the support system that helped the students to navigate through their hardships. No pieces and no puzzle are the same for each participant, but it is a puzzle that made sense and worked for each participant because each of them have graduated among the highest achievers in their graduating class.

Theme 3: Types of In-School Support

This theme emerged when participants discussed the resources they leveraged to support their academic goals. The three types of support the participants in this study discussed were teachers, counselors, and college preparatory programs. The relationships each participant formed with the three resources varied from participant to participant as some only used one resource while others used all three types.

Teachers

Teachers and the relationships with teachers were resources and assets to students. Sydney, Moua, Selena, Antonio, and Maria turned to their teachers for academic help, while Marti and Kinnaly turned to their teachers for a listening ear. During the interview, Sydney stated:

> I always knew like oh yeah teachers were there, and like a quick question they can help but that's when I really understand like oh yeah teachers are willing to give up extra time to help you and that's when I really started to rely on them, relying on them the most.

Sydney asked questions and sought help whenever she ran into academic issues that she could not figure out on her own. She also only sought help after she had exhausted all her options of figuring out the answer herself. Per Sydney:

> I've always wanted to rely on myself and because, I don't know, I have this mentality like it's just you in this world it's just yourself. You know, you have to try your best so that's when I was always like okay, that's why I always put it like on my shoulders like until I tried my hardest and I wasn't able to get it that's when I would use them as a last resort, because I had no other option.

Similar to Sydney, Maria also only sought help from a teacher as a last resort. She stated:

> I would ask for help, but also, if I know that I'm struggling like if I can't really figure it out, because, first, I have to like okay, if I can't figure it out, then I'ma go do this see this or or go back to what I don't know like you know go back to what we were doing at the moment and see if I can figure it out and if not, then I'll ask for help.

Interestingly, Sydney and Maria identified only teachers as a resource they sought help from even though they sought help from teachers as the last resort. Contrary to these two

participants, Antonio and Selena turned to teachers as part of their learning regimen. When asked about a resource she would use to help her with her academics, Selena stated she preferred "going up to my teachers and asking if I could maybe stay after school you know, during lunch, if I could go in and ask for help." Selena sought out additional academic support from her teachers as her studying routine because "I couldn't receive that same help from my parents." This was important since her parents were not able to help her with her schoolwork. Similar to Selena, Antonio also integrated his teachers into his studying regimen. When Antonio spoke about his teachers, Antonio stated:

> When having teachers, especially like in high school where you have a lot of assignments, and a lot of classes you know it's no longer one teacher, but six, seven, so making relationships has like multiplied but I was able, I still managed to build relationships, and this is what really helped me.

Antonio actively sought relationships with his teachers to ensure that he received help from them with his schooling. The participant saw teachers as assets that can help him to achieve his goal of getting into college. Antonio's teachers also supported him after his father left their family. He described, "They [teachers] always show their support, you know that they were always. They will understand you know, and they'll give me my my space even though they didn't know." In addition to viewing teachers as a resource for academic help, Marti utilized them as confidants. When discussing a teacher and a college preparation program that she trusted, Marti stated:

> So, both [teachers] have been able to help me academically but what really made me realize that I could turn to them is their focus on mental health. Making me realize that I do have to prioritize my mental health before all. I don't know, it really did open my eyes

and allowed me, I guess, to become comfortable enough with the people in Upward Bound and with Ms. Papas to discuss what I felt like was holding me down in that moment, and how they could, you know, help me and support me and overcome that.

Marti found that having a teacher who prioritizes mental health over academic success was important to her because of the mental health struggles that she dealt with in her sophomore year. She appreciated how her teachers valued her as a human being more than her academic achievements. She described her sophomore year as follows: "I'd say [sophomore year] was the most challenging I know for many it's usually freshman year but for me it's the year that I actually dealt with mental health issues I guess um… more." Marti needed teachers who were willing to help her with her academics but also prioritized her mental health and helped her through the particular challenges. Marti sought out her teachers for academic help when she had a medical condition. When discussing her medical condition, Marti talked about how her teachers helped her by extending due dates.

Differing from the other study participants, Kinnaly revealed that she felt connected to a teacher when the teacher shared her own struggles and coping mechanisms. Kinnaly shared the following:

She [teacher] started to open up about like, you know issues that were going on at school. So, through that, I felt as if, you know, I felt comfortable enough to talk to her, because she also does stuff like…creates reflections. She really wants to help a student and you can really tell that she's like really sympathetic and empathetic as well, and so through the way she like presents herself and carries herself, I feel as though that's, the main reason why I opened up to her.

Kinnaly formed a meaningful relationship with this teacher who provided crucial support; Moua shared how he received "a lot of help from [his] Upward Bound program" yet also knew he could count on his teachers. He shared, "I always understand where to find them [teachers] and I always know to reach out." Teachers were important people in all these participants' lives as they are the constant people in everyone's academic journey.

Counselors

School counselors were another resource student participants discussed as a source of knowledge and emotional support. Four of the participants shared that they utilized their school counselors as a resource for information and emotional support. Selena described seeking information when discussing counselors at her school:

> The counselors have provided information with things such as like the dual-enrollment classes, AP classes, what those classes do, how they're like how they're beneficial for when you go to college. I think those type of knowledge [college information] and receive them that type of information also helped me gain that knowledge.

Moua also described how the counselor was a resource for him: "The counselors they come in and talk about our like our future plans like what we're going to do that we're going to college, and they also workshopped about colleges." Aside from being a source of information, Moua also had a close relationship with his counselor. Moua described forging a close relationship with his counselor during their shared car rides to attend events at the district, and he credited this with them having a strong relationship. This was how he described the experience, "We'll always have meetings, and we will always talk there and they're like during the car ride to the meeting and we got close there."

While Moua and Selena identified the counseling department as a source of information for them, Marti and Maria identified their counselors as a source of emotional support. Marti described how the two counselors helped her:

> I could start with you and Ms. Walker in our officer meetings [meetings among student leaders in the club] I'm comfortable enough where once we're done talking about the agenda we have planned I could ask um...questions about not only my academic life but I guess sometimes my personal life as well, and how I could handle a situation.

Marti felt supported by the counselors and appreciated the time they took to check in on her and asked questions about her that were beyond academics. This showed Marti that the counselors cared about her, and she felt comfortable enough with them to share her personal life. Maria also described similar experiences with her counselor:

> I've always gone to her [school counselor] for school and for stuff like that… She was just the first person I thought. I knew that she wouldn't be like, she wouldn't go telling them [participant's parents], she wouldn't go to my mom or my dad…I can just go to her with confidentiality and she wouldn't say anything.

Maria's counselor was someone she could confide in while also seeking academic advice. Kinnaly also shared how her junior high counselor was someone who helped her overcome an obstacle. This is how she described the experience:

> I did self-harm when I was like in sixth and seventh grade and then I got caught. I remember my old counselor in middle school, she called me up to talk to me, and she was just, you know, just trying to figure out why [I] did things that I did. I told her and ever since then I stopped I'm, you know, that never came across my mind again.

92

Participants described experiences that highlight how counselors were an important in-school resource who helped student participants overcome obstacles in their academic or personal lives. College preparation programs were also important resources and offered much support to students.

College Preparatory Programs

The three types of college preparatory programs available at the participants' high school are Upward Bound, Early Academic Outreach Program (EAOP), and the Educational Talent Search (ETS). All three programs are federally funded and affiliated with the local University of California campus. The goal of these college preparatory programs is to increase post-secondary education access for low-income students or first-generation college students by providing college advice, tutoring, and exposing students to college experiences that included field trips to colleges, tutoring, and advising (Pitre & Pitre, 2009). The two programs that the participants discussed as having supported their challenges and helped meet their goals of going to college are EAOP and Upward Bound. Moua and Marti discussed their times with Upward Bound, while Selena discussed her participation with EAOP. For Moua, who has always participated in after school programs, Upward Bound was the main support he utilized throughout high school as it provided a safe space and all the resources he needed. This is how Moua described Upward Bound:

> I just like always a shy timid person… I joined [Upward Bound] programs and I got to know people more. I got to learn more like especially during high school during Upward Bound program, taught me a lot and get out of my bubble [and] speaking up more.

Upward Bound was a place that Moua felt he could be out of his shell and where he was getting the resources he needed. Moua also credited Upward Bound with helping him build his

self-esteem and confidence to interact with teachers and other students. He described it as follows:

> I was really like more talkative and outgoing in the after-school program and it just started more in classes during my high school years. I just started getting more [comfortable] in class, so it wasn't really too much, but I just started getting going out more like more outgoing started talking to the teachers more like mostly during my sophomore junior years.

The relationships Moua formed with Upward Bound staff helped him gain confidence to build relationships with peers and teachers. Similar to Moua, Marti was attracted to Upward Bound to access all the resources that she was looking for. She was very excited by all the resources that the program offered, and this was how she felt:

> Once I joined [Upward Bound], I don't know, um, there was a lot of first times. Like my first time with tutors, that I could go to [for] homework and help me. I guess helped me study for a test, helped me get my grade up, helped me answer a question that I might not have felt comfortable discussing with my teacher. Going to my first Saturday academy on UC campus where I got to meet and interact with all these different kids from not only [local city] but the Bay Area. Having my first study prep session I know it was, it was great, I had never experienced something like, I am, yeah, it was, it was great.

Upward Bound helped Marti realize the possibilities when resources are available, and she took advantage of all the services that they provided for her. They also provided her with her first laptop because before Upward Bound, Marti was relying on the public library for access to a computer to do her homework. Similar to Moua and Marti, Selena joined EAOP for the resources that they could provide for her in addition to the resources at her school.

94

All participants cited one or two or all three of these in-school support of people or programs that they turned to when they needed to overcome obstacles while maintaining their academic excellence. In the next section, I present the data of how each participant came to realize the benefits of their chosen resources.

Theme 4: Making Meaning of In-School Support

The last theme of how the participants made meaning of in-school support emerged when the students discussed how they utilized help within the school system. This theme provided insight into how participants perceived in-school support. The differentiation between each participant's level of maximizing the resources available to them are dependent on the resources the participants were looking for, the experiences the participants previously had with that particular support entity, and the history of certain resources with the participant's family, which includes the impact of the school system.

After each interaction with a school official or program staff, the participants made meaning of the interaction, and the meanings provided them with a generalization of how they felt about that in-school resource. The outcome of the initial interaction was dependent on the relationship the students were able or not able to form with the staff member of the school and/or programs. Positive connections tended to lead participants to continue to build a relationship with that individual and consider them a valuable resource in the future. Negative connections deterred the participants from seeking help from that source again. However, not all interactions and interpretations are finalized because participants continue to build on their perceptions of in-school resources after each interaction. The interactions resulted in strengthening the relationships the participants had with the resource(s) or weakening their bonds. For example,

the balance between positive and negative relationships with teachers may lead the participant to

be more selective of the type of teachers they seek or do not seek help from. Family and friends'

recommendations for a particular type of in-school support also influenced whether a participant

participated in a program or talked to a staff member. Lastly, participants who knew the types of

support they needed actively sought out resources that provided such support. These three factors

varied between the participants depending on their perception toward in-school support.

Direct Experiences with Teachers and Staff

Participants discussed direct experiences with teachers and staff that influenced how they

felt about in-school support—whether it was negative, positive, or a combination of both—which

shaped the relationships the participants had with teachers and staff. Positive experiences can

strengthen and solidify the relationships, while negative experiences cause discord in the current

relationship and deter future relationships (Spencer, 1995, 1999). The relationships with school

and program staff facilitated the meaning-making of the participants' perceptions of the

resources and affected their decision of whether to continue to seek help from the resources in

the future (Spencer, 1995, 1999). Positive experiences can mitigate negative experiences from

the past or lessen their impact.

Kinnaly and Sydney spoke about the impact of positive and negative interactions with

school support. Kinnaly was highly guarded when it came to seeking support from school, and

she sought the least amount of help. Kinnaly spoke of hiding her problems from home at school

by being the "perfect student" in the classroom, and her teachers did not know she needed help.

Kinnaly stated:

> I was always like trying to I guess mask my issues by offering them [teachers] help, if
>
> that makes sense. Like, I was the teacher's pet basically…So they never really you know

96

thought of me, as somebody that was going through all these issues and just saw me, as someone who wanted to help.

It was not until middle school that a school staffer finally noticed that Kinnaly was struggling. At this time, Kinnaly had begun to self-harm, and her school counselor called her into the office. Kinnaly stopped her self-harm behavior from this meeting and felt more open with school staff. Meeting with the junior high counselor helped Kinnaly with her self-harming behavior and helped Kinnaly strengthen relationships with teachers. Kinnaly shared how her relationships with teachers changed this was how she described the change in connections:

My connections with my teachers started to become better as well because like when I was, you know, going through all those issues, I felt like a victim. So I never really liked to, you know, talk to anybody, but ever since that they made me feel, you know, more comfortable with expressing my issues.

However, Kinnaly also experienced instances where she felt invalidated by staff when she had opened up to them, causing her to not want to open up to people. This was how Kinnaly described being misunderstood by those that wanted to help her:

They made me feel invalid for the things that I went through, made me feel like I was you know overreacting and some situations, maybe I'm too emotional. Um so yeah, it definitely has to do with like how people treated me and how they actually so-called help me. So yeah, they would just be like you know get over it, or you know just brush it off [as] it's really not that big of a deal when it's like way deeper than how they perceive it. So I never really opened up to people just because you know some people just can't understand.

97

Contrary to her past experiences, Kinnaly found one teacher in high school who she trusted and validated her experiences. Kinnaly might not have been able to open up to this teacher if it was not for the relationship she had with her middle school counselor. Even though Kinnaly mostly felt guarded in terms of seeking support from school staff, her positive experiences mitigate the negative experiences so that she is able to open up to staff who really make a connection with her. Similar to Kinnaly, Sydney also had negative experiences that were detrimental to how she felt about school support. However, Sidney also had positive experiences with school personnel that assuaged the negative feelings. Sydney only utilized teachers as her in-school support, but she asked for help sparingly because of a combination of negative and positive experiences with teachers. A negative experience during the first grade deterred Sydney from seeking help because after that experience, she felt that teachers were not there to help students and that she needed to rely on herself. This is how she described that experience:

> When I was in first grade, I would with the slightest confusion that I had, I would ask. One time, I asked the teacher and she was like rude and mean…One day she told me she's like 'I'm busy I'm cleaning the windows', and that made me upset like 'why don't you want to help me?'

This experience caused Sydney to think that teachers were not willing to help their students and as a result became more self-reliant to avoid feeling rejected again. Sydney stated:

> After that that thing that happened, I was always like okay 'Sydney you don't have to ask for help if people don't want to give it to you. If the teacher she doesn't want to give you the help don't beg for it, you can do it on your own.'

This experience hardened the participant and resulted in her feeling alone and hesitant to ask for help. However, Sydney also had positive experiences that allowed her to realize that teachers can also serve as positive resources. Here is how she described this experience:

I remember one day when I was in fifth grade we had started doing long division with decimal numbers and I you know I didn't really understand…I remember I went to school early that day and the teacher, she was in her classroom so I went up to her and I told her, I was like 'Oh, you know, do you like', I told her like 'oh I'm not able to do this, can you help me on this?'…She got up this whiteboard and she like, and she again she like, showed me her own tricks…After, I guess you could say when I realized how much time she put into, like making sure I because after that problem that I didn't understand, she would just like to make a problem problems and like we reviewed for a couple more problems and I guess you can say, since I realized how much time and effort she put into, for into me actually understanding the math concept, that's when I realized like, oh like she really does want to help me she really does care for my... like, if I understand or not and that's when from there, I guess that's when I really started to strongly rely on teachers for any type of question that I had.

The experience in fifth grade helped Sydney change how she viewed teachers as a resource, and she began to ask for help from her teachers. However, this experience did not eradicate the negative interaction with the teacher in the first grade because even though she began to rely on teachers for help, she still had her reservations. Sydney learned that she had to rely on herself because she did not want to "bother" her teachers as she felt like she bothered her teacher in first grade. More importantly, she interpreted that experience as "teachers don't want to help students," so when it came to needing help with homework, Sydney would:

99

Take it home try my hardest when it was like, to the point that I just tried so many ways, and I could not get the answer I just I couldn't get it, that's when I was like okay I can't wait, I have to go to the teacher.

Even though hesitant in asking for help, Sydney kept it as a tool she would use when necessary. This could stem from her positive experience with her fifth-grade teacher, which empowered her to seek help from her teachers afterward even though it was a last resort for her. Unfortunately, the first-grade interaction with the teacher was not the only negative experience that Sydney went through. She discussed two more incidents of negative experiences that caused her to have distrust in school staff and further solidified her feelings that she was alone and had to rely on herself. This is how she described her feelings on asking for help at school:

I am not willing to waste my time trying to find, trying to seek trust and honesty…at the end of the day, they leave as well, and they stop helping. I'm not going to waste my time trying to fix these things.

Experience after experience caused her not to put any trust in the school staff to protect herself from getting hurt again. This led to Sydney only utilizing her teachers as a resource when most needed, and she did not seek help from any other resources.

Maria is also reluctant to seek help from school teachers due to negative experiences in the classroom. Her hesitation is rooted from observing the ridicule students who asked questions in the classroom received from other students. Maria described her experience in elementary school:

Students would laugh at other students for the questions they would ask and so maybe I was just afraid of being laughed at. Because sometimes they were like not dumb questions, but they were like you know, like you really didn't know that stuff like that

100

you know that you, they would laugh at the other students that would ask, so in that case, I would like just put my hand and not even and not even ask.

Fortunately, Maria described positive experiences with teachers when she was in the English language immersion program. During her time in the immersion program, Maria felt that "teachers around us would help us." Additionally, she was identified as a language learner, and she received additional support to help her be reclassified as fluent in English. This experience was traumatizing because:

> I just didn't like going to the back, like getting stepped out from class, like letting the other kids know that I needed more, that there was something wrong with me like I was just scared that they'd make fun of me.

Being pulled out in front of her classmates caused Maria to feel less than, and she was worried that her classmates would ridicule her. Maria felt singled out as someone who needed extra help and different from the rest of her classmates. However, Maria expressed gratitude about receiving the help because she acknowledged that she knew she needed the help, but she also felt how visible it was to other students. The embarrassed feeling also deterred her from getting help from her teachers as much as she needed to. The combination of feeling singled out when receiving tutoring and worrying about "looking dumb," led Maria to only ask questions when it was the last resort or when no other students were around. Nonetheless, Maria felt highly supported by her teachers, given her positive experiences with her teachers at a young age whenever she asked them for help. She described her kindergarten teacher as the most impactful teacher to her:

> The one that has the most impact, I'd say would be my kindergarten teacher because first she was my kindergarten teacher, second she was a teacher that also had taught me a lot. I

remember good experiences with her, because she was also the teacher with the bilingual and she she would have so much patience and with us kids with us kids and learning both languages, she was just a very good teacher.

A strong relationship with her kindergarten teacher enabled Maria to have a positive image of teachers in the future, which aided in her seeking help from them. Maria reveals how she separated her concerns of other students and the teachers' willingness to help in this statement: "Maybe not the teachers, more like the students in a way, but at the same time I knew that teachers were willing to help."

Different from the first three participants, Marti and Selena created strategies to seek out resources that they could regularly seek help from and strayed from resources that were perceived as unsympathetic. Marti discussed the importance of teachers to her academic success due to her experience with a teacher who introduced her to new things in sixth grade. Her relationship with this teacher supported her to view teachers as a resource. Due to the positive experience, Marti sought out her teachers when she needed help regarding her medical issues. Most of her teachers responded supportively, while one teacher responded with, "Okay, whatever deal with it." This caused Marti to never ask this teacher for help again because she viewed this teacher as someone who was not a resource to her. Interestingly, this teacher offered after school tutoring to students, yet Marti did not feel welcome to attend. The culmination of positive experiences with many of her teachers helped Marti view teachers positively, and she still sought help despite the unsympathetic reactions of some teachers to her struggles.

In addition to unemphatic teachers, Marti also felt distrust toward her administrators due to their retaliative behavior toward her after she spoke up at a board meeting regarding the lack of resources at her school. She felt that after the passionate statement, the administrators could

102

"easily point me out in a crowd," and she faced consequences for a dress code violation that she felt other students did not get penalized for. Through this experience, she felt that "I couldn't trust the principal and the vice principal" and that:

I wouldn't be comfortable going to them and explaining kind of what happened because, if my voice wasn't heard when something when I talked about, something so simple as basic necessities and felt like I was looked at differently in a negative way after that, I couldn't imagine after going to them about something more drastic.

Marti internalized these experiences as "she must stay out of their way throughout high school," and this resulted in her being "more quiet." Marti felt that she could have participated more in high school but did not because she could not trust the school administrators. Marti chose to work around them and stay out of their way during the remaining years of high school.

Similar to Marti, Selena had welcoming experiences from teachers when she sought help but also had teachers who turned her away. Selena discussed two contrasting experiences that provided exemplified the type of teachers she sought help from. Selena described her fifth-grade teacher as follows:

When I would get discouraged, my teacher was always there, and I think my teacher is one of the main reasons that you know I made the biggest progress because of how much he encouraged me and how much he was there for me and for all of the students.

Selena's fifth-grade teacher made efforts to be there for his students, encouraged them, and provided help when they needed it. This teacher modeled for Selena the type of teachers she could ask for help from. Contrary to the fifth-grade teacher, Selena had a science teacher in the eighth grade who "had like basically did not put any effort to teach his students" and "he wouldn't even try to teach him, like he definitely did not teach he just made us do a packet and

you know, answer the questions from the book and that would just be it." Through the experiences of these two teachers, Selena formulated the following as a strategic roadmap for herself:

> Realizing that teachers, um that certain teachers just don't put in the effort to teach their students. Just doesn't like motivate me to ask them for help, like if I see that they're putting very little effort in their in their classroom with their students, then I know that that's like a teacher on that I can't really trust like because basically if I see that that teachers not putting in that much effort and what's going to make me realize or make me think that that teacher is going to give me that support that he doesn't give to his students in the classroom.

This is a practice Selena employed throughout high school, and experiences with various teachers confirmed this theory for Selena. Selena shared, "I think that all of the teachers that I have asked for help have always helped me. For the same reason that, like, I always ask for help with the teachers that I know that I can trust." For this participant, instead of feeling deterred and asking for help less, she reflected on her experiences and formed a theory to help her navigate receiving help from her teachers (Spencer, 1995, 1999). This process aligns with the PVEST model of refining coping mechanisms through lived experiences for the desired outcomes.

Not all participants had negative experiences when seeking help. Antonio felt supported throughout his education journey, especially from his teachers. He started relying more on his teachers after having a teacher who went above and beyond for him in junior high. This is how he described the teacher:

> She was actually one of the first teachers who actually helped me realize that I'm a great student and need to regain focus and participate in discussions more. After I did this, she

realized this and started talking to me a lot and this continued to motivate me, and this

really carried on our relationship.

He was also able to confide in the teacher and made a connection with her in ways that he was

not able to do with his previous teachers. This was how he described their connection:

I would always talk to her, and this is what really made a difference between all the other

previous teachers. I had, I didn't have this connection with them, I didn't have, I didn't

have the, I wasn't really looking to talk to them when I didn't need to, and Miss Gilman

was this exception, she was an amazing listener, and she does teach me a lot outside the

classroom environment.

From this experience forward, Antonio made it a point to foster relationships with all his

teachers because he saw the benefits of having a close relationship with teachers. When asked

how he fostered the relationship, he responded, "Usually I do it by talking to them a lot and

asking a lot and getting to know them by trying to stand out to them. This really helps with

building relationships with your teachers." Antonio expressed how much support he received

throughout his school years and said he has never had a negative experience with his teachers.

All these students recounted personal interactions with school staff who influenced their

thinking of school staff, whether positive or negative. Some negative experiences were more

detrimental than others, and some were so detrimental that they deterred the participants almost

completely from seeking support again. Some participants also went through enough positive

experiences that they could work around the system by forming theories to help them seek out

the best support.

Seeking Out Specific Resources

In the previous section, I discussed interactions in the classroom or on the school campus, and in this section, I discuss the participants' resources specifically sought out. Moua acknowledged during the interview that he does not know much about the U.S. education system and the college application process. This is what he shared:

I knew that I didn't understand the process. I knew that I was going to need help throughout school…Just something that I had to do, I went out and did it. I went out and joined that program [Upward Bound] my freshman year because I knew that I just needed help to be able to go to college and during those years I would also ask my counselor.

Moua was proactive about seeking the knowledge that he wanted and knew that he did not know much about such knowledge. He was actively engaged with Upward Bound and with the counseling office throughout high school. Selene also had a very similar approach to Moua: She joined a college preparation program (EAOP) and attended presentations by the school counselors. This is how she discussed EAOP and the school counselors:

So, like in EAOP I have, I've been in that program since ninth grade and each year I have learned more about college like, such as the finances, the housing, what it takes to be a college student and what it takes to be a successful college student. And those just, like, those meetings, even if it was just, like, once a month or something like that, I think those that would really help me and then you know when I needed when I had questions about something, and you know going to the counselor counseling office also, also helped me gain that knowledge or receive that information that I needed.

Both these participants knew what they needed and where to find the relevant support.

The knowledge attracted these students to these resources, but they both took the initiative to try the programs and saw value in the programs once they joined and continued to

106

stay in the programs. Similar to Moua and Selena, Marti also joined a college preparation program services offered by the program. Marti was looking for resources such as tutoring, test preparation workshops, and extra help that her friends from other areas had at their schools but she did not have at her school. This is what was promised to her at the recruitment:

> Tutoring, and Saturday academies where you get tutors to help with English literature, or even what the SAT. There was an SAT prep. And I realized, I was like wow you even offer tutoring at school, I don't know it really it was like a sign, that's how I saw a sign, to finally be able to get it together and have something that was close to home.

The program even provided a laptop for Marti because she was relying on the public library or the school library for access to a computer. The attraction of the services kept Marti engaged in the program, and she continued to rely on it for support throughout high school. Marti also shared the sentiment that she wished she knew these programs existed earlier because it would have been much less stressful for her. Accessing these programs had been beneficial to the students who participated in them, but they all had to seek out the programs, and they were not built to serve all students at the school.

Family History

The last factor discussed in the interviews on how students perceive in-school support is the history the participants' family members had with school programs. Maria described that her initial trust for her high school? counselor was because her brother had the same counselor, and her mother advocated for her to have the same school counselor. She stated, "She also helped my brother, she was my brother's counselor." This turned into a strong support system for Maria as her counselor was someone she confided in times of need. Moua joined Upward Bound because his uncles went through the program and recommended the program to him. Upward Bound was

107

Moua's main support system throughout high school as he was more comfortable in the program than in the classroom. These recommendations can be crucial first steps for the students because otherwise they may not know about the programs or take the initial step of joining the programs.

Whether it was a first-hand experience, help they sought out, or a family recommendation, all participants received and felt supported at one point in their education journey. Students such as Kinnaly and Sydney were more guarded about their support systems, but they both agreed that there was support. For example, Sydney sought help as a last resort or did not want to spend time asking for help because of her past negative experiences. Similarly, Maria also expressed that she felt supported, but it was the perception from other students that prevented her from seeking support when needed. Both Marti and Selena were selective of who they choose to seek help from, but both had teachers and college preparation programs as a constant presence throughout high school. Even though Moua mostly accessed support through the Upward Bound program, he also expressed how he felt school staff were there for him if needed. Lastly, Antonio felt his teachers have been there for him and went above and beyond to support him in high school. Overall, all participants utilized in-school support but varied in frequencies.

Summary of Major Findings

The findings presented in this chapter resulted from interviews with seven academically high achieving students of color who were attending a low resource high school. All the participants attended the same high school all four years and graduated the top 10% of their class. Through their narratives, four themes emerged to provide insights into the obstacles this group of students overcame and how they perceived in-school support. The first theme was the

types of obstacles these participants faced, and it was divided into two categories. The first

category reveals the obstacles that stemmed from inequities in the academic system. The second

category of obstacles centered on familial hardships. The second theme was the academic

resilience narrative that emerged when learning about how participants dealt with their obstacles.

The third theme was about the types of in-school support that these participants utilized in

conjunction with other support they have in their lives to overcome their obstacles. The last

theme was understanding how these participants chose their in-school support and made meaning

with the interactions they had with these resources.

CHAPTER 6: DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

Introduction

This last chapter is organized into five parts: the research questions, discussion of the findings, implications, recommendations, and conclusion. I will begin by representing the research questions. In the discussion of the findings section, I answer the research questions with the themes that I discussed in chapter five. Subsequently, I discuss the implications for students of color attending low resource schools in general and high achieving students specifically. In the following section, I include recommendations from the participants for the education system, my recommendations for future studies, and how this study is an inflection point for me as a researcher and a counselor.

Research Questions

1. In what ways do academically high achieving students of color attending a low resource school overcome challenges?

2. How do academically high achieving students of color attending a low resource school perceive in-school support?

Discussion of Findings

The findings of this study suggest an education system operating under the assumption that all students have equal access to resources similar to White middle class students (Conchas, 2006; P. Gorski, 2013; Lynch, 2018). For example, only 15% of homes with an annual income below the poverty threshold have a computer at home, while the rest relied on public resources such as libraries or afterschool programs (Lynch, 2018). From the participants' experiences, the

educational system assumed that all students have equal resources (e.g., come from families who are familiar with the education system, similar resources, and everyone speaks English fluently). To overcome these assumptions, students along with the support of their families and school created strategies to cope and identified mechanisms that propelled them to persist through their educational journey and achieve academic excellence. No one roadmap was the same since each student's lived experience was unique. However, the obstacles shared could have been preventable given a more inclusive education system. When asked specifically about in-school support, the participants identified teachers, counselors, and college preparatory programs as key institutional actors and programs that they sought help from. How the participants formed and nurtured relationships with in-school support personnel depended upon their prior experiences or relationships. The in-school relationships are viewed as resources. The experiences or outcomes of these relationships also determined the likelihood of students cultivating future relationships with these key personnel or continuing to utilize these resources.

Theme 1 – Structural and Institutional Discriminations

Educational leaders often position students of color attending low resource schools as being "at risk" rather than viewing the systemic barriers within the education system as the obstacles that deter persistence in P-12 systems (Valencia, 2010). However, such analyses put the blame on students of color attending low resource schools and alleviates the responsibility from the education system (Gorski, 2011). The students in this study faced numerous systemic barriers that resulted from structural and institutional discriminations. Obstacles such as limited understanding of the education system, language barriers, balancing family and school duties, resource scarcity, mental health issues, and negative school experiences stemmed from policies

that caused differential and harmful effects on students of color attending a low resource school. The obstacles identified by the participants in this study mainly center around structural inequities and institutional discrimination. Structural discrimination includes the "policies of dominant/race/gender institutions and behavior of those that implement these policies and oversee these institutions with the intent of race/ethnic/gender neutral but cause differential and/or harmful effect on minority race/ethnic/gender group" (Pincus, 1996, p. 186). Institutional discrimination includes "the policies of the dominant race/ethnic/gender institutions and the behavior of the individuals who control these institutions and implement policies that are intended to have a differential and/or harmful effect on minority race/ethnic/gender groups" (Pincus, 1996, p. 186).

School leaders often assume that all students start school with an understanding of how the P-16 educational system works. The assumption that all students have the same understanding of the P-16 system is punitive toward families who are not familiar with this country's education system (Espinoza-Herold & González-Carriedo, 2017). Multiple participants were concerned that they had limited understanding of the education system even though they have participated in the education system for years. None of the participants discussed any instances where they were taught how the education system operates, and they sought the information on their own (Cates & Schaefle, 2011). These students have limited social capital for "knowledge or strategies that can be applied to the process that leads to college" (Cates & Schaefle, 2011, p. 322). Moua, Sydney, Marti, and Selena had to join programs such as AVID, EAOP, and Upward Bound to learn how to navigate the education system.

The participants' stories in this study also show how the educational system favors the English language, and practices are punitive toward multilingual students and families. This is a barrier for families and students who are not fluent in English in accessing the education system without a readily available interpreter. This is also an example of pathologizing parents of color because the school may not be communicating with these parents in the language that they can understand, and these parents do not feel welcome at the school (Espinoza-Herold & González-Carriedo, 2017; Gorski, 2013). More importantly, by discounting students' home languages, schools are in favor of assimilationist policies and practices (Conchas, 2006). This practice devalues the social capital of students of color and can hinder academic success (Conchas, 2006). Creating learning environments that recognize the social capital of students of color can enhance all students' learning.

The system also assumes that all students have the financial resources that middle class families can afford such as tutoring, exam preparations, and/or technology. The school assumed that all students have access to a computer at home, which created an extra burden for students and their families who do not have one. Marti, who did not have a computer at home until Upward Bound provided one for her, relied on using the computers at public libraries until her sophomore year because her teachers assigned her schoolwork that required access to a computer. Sydney expressed the need for tutoring when she was younger but was not able to access the help. The constant adaptations to the system and the financial hardships are detrimental to the mental health of some of the participants. Lastly, the negative experiences some of the participants endured in school are preventable if teachers and staff are better trained to honor and legitimize the experiences of students of color (Wiener, 2006). The hardships experienced by participants are an example of how structural racism impacts students of color

attending low resource schools. Deep-rooted discrimination based on race and socioeconomic status creates biases and barriers that do not support the academic development of students of color (Lee, 2009). If the education system is reflective of the diversity of its students' population and gears support programs toward the needs of all students, students similar to the participants in this study would not have to jump over so many hurdles just to get on even ground with White middle class students.

Theme 2: Academic Resilience

How the students overcame their obstacles could be viewed through Morales' academic resilience model. The participants in this study are considered to have academic resilience because they overcame obstacles despite the unfavorable conditions that students of color living in poverty must endure (Gonzalez & Padilla, 1997; Morales & Trotman, 2004; Wang et al., 1995). As stated earlier, the unfavorable conditions are the institutional and structural barriers that exist in the education system. Unfortunately, this reflects the lack of improvement within the education system and a failure to remove hurdles that must be overcome by students of color attending low resource schools. This model perpetuates the call for students of color attending low resource schools to continue to combat systemic barriers instead of calling for changes for the inequitable environment and policies in the schools they attend.

One way that these participants combated the unfavorable conditions is by building relationships with teachers and counselors in school and out of school programs who helped them build confidence for their academic potential. Meaningful relationships with teachers and counselors helped these participants see their academic potential, which is important in combating obstacles in the future (Patall et al., 2014). Students also saw the correlation between

achieving good grades and securing a better future for themselves and their families (Gayles, 2005). The support from family and personal attributes played crucial roles in students overcoming obstacles. Student participants believed that hard work and perseverance would help them do well in school, which aligns with the concept of grit and zest. The educational system idealizes characteristics such as grit and zest as the winning combination of how to be successful academically (Love, 2019). Grit is defined as "perseverance and passion for long-term goals" and zest as "finding and sharing excitement in what you do" (Character Lab, 2020). The participants internalized these deficit constructs taught in school and emphasized the need to work hard and persevere rather than understanding these struggles as systemic issues.

Additionally, student participants aspired to gain admission to a college or university and understood the importance of achieving academic success in school; this became the students' driving force in P-12. Morales' (2000) academic resilience model helps in understanding the students' experiences. Participants began by reflecting upon and identifying the areas that they needed support to achieve their goal of attending college after high school, which signaled academic success. Subsequently, participants shared about how they could seek help when needed, and they knew where to get the help from. They identified resources such as teachers, college preparation programs, staff members, family, and friends who were instrumental in offering support to them. These key individuals and the relationships formed with each of them served as an essential resource to help the students improve and sustain their grades in classes. These individuals also nurtured and inspired the students' confidence to persevere and became part of their support systems as they continued to strive for academic success.

Student-driven models put the burden on the students to be proactive and remedy the discriminations that are embedded in the education system. This pushes the narrative of meritocracy and assimilation to be successful in the education system. This is harmful to students of color who attend low resource schools because it penalizes these students for their cultures and the limited access to resources (Gorski, 2013; Tabron & Venzant Chambers, 2019; Valencia, 2010). The educational system pathologizes students of color from low SES families as not working hard enough, not proactive enough, and not resourceful enough (Espinoza-Herold & González-Carriedo, 2017; Gorski, 2013). Despite decades of studies, the same structural barriers are still in place, and the responsibilities of overcoming these obstacles continue to be placed on the shoulders of the students instead of reexamining school policies and leadership practices.

The participants in this study internalized grit ideologies and meritocracy because this is what is valued and applauded by the school system. For example, Sydney and her family "normalized" Sydney being her parents' translator all her life even though they are being denied access to services that they are entitled to. However, Marti and Sydney acknowledged that if they had more help, they would not have to struggle as much. Marti recognized the inequities in resources between her school and other more affluent schools, but she "didn't know who to be mad at." Marti saw that students who attended more affluent schools had access to resources that she did not have at her school. Marti's observation is echoed across the country that students of color are more likely to attend schools that receive less funding than more affluent schools and schools that are using outdated learning facilities (Knoff, 2019; Gorski, 2013). Even though some participants saw the issues within the education system, they took it as their responsibility to overcome the issues. This could be due to the participants not seeing support within their school environment and not being able to recognize the structural inequity issues yet.

As discussed in the previous section and in the data finding section, most of the unfavorable conditions stem from the education system due to structural and institutional discriminations. They are system-generated obstacles, but the expectation is on students of color living in low socioeconomic neighborhoods to overcome them. For example, Sydney and Selena discussed the lack of tutoring available to them, and they were not able to receive help from their parents. The situation is exacerbated when they also had to tutor their younger siblings due to lack of tutoring available. Another example is when Sydney discussed her limited knowledge of navigating the system; her older sister was not able to help Sydney because the older sister also lacked the knowledge. However, Sydney was also responsible for helping her younger sister navigate the same system. Students of color are burdened with finding their own resources, but they also take on the responsibility of helping their younger siblings find help. Students would not have to overcome language barriers, find their own resources, figure out which teachers they are able to seek help from, learn how the education system works, and help their younger siblings with school if all these are built into the system already. Sydney reflected that if tutoring was available to her younger siblings, she would not have to spend time helping them, and she could also receive the help she needed. Other participants also discussed being aware that they cannot afford tutoring and relied on their teachers for help. Not all teachers were equally available, and the participants found ways of identifying teachers and staff who would help them.

Unfortunately, even though low resource schools need more qualified teachers, they are staffed with less experienced teachers with more instructional skill gaps (Knoff, 2019; Gorski, 2013; Wiener, 2006). The school system set expectations for students, but they did not provide the tools for the students to meet such expectations. The participants in this study would not have as many obstacles to overcome and be as stressed as they were if the education system was

designed to serve all students and their needs. If the goal is to bridge the opportunity gap, barriers within the education system must be removed for students. The narrative of teaching students to overcome obstacles and to have grit and zest will maintain the status quo as proven by the data. Until the need for academic resilience is obsolete, the opportunity gap will persist. Students of color attending low resources schools lack opportunities to achieve because of the superfluous obstacles that hinder their progress. The participants in this study achieved academic success, but it was not without hardships. They spoke of support from families and trusted staff, but it was not obtained without trial and error. Other students who have as much academic potential as these students may not be as lucky with a supportive family and/or meeting teachers or programs that care.

Family support was pivotal to the success of the participants as six out of the seven participants lived with both of their biological parents. These participants discussed witnessing the sacrifices their parents made for them, which served a source of motivation for them to do well. Learning how students of color view in-school support and how they perceive supportive staff will be informative for schools when aiding students and their families with more equitable school experiences.

Theme 3: Types of In-School Support

Teachers, counselors, and college preparatory programs were in-school support that the participants identified as key institutional actors and programs that helped them overcome their obstacles. Teachers and counselors are part of the school institution to educate and support students. College preparatory programs provide support for students, who participate in their programs, outside of the classroom and supplemental to the services schools provide. Teachers,

118

school counselors, and college preparatory programs collaborate to support students in learning about college admissions and advance their goal of getting into college. Teachers were the most utilized resource by all the participants, yet there are fewer qualified teachers at low resource schools (Fahle et al., 2020). These students were proactive in seeking help from their teachers by actively building relationships with teachers or learning which teachers to seek help from. The participants discussed the lack of available tutoring in school, which could have alleviated the pressure of seeking help from their teachers.

Counselors were another resource that the participants utilized to obtain information or to confide in. Maria turned to her counselor when she needed academic advice or needed to confide in someone about personal matters. Likewise, Kinnaly's junior high school counselor helped her deal with self-harming behavior, and this experience encouraged her to share her struggles with school staff. Moua, Marti, and Selena utilized their counselors for knowledge and support. Unfortunately, the average ratio of students to counselors is 622:1, which is higher than the recommended ratio of 250:1 by the American School Counselors Association (Jones, 2019). Counselors were important to some of the participants, but with the ratio at 622:1, not all students will have access to counselors equitably. Some of the participants also recommended the presence of mental health counselors in school as a few of them discussed mental health concerns. The site of the study does not have any mental health counselor on campus and "youth needing mental health services are more likely to access those services in a school setting than in a community-based mental health setting" (Carlson & Kees, 2013). The presence of mental health counselors on school campuses would alleviate some of the workload from the school counselors to allow them to focus on the academic and college-going aspect of student life.

119

College preparatory programs were another resource that participants utilized, and they served as compensation for services that the school was lacking. These programs are designed to "increase the college enrolment and completion rates of economically disadvantaged and underrepresented ethnic background students" (Pitre & Pitre, 2009, p. 96). Participants who maximized all the resources these programs offered found them to be supportive and helpful. However, admissions into these programs are limited in capacity, require an application process, and participants have to meet eligibility criteria. Students who are interested in joining these programs must invest time outside of school hours to participate in their services, which may not be feasible for students who work or help out their parents at home. For example, Upward Bound offers a five-week summer program that requires participants to stay on campus during the week and go home on the weekend (Pitre & Pitre, 2009). This may deter students who have to work or have other responsibilities from being able to participate. More importantly, there is limited space in each of the programs and one of the recruitment methods is recommendations made by school staff for potential participants (Pitre & Pitre, 2009). This can be problematic because students who are not deemed as potential participants by school staff may not be referred to the programs. School staff could potentially be the gatekeepers of those who are able to join these programs. This is illustrated by only three out of the seven high academic achieving study participants joining a college preparatory program even though participants who joined gave high praises to their experiences. More students would benefit from college preparatory programs if they were more accessible to more students and incorporated their services as part of the school day. All three resources required the participants to be the initiators to ask for help or to apply for a program.

Not all students would ask a teacher for help, talk to a counselor, or apply to a college preparatory program. One reason that students may not ask for help is due to negative experiences with school actors who can cause a trust gap (Walker, 2017). A trust gap is "when students have lost trust, they may have been deprived of the benefits of engaging with an institution, such as positive relationships and access to resources and opportunities for advancement" (The Science Teacher, 2017). This was evidenced in Sydney; after multiple negative experiences with school staff, she was deterred from seeking help unless it was the last resort. This positioned these students with a trust gap and at a disadvantage because they are not able to access the help they need. Lastly, these three types of resources may work for this specific group of students, but other students may need other resources that are not mentioned here.

Theme 4: Making Meanings of In-School Support

How the participants perceive in-school support and choose their in-school support can be understood via PVEST. Phenomenological variant of ecological systems theory (PVEST) by Margaret Beale Spencer is a developmental framework that considers the self, historical context of the person's various identities, the person's ecological system, and the person's lived experience when examining a person's development (Nasir et al., 2009; Spencer, 1995; Spencer et al., 1997, 2001; Swanson et al., 2002, 2003). For this study, I begin with stress engagement, which is when the participant discusses an obstacle that requires coping skills. How the participant copes with that obstacle is dependent on how the participant has coped with similar obstacles in the past, how the participant feels about seeking help, and the participant's culture and family culture regarding school and seeking help. Once the participant seeks help, the

outcome will either affirm how they felt about that resource or alter it if the outcome is different from the last time. This process continues to happen and, as time goes on, the participant forms solid coping mechanisms that they continue to utilize as long as they result in personally desirable outcomes.

For instance, Sydney had a cautious relationship with her teachers—her main source of in-school support. She was readily asking her teacher for help until she had a negative experience at a young age where she felt rejected. Sydney internalized this traumatic experience, and it resulted in her believing that teachers were not there to help her so she should rely on herself when it comes to academic help. Moving forward from that experience, she mostly relied on herself to figure out her academic struggles. She was able to achieve academic success through this method, which confirmed to her that this coping mechanism provided her with a desirable outcome. However, in fifth grade, Sydney met a teacher who genuinely spent time helping her. Through this experience, Sydney's opinion regarding teachers and asking for help was positively altered. However, Sydney's perspective on teachers did not change completely as she was still having success by relying on herself. Through this experience, Sydney would only ask for help as a last resort. This combination has proven to work for Sydney, and she utilized it throughout junior high and high school. Sydney felt that her teachers were assets but because of the detrimental experience at a very young age, she sparingly asked for help to protect herself from feeling rejected.

Moua mostly utilized the college preparatory program as his in-school support, and it also served as his safe space throughout high school. Moua learned from his uncles that after-school programs are beneficial academically and in meeting the goal of going to college. He joined after

school programs at a young age, and he felt supported and comfortable. Since he has had positive experiences in the after-school programs and received the help he needed, he concluded that this is a coping mechanism that would work for him. When he started high school, Moua wanted to find resources that would help him with understanding the education system and applying to college. He sought out an after-school program because it previously provided him the outcome he wished for. Moua joined Upward Bound because of his past experience with after-school programs and because his uncles also participated in the program and had successes. He interpreted Upward Bound as a coping mechanism that works best for him, and he mostly relied on it throughout high school.

Selena was strategic with how she sought support and the resources she needed. Selena experienced negative and positive experiences in seeking out teachers for help. Through these experiences, she reflected on which teachers were helpful to her and which were not willing to provide help. Selena saw a pattern that teachers who made an effort in their teaching in the classroom tended to be the ones that were also willing to help students outside the classroom. She also ascertained that teachers who were not making effort with their lessons in the classroom were the ones who were not willing to help students outside the classroom. Selena corroborated her theory each time she asked for help from a teacher, and the outcome of that request matched with the type of teacher she perceived them to be. This helped Selena with determining who she would ask for help in the future. This theory has served Selena well each time that it was proven to be true, and it strengthened the theory. This participant also sought help in learning more about the education system and the college admission process. She found this help when she joined a college preparatory program, EAOP, and in the counseling office at her school. Her initial interactions with her counselors and EAOP provided her with the information she needed.

Through these experiences, Selena interpreted that EAOP and the counseling office were resources that would help her meet her goals and continued to participate in EAOP and the workshops the counseling office put on.

What Marti wanted from in-school support was resources that could propel her to reach her academic potential. Marti wanted more resources to help her meet her goals of pursuing a medical degree, and she believed that getting into a good college would help her in her goals. In an effort to seek help, Marti met the coordinator of Upward Bound, a college preparatory program, while she was in the counseling office. The coordinator's enthusiasm about Upward Bound's resources persuaded Marti to give the program a try. The plentiful resources available to Marti once she joined Upward Bound were exactly what she had been looking for. She interpreted Upward Bound as a resource that would help her with her obstacles in high school, and she continued to participate in Upward Bound. Each of the experiences she had with Upward Bound were positive and productive, which solidified it as a coping mechanism for her. In addition to Upward Bound, Marti also sought help from her teachers due to her medical issues. How the teachers responded initially helped Marti interpret whether that teacher would be a resource or not. For Marti, the initial response was defining for her, and it determined whether she would continue to ask the teacher for help or not. This is a method that she refined over various interactions she had with teachers and staff.

Out of all the participants, Kinnaly was the most guarded when it came to seeking support at school even though she dealt with many hardships over the years. Kinnaly did not seek help from anyone, and she did not receive support from anyone. Her coping mechanism was to deal on her own and hide her issues from her teachers. An experience with a counselor in

124

junior high altered this belief. A counselor in junior high was the first school staff member who saw through Kinnaly's persona of a helpful student and that she was struggling. Through this experience, Kinnaly revised her belief from not opening up to being more willing to open up to staff at school. This interpretation opened the door for her to be able to confide in one of her teachers in high school. Even though she was still reluctant in opening up to other people, she was still willing to be open with the right staff member. Through lived experiences, Kinnaly adjusted her coping mechanism of talking to someone as more positive outcomes occurred when she opened up to teachers.

Antonio received the most support from his teachers, and they were his main source of support at school. Antonio learned at a young age that communication is key. He also had an influential relationship with a teacher in junior high that was established through communication. From this experience, Antonio wanted to replicate all his future relationships with his teachers to be similar to the ones he had in junior high because of how beneficial and meaningful it was to him. This became a reliable reactive coping strategy, and Antonio continued to use this format and made the extra effort to talk to his teachers, have a relationship with them, and check in on them daily (Spencer, 1995). As each relationship brought him success academically and his teachers always looked out for him, it solidified this roadmap to success for him. This roadmap was further strengthened when Antonio was struggling in school during distance learning because this learning format did not allow him to form strong relationships with his teachers. His grades improved as soon as he began to have more contact with his teachers and was able to build the relationships that are crucial to his academic success.

125

For Maria, seeking support was hard, but she sought help when needed. Maria had some negative experiences at a young age that deterred her from wanting to ask for help. She felt singled out for receiving help due to her EL status when tutoring occurred in the back of the class while the rest of her classmates were receiving instructions in the front. This experience, which is a stress engagement, combined with students making fun of other students in the classroom when they asked questions caused Maria to fear being bullied by her classmates (Spencer, 1999). Maria interpreted asking for help or getting help from the teachers as putting a target on herself to be bullied by other students. However, through the encouragement of her family and friends, Maria sought help when needed. However, it did not change her fear of being bullied for asking for help, but she found a way around it. Maria adjusted to asking for help when no one was around and only asked for help when it was the last option.

Each of the participants adjusted or affirmed their set of beliefs about in-school support in relation to their academic success through their lived experiences. Their beliefs of in-school support were only theories until they faced an obstacle, which is when they tested their theories. Through these experiences, the theories are either affirmed or altered depending on the outcomes. This process is cyclical, and a person's lived experience becomes the foundation for the next time another obstacle arises similar to the progression through the domains of PVEST. Awareness of this process helps inform schools to ensure that students always feel supported and encouraged with all their interactions with staff members. It is unpredictable when an interaction will be a pivotal moment for students, especially at the elementary school age.

Summary of Discussion

The adverse conditions in the education system for students of color, especially those

attending low resource schools, are evident in the obstacles the participants share. Obstacles such

as lack of resources, shortage of qualified teachers, lack of a culturally appropriate curriculum,

and systemic discrimination are common for many students of color who attend low resource

schools (Conchas, 2006; Gorski, 2013; Ladson-Billings, 2014; Pincus, 1996). The narrative of

teaching zest and grit to students is still extant as most of the participants put in strenuous effort

to maintain their academic achievement. Fortunately, all the participants found some support

within the school walls to mitigate the barriers the education system put forth. However, the

availability of resources was a consequence of the participants actively pursuing them and not

because the resources were readily accessible to the participants. This highlights the importance

of having resources readily accessible to all students and ensuring that all students feel supported

and valued. The eradication of structural discriminations mentioned by the participants and

easily accessible resources to all students will help bridge the academic achievement disparities.

Caveats

Some caveats of this study include nonparticipation of African American students and the

difficulties that came with being in an ongoing pandemic. The focus of this study was on

students of color, but I was not able to recruit African American students who fit the criteria to

participate in the study even though African American students make up 18.3% of the student

body. The second caveat of this study centers on difficulties of conducting research in the middle

of a pandemic, which required virtual recruitment and virtual interviews. Given my established

relationships with students, I might have been able to recruit African American participants if I

was able to recruit in person. All interviews were conducted virtually via Zoom to follow the

school's district protocol of distance learning for all students. Interviewing via Zoom made it

difficult to read body language, and there were also technology hiccups during the interviews.

Some of the technology hiccups included unstable Internet connection that caused difficulties in

hearing and responding and losing Internet connection in the middle of the interview. I

combatted this by continuously checking in with students by paraphrasing their answers to

ensure accuracy. When this happened, I re-asked the last question so the participants could start

at the beginning of that question. Finally, the pandemic has increased the hardships students must

negotiate, including making meaning of the racial unrests that occurred last year and this year. In

combination, these might have impacted the participants' reflection of their adversities and

support system. Even though there are some caveats to the study, the participants provided rich

narratives and expressed satisfaction with their participation.

Implications of this Study

This study aims to provide a pulse on the obstacles students of color attending a low-

resource school face and how they experience in-school support. The participants implicitly

offered feedback on how the school affirms the diverse identities of students and identified a

couple of adults on campus they trusted. Student participants indicated that their school has

programs available to support them. The counseling office is also reaching out to students to fill

the gap in knowledge about college admissions. However, student narratives also reveal that the

school needs to be more attentive to students' needs, such as providing more mental health

services and a forum for students to raise their concerns.

It is easy for educators to assume that students who are high academic achieving are supported and knowledgeable about navigating the education system, but these student participants shared contradicting stories. The level of support experienced by the participants was wide, ranging from Sydney feeling alone and unsupported to Antonio who shared all positive things about his teachers and the school. The school needs to be more proactive in building relationships with students and particularly ensuring resources area accessible to students, particularly for those students who may not know how to reach out or do not have family members with experience in the education system. By providing resources and support to students and their families, schools are validating the student's knowledge. Doing so affirms students' identities and their families and communities.

Regardless of family background, all participants shared that the availability of more resources and more support would have alleviated some of the struggles they endured. However, P-12 schools must offer culturally relevant resources that are tailored to students' needs instead of assuming what students need, or building upon deficit and biased stereotypes. Schools must design culturally relevant support services that affirm the ethnic and linguistic diversity of the students. The participants in this study suffered because the norms and values inherent in the education system do not align with their lived experiences and reality. Language barriers, limited knowledge of the education system, inadequate medical and mental health care, and lack of technology were some of the obstacles that student negotiated. These systemic inequities need to be addressed to enhance the experiences of culturally and linguistically diverse students. These inequities circumscribed the academic potential of many students of color with limited resources available to them because they are overwhelmed in negotiating the barriers and persisting to graduation. Instead of encouraging students to have grit and zest to compensate for the deficits of

the system, educators must must acknowledge the knowledge students and their families bring to the school. Schools must also strengthen the family -school partnerships. Honoring the knowledge of culturally and linguistically diverse families will affirm students make schools more accessible to families.

Recommendations for Policy and Practice

The participants in this study expressed hardships in overcoming structural barriers that the education system can and must eliminate. The recommended policies are as follows: more resources that increase understanding of the education system for students and families at a younger age, expansion of academic enrichment programs that are accessible to low income students of color not just students who meet criteria, and more mental health services and resource centers that provide a wide variety of services. One of the obstacles that multiple participants mentioned was their limited understanding of the P-20 educational system and that they had to pursue resources that helped them bridge the knowledge gap. If more students and families are informed about the education system early on, it will be easier for them to focus on school because they have an understanding of how the system works and where they are going. Parents can work in conjunction with schools and be more involved if they have a better understanding of the school system. This can occur when schools work on strengthening family-school partnerships and ensuring the programs they offer to families are multilingual.

Another recommendation is the expansion of college preparatory programs. Three of the participants who joined a college preparatory program praised it, relied on it, and gained success with it. However, these programs often have limited space, criteria, and an application process, which excludes many students. Expansion of programs such as these would help more students

and provide students with an alternative to seeking help from teachers. The availability of these programs should be more prominent in high school and/or college campuses so more students are aware of their existence. They can also work with teachers and staff to promote the programs among students and their parents. The resources these programs provide could help many students obtain college admission, while the P-16 education system works on minimizing the systemic barriers.

Lastly, as evidenced by this group of participants, students' needs vary, and how they cope with obstacles can also be unique. Instead of assuming what students may need, a resource center can triage what the students need and provide the support accordingly. This could be a community center where students can go for academic or community resources. For example, a recommendation that came from the participants was more mental health counselors. Two of the participants discussed the impact of mental health on their wellbeing and academic success. Mental health counselors would provide students with a safe space to relax and offer culturally relevant counseling , and learn coping skills. This center will empower students and their families to advocate for their needs and give them a voice in how they want to be supported.

Future Research

African American Students

Even though I tried to recruit African American students who met the criteria set for this study and I sought help from other counselors for recruitment, I was unable to recruit any African American participants. The point of view of African American students would have enriched the data because they are one of the populations that are negatively impacted by the education system. Their experiences may be unique from the experiences of Latinx and

Southeast Asian students who participated in this study. Thus, their lived experiences could also point out other deficiencies and support in the system that have not been discussed by this study's participants.

The Other 90% of the Students

This study provided the unique point of view of students who achieved high academic success, but it did not provide the point of view of the other 90% of the student population. The participants in this study were deemed "academically successful" according to P-12 metrics and had parental support that bolstered their goal of attending college. However, it would be informative to learn from students who had to overcome more obstacles but had access to less support than the students in this study. The voices of these students would show the level of excessive structural discriminations and how pervasive they are to the achievement of students of color attending a low resource school. There may also be other types of obstacles that this study was not informed about, and these students may also have different needs than the ones discussed in this study. Learning how this group of students experiences school support and negotiates challenges will be extremely important.

Impact of Experiences in Elementary School

The participants spoke about experiences in elementary school that were crucial to them, such as needing tutoring, and defined experiences that were both negative and positive. When asked about memorable experiences in school, the participants referred to memories in elementary school where they received an award that inspired them to achieve academic success or critical experiences with teachers that could be positive or negative. A future study that focuses on the impact of elementary school and the trajectory of academic engagement for

students of color would be insightful. This study could inform how elementary schools can be improved to create more positive impacting experiences for students to promote long term academic engagement.

Conclusion

As a first-generation student of color who attended a low resource high school, I was also considered a high academic achieving student. The stories of the participants resonated with me because their experiences are comparable to mine. Similar to the second-generation immigrant students in this study, I also had a goal of going to college in the hope of realizing my parents' dreams for me when they left their home country. I was also and still am my parents' interpreter. Furthermore, similar to these participants, I did not know about the American education system and have always felt lucky to have earned admission to UC Berkeley after high school. Part of the reason I wanted to focus my dissertation on this topic and this group of students is because I relate to this population, but most importantly, insights into these students' obstacles, how they overcome the obstacles, and how they perceive in-school support is informative of how to better support students to achieve their academic potential. This study has also provided a pulse of the conditions of the education system for students of color who are attending low resource schools.

The result of this study showed that students of color who attend low resource schools are still being treated from a deficit point of view. The education system still exists to serve White middle class students with the assumption that all students and their families understand the American education system and have the resources that the system requires to excel as well as the technology required to do the schoolwork. The participants in this study overcame their struggles by being resourceful and had the support of their families and confidence in

133

themselves. All the participants experienced academic success at a young age that gave them the confidence they needed to continue to try. Most of them come from two-parent households that are highly supportive of their education and instilled the importance of education in them. Lastly, the participants utilized in-school support to compensate for the deficiencies of the education system. They sought help from teachers and college preparatory programs when tutoring was not available to them. They joined programs and sought help from their counselors for their limited knowledge of the education system. They sought help when they were struggling academically or emotionally. Importantly, they continued to adjust and alter their support system for one that is most beneficial and supporting.

Not all their experiences with in-school support have been positive. How the participants perceived in-school support is dependent on the culmination of all their lived experiences with the resources and the outcomes of those experiences. As the participants shared, the experiences at a young age could have long-lasting effects, whether positive or negative. Their obstacles and how they dealt with these obstacles tell the narrative of grit and zest is still prominent in the education system, with the expectation of students of color to overcome system-generated barriers. However, to bridge the achievement discrepancies, there should not be barriers stemming from the system that students have to overcome. As stated in Chapter 1 of this dissertation with Tupac Shakur's 1999 poem *The Rose that Grew from Concrete*, students should prosper in healthy soil instead of concrete. The success of students of color from low socioeconomic families should be expected and should not be the exception.

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Appendix A: Interview Protocol

Section	Context & Questions
Welcome, General Housekeeping items and consent forms	Hello, as you know I'm Diep Doan, a counselor at your school and a graduate student at UC Davis. Thank you for taking the time to share your stories and experiences. This interview is via Zoom and it will be recorded for research purpose. I will also use a recorder to record our conversation just in case there's issues with the Zoom recording. Before we begin, I want to confirm that I have received your consent form and you have a copy of the questions for the interview today. Please let me know if you have any questions
Consent and ground rules	I want to remind you that your participation today is voluntary, and you should only discuss things you feel comfortable discussing with me. You may stop the interview at any time. I will keep all information you provide today confidential. To protect your confidentiality, your comments will not be linked with personally identifying information. However, I do have to break our confidentiality if you are telling me that you are planning on hurting yourself, hurting someone else, or someone else is hurting you. I will be recording our interview so I can listen to your answers later. These videos and my notes will be destroyed at the end of the study. Additionally, your personally identifying information will not appear when I present this study or publish its result. Do you have any questions before we begin?
Purpose of the interview	The purpose of this interview is to learn from you about the obstacles you overcame to maintain academic excellence and the supports that helped you through these difficult times. I'm also interested to learn whether school played a role in supporting you through your difficulties and how you perceive in-school supports. Researches have shown that there are disparities in academic outcomes between students of color and white students. You are an example of how to be academically successful despite of the challenges have you faced. The information you share today will help inform how schools can better serve students of color in ways that are meaningful to them. Do you have any questions before we start? Our interview will be about an hour.

Demographic information	**We will begin with demographic information about you.**
	1. Please tell me about your family, such as who do you live with, how many siblings do you have if you have any?
	2. Are you going to be the first one in your family to graduate high school?
	3. Is there anyone in your family who is attending college?
	4. What ethnicity do you identify with? In what ways is this identity important to you?
Interview	1. Can you share some memorable school experiences that happened before high school such as in junior high or elementary school? Why were they significant to you?
	2. What are some of your reasons for earning good grades?
	3. When did you began to realize getting good grades is a goal you want to achieve and what prompted this realization?
	4. What motivates you to stay focused on school and earning good grades?
	5. Please share three or four of the biggest obstacles that you overcame or continue to face that made it difficult for you to stay focus on school and earning good grades?
	a. Who were some people or resources that you turned to for help when you were facing these obstacles such as family members, friends, or someone at school?
	b. How did (whatever participant mentioned as their support system) help you get through the difficult situations?
	c. If mentioned school – what was your experience with this person/resource that helped you realize that they could help you? Please share your most memorable memory with this person/program?
	d. If did not mention school – Did you considered turning to someone at school to help you overcome the obstacles? Why or why not? Could you share an experience that made you feel whether school is/is not a resource you can turn to for help?
	6. Who are the adults on campus that you can trust? How do you know you can trust them and can you share an experience you have had with them?
	7. You are senior, what are some ways do you think school can do a better job to help students feel that school can be a source of support for students?