

Article 67

The Relationship Between Cultural/Ethnic Identity and Individual Protective Factors of Academic Resilience

Dale Weaver

Dr. Weaver has been a teacher and school counselor at the elementary, middle, high school, and college levels and is also a retired military officer. Research interests include the impact culture and ethnicity have on resilient outcomes in the school setting.

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to explore the relationship between cultural/ethnic identity and the individual protective factors of academic resilience. A correlational design and multiple regression were utilized to compare students from a convenience sample of two different ethnic groups (African Americans and European Americans) in one high school in Virginia. Students' ethnic identity scores were compared with their scores of resilience. The relationship between ethnic identity, resilience, and academic success was also examined. Results indicated that a significant positive relationship existed between cultural/ethnic identity and resilience. The study also revealed that a significant positive relationship existed between cultural/ethnic identity and the individual protective factors of resilience (Optimism, Self-efficacy, Interpersonal Sensitivity, and Emotional Control). Findings indicated that resilience predicted grade point average (GPA). The study also found that parents' educational level was significantly correlated with their children's GPA. There were no significant differences between Black and White students on measures of ethnic identity, resilience, and negative life events.

Fifteen million children in the United States today are at-risk of failing in school and dropping out; the number grows larger every year (Thompson, 2006). However, despite the odds being stacked against them, many at-risk students are still able to overcome adverse circumstances, have positive developmental outcomes, and do well academically in school. We have limited understanding about how these successful children and youth are educationally resilient to high-risk family and community environments. Not enough research has been done to determine exactly how and to what extent students' cultural/ethnic identity affects their resilience. By understanding how cultural/ethnic identity might influence at-risk adolescents, researchers may learn how to provide the environments and support needed to enhance all students' success (Vincent, 2007).

The research discussed in this article suggests that the stronger students' cultural/ethnic identity and the higher their resilience, the more likely it is that they will be successful academically. If the link between strong cultural identity, resilience, and positive academic outcomes can be established, educators could then explore ways to improve students' grades through strengthening their cultural/ethnic identity. As counselors and educators, we would be remiss if we did not seek ways to capitalize on the strength of students' cultural/ethnic diversity as a means to enhance academic outcomes for the increasingly diverse student population in the United States.

Resilience Theory

School failure is thought to be caused in part by the presence of risk factors that contribute to emotional difficulties and poor functioning. These risks can originate from the individual or from his or her environmental context (Werner, 1993). Risk factors do not predict a negative outcome with certainty; rather, they expose youth to circumstances associated with a greater likelihood of a maladaptive or unhealthy outcome (Lerner & Galambos, 1998). Risk normally involves the presence of risk antecedent conditions which create vulnerabilities in the individual's environment that are likely to lead to problem behaviors with serious negative health outcomes (Arrington & Wilson, 2000). When adolescents are exposed to high risk antecedent conditions in their environment, this exposure can increase the likelihood of a poor developmental outcome (Bronfenbrenner, 1986).

Academic Resilience

Understanding how some youth are successful at school despite having to overcome adverse personal and environmental factors holds promise as a possible way to help more adolescents be academically successful. Educational or academic resilience is defined as "the heightened likelihood of educational success despite personal adversities brought about by environmental conditions and experiences" (Wang, Haertel, & Walberg, 1997, p. 4). In Western culture, getting good grades in school is considered an important developmental task and is a marker for healthy outcomes later in life (Masten & Coatsworth, 1998). Educational resilience can be thought of as a continuous interaction between an individual and characteristics of his or her environment. Resilience consists of two components: the presence of significant adversity and achievement of a positive outcome despite the threat or risk (Garmezy, 1991; Masten & Coatsworth, 1998; Rutter, 1994). In order for an adolescent to be considered resilient, he or she must be experiencing some type of risk or adversity and be doing well despite the risk(s).

Multicultural Theory

In addition to resilience theory, cultural and ethnic identity theory was examined when comparing different groups of students. Many researchers have suggested that adolescents' race/culture/ethnicity has a significant influence on how they deal with adverse circumstances (Arrington & Wilson, 2000; Garcia Coll & Magnuson, 2000; Lerner & Galambos, 1998; Yasui & Dishion, 2007). Sue and Sue (2003) studied

multicultural theory and noted that people's worldviews, largely influenced by their cultural background, can have a powerful influence on their ability to successfully adapt to the environment. According to Sue and Sue, worldviews are "composed of our attitudes, values, opinions, and concepts and affect how we think, define events, make decisions, and behave" (p. 268). Members of minority groups often perceive and experience their lives differently based in part on their cultural upbringing and different worldviews. In Western culture, European Americans, currently the dominant group in the U.S. tend to assume their worldview is shared by members of all other cultures (Sue & Sue, 2003). However, many members of other cultures do not share those same values, which can cause them to make meaning of their world differently.

Although, in many cases, there are substantial differences between cultural/ethnic groups, research supports the notion that students with a strong identification with their cultural group tend to do better in the school environment (Lerner & Galambos, 1998; Yasui & Dishion, 2007). Many of the students with strong cultural ties utilize their group as a support structure, calling on family members and their cultural beliefs/traditions when facing adverse circumstances in the environment. Thus, in this study, multicultural theory presupposes that most students, regardless of their cultural or ethnic group, will perform better academically if they have a solid cultural support structure to rely on in times of need. For Black students, past research suggests a strong racial identity can serve as a *suit of armor* to protect them from negative environmental conditions (Arroyo & Zigler, 1995). Findings from research focused on White students and their cultural identity suggest that Whites tend to downplay the importance of their culture when in the majority. However, Whites also frequently rely on their strong cultural ties when in need of support to get them through tough times (Grossman & Charmaraman, 2009; Phinney, Cantu, & Kurtz, 1997).

Antecedents of Risk

Researchers have explored the causes or antecedents of risk in order to better understand the origin of poor developmental outcomes and dysfunction. Carbonell, Reinherz, and Giaconia (1998) stated that risk can be thought of as events or conditions that make a poor outcome more likely. However, because risk is present, it does not predetermine a negative outcome; rather, it simply makes the probability higher (Masten & Coatsworth, 1998). Bowlby (1951) was among the first to suggest that family experiences can have a strong effect on children's psychological development. Bronfenbrenner (1986) also suggested that children are part of a living system and are embedded in their surrounding contexts.

Further exploration of risk antecedents led to studies that examined key environmental risk factors. One such risk that is frequently described in the literature is low socioeconomic status (SES). Researchers have consistently determined that low SES is a reliable predictor of unfavorable outcomes in adulthood (Doll & Lyon, 1998; Duncan & Brooks-Gunn, 2000; Schoon & Parsons, 2002). Lack of financial resources, family disorganization, and overcrowded conditions are thought to all contribute to poor outcomes. A second major environmental risk factor that researchers have studied is single-parent families. Several researchers found that children of single-parent families were more likely to have lower grades, lower test scores, and to drop out of school at a

higher rate than children who were raised by two parents in intact families (Astone & McLanahan, 1991). A third key environmental factor associated with poor outcomes is being a minority. Several studies have examined minority status and its correlation with life trajectories. According to Sellers, Copeland-Linder, Martin, and Lewis (2006), racial or ethnic minority youth have an increased risk for academic problems at school and the development of mental health problems.

Antecedents of Resilience

Protective factors are considered to be on the opposite end of the behavioral spectrum and to be precursors to resilient outcomes among adolescents (Masten & Coatsworth, 1998; Werner, 1993). It is thought that protective factors moderate a person's reaction to stress or adversity and interact with the sources of risk to reduce the probability of negative outcomes. According to Rutter (1979), protection from risk does not mean risk is completely avoided; rather, a resilient individual engages with risk and copes with it. Protective factors emanate from three sources: the individual, the family, and the environment or social context.

Families, Schools, and Communities

During the 1980s and 1990s, some investigators studied the environmental context of adolescents in more detail and realized that there was an interaction between three of the key social components, namely families, schools, and communities. Henderson and Mapp (2002) studied the school-family-community triad from the perspective of the school. Their meta-analysis synthesized 51 studies done in the past 11 years that examined school-family-community partnerships. Results of their analysis indicated that higher levels of parent and community involvement in the schools resulted in higher grades for students, better attendance, higher graduation rates, and better social skills.

African Americans

Considerable research has been done with regard to the relationship between racial identity and resilience of African American children and youth. Many Blacks have to overcome poverty or face systemic oppression, which can result in poor psychological outcomes (Thornton, Chatters, Taylor, & Allen, 1990). At the same time, researchers have looked at the function of racial socialization as a means of strengthening racial identity. According to Arroyo and Zigler (1995), a strong racial identity has been shown to facilitate the development of competencies among African American adolescents and can serve as a suit of armor to protect youth from negative environmental influences (Miller & MacIntosh, 1999).

European Americans

Many researchers have pointed out that there are significant differences between Whites and members of other racial/ethnic groups in terms of how they define their own

identity (Diemer, 2007; Grossman & Charmaraman, 2009; McDermott & Samson, 2005; White & Burke, 1987). According to Knowles and Peng (2005), White racial identity has been an under-investigated construct, perhaps because race and ethnicity play a less salient role for White adolescents, simply because they are in the majority. Many Whites do not believe they have a race at all (Jackson & Heckman, 2002). One possible reason for this phenomenon is that Whites may feel uncomfortable with White privilege and may be reluctant to admit being White, because membership carries with it some *invisible* advantages. Although Whites tend to downplay the importance of race and ethnicity when they are in the majority, some researchers have found that, when Whites are in the numerical minority, they have an increased need for group solidarity (Grossman & Charmaraman, 2009; Phinney et al., 1997).

The Cultural Identity/Resilience Study

Although much research has been done in the past that looked at risk and protective factors of resilience (Garmezy, Masten, & Tellegen, 1984; Masten & Coatsworth, 1998), few studies have examined the relationship between cultural/ethnic identity and resilience. Several investigators have noted this gap in the research and recommended that more studies explore the influence culture may have on resilient outcomes (Arrington & Wilson, 2000; Garcia Coll & Magnuson, 2000; Winfield, 1995). Many studies done on culture and ethnic identity during the past 20 years have only included African Americans. Additionally, little research has examined Whites and their cultural or ethnic identity, since they are the default racial group and are often ignored (McDermott & Samson, 2005). Moreover, few studies have examined the positive effects of culture and ethnic identity on both resilience and academic outcomes in the school setting. Therefore, the study discussed in this article examined the relationship between ethnic identity and resilience among both Blacks and Whites. The research also looked at the relationship between ethnic identity, resilience, and academic success.

Thus, the premise of this study was that adolescents attempt to negotiate their world and be successful in school. However, they each possess a different combination of risk and resilience factors that originate from the individual, family, and environment. These risk and resilience factors interact to directly influence adolescents' developmental outcomes. In the past, researchers have overlooked the impact cultural and ethnic identity may have on resilience outcomes. Cultural upbringing and ethnic identity have been shown to be powerful influences on the way adolescents view their world and make meaning of it. However, few researchers have explored the way culture and ethnic identity impact the individual protective factors of resilience as they relate to academic success. This gap in the literature provided the rationale for this study; that is, there was a need to examine the interaction between cultural/ethnic identity and resilience and their potential impact on academic performance. These findings could better inform policies, help create more targeted prevention/intervention approaches, and enable more students to succeed at school.

Procedure and Instrumentation

Data was collected for the study in each of ten health classes in one high school in Virginia. Students completed surveys during one class period lasting one and a half

hours. Four different instruments were used. First, a demographic questionnaire was used to determine the students' age, grade, who the student lived with, and his/her parents' educational level. Second, students completed a self-rated Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure – Revised (MEIM-R; Phinney & Ong, 2007), which utilized a five-point Likert scale (from strongly agree to strongly disagree). The MEIM-R consists of six items—three items ask students to rate themselves on their level of exploration of their culture and ethnic group, while the other three items require students to rate their level of commitment. The measure produces a mean score between one and five, which represents the participant's overall ethnic identity score. Using the five-point Likert scale as a reference, a mean score of one or two would be considered a low level of ethnic identity. Students with a mean score of three would be considered to have a moderate level of ethnic identity, while students with a mean score of four or five would be thought to have a high level of ethnic identity.

Third, a 44-item Resilience Inventory (RI) was administered, which asked students to answer questions regarding four individual protective factors of resilience: Optimism, Self-efficacy, Interpersonal Sensitivity, and Emotional Control (Song, 2003). The RI also utilized a Likert scale. The subscale scores on each of these individual protective factors of academic resilience were compared to ethnic identity scores to determine if relationships exist. The RI yields an overall mean score for resilience, as well as mean scores for each of the four subscales, which were then compared to mean scores of ethnic identity and negative life events to determine if relationships exist. One way to interpret mean scores from the RI would be to use the five-point Likert scale as a reference. For example, a mean score of one or two would be considered a low level of resilience (or one of its individual protective factors). Students with a mean score of three would be considered to have a moderate level of resilience, while students with a mean score of four would be thought to have a higher level of resilience. A mean score of five on the RI would be interpreted as the highest level of resilience possible.

Fourth, a negative life events inventory (NLEI) was administered to determine the extent to which students had experienced adversity in their lives during the past year (Peterson, Duncan, & Canady, 2009). The NLEI was utilized because the questions are geared towards the stressors that typically occur in adolescents' lives. This survey simply counted the total number of negative life events (out of 17) students experienced during the past year. Mean scores from the NLEI can be interpreted by considering the possible range of scores from one through seventeen. In the sample of students for this study, the overall mean for the NLEI was 3.43, meaning the average number of negative experiences students had was a little more than three per year. The highest number of negative experiences reported by a student was 11, while several students reported having no negative experiences the previous year. Therefore, students who reported having few or no negative life experiences would have the lowest adversity scores. Those students with one or two negative experiences would be considered to have lower levels of bad experiences, while students with mean scores in the three-to-four range could be considered to have a moderate amount of negative experiences. Students whose mean negative life experience scores were five or more could be considered to have higher levels of negative experiences.

Research Design

A descriptive correlational design with regression analysis was used to determine if significant relationships existed between multiple variables (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2007). Multiple regression was used to determine if certain variables, such as cultural/ethnic identity, resilience, and negative life events, were predictive of academic success (as measured by GPA).

Hypotheses

1. A positive relationship exists between cultural/ethnic identity and resilience, as measured by subjects' composite scores on the Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure-Revised and their composite scores on the Resilience Inventory.
2. A positive relationship exists between cultural/ethnic identity and the resilience protective factor of Optimism, as measured by subjects' respective scores on the Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure-Revised and their subscale scores on the Resilience Inventory.
3. A positive relationship exists between cultural/ethnic identity and the resilience protective factor of Self-efficacy, as measured by subjects' respective scores on the Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure-Revised and their subscale scores on the Resilience Inventory.
4. A positive relationship exists between cultural/ethnic identity and the resilience protective factor of Interpersonal Sensitivity, as measured by subjects' respective scores on the Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure-Revised and their subscale scores on the Resilience Inventory.
5. A positive relationship exists between cultural/ethnic identity and the resilience protective factor of Emotional Control, as measured by subjects' respective scores on the Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure-Revised and the subscale score on the Resilience Inventory.
6. Resilience, as measured by the Resilience Inventory, and ethnic identity, as measured by the Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure – Revised, are predictive of academic success, as measured by grade point average.
7. Ethnic identity, as measured by the Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure – Revised, 2) resilience, as measured by the Resilience Inventory, 3) negative life events, as measured by the Negative Life Events Inventory, and 4) the interaction of resilience and negative life events are predictive of academic success, as measured by grade point average.
8. There is no difference between African Americans and Whites in ethnic identity, as measured by the Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure – Revised.
9. There is no difference between African Americans and Whites in resilience, as measured by subjects' composite score on the Resilience Inventory and their subscale scores of Optimism, Self-efficacy, Interpersonal Sensitivity, and Emotional Control.
10. There is no difference between African Americans and Whites in negative life events, as measured by the Negative Life Events Inventory.

Sample and Demographics

A convenience sample was drawn from the accessible population of students at one high school. The participants were students enrolled in Health I or Health II classes for the Spring 2009 semester. A total of 239 students in grades nine through twelve attended the ten health classes, however, parent consent was received from 136 parents and 122 students actually participated in the study.

Data Analysis

In the data analysis, group mean scores for Blacks and Whites on each of the three instruments—the Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure – Revised, the Resilience Inventory, and the Negative Life Events Inventory—were compared using the independent groups *t*-test procedure. Next, Pearson Product Moment correlational analysis was conducted to determine if a relationship existed between ethnic identity (as measured by the MEIM-R), resilience (as measured by the RI), and its four subscales (optimism, self-efficacy, interpersonal sensitivity, and emotional control). Finally, stepwise multiple regression was used to determine whether RI, MEIM-R, and NLEI were predictive of GPA. An additional regression analysis was done to determine if GPA was predicted by ethnic identity (MEIM-R), resilience (RI), negative life events (NLEI), or the interaction of RI and NLEI.

Results

There were a total of 122 high school students from ten health classes who participated in the study, which is 12 percent of the overall school population of 1,039 students. Ninety-one White students and 20 Black students participated. The remaining 11 students were Asian, Latino, and Native American, but the results of their surveys were not analyzed because the number of students in these three groups was too small to be statistically significant. The average age of the White students was 15.2 years, while the average age of the Black student sample was 15.6 years. Regarding gender, there were 49 White males in the sample and 42 White females; among Blacks, there were 12 males and 8 females. Overall, there were more 9th and 10th graders who participated in the study than older students, since most students in Virginia take health the first or second year of high school. In this study, there were 64 9th grade students who participated, 44 10th grade students, 12 11th grade students, and two 12th grade students.

Hypothesis One

A positive relationship exists between cultural/ethnic identity and resilience, as measured by participants' composite scores on the Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure-Revised and their composite scores on the Resilience Inventory.

Results. The Pearson Product Moment correlation revealed that cultural/ethnic identity and resilience were significantly related ($r = .424$, $n = 122$, $p = .000$). Therefore, hypothesis one was supported. The means, standard deviations, and sample sizes for MEIM-R and RI are provided in Tables 1 and 2.

Table 1
Means, Standards Deviations, and Sample Size for MEIM-R

Measure and group	Mean	Standard deviation	<i>n</i> =
MEIM-R			
Overall sample	3.20	.86	122
African Americans	3.32	1.05	20
Whites	3.13	.81	91

Hypothesis Two

A positive relationship exists between cultural/ethnic identity and the resilience protective factor of Optimism, as measured by subjects' respective scores on the Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure-Revised and their subscale scores on the Resilience Inventory.

Results. The Pearson Product Moment correlation revealed that cultural/ethnic identity and the resilience protective factor of Optimism were significantly related ($r = .271, n = 122, p = .003$). Therefore, hypothesis two was supported.

Hypothesis Three

A positive relationship exists between cultural/ethnic identity and the resilience protective factor of Self-efficacy, as measured by subjects' respective scores on the Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure-Revised and their subscale scores on the Resilience Inventory.

Results. The Pearson Product Moment correlation revealed that cultural/ethnic identity and the resilience protective factor of Self-efficacy were significantly related ($r = .439, n = 122, p = .000$). Therefore, hypothesis three was supported.

Hypothesis Four

A positive relationship exists between cultural/ethnic identity and the resilience protective factor of Interpersonal Sensitivity, as measured by subjects' respective scores on the Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure-Revised and their subscale scores on the Resilience Inventory.

Results. The Pearson Product Moment correlation revealed that cultural/ethnic identity and the resilience protective factor of Interpersonal Sensitivity were significantly related ($r = .231, n = 122, p = .011$). Therefore, hypothesis four was supported.

Hypothesis Five

A positive relationship exists between cultural/ethnic identity and the resilience protective factor of Emotional Control, as measured by subjects' respective scores on the Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure-Revised and the subscale score on the Resilience Inventory.

Results. The Pearson Product Moment correlation revealed that cultural/ethnic identity and the resilience protective factor of Emotional Control were significantly related ($r = .241, n = 122, p = .008$). Therefore, hypothesis five was supported.

Hypothesis Six

Resilience, as measured by the Resilience Inventory, and ethnic identity, as measured by the Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure – Revised, are predictive of academic success, as measured by grade point average.

Results. A stepwise multiple regression was conducted using grade point average as the dependent variable and RI and MEIM-R as the predictor variables. The analysis revealed significant findings for the RI ($F(1, 121) = 13.632, p = .000, R^2 = .102$) but not for the MEIM-R. Resilience level showed to be a significant predictor of grade point average, while the level of ethnic identity was not significant. Therefore, hypothesis six was partially confirmed.

Hypothesis Seven

Grade point average is a function of: 1) ethnic identity, as measured by the Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure – Revised, 2) resilience, as measured by the Resilience Inventory, 3) negative life events, as measured by the Negative Life Events Inventory, and 4) the interaction of resilience and negative life events.

Results. A stepwise multiple regression was conducted using grade point average as the dependent variable and RI, MEIM-R, NLEI and the interaction of RI and NLEI as the predictor variables. The analysis indicated that RI was predictive of GPA ($t(121) = 3.692, p = .000, R^2 = .102$). However, MEIM-R ($t(121) = -.377, p = .707$), NLEI ($t(121) = -1.504, p = .135$) and the interaction of negative life events and resilience ($t(121) = -1.513, p = .133$) were not predictive of GPA beyond the contribution of RI. Therefore, hypothesis seven was partially confirmed, since resilience was predictive of GPA.

Hypothesis Eight

There will be no difference between African American and White participants in ethnic identity, as measured by their scores on the Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure – Revised.

Results. An independent groups *t*-test was used to compare the African American and White samples on the MEIM-R. The *t*-test ($t(109) = .933, p = .353$) indicated no significant difference between groups. Therefore, null hypothesis eight was supported. The means, standard deviations, and sample sizes for MEIM-R are provided in Table 1 above.

Hypothesis Nine

There will be no difference between African American and White participants in level of resilience, as measured by their composite score on the Resilience Inventory and their subscale scores of Optimism, Self-efficacy, Interpersonal Sensitivity, and Emotional Control.

Results. A series of independent groups *t*-tests were conducted to examine the differences between the African American and White participants on overall resilience and the subscales.

1. The *t*-test for overall resilience ($t(109) = 1.002, p = .318$) indicated no significant difference between groups.
2. The *t*-test for the subscale of Optimism ($t(109) = 1.239, p = .218$) indicated no significant difference between groups.
3. The *t*-test for the subscale of Self-efficacy ($t(109) = 1.369, p = .174$) indicated no significant difference between groups.
4. The *t*-test for the subscale of Interpersonal Sensitivity ($t(109) = -.224, p = .823$) indicated no significant difference between groups.
5. The *t*-test for the subscale of Emotional Control ($t(109) = -.388, p = .699$) indicated no significant difference between groups.

In summary, there were no significant differences in RI and the RI subscale scores of Optimism, Self-efficacy, Interpersonal Sensitivity, and Emotional Control between African American and White participants. Therefore, null hypothesis nine was supported. The means, standard deviations, and sample sizes for the RI and its four subscales are provided in table 2 below.

Table 2

Means, Standards Deviations, and Sample Size for RI and subscales: Optimism, Self-efficacy, Interpersonal Sensitivity, and Emotional Control

Measure and group	Mean	Standard deviation	<i>n</i> =
Resilience Inventory			
Composite Score			
Overall sample	3.70	.49	122
African Americans	3.78	.46	20
Whites	3.66	.49	91
Optimism			
Overall sample	3.64	.78	122
African Americans	3.81	.87	20
Whites	3.57	.76	91
Self-efficacy			
Overall sample	3.74	.55	122
African Americans	3.86	.48	20
Whites	3.67	.55	91

(continued)

Table 2

Means, Standards Deviations, and Sample Size for RI and subscales: Optimism, Self-efficacy, Interpersonal Sensitivity, and Emotional Control (continued)

Interpersonal Sensitivity			
Overall sample	3.76	.66	122
African Americans	3.70	.80	20
Whites	3.74	.65	91
Emotional Control			
Overall sample	3.05	.78	122
African Americans	3.00	.76	20
Whites	3.05	.79	91

Hypothesis Ten

There will be no difference between African American and White participants in negative life events, as measured by the Negative Life Events Inventory.

Results. An independent groups *t*-test was used to compare the African American and White samples on the NLEI. The *t*-test ($t(109) = .480, p = .632$) indicated no significant difference between groups. Therefore, null hypothesis ten was supported. The means, standard deviations, and sample sizes for the NLEI are provided in Table 3 below.

Table 3

Means, Standards Deviations, and Sample Size for NLEI

Measure and group	Mean (17 possible)	Standard deviation	$n =$
NLEI			
Overall sample	3.43	2.20	122
African Americans	3.55	1.93	20
Whites	3.30	2.18	91

Additional Finding

There was one additional finding. A Pearson Product Moment correlation revealed that parents' educational level and students' GPA were significantly related (students' mothers: $r = .277, n = 115, p = .003$; students' fathers: $r = .256, n = 111, p = .007$).

Discussion

The cultural identity/resilience study explored the relationship among cultural/ethnic identity, resilience, and academic success. Several interesting findings emerged. First, resilience was predictive of academic success (i. e., GPA), with students having higher resilience indicators also tending to have higher grades. Second, ethnic identity was significantly and positively correlated with resilience, as well as with each of the four component protective factors of resilience (Optimism, Self-efficacy, Interpersonal Sensitivity, and Emotional Control). Ethnic identity was not found to be significantly correlated with GPA, however, a significant correlation between parents' educational level and their children's GPA was found. This additional finding is considered to be important, since it suggests that parents' success, as indicated by educational level, has a direct bearing on their children's academic success, as indicated by grade point average.

Hypothesis One suggested that there would be a positive relationship found between cultural/ethnic identity and resilience; it was confirmed by the data to be statistically significant. One way to interpret this finding is by thinking of culture as an adaptive mechanism that helps groups of people (i. e., different cultures) develop strategies to cope with adversity. Students seem to take their cues from their culture and incorporate these unique approaches into their own resilience strategies for dealing with difficult circumstances. The pride students feel in themselves and their own ethnic identity appears to generalize to an overall feeling of pride and translates into other areas of their lives, including the academic setting. Thus, students who possess unique cultural norms and values seem to be better equipped to adapt to a changing environment and be more resilient. This finding suggests that one way to help students be more resilient in the school setting could be to strengthen their ethnic identity.

Hypotheses Two through Five posed that cultural/ethnic identity would be positively related to the resilience protective factors of Optimism, Self-Efficacy, Interpersonal Sensitivity, and Emotional Control. These hypotheses were supported, as ethnic identity and these four resilience subscales were found to be significantly related. Regarding Hypothesis Two, the link between ethnic identity and Optimism aligns with previous research conclusions that Optimism can be an important individual protective factor against life stressors. It appears that strengthening students' feelings of ethnic identity may bolster their sense of optimism which, in turn, could help students become more resilient.

Findings for Hypothesis Three revealed that students' belief that they could complete a task (Self-efficacy) was by far the strongest correlation with ethnic identity in the study; it was nearly twice as high as the next closest individual academic protective factor of Optimism. This finding suggests that when students have a strong sense of ethnic identity and pride in their culture, they may be more likely to have a related higher level of confidence in completing work successfully. It further suggests that teachers and counselors could make promotion of self-efficacy a key consideration of educational intervention programs that strengthen ethnic identity, which could lead to a related increase in resilience.

Hypothesis Four proposed that a positive relationship would exist between cultural/ethnic identity and the resilience protective factor of Interpersonal Sensitivity.

This hypothesis was supported, since ethnic identity and Interpersonal Sensitivity were shown to be significantly and positively related. This means that being sensitive to the thoughts and feelings of others is valued in many cultures and is also a component of academic resilience. In the school setting, being aware of and sensitive to how others feel is thought to help students get along better with teachers and peers, and therefore, may be associated with better academic outcomes. Thus, we may want to supplement programs aimed at promoting resilience through strengthening ethnic identity with other types of interventions to ensure that the interpersonal sensitivity protective factor is also promoted.

Results for Hypothesis Five confirmed that ethnic identity and the resilience protective factor of Emotional Control were positively related. Based on this finding, it can be inferred that the ability to control emotions and self-regulate feelings is a shared characteristic for both ethnic identity and resilience. In other words, students who can monitor their feelings and keep their emotions in check tend to adapt better within cultural settings and tend to have higher levels of ethnic identity. Additionally, emotional control has been found to be a key component of resilience. Thus, emotional control is an ability that is often considered important in many cultures and is a valued ability associated with higher levels of resilience.

Hypothesis Six was partially confirmed, in that resilience was predictive of academic success in terms of GPA, whereas ethnic identity was not significantly related to GPA and therefore did *not* predict higher grades. If resilience predicts academic success, educators could focus on strengthening resilience, and could expect students' grades to have a corresponding rise. Regarding the lack of a significant correlation between ethnic identity and GPA, it could be that ethnic identity has an *indirect* relationship with GPA. Higher levels of ethnic identity were found to be associated with higher levels of resilience, and resilience predicted higher grades. Therefore, it may be that ethnic identity makes an indirect contribution to academic success through its positive correlation with resilience—a recommended topic for further study.

Hypothesis Seven suggested that grade point average could be predicted by ethnic identity, resilience, negative life events, and the interaction of resilience and negative life events. Although significant positive relationships were found to exist between ethnic identity and resilience and between resilience and academic success, no relationship was found to exist between ethnic identity and academic success. As suggested in Hypothesis Six above, a strong ethnic identity may only contribute *indirectly* to higher grades. The key finding in Hypothesis Seven was its affirmation that greater resilience appears to predict higher grades. Regarding the lack of an expected significant correlation between negative life events and GPA, one explanation could be that the low average number of negative life events (three per student) failed to significantly impact students' grades because students were able to take things in stride and adapt to those negative experiences. The data also failed to reveal a significant relationship between the interaction of resilience and negative life events. It was anticipated that students with higher resilience scores and a higher number of negative life events would still have higher grades because of the buffering effect their resilience may have provided. It could be that there are high levels of variability among students regarding their risk and resilience factors and how these factors interact with negative events to impact academic success. Additionally, not much is known about the specific ways certain combinations of

individual resilience factors buffer students from different types of bad life experiences. Additional study is needed to determine how negative life events interact with individual protective factors and affect resilient outcomes.

Results from Hypothesis Eight indicated no significant differences in ethnic identity between Blacks and Whites. This was a surprising result, since the literature suggests that Blacks normally have higher levels of ethnic identity, because, compared to Whites, they typically face more adversity. There are several possible inferences that can be made regarding the lack of anticipated differences in ethnic identity for Blacks and Whites. First, it could be that there *are* no differences between Blacks and Whites with regard to their ethnic identity, and Black and White students feel the same levels of pride and identification with their ethnic group. Another possibility is that the Black students in this study may not have encountered a substantial amount of racism or discrimination as would be expected; thus, they may not have needed to rely on their ethnic identity for its protective effect. Additional study is needed to explain the similarity of ethnic identity levels between Blacks and Whites.

The findings from Hypothesis Nine revealed that there were no significant differences in resilience between Blacks and Whites. This finding was not anticipated, as it was thought on the basis of previous research that Whites would have higher levels of resilience because they were believed to be able to utilize more individual, family, and community protective factors. One potential interpretation for the lack of significant differences found in resilience scores among Blacks and Whites could be that the Black families in this study may have been uniquely able to afford substantial protection for their children, despite the increased risk that being a single-parent family configuration normally invokes. Perhaps, in this school, in this community, at this point in time, the playing field had truly been leveled and both Black and White students had an equal opportunity to succeed. Thus, we cannot assume that minorities lack sufficient protective factors to buffer them from the risks they face on the basis of the differential levels of discrimination and oppression they normally face.

Results from Hypothesis Ten revealed that there were no significant differences between Blacks and Whites on the Negative Life Events Inventory (NLEI). There are several inferences that could be made regarding this finding. First, the lack of anticipated differences could be because there *were* no differences between these two groups of students. That may be because Black and White families live and work in the same community, appear to face similar risks, and seem to have access to the same resources.

There was one additional finding relating to parents' educational level as correlated with their children's GPA. Previous research (Duncan & Brooks-Gunn, 2000; Schoon & Parsons, 2002) suggested that parents' educational level is significantly and positively correlated with students' GPA because of the positive influence parents exert on their children. This additional finding was confirmed, in that for both Blacks and Whites, higher levels of parental education were positively and significantly correlated with students' GPA. Parents exert a powerful influence on their children and can directly contribute to their academic success through encouragement, school involvement, and by setting a good example. Thus, it is important for teachers and school counselors to keep in mind the critical role that parents play in their children's academic success and for educators to encourage parents to be actively involved in school activities.

Evidence-Based Practice

Knowing the value a strong cultural/ethnic identity can have in strengthening students' psychological functioning and academic performance has motivated researchers to design prevention programs that address this important area. One such program described by Bass and Coleman (1997) is entitled the Rites of Passage, a school-based program designed for African American males. The program is based on the premise that becoming grounded in the values and social support system of students' culture of origin is necessary before students can develop and demonstrate competence in a second culture. One key goal of the Rites of Passage is to help African American adolescents develop a positive sense of cultural self through a social and cultural inoculation process that facilitates healthy development.

In Bass and Coleman's (1997) intervention, six African American males in sixth grade at one school participated in the program. These students were considered at-risk for academic underachievement and were referred by the school psychologist and social worker. Students were evaluated using a classroom behavior scale completed by their teachers, academic goals, school disciplinary records, and GPA. Students participated in a 20-week group intervention in which they met with a teacher once a week for 45 minutes. During the first ten sessions, students learned the seven Kwanzaa principles of Umoja (unity), Kujichagulia (self-determination), Ujima (collective work and responsibility), Ujamaa (cooperative economics), Ma (purpose), Kuumba (creativity), and Imani (faith; Karenga, 1980). During the second ten sessions, students learned how to put the principles into practice by sharing with the group the challenges they faced living out the principles and reaching their academic goals. As reported by teachers, results indicated students showed significant positive changes in both behavior and academic performance, as well as a significant drop in the number of disciplinary infractions.

Another successful evidence-based program is Big Brothers/Big Sisters, the largest mentoring organization in the United States (Morrow & Styles, 1995). This program consists of traditional one-on-one mentoring between a youth and adult, carefully matched based on a culturally-sensitive screening process. Behaviors targeted for improvement include individual, family, and school risk factors, such as delinquency, substance use, violent behavior, family conflict, academic failure, and persistent antisocial behavior at school. A national evaluation of the program (Grossman & Garry, 1997) found that the mentoring that occurred through the Big Brothers/Big Sisters program resulted in adolescents who were less likely to use drugs and alcohol, less likely to use violence against others, less likely to miss school, more likely to have positive feelings about school, and more likely to have stronger relationships with both peers and parents.

The evidence-based programs described above provided examples of successful, culturally sensitive interventions that took place within the schools, families, and the community. Other similar programs that strengthen the cultural and ethnic identities of the different groups found in schools should be developed and implemented as a way to increase students' cultural pride and ethnic identity, strengthen their resilience to adversity, and potentially improve their academic performance.

Limitations

One limitation was a lack of norms for the instruments used in the study (Multigroup Ethnic Identity –Revised , Resilience Inventory, and Negative Life Events Inventory). Without established norms, the means of the groups for each of the different measures cannot be compared to other samples and populations. Additionally, because there are no levels established for each instrument, the magnitude of the mean scores for each group can only be estimated. Thus, the lack of norms limits the results of the study and its generalizability to other settings and populations.

Another limitation of this study was the small sample size of the participants. There were a total of 122 students who answered the survey questionnaires; however, only 20 were African American. The small sample size for this group could reduce the power of the tests and limit the ability to generalize the results to other populations. Secondly, the researcher had hoped to survey a variety of ethnic groups, including Latino Americans, Asian Americans, and Native Americans. However, because there were so few students from these ethnic groups in the school where the study was conducted, the group sizes were too small, so the means of these groups were not considered. Having students from several different ethnic groups could have enhanced understanding of the relationship between ethnic identity, resilience, and academic success. A third limitation was the sole use of self-report instruments. This could result in a response bias, especially if participants responded in a certain manner because they thought there was a socially desirable way to answer the questions. A final consideration is the previously noted potential limitation of the NLEI to measure all negative life experiences that occurred to students. There may have been incidences of discrimination and racist treatment as well as other traumatic events which went uncounted because the survey didn't specifically list those events, thereby rendering an inaccurate picture of the total amount of adversity experienced by students.

Several results from this study should be interpreted with caution. First, the significant correlations between ethnic identity and resilience, and between ethnic identity and the four resilience subscales (Optimism, Self-efficacy, Interpersonal Sensitivity, and Emotional Control) does not necessarily imply that one *caused* the other (Gall et al., 2007). One cannot assume that stronger ethnic identity *causes* resilience, nor can one assume that higher scores of resilience and its individual protective factors *cause* stronger ethnic identity. Second, the data gathered was not collected through random sampling techniques, rather, from a convenience sample of all students in Health classes from one high school during one semester. Random sampling could have been a way to ensure the sample was representative of the overall school population. Finally, students were all from the same school in Virginia. Their attitudes, beliefs, and values may or may not be representative of the attitudes, beliefs, and values of adolescents from other schools and other settings in different parts of the United States. Therefore, caution must be exercised when generalizing results from this study to other populations.

Despite its limitations, the study contributes to the literature in several key ways. First, a significant relationship between ethnic identity and resilience, including its individual protective factors, was revealed. Second, resilience was shown to be predictive of GPA. Third, contrary to current literature, there were no significant differences revealed between Blacks and Whites on measures of ethnic identity, resilience, and

negative life events. Fourth, an additional finding revealed that parents' educational level was significantly correlated with their children's GPAs. Overall, the link between ethnic identity and resilience is important, while the ability of resilience to predict grades is powerful. Based on these findings, several ways for counselors and teachers to increase ethnic identity, resilience, and grade point averages were suggested. These suggestions have the potential to increase the likelihood of academic success for many students.

Implications for Future Research

In the future, there could be several ways to expand on the results of this study. First, the relationship between ethnic identity and resilience should be explored in more depth. This could be done by increasing the sample size and including representatives from all the major cultural/ethnic groups in the United States. The ways different groups perceive their world, respond to stressors, and develop means to adapt and overcome adverse circumstances should be examined in greater detail. Second, researchers should sample participants longitudinally, since previous studies have suggested that both resilience and ethnic identity are developmental in nature and change over time. Third, participants who had experienced many more negative life events or had experienced a greater amount of environmental stress could be studied in more depth to determine their level of resilience and how their protective factors helped them face and overcome adversity. Future studies could also include a measure of the type and amount of discrimination, racism, and prejudice experienced by participants, as this stressor may have a profound effect on resilient outcomes.

Summary

This study contributed to the literature in several key ways. First, a significant relationship between ethnic identity and resilience, including its individual protective factors (Optimism, Self-efficacy, Interpersonal Sensitivity, and Emotional Control), was revealed. Second, resilience was shown to be predictive of GPA. Third, contrary to current literature, there were no significant differences revealed between Blacks and Whites on measures of ethnic identity, resilience, and negative life events. Fourth, an additional finding revealed that parent's educational level was significantly correlated with their children's GPAs. Overall, the link between ethnic identity and resilience is important, while the ability of resilience to predict grades is powerful. Based on these findings, several ways for counselors and teachers to increase ethnic identity, resilience, and grade point averages were suggested. These suggestions have the potential to increase the odds of academic success for many students. Further exploration of culture and ethnic identity may also help to illuminate our understanding of exactly how cultural resilience protects adolescents from the effects of negative life events.

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Note: This paper is part of the annual VISTAS project sponsored by the American Counseling Association. Find more information on the project at: http://counselingoutfitters.com/vistas/VISTAS_Home.htm