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An Investigation into Self-Efficacy and Academically Successful Minority Students Honors Thesis

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Abstract

Data from the National Center for Education Statistics have indicated that minority students have the fewest conferred degrees in the United States (Snyder, 2016). A review of the literature has attributed this phenomenon to various factors, including socioeconomic status (Harvey, 2016), parents' education level (Faye Carter, 2006) and lack of cultural congruity with the institution (Edman, 2008; Tierney, 1999; Trueba,1988). Ofcourse, there are minority students who defy the statistics and have achieved academic success. Other research has suggested that self-efficacy may be key to such success. The purpose of this study was to determine which factors are correlated with a strong sense of self-efficacy in academically successful minority students.

This research utilized semi-structured interviews with 10 minority students at Bridgewater State University. The result found four key factors that help foster a sense of self-efficacy; personal triumph, overcoming personal adversity, social observation and positive affirmation. The results of this study will help support the implementation of evidence-based practices to support minority students who experience academic challenges.

An Investigation into Self-Efficacy and Academically Successful Minority Students

Introduction

In 1954, Thurgood Marshall argued before the Supreme Court's *Brown vs. Board of Education* case for equal protection for all students in the United States school system. The Supreme Court ruled that segregation in the education system was unconstitutional. However, 64 years later there are still discrepancies with academic achievement with minority students (United States Courts, 2018). In 2016, data from the National Center of Education Statistics reported that minority students have the fewest conferred degrees in the United States (Snyder, 2016). The report showed that white students obtained bachelor's degrees at 67%, Hispanic students at 12%, Black students at 11%, Asian/ Pacific Islander students at 7%, two or more races at 3% and Native American students at 1%. This issue is significant because without a postsecondary-degree, minority students are restricted in their ability to obtain wealth and support their families. When this occurs, it becomes a societal concern leading to economic inequality .

Purpose of Research

It is important to study the academic achievement gaps of minority students because all students in America deserve equal opportunity for success. For the purpose of this research, minority students are defined as students with an ethnic background other than Caucasian, immigrants, first-generation students and members of the LGBTQ community. While research (Edman, 2009, Faye-Carter, 2006, Swail et al., 2003) has shown that many factors have proven to be obstacles to academic equity, this researcher sought to be solution-focused. Decades of research have found that self-efficacy has shown to be instrumental in the academic success of students of all ages.

The question this research sought to answer was: what are the key factors that foster self-efficacy in academically successful minority students? The researcher sought to identify data that could be utilized to establish and/ or inform programs and policies to address these disparities and support the success of minority students.

Acquiring a degree is not only beneficial to the individual but also to society. The attainment of a postsecondary degree increased minority student's social-mobility (Faye Carter, 2006), the ability to move upward in one's social position. Increased social-mobility is important in creating a pathway to increase equality in a society with significant social injustice and oppression. Furthermore, with the acquisition of a college degree society benefits from an increased economic tax base and reduced dependency on social services programs such as SNAP, Section 8 and Medicaid (Futrell, 1999; Levinson, 2007; Vernez & Mizell, 2001). Further research (ASHE Higher Education Report, 2014) explains that the increased earning potential is the most important benefit of earning a bachelor's degree or higher noting,

> "For instance, a Black male can expect to earn $30,723 a year with a high school diploma alone; however, with a bachelor's degree their mean earnings rise to $55,655 (an increase of nearly $25,000 per year). An increase in earnings is also seen for those Black men who earn master's degrees, with mean earnings of $68,890 (an increase of roughly $13,000 from a bachelor's degree per year). [...] White men reap higher mean earnings per year than their Black male counterparts. A White male with a high school diploma will earn $5,695 more per year than a Black male with the same degree ($36,418 per year). Greater disparities are seen at successive degree levels, where White men with bachelor's and master's degrees earn $15,631 ($71,286 per year) and $22,886 ($91,776 per year) more than Black men, respectively (US Census, 2012)." *(ASHE Higher Education Report, 2014).*

While this report demonstrates economic disparity among races regardless of academic achievement, educational attainment enables minority students to have social advancement that they are less likely to achieve otherwise. Educational attainment lays the foundation for adulthood, socioeconomic status, interpersonal relationships and mental health (Peguero, 2015).

Due to the severity of the implications, it was important to explore solutions that are specific to the minority population. It was vital to explore these solutions with minority students who have attained academic success because they are able to provide valid input and strategies that may improve outcomes.

Literature Review

In preparation for the study, past research was reviewed to understand the most consistent predictors of academic success among minority students. One of the most reliable predictors is self-efficacy. Research (Bandura et al, 1996; Bryne, 2014; Gaylon, 2012; Peguero, 2015; Young, 2010) indicated that academic self-efficacy is a key predictor to increase the likelihood of student academic success. Self-efficacy is defined as an individual's perceived capability in performing necessary tasks to achieve goals (Bandura, 1997). Many factors serve as guides and motivators; however, they are ultimately rooted in the core belief that one has the power to produce desired effects by one's actions, otherwise one has little incentive to act or to persevere in the face of difficulties (Bandura, 2002).

Four Sources of Self-Efficacy

Bandura (1977) identified four sources of self-efficacy: mastery experiences, formally known as performance accomplishments, vicarious experiences, emotional and physiological states and verbal persuasion. Bandura (1977) explains that mastery experiences is the most important source of self-efficacy. Mastery experiences are the most influential source of efficacy information because they provide the most authentic evidence of whether one could summon whatever it takes to succeed. Success builds a robust belief in one's personal efficacy (Bandura, 1977). Positive and negative experiences can influence the ability of an individual to perform a given task. If one has performed well at a task previously, he or she is more likely to feel

competent and perform well at a similarly associated task. Coincidentally, failure can also be a source of self-efficacy, if failures are later overcome by conviction (Bandura, 1977).

Vicarious experiences provide individuals a means to survey their own ability to succeed. People can develop high or low self-efficacy vicariously through other people's performances. A person can watch someone in a similar position perform, and then compare his own competence with the other individual's competence (Bandura, 1977). If a person sees someone similar to them succeed, it can increase their self-efficacy. However, the opposite is also true; seeing someone similar fail can lower self-efficacy. Vicarious experience is a particularly important concept for the population of this study. As previously mentioned, the US Census report (2012) shows that minority students have significantly fewer conferred degrees than their cohorts. This makes minority students more vulnerable to developing a lower sense of academic self-efficacy.

Verbal persuasion describes an event when an individual receives encouragement (Bandura, 1977). The effectiveness of verbal persuasion correlates with the level of credibility of the person offering encouragement. Emotional and physiological state is deemed the least influential though important. The way an individual perceives and experiences emotional arousal in challenging situations can also be a source of self-efficacy. One's ability to manage stress and natural temperament contribute to the role of self-efficacy.

While the theory of self-efficacy (Bandura, 1977) will be proven for decades to come, the research (Bandura et al., 1996; Bryne, 2014; Gaylon, 2012; and Zimmerman, 2000) does not specifically focus to minority students. Minority students have had a dramatically different experience in society and the classroom. This researcher sought to explore if fundamental differences in social location affected the way minority students foster a sense of academic self-efficacy within themselves.

Academic Self-Efficacy

Bandura et al.'s (1996) research showed that students who believed they could exercise control over their learning and mastery of coursework achieved academic success. The study consisted of 124 female and 155 male middle school students. The ages ranged from 11-14 years old. When students believe in their own capability and have a deeply rooted belief in their ability to create the outcome they desire, the obstacles, that undoubtedly come, will not be able to stop them from obtaining their goals. This study (Bandura et al., 1996) gives insight to the important role self-efficacy places in academic achievement of students. However, the study (Bandura et al., 1996) does not distinguish differences among developmental stages. Furthermore, the study explored socioeconomic status of the participant's family but does not make any distinction about possible minority status.

In 2000, Zimmerman asserted that decades of research have shown that self-efficacy has emerged as a highly effective predictor of students' motivation and learning. Further, Zimmerman (2000) noted that decades of research has demonstrated the validity of self-efficacy in predicting performance outcomes of students.

Gaylon (2012) noted the relationship between self-efficacy, class participation and academic performance which found that self-efficacy was most strongly related to class participation, exam performance and the highest level of GPA. With a relatively small sample size, consisting of 37 male and 128 female undergraduate students, Gaylon (2012) did not address the specific challenges of minority students, though it did acknowledge the need to study interventions to increase self-efficacy. Bryne (2014) investigated the academic achievement of first year accountant students with findings demonstrating that self-efficacy was associated with achieving significantly better results in the accounting modules.

These studies found that self-efficacy was a reliable predictor of academic achievement. However, the focus of these studies did not look at the minority status of the participants and how this may impact academic performance.

Academic Self-Efficacy and Ethnic Minority Students

Young (2010) noted self-efficacy within an academic setting allows students to believe that they were capable of completing the college-related task, such as completing assignments and passing examinations. Vuong (2010) revealed that self-efficacy had a direct impact on the GPA and persistence rate of the first-generation college sophomore student study participants. Students who were found to have high self-efficacy resulted in higher GPA and increased persistence rates. This study (Young, 2010) acknowledged the barriers first-generation college students face in contrast to second-generation students, as they are at a higher risk of attrition. The sample derived from five California universities and included 1,291 participants.

Similarly, Peguero (2015) found that increased academic self-efficacy can facilitate academic attainment of adolescents, as well as minimize the risk of dropping out. This study had a substantial sample size of 11,820 students from 580 public schools. Peguero (2015) explored the significance of inequality among those who identified as gender, racial and ethnic minorities. The results of this study indicated that gender and ethnic minorities have relatively lower levels of academic self-efficacy. However, the data demonstrated that high academic self-efficacy can reduce the negative effects of gender, racial, and ethnic dropout disparities. Limitations identified by Peguero (2015) was the date of the data used for the research; it was collected from 2002 to 2006. Peguero (2015) believed with more recent data, other trends may have been observed. For example, the changing demographics as a result of immigration to America is also

cited as another limitation. The rapid change in the United States' population was not captured in the data from 2002 - 2006.

Further review of the literature found that high self-efficacy at the beginning of the year predicted better college adjustment at the end of the 1st year (Ramos-Sanchez, 2007). Ramos-Sanchez (2007) found a distinction that non-first- generation students had higher levels of academic self-efficacy than first-generation students. This distinction indicated that there is a difference between levels of self-efficacy in minority students and their peers. This would also infer that the way minority students foster high levels of self-efficacy is also different.

Zajacova (2015) sought to investigate the impact of stress and academic self-efficacy on 107 nontraditional, immigrant and minority college freshmen. Zajoacova (2015) found that academic self-efficacy was a more robust and consistent predictor than stress of academic success. This research was significant because it continued to support the importance of high academic self-efficacy and its ability to offset numerous obstacles minority students encounter. Zajoacova (2015) recognized the sample as a notable limitation in this study, both for the modest size and limited diversity among the minority cohort.

These studies (Peguero, 2015; Ramos-Sanchez, 2007; Voung, 2010 and Zajoacova) demonstrated that self-efficacy helped improve academic outcomes for ethnic minority students. However, the focus of these reports do not investigate the factors that foster self-efficacy. As a result, this researcher sought to explore those very factors.

LGBTQ and Academic Self-Efficacy

While engaged in this research project, the data began to show a new dimension that could not be ignored. Though this research sought to investigate factors that contributed to high academic self-efficacy within the ethnic minority student population, 30% of the participants

interviewed also identified as members of the LGBTQ. Their identities as ethnic minority students closely intersected with their identity as LGBTQ students. It was important to this researcher to include this aspect in the data. Research (Poteat et al., 2014) has shown that LGBTQ youth also have significant challenges with academic achievement. LGBTQ youth are more likely to be victimized in a school setting and experience mental illness at a higher rate that their heterosexual peers (Poteat et al., 2014). The literature related to LGBTQ students and academic self-efficacy is significantly limited. Much of this body of scholarly work (Brant, 2016; Brant, 2017 and Poteat et al., 2014) explores the self-efficacy of the faculty that work with and serve students in the LGBTQ community, not the students themselves . Further research is needed to support the academic success of these students. While this was noteworthy and important, it is not the main focus of this study.

Theoretical Framework

Grounded Theory. The data analysis was conducted using grounded theory. This method has a sociological perspective. Researchers Glaser and Strauss wanted to develop a method through which a theory could be determined inductively from the current data; they did not want a theory previously developed to be imposed on the data (Martinez Perez, 2015). The aim is to develop a well-grounded theory that describes, explains and interprets the data (Glaser, 1967). Grounded theory was utilized to allow the data to determine the theory. Grounded theory is one of the most frequently used methodology in qualitative research because it provides researchers with guidelines, advice, and perspectives regarding its use and to ensure the rigor of the research contribution (Charmaz, 2014). Furthermore, Wiesche et al., (2017) asserts that this analytical methodology is particularly important in cases where prior research is limited or does not pertain to the population the researcher seeks to study because the theory is established from

the data collected. This study utilized grounded theory to give voice to a population that is often marginalized. There isn't current literature that addresses their specific concern, as a result, the theory would need to come directly from that data.

This study utilized the Charmaz (2014) constructivist ground theoretical :framework. Constructivist grounded theory (CGT) meticulously analyzes the data through multiple processes. In CGT, literature review is recommended in order identify gaps in previous literature, place the research in context, refine, extend or revise existing theories, and to "weave the discussion" in the light of earlier works (Charmaz, 2014). In CGT, the researcher is identified as the co-constructor with the research participant, empowering the participants. Charmaz (2014) noted that the exchange between researcher and participant aids in constructing the subsequent theory. Unlike classic and straussian grounded theory (Wiesche et al., 2017), constructivist grounded theory established that the researcher was subjective. The was important because the researcher is also a minority student, who have also been academically successful.

Strength Based-Perspective. This researcher's work was also guided by the strength-based perspective (Hammond, 2012; Saleeby, 2013). This perspective seeks to understand the crucial variables contributing to an individual's resilience and the well-being of families and communities. Furthermore, the strength-based approach affrrms the reparative potential in people and seeks to enhance strengths as opposed to deficits (Hammond, 2012). Developed for social work practice, the strengths perspective has six foundational principles (Saleeby, 2013):

1. Every individual, group, family and community has strengths.

This concept guides social work practitioners to recognize that the client has a wealth of resources and can be knowledgeable about the challenges they face as well as the solution. The strengths model guides the practice to assess resources, understand the client's understanding of

their current functioning and respect the client's evaluation and potential progress they make

towards positive change (Saleeby, 2013).

2. Trauma and abuse, illness and struggle may be injurious, but they may also be sources of challenge and opportunity.

This principle guides social workers to move from a "damage model" (Saleeby, 2013) which

views the client as victims into a challenge model. The challenge model acknowledges the

client's pain and suffering but views it as an opportunity to develop and grow. The strengths

perspective posits that people will be motivated to change and grow when their strengths are

acknowledged (Saleeby, 2013).

3. Assume that you do not know the upper limits of the capacity to grow and change and take individual group and community aspirations seriously.

The objective of this core idea is to help the client without asserting personal bias. The idea is

that clients are better served when providers align with their aspirations and goals, and believe in

their possibilities (Saleeby, 2013).

4. We best serve client by collaborating with them.

This concept was an important aspect of the research. This principle further supports the

constructionist ground theory methodology because it allows the researcher and participant to co-

construct the theory that will arise from the data. Furthermore, the collaborative nature of the

study helps to create an environment for the participants to feel comfortable sharing their

experiences (Saleeby, 2013).

5. Every environment is full ofresources.

Ultimately, regardless of the environment there are resources that can help clients in meeting

their goal for positive change (Saleeby, 2013).

6. Caring, Caretaking and Context

This fmal principle describes three aspects of a caring relationship. First, all families must be permitted and assisted in caring for their family members. Secondly, compensated caregivers must provide the highest quality of care without sacrificing their own well-being. Lastly, all people who require care must receive it. Moreover, it is important to consider the context of the environment the client who receive care exist in. It is important to understand the systems and social policies that effects the quality oflife of the individual as well as the community (Saleeby, 2013).

Intersectionality. This framework was originally conceptualized when feminists of color (Einstein, 1977, Moraga and Anzaldua,1981) began to identify the intersection of oppression that women of color endured that were similar and different from white women and men of color (Burbar, 2016). In 1991, legal scholar and civil rights activist, Kimberle Crenshaw, created the term intersectionality to describe the double discrimination that women of color faced in the legal system (Burbar, 2016). Further, feminists of color (Collins, 2000; Davis, 2008; Hooks, 1984; McCall, 2005; and Shields, 2008) continued to contribute to the development of intersectionality as a theory and method. Intersectionality enables researchers to analyze the relationship of power and disadvantage within an individual's social identity and location.

While intersectionality was not originally a theoretical framework for this study, as participants shared their experiences it became evident that the various social locations of the participants were significant in their stories. Intersectionality is an analytical framework that specifically investigates how privilege and oppression intersect, and how those intersections create social identities. Intersectionality displays the diverse experiences of oppression and privilege within social groups (Burbar, 2016). Intersectionality simultaneously situates social

identities and social locations in terms of race, class, gender, and sexuality, and maps the role of oppressed and oppressor (Burbar, 2016). For example, one participant shared their experiences of being a first-generation female in the LGBT community. She identified strongly with her social identity and her conviction to demonstrate that she belonged at Bridgewater State University, which fueled her sense of high academic self-efficacy. Another participant shared her experience as an immigrant over the age of 35. She described the discrimination she felt from another student and how she was able to overcome their misconceptions about her academic abilities. This experience also reinforced her sense of academic self-efficacy. Their social identities mattered because the participants were often reminded of it in subtle and not so subtle ways. It was impossible to ignore the undercurrents of oppression and discrimination the participants felt in their daily lives as minority students.

Methods

The research design was especially appropriate due to the nature of the study. Qualitative research allows researchers to obtain a richer and more intimate view of the social world than more structured methods. These methods provided a greater voice to the participants (Engel, 2010). This research design encouraged participants to give deeper insight into how they were able to obtain their academic success. This qualitative research study completed 10 semi-structure interviews with minority students who have demonstrated academic success. Academic success was defined as students who have earn a minimum of 75 credits and have maintained a GPA of 3.0 or higher. The participants were men and women of various minority cultural backgrounds, ages and sexual orientation. The study utilized convenient sampling and snowball sampling to recruit participant for this study. A flyer was displayed on various BSU buildings (See Appendix A). The flyer explained the criteria for the study. Participants had to be a minority

student, have 75 credits or more and a GPA of3.0 or higher. The flyer also advertised a stipend of $25 for participation in the research. The interviews were conducted in a private office on campus in the social work department building. Prior to the interview, participants were informed of the purpose of the study, risk and benefits, and their right to withdraw consent at any time without penalty (See Appendix B). All participants gave their informed consent to participate in the study. Each interview followed the interview protocol (See Appendix C).

In constructive grounded theory, interviews are semi-structured with open-ended questions. Following the interview, data is transcribed and reviewed against the audio to ensure accuracy. Once the interviews are transcribed, the researcher begins the three-step coding process, open-coding, focused-coding and theoretical coding. Open coding is the process when identifying important codes. These codes are reused when similarities are identified in new interviews. The second step is focused-coding. In this step, the open-codes are organized into categories. The final step is theoretical coding, where core categories are identified. Core categories represent the reoccurring themes in the data (Charmaz, 2014). Additionally, memo-writing is an analytical tool to help the researcher reflect on the data. Memo- writing occurs through all three stages of coding (Charmaz, 2014). Data is collected and coded until saturation is achieved. Saturation occurs when new interviews do not provide new information. From the data, the theory is established (Charmaz, 2014). All interviews were audio recorded. The interviews were transcribed and coded using the three stages, open-coding, focused-coding and theoretical coding. Memo writing was used to help the research analyze the data during the coding process.

Results

Sample

The sample consisted of 10 undergraduate students at Bridgewater State University. The graph (Figure 1) illustrates demographic information about the participants. Names were changed to protect the confidentiality of the participants. Sixty percent of the participants were between the ages of20-34 while 40% were over the age of 35. The ages of the sample were divided into two subgroups to protect the confidentiality of the outliers in the study. The sample consisted of 70% Black students, 20% Latino students and 10% White students. The sample also included a variety of diverse ethnic background including Haitian, Ghanaian and Brazilian. Social work majors constituted 35% of the participants, English majors were 20%, 10% Cultural anthropology majors, 10% majored in Chemistry, 10% majored in Biology, 5% Secondary education, 5% Sociology 5% Psychology majors. Sixty percent of the participants were born anatomically female, and forty percent were born anatomically male. Fifty percent of the interviewees identified as female while forty percent identified as male and ten percent identified as nonbinary.

Figure 1

Study Participants Demographics

Name	Age	Race	Gender	Gender Identity
Abby	35+	Black	Female	Female
Benjamin	35+	Black	Male	Male
Carol	20-34	Black	Female	Female
Dennis	20-34	Black	Male	Male
Ellen	20-34	Latina	Female	Female
Frank	20-34	Latino	Male	Male
Gina	35+	Black	Female	Female
Hank	20-34	Black	Male	Male
India	20-34	White	Female	Nonbinary
Jennifer	20-34	Black	Female	Female

The purpose of the study was to explore factors that fostered high academic self-efficacy among successful minority students. The data identified personal triumphs, overcoming personal adversity, social observation and positive affirmations as the four key factors. Personal triumphs describe events in the participant's life where they achieved a goal or was acknowledged for their efforts. Overcoming personal adversity occurred when the participant was able to be successful despite hardship. Social observation was evidenced when an individual analyzed their social environment and established their own capability in comparison. Positive affirmation was encouraging words from peers, family, mentors and faculty that helped foster the participant's self-efficacy.

Personal Triumphs

60% of the participants provided a story or experience that reflected a personal triumph for them that they felt was related to their academic achievement. Below are excerpts from participant responses to illustrate this factor.

Ellen

Ellen shared how her speech in middle school sparked the idea that she was capable of more than how she was functioning at the time. Ellen noted that she had behavioral issues in middle school, but the staff was able to identify her talent in written and verbal communication and asked her to make a speech in front of the entire school. Her successful achievement helped her to identify what she was capable 0£

> "It was a speech in middle school. The guidance counselor chose me of all the students to make a speech at a tea party. It was the biggest task that I had at the time. I was in the newspaper and that was pretty cool especially for the 7th grade. And at that time, I wanted to be a lawyer and a lot of lawyers came up to me and gave me their card and were talking about Brown University. I felt more confident after that. I did believe in myself a little more. I was speaking in front of about

>1,000 people in the auditorium and I took pictures that were in the newspaper. It
>made me feel better about myself."

India

As a granddaughter of immigrants and a member of the LGBTQ community, India

expressed a commitment to achieving her academic goals for her family and to fight stigma

around her sexuality. She noted that her previous academic achievements helped her form high

academic self-efficacy.

>"Because I've done my work in the past, even if it's 3am and I'm two pages
>behind, I know that somehow, I'll get it done, even if it's the last moment
>possible. Because of my track record of turning things in, I have that confidence
>in myself that 'Ok, you're going to get this done somehow even if it's last
>minute."

India went on to explain that her successful high school career helped her first establish a

sense of high academic self-efficacy.

>"I took AP classes and took more challenging classes. Reaching certain goals for
>myself whether it was working outside of school or taking hard classes and doing
>well helped me believe that this will continue into college."

Jennifer

After becoming a wife and mother, Jennifer, took gap years between high school and

college to get married and start a family. She experienced challenge in pursuit of her associate

degree. She noted that the day of her graduation from her community college is the first time she

truly felt self-efficacy.

>"I believed that ifl could get through community college, I believe that I can do
>this. I believe that was a pivotal moment for me. It was where I started believing
>in who I was, believing in myself."

Frank

Frank is a first-generation, Latino, gay man. He noted that he struggled with depression and low self-esteem throughout his years in high school. However, after winning an award for his literary work, Frank expressed that he began to believe in his own abilities.

> "At the at end of the day, there was an award ceremony and I won an award for English. And when I went up to accept the award, he told me 'see I told you, you could do it'. And so little things like that make me go harder. It's a feeling I can't describe."

Overcoming Personal Adversity

All participants provided a story or experience that reflected an overcoming personal adversity for them that they felt was related to their academic achievement. Below are excerpts from participant responses to illustrate this factor:

Abby

In this excerpt, Abby shared how earning As at Bridgewater State University after overcoming substance abuse and struggling to maintain her GPA at community college was a vital in creating her sense of self-efficacy.

> "When I started school, my goal wasn't social work. It was nursing. I didn't think that I could do it because I struggled with science and biology in high school and at community college. But I got As in all those classes. I strived and went for tutoring when I had difficulty. I asked questions. For me to go from a D at community college and get an A, I felt like 'woah, I can do this'. It felt good."

Carol

Carol echoes Abby's previous statement. She experienced academic challenges in high school. Yet when she earned high marks in her courses at Bridgewater State University, she began to establish her own sense of self-efficacy.

> "My grades in high school was pretty terrible and I decided to come to BSU on the last day to commit. During my first semester, I took a lot of easy classes and

I did very well, and I thought ok I can do this. Then I took my first classes within the major and I thought 'Oh I'm actually really good at this."

Benjamin

Benjamin grew up in severe poverty. His country of origin did not have public education for its citizens. His mother was unable to fund his education due to the level of extreme poverty. Benjamin was determined to go to school and found a way to attain his goal.

"It started early in my life because I invest in my education, not my mom. I invest in my education because after middle school my mom said 'Ok it's over. I can't do anything for you anymore.' But I said "Mom, I'm going to school. Don't worry about that." And I started a business around 13 years old. I bought beans, corns and stuff like that. I'd buy them and save them and when the price went up, I'd sell them again. I spent more than 15 years doing that to achieve my goal of going to university by myself"

Benjamin went on to explain that achieving this goal and becoming a lawyer in his native country, helped to establish his sense of self-efficacy. He believed that he was capable of anything he put his mind to.

Gina

Gina is a nontraditional student. She described going to school with students that are her daughter's age. Gina is also an immigrant and simultaneously navigates a different culture than she grew up in.

"I remember one time I was in class with a group and there was a girl who wanted to humiliate me. She never wanted to be in my group and told other students not to work with me. She prejudged me. She thought that when someone is an adult, they do not know anything. So, I withdrew myself from the group and I told the professor that I can do the group project by myself. I did the project very nicely. And when I submitted the project, the professor used my project as an example to the class of what the assignments should look like. He praised me and advised students to reach out to me for help. And the same girl came up and asked me for help, and I said to myself that 'I cannot give up, I cannot let these things affect my academic progress.' It makes me feel proud. I felt like I am capable, and I take advantage of that to help me move forward."

Social Observation

60% of the participants provided a story or experience that reflected a social observation for them that they felt was related to their academic achievement. Below are excerpts from participant responses to illustrate this factor:

Hank

Hank shared how watching his mother raise him on her own, struggle and eventually succeed inspired his sense of self-efficacy.

> "I saw my mother struggle. Watching my mom just constantly work, even when she didn't have the documents she would work under the table. She was a hairdresser since the age of 12 and she carried that skill wherever she'd go. And because of that, we ended up getting ourselves out of our uncle's basement into a one-bedroom apartment. About a year and a half later, we moved into a two-bedroom apartment. Three years later, we moved into a three-bedroom apartment. Our next step is to buy a house. It's like anything is possible. So, she also helped instill that 'I can do anything" [attitude].

Gina

Gina is a nontraditional student, immigrant and mother to adult children. Gina described how her mother's zeal to continue learning despite her age helped Gina make the decision to pursue academic attainment.

> "My mother continues to go to school at 70 years old. She keeps learning. She takes computer class and English classes. If she is able to keep learning, then I have no excuse."

Jennifer

Jennifer shared that she experienced challenges managing the many roles she plays as a mother, wife and student. Additionally, Jennifer previously experienced sexual assault and

childhood bullying. She was able to see the success of a fellow student who shared her

experiences. Jennifer identified that she felt that she could succeed as well as a result of this

social observation.

> "I had a friend. She has multiple children; a broken marriage and she was a victim of sexual abuse. She was raped. So many circumstances had happened to her and when I saw her, I just saw a hero. I saw a leader. I saw somebody that I'm like 'Wow, I thought my circumstance was heavy, but her circumstance was heavy, but she was still pressing on. It was reflective academically because she's a straight A student. Even though she had all of these factors in play, it didn't weigh her down. She was still able to perform well. That was definitely a fuel for me. Like 'Wow, look at this person she has multiple children, I only have one. So, when you look at others you can see, Wow I can do it too."

Ellen

Ellen noted that she witnessed her mother's challenges and noted that she did not

want to repeat her behaviors.

> "I was motivated by my mother because at one point in her life she struggled with alcohol and rather than using that to deter me, I used it as a motivator. I wanted to do the opposite of my mother and be successful. I feel like pain can be a motivator especially for minority students."

Positive Affirmations

70% of the participants provided a story or experience that reflected a positive

affirmation for them that they felt was related to their academic achievement. Below are

excerpts from participant responses to illustrate this factor:

Jennifer

Jennifer described her experience at a student at Bridgewater State University.

> "Whenever I am participating in conversations, my teachers would tell me 'Wow, you're well-spoken and you really understand the context.' And as these words were spoken to me, I began to see that 'Wow, I have these strengths. I'm knowing who I am. I am self-actualizing. I know who I am. I know my strengths."

Gina

This example was used previously to exemplify personal triumph. However, the

professor's positive affrrmation supplemented Gina's personal success when he praised her in

front of the class.

> "I did the project very nicely and when I submitted the project, the professor used my project as an example to the class of what the assignments should look like. He praised me and advised students to reach out to me for help. And the same girl came up and asked me for help, and I said to myself that 'I cannot give up, I cannot let these things affect my academic progress.' It makes me feel proud. I felt like I am capable, and I take advantage of that to help me move forward."

Ellen

Ellen discussed that her mother was able to find constructive ways to view characteristics

that other might deem problematic.

> "My mother was a reinforcement because she would see what someone would see as a negative attribute but find the positive in it. I was argumentative when I was younger, and my mother would suggest that I become a lawyer."

Frank

Frank shared that he often felt self-conscious about his academic performance in

comparison to his peer. He noted that he felt encouraged to believe in himself when he was

received positive affrrmation from his middle school teacher.

> "I remember a teacher in middle school. Remember those MCAS writing prompts? I had a knack for writing back then. My teacher loved it so much that he shared it with other teachers in our grade and they all loved it. They had a lot of faith in me. I remember he would meet with each student to discuss our academic progress and I would tell him that I didn't feel like I was doing well. I felt like I wasn't doing as well as the other kids because they were managing to get straight As and I would always have a B in there somewhere. My teacher told me that I think you're doing a really good job and you should have more faith in yourself"

Discussion

The results of the study identified factors that fostered high academic self-efficacy among successful minority students. The data identified personal triumphs, overcoming personal adversity, social observation and positive affirmations as the four key factors. Personal triumphs describe events in the participant's life where they achieved a goal or was acknowledged for their efforts. Achieved success was found to be a source of self-efficacy for most of the participants. Similarly, Bandura (1977) found that the participants in his study shared how achieving goals, winning awards or being acknowledged help to establish their sense of academic self-efficacy. Bandura (1977) asserted that attaining success has shown to have the strongest correlation with fostering self-efficacy.

Overcoming personal adversity occurred when the participant was able to be successful despite hardship. This event helped the participant to believe in their own capabilities. The strengths-based perspective denotes that one cannot assume the upper limits of the capacity to grow and change (Saleeby, 2013). The participants were able to make positive changes despite their adversity and by doing so, they established a foundation for their self-efficacy. Bandura (1977) also found that failures are also a source of self-efficacy, if they are eventually overcome. This phenomenon was also illustrated in the findings in this study. For example, many participants discussed struggling to achieve a high GPA in high-school or community college, but when they came to Bridgewater State University, they began to experience academic successes that became a source of self-efficacy for them.

Social observation was another factor that fostered self-efficacy. Participants described how witnessing oppression and injustice fueled their sense of self-efficacy. Participants also noted observing other's success was an element that fostered self-efficacy. The participants'

social location helped them to analyze the world around them and assess their own abilities. Some were fueled by frustration because they believed they deserved more than the world had offered them Intersectionality provides further context for this event. This theoretical framework gives evidence that minority students can face varying levels of oppression because of their social location. For example, a participant experienced discrimination because she was female and LGBTQ and another participant was male, immigrant and low-income. However, through social observation, they were able to assess that they are capable and set out to demonstrate that to others.

Others were motivated by the success of others. Bandura (1977) described the latter as vicarious experience. Vicarious experience offers individuals the opportunity to analyze their ability to succeed in comparison to someone else. If the individual recognizes someone similar to them succeeding, it can increase the individual's self-efficacy. Participants shared that watching their family members struggle and persevere gave them a sense of self-efficacy. Other participants noted that observing mentors and professors helped foster their sense of self-efficacy.

Affirmations was the final key factor. Participants expressed that encouraging words from peers, family, mentors and faculty helped established their self-belief Bandura et al., (1977) identified verbal persuasion as a source of self-efficacy in his study. Verbal persuasion is identified as the event when a person receives encouragement. Subsequently, the effectiveness of verbal persuasion is dependent on the perceived credibility of the person giving the words of encouragement. If the person is believed to be credible, verbal persuasion will be more efficacious.

Though not illustrated in the majority of interviews, some study participants noted that they struggled with a sense of belonging when they first arrived at Bridgewater State University. They shared that they were able to overcome this when they become connected to on-campus activities. Whether it was the dance team or student employment, these participants noted that being connected to on-campus resources opened opportunities to experience positive affirmation, social observation and personal triumphs.

OveralL findings of this research resonate strongly with Bandura's (1977) concepts of self-efficacy. This research affirmed the value of self-efficacy while also underscoring the critical importance for more research among academically successful minority students. The use of constructivist grounded theory was intentional to give voice to a group who are often unacknowledged and invisible. Additionally, constructive grounded theory offers the researcher the ability to be subject, as an academically successful minority student, the researcher was able to identify with the challenges and successes of the research participants. The strengths-based perspective empowered participants and gave them the ability to identify factors in their success. Academically successful minority students have a wealth of knowledge that can help to improve academic outcomes for all minority students.

Limitations

As with all research, there were limitations identified in this study. The main limitation was the sample size. This study interviewed only 10 participants. Furthermore, due to the size and limited scope, qualitative data cannot be generalized. Additionally, though the enrollment in an undergraduate program was verified, other eligibility requirements such as the number of credits and grade point average of participants were self-reported. Lastly, self-efficacy was not measured it was inferred through the participants' self-reported academic performance.

Implications

The aim of the study was to provide research-informed suggestions to improve academic attainment outcomes for minority students. As a result, there are four recommendations:

1. Positive Affirmation Initiative

Throughout the research, students described how words from their professors helped foster their high academic self-efficacy. In a society where minority students receive negative messages, it is a matter of equity to counter those messages with positive affirmations. The researcher is proposing that Bridgewater State University creates a university wide initiative to acknowledge the successes of minority students. The positive affirmations can be provided via email, notes on assignments, advising or during office hours. Offering positive affirmation to minority students is an effective and cost-efficient way for Bridgewater State University to help minority students foster their own sense of self-efficacy.

2. Hire More Diverse Faculty

The researcher had the opportunity to attend new faculty training in summer of 2018. As an undergraduate student, the researcher was asked to provide input and feedback about what practices makes an effective professor from my experience. The researcher sat through the presentation and listened as the Institutional Research Department discussed its goal for increased attrition for low-income minority students. This is a noteworthy goal and the researcher applauds Bridgewater State University for making this a focal point of the institute's research. However, the researcher also observed that the newly hired faculty did not reflect the students that the university seeks to support. In order to offer opportunity for social observation, or as Bandura (1977) describes, vicarious experience, minority students must have the opportunity to see professors and faculty that represents their own identities.

3. Further Research and Funding for Mentorship Programming

The Division of Student Success and Diversity at BSU has a mentorship program. However, faculty are asked to volunteer their time to mentor students. With additional funding, faculty mentors can give more time to supporting their mentees. The mentor relationship should not be solely academic. It is important to build a rapport with the student, so the mentor is deemed more credible. Rapport building can take place on and off campus and beyond the classroom. It can take the form of a biweekly lunch. Participants shared how positive affirmations were impactful because they believed that the person believed in them. Individual relational time helps to establish the mentor's credibility with the student. A mentoring relationship gives students the opportunity to establish high self-efficacy through social observation and positive affirmation. Participants shared how positive affirmations were impactful because they believed that the person believed in them.

4. Intentionally Connect Students to on Campus Resources

Though not a significant finding, some participants expressed struggling with finding a sense of belonging at BSU. Some struggled with feelings of doubts that they belonged at Bridgewater State University. Though the study participants were able to overcome these concerns, the researcher notes that others may not. In order to address this, it is suggested that upon enrollment, minority students (and students in general) should be informed of on campus resources that will provide support throughout their undergraduate career. These resources provide opportunities for social observation, personal triumph and positive affirmation. Resources include but not limited to: Academic Achievement Center, Department of Undergraduate Research, GLBTA Pride Center, various sororities and fi:atemities, cultural clubs and the Mentor Leadership Program.

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Appendix C

Interview Protocol

Phone Script:
Thank you for your interest in the study. My name is Julie Clerge. I am working under Dr. William to investigate factor that foster success students' ability to believe in their own ability to succeed academically. Specifically, we are seeking ways to create academic self-efficacy. We are seeking to interview 20 students that will help us learn how self-efficacy is developed in academically successful minority students. There are a few criteria to participate in this study. Do you have a minimum of 75 credits? Do you have a GPA of 3.0 or higher? Do you identify as a minority student? Are you wiling to meet for a one hour- ninety-minute in-person interview? (If yes to all, I will obtain their contact information and schedule the interview. If no, thank them for their interest but inform them they can not participate in the study.)
I look forward to meeting you. Before I let you go, I need to rely some important information about the study.

You will be asked to participate in a one hour to ninety-minute interview to discuss self-efficacy and its origin. Your participation in the study will last one hour to ninety minutes. The interview will be recorded for data collection purposes.
You can withdraw from the study at any time. If you decide to withdraw from the study, you may do so at any time without penalty and still receive the $25 stipend. Upon withdrawal, any information gathered for the research will be destroyed.
There are no intended risks for participating in this study. An anticipated benefit to participants is acknowledgement and affirmation of their lived experiences that have supported their self-efficacy. This can be very empowering. Additionally, you will be given a $25 stipend for your participation.
Your information will be kept confidential by de-identifying all personal information. All information will be securely locked. All personal information will be destroyed at the end of the study.
Additionally, while every effort will be made to keep your study-related information confidential, there may be circumstances where this information must be shared with:
* Federal agencies, for example the Office of Human Research Protections, whose responsibility is to protect human subjects in research;
* Representatives of Bridgewater State University, including the Institutional Review Board, a committee that oversees the research at BSU.
Participation in this study is voluntary. Refusal to participate in this study will have no effect on any future services you may be entitled to from the University. Anyone who agrees to participate in this study is free to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty.
If you have any questions, feel free to reach out to me at any time. Have a great day and see you on **scheduled day, date and time***

Interviewer: Julie Clerge

(Talk through the informed consent form)

What is your age?

What is your race?

What is your ethnicity?

What is your sex?

How do you Identity? Male, Female, Transgender or other?

What is your program of study?

(Introduction of study)

(Ask if they have question and remind them ofrefusal/withdrawal policy)

What are some of your core beliefs about yourself?
      Prompt: What are some of your beliefs that help you to achieve your academic goals?

Can you think about the time when you first believed in yourself?
       Prompt: What did that feel like? What were those beliefs? What made that possible?

How did that event change your perspective?
      Prompt: In what ways, positive and/or negative, did this event influence your perspective?

Were there any other reinforcements to support your sense of self-efficacy, please provide 2 examples?

Do you think self-efficacy is innate or learned and why do you believe this?

(Inform participants that interview is coming to an end)

What would you want others to learn about how you achieved high self-efficacy?

(Thank participant and provide them with stipend for participation)