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Racial Identity, Resilience, Coping, and College Retention in African American College Students Attending a Predominantly White University
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Chapter I

Review of the Literature

Student retention is an important factor in the survival of tertiary level institutions. Today, it is more challenging to retain students, especially with the diversification of college student needs. Recently, concern has grown regarding the retention of African American college students, who have the highest drop out rate than any other ethnic group (US Department of Education, 2001). A person’s racial identity, resilience, and coping behaviors are believed to be associated to college student retention (Chavous et al., 2003; Graham, Baker, & Wapner, 1985; Oyserman, Bybee, & Terry, 2003; Spencer, Noll, Stoltzfus, & Harpalani, 2001). However, the present literature is unclear of their role in the retention of African American college students. The proposed study will address this gap by examining the relationship between racial identity, resilience, coping, and college retention in African American college students.

This chapter will provide a review of the literature pertinent to understanding racial identity, resilience, coping, and college retention in African American college students. It will address four main areas: (1) the historical and theoretical background of African American racial identity development, (2) an overview of the concept of resilience, (3) a review of the theoretical background of coping, and (4) the extent to which the literature provides evidence of the relationship between racial identity, resilience, coping, and college student retention. The objective of this chapter is to provide a theoretical framework to inform this study.
Racial Identity: Historical Background and Conceptualization

Black racial identity has been researched extensively over the past several decades. Initial inquiries by early scholars like Du Bois (1903) and Lind (1913) highlighted the unique psychological struggle of balance within Black people. Du Bois termed this struggle the “double consciousness.” He wrote “this sense of always looking at one’s self through the eyes of others, of measuring one’s soul by the tape of the world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his two-ness, an American, a Negro” (Du Bois, 1903, p. 8).

Lind (1913) agreed with Du Bois’ premise that Black people’s identity and experiences differ from the majority population. In 1913, Lind wrote The Color Complex in the Negro where he explored these differences. In this paper, Lind (1913) proposed that Black people struggle with the sense of inferiority that is forever represented by the color of their skin. He implied that Black people would experience cognitive dissonance if they fail to accept their Black identity as “reality”. In an effort to rectify this conflict, Lind (1913) stated that Black people would take on White mannerisms and beliefs. He also stated that Black people would employ other efforts to alleviate this cognitive dissonance. For example, creating outlandish explanations like it’s a disguise or accidentally (Lind, 1913). Lind (1913) termed this phenomenon “the color complex”.

As the notion of a Black racial identity gained acceptance, researchers focused their efforts on defining it. Early inquiries supported an “all or none” conceptualization of Black racial identity, which proposed that Black people would either accept or completely reject their Black identity. Based on this polarized perspective, acceptance will encourage a sense of confidence, whereas rejection will lead to feelings of
inferiority. Initial empirical evidence supported this self-like or self-hate perspective of racial identity. In 1936, Eugene Horowitz conducted a study on Black and White school-aged children. He used the “Show Me” test to evaluate children’s racial attitudes. In his study, children were asked several questions, such as, “show me all those you want to sit next to on a street car” and “show me all those you want to be in your class at school.” The children were then required to rank, in order of preference, photographs of both White and Black children for each question. Horowitz (1936) found that the majority of the Black children who participated preferred White photographs on the “Show Me” test.

In 1947, a study conducted by Clark and Clark (1947) also supported this “all or none” concept. Clark and Clark (1947) developed the “doll” test to measure children’s racial awareness and preferences. The “doll” test included choosing a White or Black doll to answer a variety of questions. In their 1947 study, children were asked to choose the doll they preferred for each question. Clark and Clark (1947) found that the majority of Black children preferred White dolls over Black dolls in positive characteristic questions like “give me the doll that you like to play with or the doll you like the best,” and “give me the doll that is the nice doll.” However, in questions expressing negative characteristics, like “give me the doll that looks bad,” Black children chose Black dolls over White ones. These self-hatred research outcomes were prevalent throughout the 1950s and early 1960s (Landreth & Johnson, 1953; Taylor, 1986).

In the late 1960s and early 1970s the Civil Rights Movement was gaining momentum and Blacks were becoming more empowered. It was during this time that the negative view of Black racial identity began to shift. Research conducted around this time started to reveal evidence contradictory to the once dominant negative position of
Black racial identity (Hrabá & Grant, 1970; Katz & Zalk, 1974). For the first time, numerous studies reported Blacks as having positive attitudes toward their Black racial identity and having higher levels of self-esteem (Cross, Parham, & Helms, 1998). In addition, there was also a growing lack of satisfaction with the polarized self-like or self-hate conceptualization of racial identity. Researchers began to seek a more inclusive understanding of racial identity, which led to conceptualizing it as something that developed through a series of stages.

Theoretical Models of Racial Identity

According to Helms, racial identity is “a sense of group or collective identity based on one’s perception that he or she shares a common racial heritage with a particular group” (1993, p. 3). Theories of racial identity focus on explaining the degree to which a person identifies with a particular group, since the racial identity reference point centers on the quality of a person’s identification with a specific racial group. Racial identity theorists believe that people view the world using a racial lens and understand relationships and experiences in relation to how they perceive themselves and those around them as racial beings (Carter, 1995). Carter (1995) states, “each level of racial identity is presumed to be associated with a distinct worldview that corresponds to emotional, psychological, social, and interpersonal preferences consistent with that worldview” (1995, p. 139).

Racial identity theories range from categorical to developmental. Categorical theorists believe that people’s racial identity depends on which type or class they belong to. For example, Vontress (1971), a categorical theorist, suggested that Black people could be placed in three groups: Black, Negro, and Colored Americans. Like most of the
Researchers at that time, Vontress also thought that racial identity referred to more than the color of one’s skin. He stated, “although persons of African descent in this country share a common heritage, today, this group apparently is being segmented, and the segmentation has occurred as a result of diverse perceptions held by subgroups of what used to be referred to Negro Americans. These subgroups may be labeled Black, Negro, and Colored Americans, because each group perceives itself differently and thus reacts differently to disenfranchisement” (Vontress, 1971, p. 10). Vontress proposed that the Black, Negro, and Colored American subgroups of racial identity are each associated with specific characteristics. In his paper, Racial Differences: Impediments to Rapport, Vontress states that a person who identifies as Black is “no longer ashamed of his skin color, his kinky hair, or his slave heritage” (Vontress, 1971, p. 11). Individuals in this category of racial identity no longer deny their true selves and tend to be more aware and intolerant of injustices against them. On the other hand, those in the Negro category are “on the fence.” In a sense, they are constantly shifting between White and Black values and attitudes. They are more willing to give Whites the opportunity to prove that they are good at heart. Those in the Colored category differ completely from those in the Black and the Negro subgroups. Vontress (1971) states that “in general, Colored people have of necessity maintained a symbiotic relationship with Whites, who tell them not only what to call themselves, but who go a long way in determining their behavior as well” (Vontress, 1971, p. 11). He goes on to say that “They often go through life living and acting a lie, especially those who are completely dependent on Whites. They dare not expose, even to themselves, the agony and frustration they have to endure” (Vontress, 1971, p. 12). In other words, Coloreds are people of African descent who see themselves
as Whites do despite contradictory evidence from others. For this subgroup, it is a 
necessity to accept White ideas and beliefs about Black people in order for them to 
survive.

Categorical theories of Black racial identity, like Vontress' subgroups, although 
somewhat useful, were challenged by the overwhelming surge of developmental theories 
of Black racial identity, commonly called "Nigrescence theories." Nigrescence theorists, 
like Thomas (1971), Cross (1971), and Jackson (1975), propose that racial identity 
progresses through a series of stages. Thomas (1971) suggested that Black people would 
progress through a set of predictable stages leading them away from their original anti-
Black sense of self to one that is more pro-Black and self-accepting. He identified five 
stages in the development of Black racial identity. In the first stage, Thomas (1971) 
stated that Black people are initially in a state of repression. Those at this stage repress 
their true selves and degrade their Blackness. They experience a need to be accepted as 
something other than who they truly are. In Thomas' second stage of racial identity 
development, Black people start to become aware of their self-denial and begin to search 
for an understanding of who they really are by gathering information about their true 
cultural heritage. According to Thomas (1971), Black people's continued increase in 
awareness and acceptance of their true identity was the driving force behind Black racial 
development. Thomas (1971) felt that Black people would eventually reach racial 
transcendence, his final stage of Black racial identity, when they surpass using race as a 
primary factor for their identity.

Cross' racial identity model is commonly referred to as the "Nigrescence model," 
with Nigrescence meaning "to become Black". Cross (1971) asserted that Black racial
identity evolves through a set of stages. He proposed that Black Americans experience an internal journey from self-hate to self-acceptance of their true racial identity. Cross’ model consists of five evolutionary stages of “becoming Black”: pre-encounter, encounter, immersion-emersion, internalization, and internalization-commitment.

In the pre-encounter stage, Black people have internalized Euro-centric ideas and behaviors and defined their self-concept by what is accepted by White society (Helms, 1993). They reject the values held by Blacks and believe that the Black identity is inferior. Cross later expanded his pre-encounter premise to include two forms: active pre-encounter and passive pre-encounter (Cross, 1978 as cited in Helms, 1993). As the words imply, in the active pre-encounter stage there is a deliberate idealizing of White culture. In the passive pre-encounter stage, acceptance is obtained through gradual reinforcement of behaviors reflective of the majority group. However, more research is needed to understand the role that active and passive behaviors play in the overall development of Black racial identity.

According to Cross (1971), a transformative event or series of events (e.g. personal experience of racism) during the pre-encounter stage will act as a catalyst for Black people’s progression to the encounter stage. In the encounter stage there is a realization by Black people that the White or Euro-American culture does not apply to them. Cross (1971) states that this awareness leads Black people to question their current racial identity and seek an identity that is more viable for them. Consequently, Cross (1971) surmises that in the encounter stage there is a modification from the completely anti-Black stance to a more pro-Black stance. Within this stage, feelings of confusion, hopelessness, guilt, and anger may be experienced as the person searches for his or her
viable racial identity. People in this stage may also have an overwhelming feeling that racial identity can be found rather than developed. Cross (1971) states progression from the encounter stage to his next racial identity stage, immersion-emersion, will occur when this lost and found assumption about racial identity has been replaced with one in which racial identity is developed.

In Cross’ third stage, immersion-emersion, Black people will immerse themselves psychologically and behaviorally in the Black culture, valuing everything Black and abhorring anything associated with the White culture. Black people in this stage will embrace cognitive beliefs and behaviors that are considered reflections of the Black world. Therefore, this stage is characterized by the embracing of the Black experience in which the person may join groups or organizations that help to further the conditions of Black people. Cross (1971) further suggests that if Black people continue on their racial exploration, their racial emotions will recede and they will experience a change in how they see themselves. By the end of the immersion-emersion stage, Black people’s initial self-hate beliefs begin to be replaced with a cognitive acceptance and internalization of a positive Black racial identity. This transformation is the beginning of Cross’ fourth stage, internalization.

In Cross’ internalization stage, Black people will integrate internal positive qualities toward their racial identity into their personality (Cross, 1971). They will exhibit a personality with a positive stance toward their racial identity. This development in their internalized racial identity leads to the last stage, internalization-commitment. In this stage, there is an active participation in the social realm of Black culture (Cross, 1971). Everyday activities are carried out in accordance with the Black stance. For
example, a person will reflect behaviors and attitudes that challenge the oppression of Black people within his or her community. In summary, movement from the pre-encounter stage to the internalization-commitment stage is associated with an increase in self-esteem and a decrease in negative emotional functioning (Cross, 1971).

Another developmental theorist, Jackson (1975), termed his model of racial identity “the Black Identity Development” (BID). Jackson’s BID suggests five developmental stages: naïve, acceptance, resistance, redefinition, and internalization. The naïve stage is symbolized by the absence of social consciousness or identity. For example, Black people in this stage are not aware of any differences between themselves and the White majority population. However, in the acceptance stage there is a conscious internalization of racial dominance with a prevailing thought that White attitudes and beliefs are right. Black people in this stage have completely accepted the majority racial group and their beliefs about the worth of Black people and their culture. Jackson (1975) thought that a person will progress through the other stages as a result of internal or external motivational contradiction to the individual’s current stage worldview. Jackson (1975) suggests that while in the acceptance stage individuals are confronted by “racial incidents,” which leads to an increased awareness of Black-White racial imbalance. This leads to the next stage, resistance, which is driven by the awareness of racial imbalance.

Once in the resistance stage, Black people start to reject the White majority’s definition and values about Black people and Black culture. The continuous racial injustices experienced by Black people begin to challenge their once held belief that White attitudes and beliefs are right. Eventually, the pro-White attitudes and beliefs are rejected and replaced by pro-Black ones. This transformation occurs in Jackson’s fourth
stage, redefinition (1975). In the redefinition stage, Black people engage in reaffirming, renaming, and reclaiming their sense of Blackness and unlearning the once held pro-majority beliefs. In order to do this, they start to interact more with other Black people, and learn more about the Black culture. In Jackson's (1975) last stage, internalization, individuals internalize their newfound sense of Blackness. Their new beliefs and understanding of being Black becomes a part of them. They no longer feel obligated to explain, defend, or protect their Black identity. Jackson (1975) believes that it is essential that Black people progress through each stage. He also feels that one cannot effectively skip a stage, but individuals can get stuck in one.

In general, developmental theories suggest that racial identity evolves from self-hate to self-acceptance. This conceptualization of racial identity has remained the forerunner amongst researchers over the last decade.

Criticisms and Revisions to Cross' Racial Identity Model

Cross' developmental model is the most notable racial identity model. It has been used to investigate a variety of other cultural identities (Downing & Roush, 1985; Helms, 1990). In addition, Cross' (1971) model of racial identity has also had its share of criticisms by researchers. Some critics expressed skepticism toward the lack of a clear definition of the process of becoming Black (Akbar, 1989). Others expressed concerns about Cross' use of defining his model in stages, even though people could skip or recycle through them (Nobles, 1989). In an effort to address some of the flaws in his theory, Cross revised his model and elaborated more on the Nigrescence theory in 1991.

Cross' revised racial identity theory retained four of the five original stages (Pre-Encounter, Encounter, Immersion-Emersion, and Internalization). In his revised model,
Cross (1991) proposed that a person’s self-concept is composed of two components: personal identity and reference group orientation. Cross (1991) defined personal identity as an individual’s sense of uniqueness, or in other words, everything that makes people special, like personality traits. Reference group orientation is defined by Cross (1991) as social group membership reflecting social affiliation preferences. In his revised model, Cross attempted to explain the discrepancy between an individual’s personal identity and reference group orientation.

Cross adapted his racial identity stages to include personal identity and the reference group components (1991). The pre-encounter stage now included two identities: pre-encounter assimilation identity (pro-White and low race salience) and pre-encounter anti-Black identity (miseducation and self-hatred). The encounter stage remained the same and was used to describe events leading to racial identity transformation. The immersion-emersion stage was also retained. However, he proposed some theoretical changes. Cross believed that the intense Black involvement and anti-White activities exhibited in the immersion-emersion stage were separate entities (1991). The last major change that Cross (1991) made to his racial identity model was to combine the internalization and internalization-commitment stages into one stage, the Internalization stage.

In summary, Cross’ (1991) revised racial identity model expanded to include seven identities: two each in pre-encounter and immersion-emersion, and three in the internalization stage. In addition, Cross’ revised model also contended that an individual’s personal identity and reference group orientation moderated the relationship between racial identity and personality traits (1991). Overall, however, Cross (1991) still
retained the notion that early stages (pre-encounter) of racial identity development were associated with lower levels of self-esteem and later stages (internalization) were associated with higher levels of socioemotional functioning.

Cross’ Black racial identity model has been adapted and researched extensively. For example, Janet Helms (1990) utilized Cross’ original Nigrescence model extensively in her research. Although she found it useful, she eventually amended Cross’ model to reflect her own ideas about racial identity. Helms suggested in her revised racial identity model that each stage presented by Cross (1971) contained three inter-related components: personal identity, ascribed identity, and reference group orientation (Helms, 1990). Helms defined personal identity as an individual’s self-views focusing on such areas as self-esteem and anxiety. Ascribed identity, however, focuses on the preference an individual has for inclusion in a specific racial group and how that relates to the choices he or she makes to a particular racial group. Helms (1990) stated that the last component, reference group orientation, was the extent to which racial group inclusion affects an individual’s feelings, thoughts and behaviors. Helms (1986) also proposed that each stage presented by Cross (1971) were distinctive worldviews. These worldviews allow people to organize and understand information about the world they interact with, especially racial information.

In her later work, Helms (1995) challenged Cross’ use of a stage model to describe racial identity development. Helms suggested that racial identity development was a dynamic not a static process as proposed by Cross’ use of stages. She also suggested that racial identity development occurred as a result of changes in people’s statuses. Helms (1995) defined statuses as distinctive worldviews that change throughout
a person’s life. These statuses are suggested to be at the core of racial identity
development because they drive people’s schema, which is the behavioral representation
of their unique worldview (Helms & Cook, 1999). Helms felt that each stage presented
by Cross was associated with a status that could be measured as an attitude observed
through people’s schemata. Helms and associates (1996) stated that measures of racial
identity, like Black Racial Identity Attitudes Scale (RIAS-B), are assessing people’s
schemata rather than their statuses. However, assessing people’s schemata will provide
insight into their statuses and racial identity development.

Developmental theories, like Cross’ Nigrescence model, have continued to be
used in recent research. However, they are now being challenged by contemporary
theories such as the Multidimensional Model of Racial Identity (MMRI) (Sellers,
Rowley, Chavous, Sheldon, & Smith, 1997). Sellers and associates (1997) suggest that
racial identity is multidimensional in nature and they created the MMRI to measure its
multilayered dimensions. Their multidimensional theory is the result of a fusion of two
perspectives on racial identity, the mainstream perspective and the underground
perspective. Sellers and associates (1997) state that the mainstream perspective
concentrates on common characteristics of racial and ethnic identities, whereas the
underground perspective focuses on what is the historical and cultural meaning of being
African American. The multidimensional theory suggests that African Americans have
many social identities and that race is only one of these social identities (Sellers et al.,
1997). These identities are shaped by conditions or situations that people encounter and
are organized in a hierarchical formation. The MMRI, unlike Cross’ Nigrescence theory,
concentrates on the content of the person’s racial identity.
The MMRI suggests four primary dimensions of racial identity: salience, centrality, ideology, and regard (Sellers et al., 1997). Racial salience refers to the extent to which an individual’s race is important to his or her self-concept. Racial centrality is the degree to which people use their race to define themselves. Racial ideology is the degree to which a person holds a specific viewpoint of African Americans. Sellers and associates (1997) identified four distinct viewpoints: nationalist philosophy, oppressed minority philosophy, assimilationist philosophy, and a humanist philosophy. The nationalist ideology focuses on the importance and uniqueness of being Black. The oppressed minority ideology emphasizes that the oppression experienced by African Americans has similarities to other minority groups. The humanist philosophy highlights experiences that are shared by everyone. The last philosophy, assimilationist, stresses the shared experiences of African Americans and other Americans. The fourth dimension of the MMRI, racial regard, refers to the overall feelings people have about how they view African Americans and how others view African Americans.

In summary there is no uniform or united definition or conceptualization of racial identity. Society’s understanding of racial identity has gone through and continues to go through transformations. Despite this lack of agreement, there appears to be an overwhelming consensus that racial identity involves one’s identification with a specific racial group. The MMRI has been used in a variety of studies involving racial identity. However, it only examines African American racial identity within the context of the group and not within the framework of the majority society. In addition, Cross’ (1971) original racial identity model continues to be highly used by researchers. A sizeable amount of studies over the last ten years on racial identity used Cross’ (1971) model as
their theoretical basis. Some of these studies included Buckley and Carter (2005), Gilbert, So, Russell, and Wessel (2006), Johnson and Arbona (2006), and Spurgeon and Myers (2010). In this study racial identity will be conceptualized as a developmental process. It will be viewed in the terms suggested by Cross (1971) and measured using the Black Racial Identity Attitudes Scale (RIAS-B).

Overview of Resilience Research

In their book, Resilience and Development: Positive Life Adaptations, Glantz and Johnson (1999) provide an acceptable review of resilience research. In this work, Glantz and Johnson admit that researching resilience is a “formidable” task for scholars to undertake. Despite the challenge it creates, resilience has been a topic of interest for many researchers. As a result, the literature is quite bountiful, touching on such topics as risk factors, protective factors, and even different models to explain the resiliency phenomena. One of the greatest feats that scholars face when researching resilience is probably making sense of the highly disparate body of resilience literature. According to Richardson (2002), resilience research illustrates three distinct waves of inquiry: a combination of qualities, a process, and an innate mechanism.

The first building blocks toward understanding resilience came from the field of developmental psychology. Researchers in this field attempted to understand the mechanisms behind how people deal effectively with stressful situations, the impact of risk factors, and the development of a person’s ego-strength (Fine, 1991; Luthar & Zigler, 1991, Rutter, 1987). Their discoveries in these areas gave rise to the human phenomenon of resilience. Early researchers in the field of resilience concentrated their efforts on uncovering specific characteristics that enabled people to thrive in the midst of adversity.
These scholars attempted to explain resilience as a combination of strengths that helped individuals survive through the many adverse situations they encounter throughout their lives.

The formulation of a list of characteristics initiated the search for understanding how these characteristics were developed and maintained. Hence, the birth of the second wave of research that ventured into exposing the resiliency process. Richardson (2002) stated that during this era, resilience came to be seen as “the process of coping with adversity, change, or the opportunity in a manner that result in the identification, fortification, and enrichment of resilient qualities or protective factors” (p. 308).

The last area of focus described by Richardson (2002) was innate resilience. Researchers during Richardson’s (2002) last wave viewed resilience quite differently than those previously. Resilience once synonymous with bouncing back was now seen to mean “growth or adaptation through disruption” (Richardson, 2002, p. 313). The growth discussed by innate resilience researchers was triggered by the interruption of the homeostatic state of an individual and was fueled by an individual’s internal motivational energy. In other words, the observable resilient behaviors were the result of the internal drive toward maintaining the individual’s homeostatic state. Therefore, resilience was seen as a “self-righting mechanism” (Richardson, 2002).

Innate resilience, the last wave of resilience research, allowed resilience to be examined in relation to anatomical and biochemical mechanisms. Hans Selye, a major researcher in this area, attempted to uncover the exact chemical responses to physiologic stressors. Through his research, Selye was able to formulate a theoretical model of adaptive responses (Selye, 1950). He termed this model the general-adaptation-
syndrome. Selye’s model (1950) suggested that the body’s response to stress was dependent upon the nervous system. He also believed that the chemical responses to physiologic stressors took place in three stages: the alarm reaction, the stage of resistance, and the stage of exhaustion (Selye, 1950). In Selye’s model, resilience was defined as the body’s ability to hold firm during these times of stress (1950).

Although Selye’s model was developed in 1950, it continues to inspire research inquiry. One area of research that has benefited from Selye’s work is Psychoneuroimmunology. Psychoneuroimmunology is the study of the interactions that occur between psychological processes, the nervous system, and the immune system of the human body. This area of study is helping society understand that “whatever impacts one side of the mind-body equation impacts the other” (Hand, 2003, p. 2). It also highlights the other end of the resilience exploration: the psychological.

Hand (2003) suggests the psychological conceptualization of resilience encompasses two major reference points. The first reference point is the restorative where the focus is on factors that help individuals bounce back during periods of stress. The other is the preventive, which deals with characteristics that make people more susceptible to adverse situations. The literature does not lend itself to either viewpoint. Instead it is trickled with voluminous studies that examine either viewpoint or both. This study is in the realm of the latter: the preventive.

**Relevant Theoretical Conceptualizations of Resilience**

In order to study resilience, it is essential to first define it, which can be a major challenge since the literature lacks one unifying definition of resilience. Walker, Gleaves, and Grey (2006) state that resilience is “the ability to recover rapidly from
difficult situations, as well as being the capacity to endure ongoing hardship in every conceivable way” (p. 251). Masten (2001) defines resilience as “a class of phenomena characterized by good outcomes in spite of serious threats to adaptation or development” (p. 228). On the other hand, the Oxford English Dictionary defines resilience as “the capacity to recover quickly from difficulties, toughness” (Oxford English Dictionary, n.d.).

The different definitions of resilience can at times compliment each other, as well as present competing and contradictory viewpoints. In the latter for instance, they have created barriers to understanding resilience, though unintentional. For example, the constant paring of resilience and trauma has led many to define resilience as a process of recovery (Bonanno, 2005). Resilience and recovery are different, even though they share similar components. Research has implied that in recovery, people struggle for a period of time before they are able to return to their normal functioning (Bonanno, 2004). On the other hand, resilience allows people to continue on life’s journey with no to minimal disruption (Bonanno, 2004; Bonanno, 2005). This prevailing tendency of using recovery and resilience interchangeably has only added to the already perplexing literature on resilience. In his review of resilience research, Richardson (2002) stated three ways in which resilience was conceptualized: a process, an outcome, and a trait.

Several researchers believe that resilience is an evolving process. Luthar and Cicchetti (2000) stated that resilience is a “dynamic process wherein individuals display positive adaptation despite experiences of significant adversity” (p. 858). In addition, Garmezy (1983) suggests that resilience is a process that requires two conditions: risk factors and positive adaptation. According to Garmezy (1983), risk factors are significant
threats to the individual, which increases the possibility of a negative effect. The second condition, positive adaptation, varies based upon the person and the situation.

Moreover, researchers have proposed process-oriented models of resilience. Waters and Sroufe (1983) describe resilience using their transactional process model. In their model, they suggest that resilience is a result of the successful interaction between biological, social, and psychological resources in the face of life stressors (Waters & Sroufe, 1983). Flach (1988, 1997) proposes a model in which resilient qualities are developed through a process that involves the law of disruption and reintegration. Richardson, Neiger, Jensen, and Kumpfer (1990) present a model similar to Flach’s model (1988, 1997). Richardson et al. (1990) proposes a linear resiliency model that illustrates the role that disruption and reintegration play in forming resilience. According to Richardson et al. (1990), interactions within people’s lives will disrupt their homeostatic states, thereby, leading them to make decisions about how to react. It is through their reaction to these disruptions that resilient reintegration occurs, which is the use of a coping process that results in “growth, knowledge, self-understanding, and increased strength of resilient qualities” (Richardson, 2002, p. 310). Overall, resilience is seen as a process that occurs in response to risk factors or life stressors to facilitate healthy functioning.

Resilience is also viewed as the outcome from one’s efforts to deal with multiple and often chronic stressors. Masten (2001) stated that the aim of resilience research was to “account for these good outcomes” (p. 228). Resilience is always judged in the context of risk or adversity exposure (Riley & Masten, 2005). According to Rutter (2006), two conditions are required to describe resilience in an individual’s life:
significant adversity and a positive outcome. Other researchers agree with Rutter (2006). For instance, Masten (2001), states that resilience is “a class of phenomena characterized by good outcomes in spite of threats to adaptation or development (p.228). Masten, Best, and Garmezy (1990) propose that there are three major resilient outcomes. They suggest that some individuals have better-than-expected outcomes even though they are from high-risk groups, that some individuals demonstrate good adaptation in stressful situations, and yet others show a quick recovery from a traumatic event. Based upon these assumptions, resilience outcomes can be divided into three categories: better-than-expected performance, good adaptation in stressful situations, and a quick recovery from traumatic events. In general, however, resilience is seen to include a positive outcome in the midst of adverse situations.

Other researchers lean toward viewing resilience as a personality trait, sometimes referred to as a “protective factor.” According to Wagnild and Young (1993), resilience is a personality characteristic that moderates the negative effects of stress and promotes adaptation. In an attempt to understand resilience as a trait, Gorell-Barnes, Thompson, Daniel, and Burchardt (1998) interviewed fifty adults, focusing on their strengths and how they survived difficult situations. The results indicated that resilient people have an internal ability to adjust their perspective toward a positive outlook on their situation. Parr, Montgomery, and DeBell (1998) also agreed that resilience is a personality trait. They stated that resilient individuals possess qualities that allow them to effectively monitor and regulate their emotions during stressful situations. In addition, after interviewing clients from their private practice, Wolin and Wolin (1993) propose a trait-oriented theory of resilience. They believe that people learn to be vulnerable to stress and
those that are resilient learn to overcome obstacles by thinking and behaving differently. In other words, they consider resilience to be a learned trait that becomes stronger as one encounters difficult situations. Overall, these researchers agree that resilience is a trait that encourages successful adaptation to difficult situations.

In summary, the literature offers different viewpoints and explanations of resilience. Overall, there is no one definition or theoretical viewpoint, thus far, which has offered an encompassing framework that is useful across all domains. Theorists are split on many levels, as whether resilience is an innate trait or something that is learned. Some researchers have even attempted to avoid placing resilience into either one of these categories. Masten, Best, and Garmezy (1990) define resilience as a “process, capacity, or outcome of successful adaptation despite challenges or threatening circumstances (p. 426). Resilience is a multidimensional and complex construct. Hand (2003) describes it best. He says that “it is both a process and an outcome, a composite of many elements, a discrete entity, and a whole greater than the sum of its parts” (p. 26). In this study resilience will be defined as a personality trait that enhances an individual’s ability to adapt successfully to stressful situations.

Coping

Coping is “a stabilizing factor, that can help individuals maintain psychosocial adaptation during stressful periods; it encompasses cognitive and behavioral efforts to reduce or eliminate stressful conditions and associated emotional distress” (Holahan, Moos, & Schaefer, 1996, p.25). Coping appears to go hand in hand with stress, which is a common experience, even in the lives of college students. Despite the mutual experience of stress, people react to it in a variety of ways. Some may become
overwhelmed, while others are able to deal with their stress successfully. This discrepancy may be due to differences in coping. Researchers have found that how people cope with stress can either increase or decrease its negative impact (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984; Nurius, Furrey, & Berliner, 1992; Snyder, 2001; Suls & Fletcher, 1985).

The study of how people cope has been in the forefront of psychological research, especially over the past decade. However despite the sizable body of literature, there remains little coherence amongst researchers regarding the underlying mechanisms of coping. A review of the literature presents two main approaches of conceptualizing coping: the dispositional approach and the contextual approach.

Theories of Coping

The dispositional approach, also referred to as “the trait model,” assumes that people’s personality traits influence the coping strategies they use in stressful situations. These traits are thought to be stable, and therefore coping strategies are also thought to remain consistent over a variety of stressful situations. The dispositional conceptualization of coping has its roots in psychoanalytic psychology, which views coping as a combination of defense mechanisms, ego processes, and personality traits (Bolger, 1990; Costa, Somerfield, & McCrae, 1996; Freud, 1959; Vaillant, 1977).

Sigmund Freud (1959) was the first to present the idea of defense mechanisms. He stated that defense mechanisms are the means people use, mostly unconsciously, to deal with unpleasant ideas and feelings. Freud felt that people would engage in these defense mechanisms in order to protect themselves from becoming overwhelmed by their numerous life demands. Freud (1952) proposed that these mechanisms started out as biological. For example, he suggested that in infancy, babies protect themselves using
biological means such as sucking and spitting out. According to Freud, biological defense mechanisms evolve into psychological defense mechanisms, which eventually influence a person's interpretation of the world.

Anna Freud, like her father Sigmund Freud, also believed that ego defenses helped people deal with threats to their psychological stability. In her *Ego and the Mechanisms of Defence* (1946), she summarizes the ten psychological defenses identified by Sigmund Freud (regression, repression, reaction-formation, isolation, undoing, projection, introjection, turning against the self, reversal, denial, intellectualization, rationalization, displacement, suppression, projection, reaction formation, and sublimation), and she also introduces several ego defenses of her own (identification with the aggressor, ego restriction, denial in fantasy, intellectualization, and altruistic surrender). Anna Freud thought that defense mechanisms are essential and play an important role in adapting to one's changing environment and in personality development (Freud, 1946). She (1946) suggests that the use of effective defenses may lead to less conflict amongst the ego functions and can increase one's ability to maneuver through life's challenges. However, she also argued that overuse of one's ego defense mechanisms can have an overall negative impact on one's life, especially one's ability to cope with change and stressful situations.

Further research has led to several other theoretical perspectives such as those proposed by Menninger (1963), Haan (1969, 1977), and Vaillant (1977). Like Sigmund and Anna Freud, they also believed that coping involves ego processes and defense mechanisms. Menninger (1963), Haan (1969, 1977), and Vaillant (1977) also thought that coping is hierarchical in nature. They propose that coping is the highest and most
mature ego process, followed by less adaptive defenses and ego-failure. Menninger (1963) proposes five regulatory devices, which he ranks according to their level of internal disorganization. He believes internal disorganization is a good measure of adaptability; therefore, the higher the internal disorganization, the lower the adaptability of the coping device. In addition, Menninger (1963) states that regulatory devices that involve reducing tensions caused by stressful situations like self-control, humor, crying, and talking it out are at the top of the hierarchy. Lower levels of Menninger’s hierarchical model include coping strategies that are used inappropriately or to the extreme in which case they increase rather than decrease internal disorganization (1963). For example, second-level coping devices include withdrawing from the stressful situation either by dissociation (amnesia) or displacement (phobias). Third-order devices usually are characterized by aggressiveness, such as an explosive outburst and violent assaults. The last two levels also include coping devices that increase a person’s internal disorganization, with the fifth level leading to total disintegration of a person’s ego.

Based upon Menninger’s (1963) hierarchy, coping strategies include anything that leads to minimal disruption and internal disorganization.

Hann’s (1969, 1977) model has three components: coping, defending, and fragmentation. She believes that coping is the most healthy and developmentally advanced process of adaptation. Hann (1969, 1977) expressed that her last two components, defending and fragmentation, were the least adaptive when dealing with challenging situations. She further states that defenses are neurotic processes and may lead to ego-failure or fragmentation. Coping, according to Hann (1969, 1977), is an important process for adapting to one’s environment and involves the adherence to
reality. She believes that coping is not the distortion of one’s reality, but one’s acceptance of it.

Vaillant (1977), unlike Hann (1969, 1977), agrees with other trait model proponents, like Sigmund Freud (1959) and Anna Freud (1946), who argue that defense mechanisms “falsify reality whenever a person’s resources, skills, or motivation are insufficient to resolve inner conflicts or to master external threats to well-being” (Ihilevich & Gleser, 1986, p.5). According to Vaillant, defense mechanisms can either be dysfunctional or adaptive. He believes that dysfunctional defense mechanisms include immature activities such as projection, hypochondriasis, and reaction formation. Adaptive defense mechanisms, on the other hand, include activities like sublimation, humor, and suppression. He also thinks that defense mechanisms can be organized into four different levels, which he named psychotic mechanisms, immature mechanisms, neurotic mechanisms, and mature mechanisms. His hierarchical model starts with “immature” defenses and ends with “mature” defenses.

Overall, according to the dispositional approach, coping is determined by people’s personality traits such as their defense mechanisms. Dispositional approach measures, like the Repression-Sensitization Scale (Byrne, 1964), classify people into groups based upon their personality traits. They also make predictions about the type of coping behaviors in which a person will engage in. These measures assume that specific groups will engage in unique coping behaviors. For example, the Repression-Sensitization Scale places individuals into two opposing categories: repression and sensitization. The repression category consists of avoiding behaviors, whereas the sensitization category
includes approaching behaviors. Therefore, people in the repression category are more likely to engage in aversion coping than those in the sensitization category.

The dispositional approach dominated the early exploration into coping. However, as more research was conducted, several scholars began to express dissatisfaction with it. According to some researchers, a major limitation of this approach was that it failed to take into account the complexity and variability between the individual and the environment (Cohen & Lazarus, 1973). As a result, they proposed another way to explain coping that highlighted the interaction between the individual and the environment. This conceptualization of coping is referred to as the contextual approach.

The contextual approach assumes that situation-based factors drive people’s choices of coping responses. In this approach, coping is a process between the individual and the environment. It fills in some of the gaps left by the dispositional approach, such as describing coping efforts as process-oriented and situation-specific. Proponents of this conceptualization of coping, Lazarus and Folkman (1984), define coping as the “constantly changing cognitive and behavioral effort to manage specific external and internal demands” (p. 141). They believe that coping has two main functions, which include regulating stressful emotions and altering the person-environment relationship that causes stress (1984). Lazarus and Folkman (1984) present a process model of coping that is referred to as the transactional model of stress and coping. Their model emphasizes the role that the person-environment relationship plays in coping. Within their framework, two major processes mediate stress and its negative effects: cognitive appraisals and coping strategies.
According to Lazarus and Folkman (1984), “the relationship between the individual and the environment is appraised by the person as taxing or exceeding his or her resources and endangering his or her well-being” (p. 141). The individual’s understanding of the stressful event is of paramount importance versus the objective nature of the situation. Therefore, stress is only experienced when a specific event is appraised as threatening. An individual’s appraisal of a specific situation is the driving force of Lazarus and Folkman’s (1984) transactional model.

According to Lazarus and Folkman (1984), appraisal refers to constant judgments of the demands and constraints of the situation and the resources available to mediate those demands and constraints. Lazarus and Folkman (1984) suggest that people engage in two forms of appraisals: the primary appraisal and the secondary appraisal. The primary appraisal, often referred to as the threat-appraisal, assesses whether the situation may be harmful or beneficial. Lazarus and Folkman (1984) suggested three possible outcomes for this initial evaluation. The first possible outcome is that the situation is irrelevant, meaning that the individual has nothing to gain or lose. Benign-positive is the second possible outcome. This outcome usually occurs when the situation being assessed is thought to benefit the person, or in other words, “if it preserves or enhances well-being or promises to do so” (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984, p.32). The last possible outcome is that the situation is assessed to be stressful. Stressful appraisals are then placed in the harm/loss category, threat, or challenge category. Harm/loss situations have already impacted the person in a negative way; whereas, threat situations have not caused any negative damages, but have the potential to do so. On the other hand, challenging
situations have the potential to encourage individual growth or other possible benefits like pleasurable emotions.

People will engage in secondary appraisals when a situation is seen as threatening. During this appraisal, the individual will review what coping options are available and whether they will be effective against the threatening situation. Once a potential response to the threat is formulated, a coping response is made. It is only after the primary and secondary appraisals have occurred that coping comes into the equation. Coping, according to Lazarus et al. (1984), is the execution of the formulated response. It may seem that these processes are linear in nature, but they are not. A change in the coping stage can elicit a change in the primary or secondary appraisal processes.

Coping Styles

Endler and Parker (1990) state that people develop specific styles of coping as they encounter stressful situations. A person’s coping style is defined as the “general tendency used to manage or alter negative stressful events by thinking and acting in a particular manner” (Struthers et al., 1995, p.2). A review of the literature illustrates a lack of agreement between coping styles (Endler & Parker, 1990; Nowack, 1989). Despite this disagreement, the literature reveals two main distinctions between coping behaviors: those that engage the stressor and those that disengage the stressor (Zeitlin, 1980).

Lazarus and his colleagues (1984) identified that people utilize two main pathways of action when engaging the stressor: problem-focused and emotion-focused coping. Problem-focused coping aims to deal with stressful situations by changing the problematic behavior or the environmental conditions that maintain the stress. Emotion-
focused coping involves reducing or managing the emotional distress associated with the stressful situation. Strategies that disengage the stressor are categorized as avoidance coping and usually include efforts that involve evading the source of stress like procrastination.

In most stressful situations, all three forms of coping may be necessary. However, people tend to lean more toward one or the other. Nurius et al. (1992) stated that the continuous interaction between a person’s vulnerable factors and coping resources would result in a stable pattern of coping strategies. Research suggests that in certain situations one coping approach will dominate. For instance, task-focused coping is used more when the situation is seen as controllable (Carver et al., 1989; Folkman & Lazarus, 1980). In contrast, emotion-focused coping dominates when the stressful situation is perceived as uncontrollable and as something to be tolerated (Folkman & Lazarus, 1980).

In conclusion, coping will be viewed as both a process and a style in this study. The process approach allows for specific coping thoughts and actions to be studied in diverse stressful contexts. In addition, coping styles affect how a stressful event is perceived and managed (Folkman & Lazarus, 1985). Lazarus and Folkman’s (1984) transactional model addresses both dimensions of coping. Therefore, it will be used to examine coping in African American college students attending predominantly White universities. This model also focuses on the interaction between the individual and the environment, which will allow the researcher to examine both the campus environment and the characteristics of the students.
College Student Retention, Racial Identity, Resilience, and Coping

There are more African Americans attending higher-level educational institutions today than there were in the 1960s. Annual college enrollment rates for African Americans have been over 50% since 1993 (National Center for Education Statistics, 2001). In 2003, approximately 62% of young adult African Americans between 25-29 years old attended college (Stoops, 2004). Despite this increase in attendance, a large percentage of African Americans leave without completing their degrees (Allen, 1992; Carey, 2008; National Center for Education Statistics, 2003).

The retention of college students remains to be of utmost importance of institutions of higher learning, especially for minority students who seem to be leaving at an alarming rate. In their 6-year longitudinal study on American college students, the U.S. Department of Education (2001) concluded that African American students had the largest dropout rate than any other racial group. They also found that about half of enrolled African Americans failed to obtain a 2-year or a 4-year degree (U.S. Department of Education, 2001). In addition, retention rates for American African students at Predominantly White universities (PWU) continue to be lower than those at Historically Black Colleges/Universities (HBCU) (Rodgers & Summers, 2008).

African American students at PWU deal with a variety of unique challenges such as minority related stressors (e.g. cultural incongruity, racism, negative student-faculty interactions). Greer and Chvalisz (2007) explored minority-status stress in 203 African American undergraduate students attending both HBCU and PWU using the Minority Student Stress Scale. They found that students attending PWU reported significantly higher levels of minority related stress than those at the HBCU. The addition of minority
related stressors make African American students at PWU more vulnerable to potentially detrimental emotional, psychological, and academic outcomes (Allen, Epps, & Haniff, 1991; Dorsey & Jackson, 1995; Flemming, 1984; Smcdley, Myers, & Harrell, 1993; Williamson, 2000). Moreover, African American students are more likely to leave because of problems with adjustment than any other racial group (Constantine, 1999).

Some African American students thrive at PWU, whereas others crumble (Walker, Gleaves, & Grey, 2006). In recent years, researchers have begun to explore why some African Americans attending PWU are resilient and others are not. According to Tinto (1986), college students’ traits, such as ethnicity, influence their levels of institutional commitment and persistence towards obtaining their degree. Several empirical studies have highlighted the significant impact a student’s racial identity status and coping behaviors have on resilient African Americans attending PWU (Anglin & Wade, 2007; Chavous et al., 2003; Cross, 1991; McDonald & Vrana, 2007; Nasim, Roberts, Hamell, & Young, 2005; Oyserman, Bybee, & Terry, 2003; Spencer, Noll, Stoltzfus, & Harpalani, 2001).

Resilience, as mentioned earlier, is an ability found in individuals who, despite being exposed to risk factors are able to prevent negative outcomes like academic problems or psychological maladjustment. Researchers have pointed out that a person’s racial identity may be a risk factor, especially in situations when he or she is a minority (Carter, 1995; Cross, Parham, & Helms, 1998; Munford, 1994). Conflicts associated with one’s racial identity can drastically affect a person’s psychological functioning (Carter, 1995). Taylor (1986) suggests that Black students struggle with adapting to the social and political environment of attending a predominantly White university. As a
result, Taylor (1986) states, Black students in that environment would experience more coping and identity problems. He further expressed that for Blacks to be successful at PWU, they must know and accept their Black identity (Taylor, 1986). Moreover, other reported findings have indicated that greater identification of Cross’ pre-encounter and immersion-emersion attitudes were associated with greater feelings of inferiority, greater levels of depressive symptoms, and lower levels of self-actualization (Cross, Parham, & Helms, 1998; Munford, 1994).

Several research studies have stressed the importance of having a positive racial identity. Parker and Flowers (2003) conducted a quantitative study of 118 African American undergraduate students at a PWU to examine the impact racial identity has on students’ perceptions of their academic and campus environment. They found, using the Racial Identity Attitude Scale and the Perception of Campus Connectedness Scale Results, that those students with higher levels of racial identity (internalization stage) experienced higher levels of campus connectedness. Also, those in the immersion-emersion stage experienced more difficulties with connecting to their campus environment. A longitudinal quantitative study by Nasim et al. (2005) explored the impact of racial identity on academic achievement. Nasim et al. (2005) administered an academic pursuit achievement, identification with, and commitment toward one's race measure to 250 African American undergraduate students enrolled at either a PWU or a HBCU. Their results showed that students enrolled at the PWU experienced higher levels of oppressed minority status and reported more problems with coping and managing their adverse racial experiences. In addition, a positive self-concept was the strongest predictor of good academic performance. While investigating the relationship
between racial identity attitudes to self-actualization and affective states of African American college students, Parham and Helms (1985) found that the encounter and internalization attitudes were positively associated with self-actualization tendencies and negatively related to feelings of inferiority and hostility. They also found that the preencounter and immersion attitudes were negatively related to self-actualizing tendencies and positively related to feelings of hostility, inferiority and anxiety. Based on these studies, a positive racial identity facilitates a positive attitude and self-efficacy, which leads to academic success. Therefore, an African American student with a positive racial identity is more likely to remain in college and obtain a college degree (Cross, 1991; Rowley, Sellers, Chavous, & Smith, 1998).

According to Arrington and Wilson (2000), African Americans experience stressors differently due to their difference in ethnicity and culture. They state that culture and ethnicity affects the interaction between “psychological development and adversity so that people experience risk differently” (2000, p. 226), which may lead to a positive outlook on the stressful situation. Other studies, like Sellers, Caldwell, Shmeelk-Con, and Zimmerman (2003) and Banks and Kohn-Wood (2007), emphasize the benefit of having a positive racial identity. According to Sellers et al. (2003), Black people who positively identify with their race experience better psychological health. Therefore, those in Cross’ stages that illustrate acceptance of one’s racial identity (internalization) have been seen to experience better mental health (Cross, Parham, & Helms, 1998; Munford, 1994; Sellers, Caldwell, Shmeelk-Con, & Zimmerman, 2003). Banks and Kohn-Wood (2007) state that positive racial identity attitudes act as a moderator between racial discrimination and psychological distress. Therefore, possessing a
positive racial identity is important to an individual’s self-esteem, self-actualization, and
general psychological functioning (Cross, Parham, & Helms, 1998; Munford, 1994;
Phinney & Kohatsu, 1997). Overall, an individual’s racial identity can act as both a
hindrance, as well as a facilitator to resilience. Based upon empirical evidence, negative
attitudes about one’s racial identity can be considered a risk factor to resilience. On the
other hand, positive racial identity attitudes may act as a buffer to stress and help
facilitate resilience in these individuals.

Resilience has also been linked to coping. Foster (1997) defines resilience as
“positive changes in maintaining active or latent coping and adaptation capacities through
various mechanisms” (p. 190). Moreover, Jew, Green, and Kroger (1999) suggest,
“resiliency emerges from a system of specific beliefs that interact with environmental
stressors to determine an individual’s coping skills” (p. 77). According to these scholars,
coping is related to resilience in some capacity. Jew and Green (1998) conducted a study
examining resilience and coping. In their study, they assessed the effects that risk factors
had on resiliency and coping in a population of seventh through twelfth grade students.
In this study, Jew and Green (1998) found that students who reported a high number of
risk factors also reported lower levels of resilience, and vice versa. However, their
findings regarding coping was unclear. Jew and Green (1998) concluded that continued
efforts were needed to understand the relationship between resilience and coping.

Within the current literature only a handful of studies have examined coping
efforts used by African American students to deal with racially related stressors in
college. Swim et al. (2003) found that African American students at PWU coped with
race-related incidents by directly responding to perpetrators, by seeking social support, or
by not responding at all. Other studies report that African American students at PWU also engage in avoidant strategies like denial or distracting themselves (Billings & Moos, 1981). Still, some researchers report no differences in coping efforts amongst African American students attending PWU (Cooper, Mahler, & Whitt, 1994).

Researchers report inconsistent findings on the relationship between coping strategies and resiliency to stress. Some studies suggest that African American college students who use avoidance behaviors to deal with a race-related stress will experience a reduction in their levels of stress. But if problem-focused strategies are used, they will experience adverse health consequences like high blood pressure (Clark & Adams, 2004). However, other study findings suggest that problem-solving behaviors tend to lower stress, whereas emotion-focused and avoidance behaviors increase levels of stress for African American students (Barnes & Lightsey, 2005; Billings & Moos, 1981; Compas, Malcarne, & Fondacaro, 1988; Endler & Parker, 1994; Menaghan, 1982; Surwit, Feinglos, & Scovern, 1983). These inconsistent findings in the literature suggest that additional research is needed to understand the specific coping strategies that African Americans students use to deal with racially related stressors while attending a PWU and whether these strategies lead to resiliency.

**Summary**

Overall, the literature has hinted that racial identity, resiliency, coping, and college student retention are connected, but lacks agreement on how. As a result, more research is needed to help figure out how they are related to each other. The need towards exploring areas that will aid in increasing retention rates and academic success in African American college students is only highlighted by the disconcerting outcome
statistics surrounding this population (e.g. drop out rates, length of time for obtaining a college degree). In an effort to better understand, this study will examine the relationship between racial identity, resilience, coping, and retention in African Americans college students attending a predominantly White university.
Chapter II

Rationale and Hypotheses

African Americans' attendance at tertiary-level institutions has gradually increased over the last fifty years. According to *Status and Trends in the Education of Blacks*, more African Americans are enrolling in predominantly White universities (PWU) than Historically Black Colleges/Universities (HBCU) (Hoffman & Llagas, 2003). However, despite this increase in attendance, retention rates of African Americans continue to be lower in PWU than HBCU (Rodgers & Summers, 2008). In addition, African American college students have the highest drop out rate of any other racial group (National Center for Education Statistics, 2001).

Past research has suggested that the amount of lower outcomes are associated with the exposure to more negative experiences and minority-related stressors such as cultural incongruity, racism, and negative student-faculty interaction (Dorsey & Jackson, 1995; Smedley, Myers, & Harrell, 1993; Thomas et al., 2007). A few studies have also suggested that African Americans' inability to cope effectively with their college environment will increase the likelihood of them eventually dropping out (Edwards, Bryant & Clark, 2007; Nelville et al., 2004; Rodgers & Summers, 2008; Schwitzer et al., 1999, Von Robertson et al., 2005). For example, Constantine (1999) found that African American students attending PWU are more likely to leave college because of problems with adjustment and a lack of support systems than any other ethnic group.

Despite the obstacles, there are those resilient African American college students that graduate with their college degrees. Racial identity and coping have been hinted to play a role in the resilience of these African American college students (Banks & Kohn-
Wood, 2007; Chavous et al., 2003; Spencer, Noll, Stoltzfus, & Harpalani, 2001). The main purpose of this study is to test the mediation effects of racial identity and coping behaviors on the relationship between resilience and student retention in African American college students attending a predominantly White university (PWU).

Resilience, college student retention, racial identity, and coping have all been the focus of numerous studies over the years. However, the current research has failed to explore their mediation effects, or in other words the extent that these variables account for the relationship between resilience and college retention. The proposed study will address this gap in the present literature.

Based on the literature review and this study’s theoretical framework, the following hypotheses were proposed:

$H_1$: It is hypothesized that the positive relationship between resilience, the independent variable (IV), and college student retention, the dependent variable (DV), will be mediated by the internalization stage of racial identity ($M_1$) (see Figure 1).

$H_2$: It is hypothesized that the positive relationship between resilience, the independent variable (IV), and college student retention, the dependent variable (DV), will be mediated by coping behaviors, specifically problem-focused coping ($M_2$) and emotion-focused coping ($M_3$) (see Figure 2).
Chapter III

Method

The purpose of this study is to examine the relationship between racial identity, resilience, coping, and retention in African American college students attending a predominantly White university (PWU). This chapter will provide specific information about the research methodology applied, including the participants, the measures used, and the research procedure.

Participants

The sample of participants will include African American undergraduate students enrolled at a predominantly White university (PWU). This PWU is located in the midwest region of the United States of America. During the Spring 2010 semester, there were 4,069 undergraduate students and 2,719 graduate students enrolled at this PWU (Xavier University Office of Decision Support, 2010). Of the 6,788 students enrolled during that time, 45% were males and 55% were females. In terms of race, African Americans made up 9%, Asian Americans 3%, Hispanics 3%, and Whites made up 80% of the total student population in the spring 2010 semester. In order to determine how many participants would be needed in this study, a power analysis was conducted with a general power analysis program, G*Power 3.0.10 (Faul, Erdfelder, Lang, & Buchner, 2007). Based on the G*Power 3.1.13, a linear multiple regression (fixed model, R2, deviation from zero), with one predictor, a medium effect size (.15), an alpha level of .005, and an estimated power of .80, data from a minimum of 55 participants needs to be collected. It is expected that this quantity of participants will be achieved considering the amount of African American students enrolled at the PWU.
Measures

The measures used in this study were the researcher’s demographic questionnaire, the Black Racial Identity Attitudes Scale (RIAS-B), the Resilience Scale (RS), and the Coping Inventory for Stressful Situations (CISS).

**Demographic questionnaire.** The demographic questionnaire included a total of 12 items. It consisted of questions about the participants’ personal background such as age, gender, ethnicity, enrollment status, current grade point average, and expected academic degree. These questions will be used to gather additional information about the participants that might further inform this study (see Appendix A).

**College Retention question.** College retention was measured by whether the person was planning on remaining at the university or transferring/leaving the university. A response of remaining was scored a 1, whereas a transferring/leaving response was scored 0. Therefore, the higher the score the more likely the person would be retained at the university (see Appendix A).

**Black Racial Identity Attitudes Scale (RIAS-B).** The Black Racial Identity Attitudes Scale (RIAS-B) is a 50-item self-report questionnaire that was developed by Thomas A. Parham and Janet E. Helms (1981). It measures racial identity attitudes using a 5-point scale ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5). It has four subscales: Pre-encounter, Encounter, Immersion/Emersion, and Internalization. Each subscale reflects a predominant theme. For example, the pre-encounter subscale’s main theme is pro-White and anti-Black attitudes, whereas, the internalization subscale is characterized by positive Black identity attitudes. In this study, the RIAS-B subscales will be used to represent the specific worldviews expressed in Cross’ (1971) theory of
racial identity development discussed earlier. A total score will be obtained by summing the item values for each subscale. The higher the subscale score the more attitudes a person possesses for that respective subscale.

The RIAS-B has acceptable reliability and validity levels. Helms and Parham (1990) reported that the RIAS-B consistency coefficients range from 0.50 to 0.79 on the Encounter and Internalization scales, respectively. In a later study, Helms and Parham (1996) continued to support the strength of their measure. They stated alpha estimates of 0.76 for the Pre-encounter subscale, 0.51 for the Post-encounter, 0.69 for the Immersion/Emersion, and 0.80 for the Internalization subscales. These findings added to the RIAS-B consistency with Cross' racial identity developmental stages. Other studies have reported acceptable construct validity and convergent validity (Grace, 1984; Ponterotto & Wise, 1987). In addition, the RIAS-B has been hinted to be one of the most widely used measure found in the racial identity literature (Kohatsu & Richardson, 1996) (see Appendix B).

Resilience Scale (RS). Wagnild and Young (1993) conceptualized resilience as a personality characteristic that enhances individual adaptation to stressful situations. Through their research, they identified five resilience themes: equanimity, meaningfulness of life, perseverance, existential aloneness, and self-reliance. Wagnild and Young designed the Resilience Scale (RS) to encompass these themes. The RS is a 25-item self-report questionnaire that measures the degree of individual resilience using a 7-point rating system ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). Responders are asked to rate their feelings toward a list of statements using this 7-point rating system. Scores are then summed to come up with a total score that ranges from 25
to 175, with higher scores reflecting a higher degree of resilience. Scores of 147-175 are considered high levels of resilience (Wagnild & Young, 1993).

The RS has been found to have acceptable psychometrics. Wagnild and Young (1993) assert that the RS has good internal consistency reliability and concurrent validity with other established measures of adaptation with alpha estimates ranging from 0.76-0.91. It has also been found to be consistent over a period of time, with test-retest correlation coefficients ranging from 0.67 to 0.84. Even though it was originally tested with adult participants, numerous studies have validated its use with a variety of ages and ethnic groups (Ahern, Kiehl, Sole, & Byers, 2006; Aroian & Norris, 2000; Heilemann, Lee, & Kury, 2003; Humphreys, 2003; Rew, Taylor-Seehafer, Thomas, & Yockey, 2001). In addition, it has also been translated into several different languages such as Chinese, Russian, Spanish, and Swedish. In this study the RS will be used to measure participants’ levels of resilience (see Appendix C).

Coping Inventory for Stressful Situations (CISS). The Coping Inventory for Stressful Situations (CISS) is a 48-item self-report instrument that examines participants’ coping styles. In the CISS, task-oriented, emotion-oriented, and avoidance-oriented are used to assess Lazarus and associates’ (1984) problem-focused, emotion-focused, and avoidance coping styles respectively. Task-oriented coping focuses on dealing with the stressful problem and includes responses used to solve or minimize it. Emotion-oriented coping focuses on the emotions caused by the stressful situation and involves strategies that mediate the individual’s emotional distress. The last coping style, avoidance, includes behaviors that involve evading the source of the stress. The CISS differentiates between two types of avoidant behaviors: distraction and social. People are thought to
engage in avoidant-distracted behaviors when they shift their focus onto something more interesting or less stress provoking. Whereas when they seek out other people as a means of a diversion from the stressful situation, they are engaging in avoidant-social coping.

Endler and Parker (1990) stated that the CISS has excellent internal consistency (0.75-0.90), adequate test-retest reliability (0.55-0.73), and reasonable construct and concurrent validity. Endler and Parker did further statistical testing of the CISS in 1994. In this research study, they further confirmed the CISS validity and reliability qualities. For example, their study reported internal reliabilities ranging from 0.76 to 0.92 for all three scales and the two subscales (Endler & Parker, 1994). Overall, the CISS is believed to be a sound instrument and is robust across gender.

In this study the CISS was used to assess participants’ coping styles. Responders will be asked to indicate, based on a 5-point ranging scale (1 = Not at all to 5 = Very much), which activities they are most likely to engage in when they are faced with difficult, stressful, or upsetting situations. Item scores are summed for each coping dimension, with higher scores indicating greater use of that particular coping behavior (see Appendix D).

Procedure

After the approval from Xavier University’s Institutional Review Board, students at Xavier University will be able to read announcements about this study on the participant pool bulletin and various bulletin boards around the university. The announcements will contain information about the study, state that participation is voluntary, and that responses will be kept confidential. The announcements will also provide the study’s web-address and have tear away-tags with the study’s web-address
for participants to take. The study will use Survey Monkey, an internet-based survey system (www.surveymonkey.com), to collect participants’ responses. Survey Monkey has been used in multiple research studies and provides acceptable security measures ensuring that responses collected through this system will be kept confidential.

Upon entering the study’s survey web-address into their web-browser, participants will be taken directly to the informed consent form (see Appendix E). After reading and agreeing to take part in this study, participants will then be prompted to complete the demographic questionnaire, RIAS-B, the RS, and the CISS, which will be presented randomly to prevent arbitrary responses. Once the questionnaires are completed, participants will be given the choice of receiving class credit or being placed in a raffle drawing for a $25 cash prize. If participants choose either option, they will be directed to a new website with no connection to the first website. The second website will prompt the participant to provide personal information, which will depend on the option chosen. For example, the website for class credit will prompt participants to enter their name, class and professor’s name, whereas, the website for the raffle with prompt participants to enter their email address. This information will be collected for purposes of awarding class credit or for the $25 cash prize only and will be in no way linked with participants’ survey responses. After completing the survey, participants will be provided with information about where to turn if they have questions regarding the study or about their rights as research participants through a debriefing statement (see Appendix F).
Chapter IV

Proposed Analyses

The primary goal of this study is to examine the relationship between racial identity, resilience, coping, and college retention. Based on past research, it is predicted that racial identity \( (M_1) \) and coping \( (M_2, M_3) \) will mediate the relationship between resilience \( (IV) \) and college student retention \( (DV) \). Specifically, the internalization stage of racial identity development and problem-focused and emotion-focused coping behaviors will mediate the relationship between resilience and college retention.

The literature offers three main statistical methods for assessing total and indirect effects of multiple mediators: causal steps, product-of-coefficients, and bootstrapping. Although useful, the causal steps and product-of-coefficients approaches present several drawbacks, especially when assessing multiple mediators. For example, the causal steps approach requires all relevant relationship paths to be statistically significant, it is prone to produce Type I and Type II errors, and it does not directly estimate the size of the indirect effect (Holmbeck, 2002; Pituch, Whittaker, & Stapleton, 2005; Preacher & Hayes, 2008). Large sample size and the inability to estimate standard errors of indirect effects are just a few shortcomings of the product-of-coefficients method. The bootstrapping approach lacks these downsides. Therefore in order to test the two mediators, racial identity \( (M_1) \) and coping \( (M_2, M_3) \), Preacher and Hayes’ (2008) mediation analysis and bootstrapping technique will be used.

Utilizing the Preacher and Hayes’ (2008) technique in this study offers several advantages. First, this technique allows for multiple mediators to be tested simultaneously. Second, by allowing several mediators to be tested simultaneously, it
also reduces the possibility of Type I error due to multiple inferential tests. Third, the Preacher and Hayes’ (2008) technique allows for total indirect effects and specific indirect effects to be tested to determine their significance. Lastly, this technique utilizes bootstrapping. Bootstrapping makes fewer assumptions, which leads to more accurate inferences about the representative sample. Recently, more and more researchers are finding that the bootstrapping technique is superior to the causal steps or the product-of-coefficients, especially for assessing indirect effects (MacKinnon et al., 2004; Preacher, Rucker, & Hayes, 2007; Shrout & Bolger, 2002). In light of these benefits, Preacher and Hayes’ (2008) mediation analysis and bootstrapping technique will be used to test $H_1$ and $H_2$. 
References


Neville, H., Heppner, P. P., Ji, R., & Thyc, R. (2004). The relations among general and race related stressors and psychoeducational adjustment in Black students


Figure 1. Hypothesis 1 (H₁) illustrated in a path diagram. The path diagram indicates that the relationship between resilience and college retention is mediated by racial identity (internalization stage). The straight lines represent relationships between the variables and the + indicates the expected significant positive relationships between them.
Figure 2. H2 illustrated in a path diagram. The path diagram indicates that the relationship between resilience and college retention is mediated by coping behaviors (problem-focused and emotion-focused). The straight lines represent relationships between the variables and the + indicates the expected significant positive relationships between them.
Appendix A

Demographic Questionnaire

1. Age: _____

2. Gender: _____ Male _____ Female

3. What ethnicity are you?
   _____ African American _____ Other: __________________________

4. What is your current GPA? _____

5. Status in College:
   _____ Freshman _____ Sophomore _____ Junior
   _____ Senior

6. Highest expected academic degree:
   _____ Associates Degree
   _____ Bachelors Degree
   _____ Masters Degree
   _____ Doctorate Degree
   _____ Medical Degree
   _____ Other (please specify) __________________________

7. It is important for me to graduate from college.
   _____ Strongly Agree
   _____ Agree
   _____ Neutral
   _____ Disagree
   _____ Strongly Disagree

8. I am confident that I made the right decision in choosing to attend this school.
   _____ Not at all Confident
   _____ Mildly Confident
Moderately Confident
Extremely Confident

9. How would you describe your overall experience at your respective university?

Poor
Average
Good
Excellent

10. Do you plan to leave the school you are currently attending?

No, I plan to continue to attend
Yes, I plan to transfer
Yes, I plan to drop out of school

11. To what extent has your race/ethnicity positively influenced your academic achievement?

Very Strongly
Strongly
Moderately
Slightly
Not at All

12. To what extent has your race/ethnicity negatively influenced your academic achievement?

Very Strongly
Strongly
Moderately
Slightly
Not at All
Appendix B

Black Racial Identity Attitudes Scale (RAIS-B)

A copy of the RAIS-B is not included in this document because it is protected by copyright. This measure may be obtained by contacting Psychological Consulting LLC at huentityllc@gmail.com or by mail at 343 Washington St. Newton, MA 02458.
Appendix C

Resilience Scale (RS)

A copy of the RS is not included in this document because it is protected by copyright.

This measure can be found at http://www.resiliencescale.com.
Appendix D

Coping Inventory for Stressful Situations (CISS)

A copy of the CISS is not included in this document because it is protected by copyright.

This measure can be found at [www.mhs.com](http://www.mhs.com).
Appendix E

Informed Consent Form

You are being given the opportunity to volunteer to participate in a project conducted by Tracey King, a Xavier University graduate student. This study will explore the relationship between racial identity, resilience, and coping on college retention. You are eligible to participate in this study if you are African American, at least 18 years old, and an undergraduate at Xavier University.

If you agree to participate in this study you will be required to complete demographic information and three questionnaires. These questionnaires will ask your opinions on a series of questions pertaining to racial identity, resilience, and coping. It will take approximately 30 minutes to complete. Your completion of the survey indicates your consent to participate in the study. You may only participate one time. After completing the survey, you will be given the opportunity of being placed in a raffle drawing for a $25 cash prize, or if recruited through the university participant pool, receiving 30 minutes of credit. You will only be able to choose one.

This study requires you to complete a survey and participating involves no to minimal risk. Information collected in this study will be completely confidential. Your name maybe requested, but only for the purposes of awarding you credit for your participation or being placed in the raffle drawing. Your name will not be connected to your survey responses, and therefore your answers will not be linked to you.

Your participation is voluntary. You are free to choose not to participate or withdraw from this study at any time without penalty of any sort. Refusal to participate in this study will have no effect on any future services you may be entitled to from the university.

Your participation will help us understand more about the relationship between racial identity, resilience, and coping and how they relate to a successful completion of an undergraduate degree.

If you have any questions during or after this study, you may contact Tracey King at kingt@xavier.edu or at (513) 531-3395. You may also contact her dissertation chair and Assistant Professor of Psychology, Dr. Cathy McDaniel Wilson at (513) 745-3072. Questions about your rights as a research subject should be directed to Xavier University’s Institutional Review Board at (513) 745-2870.

Please print a copy of this consent form for your records, if you so desire.

I have been given information about this research study and its risks and benefits. I have had the opportunity to ask questions and to have my questions answered to my satisfaction. I certify that I am at least 18 years old, and by clicking continue, I freely give my consent to participate in this research project.
Appendix F

Debriefing Statement

Thank you for participating in this study, which examines the relationship between racial identity, resilience, and coping on college retention.

To be placed in a raffle drawing for a $25 cash prize, please click on the link below:

RAFFLE

To receive credit for your participation, please click on the link below:

CREDIT

If you have any questions, you may contact Tracey King at kingt@xavier.edu or at (513) 531-3395. You may also contact Dr. Cathy McDaniels Wilson at (513) 745-3072. Questions about your rights as a research subject should be directed to Xavier University’s Institutional Review Board at (513) 745-2870.

If you feel distress at any point during or after the study, we encourage you to contact Health and Counseling Center at (513) 745-3022 or the Psychological Services Center at (513) 745-3531.

Thanks again for your participation!
Chapter V

Dissertation

Abstract

The primary purpose of this study was to explore the relationship between racial identity, resilience, coping, and college retention in a sample of 94 African American college students attending a predominantly White University. Based upon the current literature, a mediation model was proposed. Specifically, it was hypothesized that the relationship between resilience and college retention would be mediated by the internalization stage of racial identity ($M_1$), problem-focused coping behaviors ($M_2$), and emotion-focused coping behaviors ($M_3$). Results revealed a positive relationship between college retention and the internalization stage of racial identity ($B = .089, z = 2.82, p = .005$), and a negative relationship between problem-focused coping and college retention ($B = -.088, z = -2.24, p = .025$). Bootstrapping analyses indicted no significant indirect effects for $M_1$ (point estimate = -.0033, 95% BCA of -.0173 to .0058), $M_2$ (point estimate = -.0055, 95% BCA of -.0203 to .0027), or $M_3$ (point estimate = .0014, 95% BCA of -.0028 to .0168).

Despite the absence of mediation, the findings of this study highlighted the complex nature of these constructs and the continued need for further exploration into their relationship.
Racial Identity, Resilience, Coping, and College Retention in African American College Students Attending a Predominantly White University

Student retention is an important factor in the survival of post-secondary institutions. Today, it is more challenging to retain students, especially with the diversification of college student needs. Recently, concern has grown regarding the retention of African American college students, who have the highest drop out rate than any other ethnic group (U.S. Census Bureau, 2002). In their six-year longitudinal study on American college students, the U.S. Department of Education (2001) concluded that African American students had the largest dropout rate than any other racial group. They also found that about half of enrolled African Americans failed to obtain a two-year or a four-year degree (National Center for Education Statistics, 2001).

A person's racial identity, resilience, and coping behaviors are believed to be associated to college student retention (Chavous et al., 2003; Graham, Baker, & Wapner, 1985; Oyserman, Bybee, & Terry, 2003; Spencer, Noll, Stoltzfus, & Harpalani, 2001). However, the present literature is unclear in regards to the role of these variables in the retention of African American college students. The proposed study will address this gap by examining the relationship between racial identity, resilience, coping, and retention in African American college students. A review of theoretical frameworks for each construct was conducted, as well as, a review of empirical evidence that supported a relationship between them.

Theoretical Conceptualization of Racial Identity

Over the years, the conceptualization of racial identity has either been categorical, developmental, or multidimensional. Categorical perspective suggests that people's
racial identity depends on which type or group they belong to (Vontress, 1971). Developmental theorists, like Cross (1971), explains racial identity as a stage progression within one’s psychological awareness towards the integration of one’s identity as a Black person. Whereas, the multidimensional model suggests that African Americans’ racial identity encompasses several dimensions and one dimension may be more relevant than another based on one’s combined social identity (Sellers, Rowley, Chavous, Sheldon, & Smith, 1997). The most notable racial identity model is Cross’ (1971) developmental model. It is widely accepted and a sizeable amount of studies have used it as their theoretical basis to investigate racial identity (Buckley & Carter, 2005; Gilbert, So, Russell, & Wessel, 2006; Johnson & Arbona, 2006; Spurgeon & Myers, 2010).

Cross’ (1971) model asserts that the development of racial identity in Black Americans occurs through a set of five evolutionary stages (pre-encounter, encounter, immersion-emersion, internalization, internalization-commitment). His model also suggests that during this internal journey, Black Americans will move from rejection of their racial identity to acceptance as their racial identity. In the pre-encounter stage, Cross’ first stage, the Black self-concept is defined by the internalization of what is accepted by the White society and the rejection of the values held by Blacks (Cross, 1971). A transformative event (e.g. personal experience of racism) is believed to act as a catalyst for the encounter stage. In the encounter stage, Black people question their current racial identity and realize that identity is not suitable for them. Therefore, they begin to seek out an identity that is more appropriate, which leads them to the immersion-emersion. In the immersion-emersion stage, Black people will immerse themselves psychologically and behaviorally in the Black culture, valuing everything Black and
abhorring anything associated with the White culture. As a result, this stage is characterized by the acceptance of the Black experience (Cross, 1971). After immersing themselves into the Black culture, Cross (1971) stated that Black people will integrate internal positive qualities toward their racial identity into their personality (Cross, 1971), which he referred to as the internalization stage. In the last stage, internalization-commitment, Black people are active participants within the Black culture and community. Everyday activities are carried out in accordance with the positive Black connection to culture and community. For example, a person will reflect behaviors and attitudes that challenge the oppression of Black people within his or her community. In summary, movement from the pre-encounter stage to the internalization-commitment stage is associated with an increase in self-esteem and a decrease in negative emotional functioning (Cross, 1971).

**Theoretical Conceptualization of Resilience**

According to Richardson (2002), the literature has conceptualized resilience in three ways: an evolving process that occurs in response to risk factors or life stressors to facilitate healthy functioning; an outcome from one’s efforts to deal with multiple and often chronic stressors; and a personality trait that moderates the negative effects of stress and promotes adaptation. Overall, the literature offers no prevailing definition or theoretical viewpoint, thus far, which encompasses a framework that is useful across all domains. Resilience is a multidimensional and complex construct. However, in order to study resilience, it is essential to first define it. In this study Wagnild and Young’s (1993) definition of resilience was used. They conceptualized resilience as a personality characteristic that moderates the negative effects of stress and promotes adaptation.
Theoretical Conceptualization of Coping and Coping Styles

A review of the literature presents two main approaches of conceptualizing coping: the dispositional approach and the contextual approach. The dispositional approach, also referred to as “the trait model,” assumes that people’s personality traits influence the coping strategies they use in stressful situations. The contextual approach assumes that situation-based factors drive people’s choices of coping responses. In this approach, coping is a process between the individual and the environment, which is the focus of this study.

Lazarus and Folkman (1984), proponents of the contextual conceptualization of coping, proposed a model of stress and coping. They suggest that people will experience stress only when a specific event is appraised as threatening (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Based on the transactional model, when a situation is seen as threatening the individual will review what response options are available and whether they will be effective against the threatening situation. According to Lazarus et al. (1984), coping occurs only when the chosen response option is executed. Therefore, they define coping as the “constantly changing cognitive and behavioral effort to manage specific external and internal demands” (p. 141).

As people encounter stressful situations, they develop specific styles of coping (Endler & Parker, 1990). The literature reveals two main distinctions between coping behaviors: those that engage the stressor and those that disengage the stressor (Zeitlin, 1980). Lazarus and his colleagues (1984) identified that people utilize two main pathways of action when engaging the stressor: problem-focused and emotion-focused coping. Problem-focused coping aims to deal with stressful situations by changing the
problematic behavior or the environmental conditions that maintain the stress. Whereas, emotion-focused coping involves reducing or managing the emotional distress associated with the stressful situation. Strategies that disengage the stressor are categorized as avoidance coping and usually include efforts that involve evading the source of stress like procrastination.

Coping will be viewed as both a process and a style in this study. The process approach allows for specific coping thoughts and actions to be studied in diverse stressful contexts. In addition, coping styles affect how a stressful event is perceived and managed (Folkman & Lazarus, 1985). Lazarus and Folkman's (1984) transactional model will be used to frame this study's understanding of coping because it addresses both dimensions of coping. It also focuses on the interaction between the individual and the environment, which will allow the researcher to examine both the campus environment and the characteristics of the students.

**College Student Retention, Racial Identity, Resilience, and Coping**

Annual college enrollment rates for African Americans have been over 50% since 1993 (National Center for Education Statistics, 2001). In 2003, approximately 62% of young adult African Americans between 25-29 years old attended college (Stoops, 2004). In addition, the U.S. Department of Education reported a 4% increase in enrollment of African Americans from 2000 to 2010 (National Center for Education Statistics, 2011). Despite this increase in attendance, a large percentage of African Americans leave without completing their degrees (Carey, 2008; National Center for Education Statistics, 2003, 2011; Rodgers & Summers, 2008; U.S. Census Bureau, 2002). In their six-year longitudinal study on American college students, the U.S. Department of Education
(2001) concluded that African American students had the largest dropout rate than any other racial group. They also found that about half of enrolled African Americans failed to obtain a two-year or a four-year degree (National Center for Education Statistics, 2001).

In addition, African American students at predominantly White universities (PWU) deal with a variety of unique challenges such as minority related stressors (e.g. cultural incongruity, racism, negative student-faculty interactions). Minority related stressors make African American students at PWU more vulnerable to potentially detrimental emotional, psychological, and academic outcomes (Allen, Epps, & Haniff, 1991; Dorsey & Jackson, 1995; Fleming, 1984; Smedley, Myers, & Harrell, 1993; Williamson, 2000). Moreover, African American students are more likely to leave because of problems with adjustment than any other racial group (Constantine, 1999).

Some African American students thrive at PWU, whereas others crumble (Walker, Gleaves, & Grey, 2006). According to Tinto (1986), college students’ traits, such as ethnicity, influence their levels of institutional commitment and persistence towards obtaining their degree. Several empirical studies have highlighted the significant impact a student’s racial identity status and coping behaviors have on resilient African Americans attending PWU (Anglin & Wade, 2007; Chavous et al., 2003; Cross, 1991; McDonald & Vrana, 2007; Nasim, Roberts, Hamell, & Young, 2005; Oyserman, Bybee, & Terry, 2003; Spencer, Noll, Stoltzfus, & Harpalani, 2001).

Researchers have pointed out that a person’s racial identity may be a risk factor, especially in situations when he or she is a minority (Carter, 1995; Cross, Parham, & Helms, 1998; Munford, 1994). Taylor (1986) suggests that Black students who struggle
with adapting to the PWU environment would experience more coping and identity problems. He further expressed that for Blacks to be successful at PWU, they must know and accept their Black identity (Taylor, 1986). Moreover, other reported findings have indicated that greater identification of Cross’ pre-encounter and immersion-emersion attitudes were associated with greater feelings of inferiority, greater levels of depressive symptoms, and lower levels of self-actualization (Cross, Parham, & Helms, 1998; Munford, 1994).

Several research studies have stressed the importance of having a positive racial identity. Parker and Flowers (2003) conducted a quantitative study of 118 African American undergraduate students at a PWU to examine the impact that racial identity has on students’ perceptions of their academic and campus environment. They found, using the Racial Identity Attitude Scale and the Perception of Campus Connectedness Scale, that those students with higher levels of racial identity (internalization stage) experienced higher levels of campus connectedness. Also, those in the immersion-emmersion stage experienced more difficulties with connecting to their campus environment. While investigating the relationship between racial identity attitudes to self-actualization and affective states of African American college students, Parham and Helms (1985) found that the encounter and internalization attitudes were positively associated with self-actualization tendencies and negatively related to feelings of inferiority and hostility. They also found that the preencounter and immersion attitudes were negatively related to self-actualizing tendencies and positively related to feelings of hostility, inferiority and anxiety. A longitudinal quantitative study by Nasim et al. (2005) explored the impact of racial identity on academic achievement. Nasim et al. (2005) administered academic
pursuit and achievement measures, and a racial identification measure to 250 African American undergraduate students enrolled at either a PWU or a HBCU. Their results showed a positive self-concept was the strongest predictor of good academic performance. Based on these studies, a positive racial identity facilitates a positive attitude and self-efficacy, which leads to academic success. Therefore, an African American student with a positive racial identity is more likely to remain in college and obtain a college degree (Cross, 1991; Rowley, Sellers, Chavous, & Smith, 1998).

According to Arrington and Wilson (2000), African Americans experience stressors differently due to their difference in ethnicity and culture. They state that culture and ethnicity affects the interaction between “psychological development and adversity so that people experience risk differently” (2000, p. 226), which may lead to a positive outlook on the stressful situation. Banks and Kohn-Wood (2007) state that positive racial identity attitudes act as a moderator between racial discrimination and psychological distress. Therefore, possessing a positive racial identity is important to an individual’s self-esteem, self-actualization, and general psychological functioning (Cross, Parham, & Helms, 1998; Munford, 1994; Phinney & Kohatsu, 1997). Overall, an individual’s racial identity can act as both a hindrance, as well as a facilitator to resilience. Based upon empirical evidence, negative attitudes about one’s racial identity can be considered a risk factor to resilience. On the other hand, positive racial identity attitudes may act as a buffer to stress and help facilitate resilience in these individuals.

Resilience has also been linked to coping. Foster (1997) defines resilience as “positive changes in maintaining active or latent coping and adaptation capacities through various mechanisms” (p. 190). Moreover, Jew, Green, and Kroger (1999) suggest,
“resiliency emerges from a system of specific beliefs that interact with environmental stressors to determine an individual’s coping skills” (p. 77). According to these scholars, coping is related to resilience in some capacity.

Within the current literature only a handful of studies have examined coping efforts used by African American students to deal with racially related stressors in college. Swim et al. (2003) found that African American students at PWU coped with race-related incidents by directly responding to perpetrators, by seeking social support, or by not responding at all. Other studies report that African American students at PWU also engage in avoidant strategies like denial or distracting themselves (Billings & Moos, 1981). Still, some researchers report no differences in coping efforts amongst African American students attending PWU (Cooper, Mahler, & Whitt, 1994).

Researchers report inconsistent findings on the relationship between coping strategies and resiliency to stress. Some studies suggest that African American college students who use avoidance behaviors to deal with a race-related stress will experience a reduction in their levels of stress (Barnes & Lightsey, 2005; Billings & Moos, 1981; Compas, Malcarne, & Fondacaro, 1988). But if problem-focused strategies are used, they will experience an increase in negative stress related consequences such as high blood pressure (Clark & Adams, 2004). However, other research findings suggest that problem-solving behaviors tend to lower stress, whereas emotion-focused and avoidance behaviors increase levels of stress for African American students (Barnes & Lightsey, 2005; Billings & Moos, 1981; Compas, Malcarne, & Fondacaro, 1988; Endler & Parker, 1994; Menaghan, 1982; Surwit, Feinglos, & Scovern, 1983). These inconsistent findings in the literature suggest that additional research is needed to understand the specific
coping strategies that African Americans students use to deal with racially related stressors while attending a PWU and whether these strategies mediate the relationship between resilience and college retention.

Summary

Overall, the literature has suggested that racial identity, resilience, coping, and college student retention are connected, but lacks agreement on how. As a result, more research is needed to help determine how they are related to each other. The need towards exploring areas that will aid in increasing retention rates and academic success in African American college students is only highlighted by the disconcerting outcome statistics surrounding this population (e.g. drop out rates, length of time for obtaining a college degree). In an effort to better understand their relationship this study will examine the mediation effects of racial identity and coping on the relationship between resilience and college retention in African Americans college students attending a predominantly White university.

Purpose and Hypotheses

The main purpose of this study is to explore the relationship between resilience and college retention and to test the mediation effects of racial identity and coping behaviors in African American college students attending a predominantly White university (PWU).

Based on past research and this study's theoretical framework, the following hypotheses were proposed:

H1: It is hypothesized that the positive relationship between resilience, the independent variable (IV), and college student retention, the dependent
variable (DV), will be mediated by the internalization stage of racial identity (M1).

H2: It is hypothesized that the positive relationship between resilience, the independent variable (IV), and college student retention, the dependent variable (DV), will be mediated by coping behaviors specifically, problem-focused coping (M2) and emotion-focused coping behaviors (M3).

Method

Participants

The participants were 94 undergraduate African American students between the ages of 18-40 who attended a medium size, private, Midwest university. The mean age of the participants was 20 years old, with 86% of the sample being between 19-20 years old. Individuals were recruited from the participant pool, as well as, the general student population using fliers that were posted on several bulletin boards throughout the university. Participants were required to be at least 18 years old, African American, and be an undergraduate at the university. As part of their participation, individuals were given the choice to receive class credit or be place in a raffle drawing for a $25 cash prize. The sample was made up of 60% females and 40% males. In regards to class standing, 18% were freshmen, 45% sophomores, 17% juniors, and 20% seniors. Participants’ mean grade point average (GPA) was 3.12, with 58% of participants having a 3.0 or higher GPA.

Measures

Demographic questionnaire. A demographic questionnaire was created to gather participants’ personal background information that was used to further inform this study.
It included questions such as age, gender, ethnicity, enrollment status, current grade point average, and expected academic degree.

**College Retention question.** College retention was measured by whether the person was planning on remaining at the university or transferring/leaving the university. A response of remaining was scored a 1, whereas a transferring/leaving response was scored 0. Therefore, the higher the score the more likely the person would be retained at the university.

**Black Racial Identity Attitudes Scale (RIAS-B).** The Black Racial Identity Attitudes Scale (RIAS-B) is a 50-item self-report questionnaire that measures racial identity attitudes using a 5-point scale ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5). It has four subscales: Pre-encounter, Encounter, Immersion/Emersion, and Internalization. Each subscale reflects a predominant theme. For example, the pre-encounter subscale’s main theme is pro-White and anti-Black attitudes, whereas, the internalization subscale is characterized by positive Black identity attitudes. In this study, the RIAS-B subscales were used to represent the specific worldviews expressed in Cross’ (1971) theory of racial identity developmental stages discussed earlier. A total score was obtained by summing the item values for each subscale. The higher the subscale score the more attitudes a person possesses for that respective subscale. The RIAS-B has acceptable reliability and validity levels (consistency coefficients ranging from 0.50 - 0.79, alpha estimates ranging from 0.51-0.8) (Grace, 1984; Helms & Parham, 1990; Helms & Parham, 1996; Ponterotto & Wise, 1987). In addition, the RIAS-B has been hinted to be one of the most widely used measure found in the racial identity literature (Kohatsu & Richardson, 1996).
Resilience Scale (RS). The Resilience Scale (RS) is a 25-item self-report questionnaire that measures the degree of individual resilience using a 7-point rating system ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree) (Wagnild & Young, 1993). The RS asks responders to rate their feelings toward a list of statements using this 7-point rating system. Scores are then summed to come up with a total score that ranges from 25 to 175, with higher scores reflecting a higher degree of resilience. Scores of 147-175 are considered high levels of resilience. The RS has good internal consistency reliability and concurrent validity with test-retest correlation coefficients ranging from 0.67 to 0.84 and alpha estimates ranging from 0.76-0.91 (Wagnild & Young, 1993). In addition, numerous studies have validated its use with a variety of ages and ethnic groups (Ahern, Kiehl, Sole, & Byers, 2006; Aroian & Norris, 2000; Heilemann, Lee, & Kury, 2003; Humphreys, 2003; Rew, Taylor-Sechafer, Thomas, & Yockey, 2001). In this study, the total score of the RS was used to represent participants’ level of resilience.

Coping Inventory for Stressful Situations (CISS). The Coping Inventory for Stressful Situations (CISS) is a 48-item self-report instrument that examines participants’ coping styles. In the CISS, task-oriented, emotion-oriented, and avoidance-oriented are used to assess Lazarus and associates’ (1984) problem-focused, emotion-focused, and avoidance coping styles respectively. The CISS differentiates between two types of avoidant behaviors: distraction and social. The CISS asks responders to indicate, based on a 5-point ranging scale (1=Not at all to 5=Very much), which activities they are most likely to engage in when they are faced with difficult, stressful, or upsetting situations. Item scores are summed for each coping dimension, with higher scores indicating greater use of that particular coping behavior. Endler and Parker (1990, 1994) stated that the
CISS has excellent internal reliabilities ranging from 0.76 to 0.92 for all three scales and the two subscales and adequate test-retest reliability (0.55-0.73). Overall, the CISS is a sound measure and is robust across gender. In this study the CISS was used to assess participants’ coping styles.

**Procedure**

Approval was obtained from the university’s Institutional Review Board to ensure this study was in compliance with human subjects standards. Upon approval, students at the university were able to read announcements about this study on the participant pool bulletin and various bulletin boards around the university. The announcements contained information about the study and tear away-tags with the study’s web-address for participants to take. The study used an internet-based survey system to collect participants’ responses that provided acceptable security measures ensuring that responses collected would be kept confidential.

After entering the study’s survey web-address into their web-browser, participants were taken directly to the informed consent form. Participants read the informed consent and were notified that completion of the surveys indicates consent to participate in the study. Those who consented to participate in the survey were then prompted to complete the demographic questionnaire, RIAS-B, RS, and CISS. Once the questionnaires were completed, participants were given the choice of receiving class credit or being placed in a raffle drawing for a $25 cash prize. If participants choose either option, they were directed to a new website with no connection to the first website. The second website prompted the participant to provide personal information, which depended on the option chosen. For example, the website for class credit prompted participants to enter their
name, class and professor’s name, whereas, the website for the raffle requested participants to enter their email address. This information was collected only for awarding class credit or for the $25 cash prize and was in no way linked with participants’ survey responses. Upon completion of the survey, participants were provided with information about where to turn if they have questions regarding the study or about their rights as research participants.

Results

Table 1 summarizes the means and standard deviations for the study’s variables and Table 2 summarizes the intercorrelations for the study’s variables.

Data Analysis Strategy

Baron and Kenny’s causal steps (1986) method is commonly used in mediation testing. It requires a series of multiple regressions, testing each mediator separately. First, a significant relationship between the independent variable and the dependent variable is determined. If there is one, the independent variable is then assessed for possible changes in the mediator. The last step evaluates the possible change the mediator has on the dependent variable. If the relationship between the independent and dependent variable gets significantly smaller when the mediator is controlled for, then mediation is present. Therefore, stronger mediators, when controlled for, will lead to smaller relationships between the independent and dependent variables. In this case, it is expected that positive racial identity (internalization stage) and coping behaviors (problem and emotion focused) will mediate the relationship between resilience and college retention. Specifically, the relationship between resilience and college retention
will become non-significant when the mediators (internalization stage, problem-focused and emotion-focused coping behaviors) are controlled for.

Although Baron and Kenny's strategy reveals the presence of mediation, it has several limitations (Holmbeck, 2002; Pituch, Whittaker, & Stapleton, 2005; Preacher & Hayes, 2008). For example, the use of multiple individual tests increases the chances of Type I errors. Another major drawback for using this method is that it requires all relevant relationship paths to be statistically significant, which can miss indirect effects of mediators. Lastly, only one mediator can be tested at a time, which makes it less desirable for testing a model with multiple mediators, like the one proposed in this study.

However, Preacher and Hayes (2008) approach to mediation testing allows for multiple mediators to be tested simultaneously. It also allows for total indirect effects and specific indirect effects to be tested to determine their significance. Moreover, by allowing several mediators to be tested simultaneously, it also reduces the possibility of a Type I error due to multiple inferential tests. Preacher and Hayes' (2008) method utilizes bootstrapping. Bootstrapping makes fewer sample assumptions, which leads to more accurate inferences about the representative sample. In light of these advantages, Preacher and Hayes' (2008) mediation analysis and bootstrapping technique was used to test $H_1$ and $H_2$.

Data Analyses

$H_1$ predicted that the relationship between resilience (as measured by the Resilience Scale) and college retention (as measured by retention question) would be mediated by the internalization stage of racial identity (as measured by RAIS-B). Preacher and Hayes' (2008) technique for assessing multiple mediators was used to
assess for mediation by the internalization stage on the relationship between resilience and college retention. The bootstrap estimates were based on a 1,000 bootstrap sample.

Data analysis revealed that the total effect of the relationship between resilience and college retention (path $c$) was not significant, meaning resilience was not reliably correlated with college retention ($B = .002, z = .118, p = .906$). No direct effect of the relationship between resilience and college retention (path $c'$) was observed, even after accounting for the effect of the internalization stage mediator ($B = .009, z = .595, p = .552$). There was also no significant relationship found between resilience and the internalization stage of racial identity ($B = .037, z = .051, p = .476$). However, a direct effect of the relationship between internalization stage and college retention (path $b$) was observed, after controlling for resilience. It was found that the internalization stage mediator had a significant positive relationship with college retention ($B = .89, z = 2.82, p = .005$). Bootstrapping analysis resulted in a point estimate of -.0033 and a 95% BCA of -.0173 to .0058 indicating an absence of significant mediation by the internalization stage mediator. Figure 1 shows the indirect and direct values for resilience, college retention, and the internalization stage of racial identity.

$H_2$ predicted that the relationship between resilience (as measured by the Resilience Scale) and college retention (as measured by retention question) would be mediated by problem-focused and emotion-focused coping behaviors (as measured by the CISS). In order to test this hypothesis, Preacher and Hayes’ (2008) mediation analysis and bootstrapping technique was used. The bootstrap estimates were based on a 1,000 bootstrap sample.
Data analysis revealed that the total effect of the relationship between resilience and college retention (path c) was not significant, meaning resilience was not reliably correlated with college retention ($B = .002, z = .118, p = .906$). No direct effect of the relationship between resilience and college retention (path c') was observed, even after accounting for the effects of the problem-focused coping and emotion-focused coping mediators ($B = .009, z = .595, p = .552$).

There was no significant relationship found in the resilience to problem-focused coping pathway ($B = .625, z = 1.29, p = .199$) or in the resilience to emotion-focused coping pathway ($B = -.076, z = .069, p = .274$). There was also no direct effect of emotion-focused coping on college retention, after controlling for resilience ($B = .018, z = .626, p = .532$). However, there was a direct effect of problem-focused coping on college retention, after controlling for resilience ($B = -.088, z = -2.24, p = .025$). Therefore problem-focused coping has a significant negative relationship with college retention.

Problem-focused coping had no significant indirect effect, which was evident by the bootstrapping analyses. Problem-focused coping produced a point estimate of -.0055 and a 95% BCA of -.0203 to .0027 indicating an absence of significant mediation between resilience and college retention. In addition, bootstrapping analysis for emotion-focused coping resulted in a point estimate of .0014 and a 95% BCA of -.0028 to .0168. This reveals a lack of significant mediation by emotion-focused coping between resilience and college retention. Figure 2 shows the indirect and direct values for resilience, college retention, problem-focused coping, and emotion-focused coping.
Discussion

The current literature is unclear about the relationship between racial identity, resilience, coping behaviors, and college retention. In an effort to understand their ambiguous nature a mediation model was designed. In the proposed model, the relationship between resilience and college retention was hypothesized to be mediated by the internalization stage of racial identity, problem-focused coping, and emotion-focused coping. By testing this mediation model, it was expected that a more coherent framework will be revealed, which would hopefully be used in future research.

The main aim of this study was to determine the mediation effects, if any, that racial identity (internalization stage) and coping (problem-focused and emotion-focused) behaviors have on the relationship between resilience and college retention. Verifying mediation effects was done using Preacher and Hayes’ (2008) mediation analysis and bootstrapping technique. Results revealed no significant mediation by the internalization stage of racial identity, problem-focused coping, or emotion-focused coping on the relationship between resilience and college retention. In addition, there was no significant relationship found between resilience and the internalization stage, resilience and problem-focused coping, resilience and emotion-focused coping, or resilience and college retention.

As mentioned earlier, the resilience literature is inundated by inconsistencies, which is probably due to the lack of a unifying definition and conceptualization of resilience (Bellin & Kovacs, 2006). This study defined resilience as a personality trait, which led to unexpected findings. Although these results are not completely incongruent with past research (Cooper, Mahler, & Whitt, 1994), they highlight the importance of
having a consistent definition of resilience. For example, defining resilience as success in school and other life accomplishments despite environmental adversities (Padron, Waxman, & Huang, 1999), may have led to the proposed results or ones completely different. Future studies should consider using a measure or measures that captures more facets of resilience.

Another aspect to consider is the dynamics associated with college retention. According to Tinto's sociological perspective of student departure (1975, 1986, 1987), there are several factors that impact a student's decision to leave college. He asserts students' predisposing factors (e.g. personality traits) affect how and to what extent they integrate themselves into their college environment. However, these predisposing factors are not paramount in their decision to stay. Tinto (1975, 1986, 1987) felt that integration was the vital factor. He stated that the greater students' integration between their background variables, goals, and institutional commitments, the more likely they would remain in college. Therefore, resilience may play a role in college retention. However, based on Tinto's perspective (1975, 1986, 1987), there are other factors that have more of an impact on a student's decision to stay.

Moreover, results reveal a significant positive relationship between the internalization stage and college retention. This finding is in line with previous research on racial identity and college retention (Cross, 1991; Parker & Flowers, 2003; Rowley, Sellers, Chavous, & Smith, 1998). Past research studies have associated the internalization stage of racial identity with college retention (Cross, Parham, & Helms, 1998; Munford, 1994; Nasim et al., 2005; Parker and Flowers, 2003). Parker and Flowers (2003) conducted a study on 118 African American undergraduate students and
found that students with positive racial identity (internalization stage) had higher levels of
campus connectedness and higher retention rates. In addition, Nasim et al. (2005) found
that a positive racial self-concept was the strongest predictor of good academic
performance. Based on previous studies, a positive racial identity facilitates a positive
attitude and self-efficacy, which leads to academic success and college retention.
Therefore, African American students with positive racial identities are more likely to
remain in college and obtain a college degree than those without (Cross, 1991; Rowley,
Sellers, Chavous, & Smith, 1998).

The results also indicated a significant negative relationship between problem-
focused coping and college retention. Past empirical findings about African American
students’ coping behaviors have been inconsistent throughout the years. In past studies
African American college students were found to use several coping strategies such as
directly responding to the stressful situation, seeking social support, and as well as
avoiding the stressful source (Billings & Moos, 1981; Swim et al., 2003). On the other
hand, past studies also reported no differences in coping efforts amongst African
American students (Cooper, Mahler, & Whitt, 1994). These varying results may be due
to the interchangeable nature of people’s coping style, their assessment of the situation,
and their unique demographic characteristics (Kariv & Heiman, 2005). The literature has
highlighted the importance of social support and spirituality, both forms of emotion-
focused coping, within the African American culture (Neighbors, Jackson, & Gurin,
1983; Pargament et al., 1990). Moreover, in external locus of control situations African
Americans have been found to engage in more emotion-focused than problem-focused
coping (Forsythe & Compas, 1987). Therefore based upon the literature, the significant
negative relationship between problem-focused coping and college retention could be explained by the unique characteristics of African Americans such as their cultural tendency to engage more in emotion-focused coping.

There are several limitations to consider when interpreting these results. First, this study used convenience sampling, which involves gathering participants in the immediate area of the study. Therefore, since this study’s population consisted of only undergraduate students at one small, Midwestern Jesuit university during the spring semester, the generalizability of the results is limited. Future research should consider examining African Americans with more diversity in age, socioeconomic status, and geographical locations. Second, this study utilized only self-reported measures for data collection, which relies on accurate responses by the participants and reliability and validity of the measures used. Future studies might consider using other forms of collecting information, such as observing or interviewing people. Utilizing several methods of data collection might help to provide further information about the relationship between racial identity, resilience, coping, and college retention. Third, the coping measures used lacked cultural sensitivity. Therefore, future research studies should consider additional or substitute measures that are more culturally sensitive such as the Africultural Coping Systems Inventory. Fourth, college retention was measured by one item with a limited response range. Other studies might consider another measure that is more inclusive of the multiple facets of college retention, that has a wider range of response options, and one that is continuous in nature versus forced choice. In addition, Fifth, this study’s self-report and self-administered design may have encouraged participants to provide socially desirable responses rather than open responses. In
another study, including a socially desirable measure (e.g. Marlowe-Crowne Social Desirability Scale) might help to monitor this likelihood. Lastly, this study used cross-sectional data. Future studies should consider a longitudinal design to enhance theoretical understanding of the relationship between these variables.

Conclusions

Despite the absence of significant mediation effects by the mediators on the relationship between resilience and college retention, the results of this study highlighted the complex nature of these variables and the continued need for further exploration into their relationship.
References


Table 1. *Summary of means and standard deviations of study’s variables (n = 94)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Standard Deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Retention</td>
<td>3.74</td>
<td>.438</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resilience</td>
<td>146.25</td>
<td>18.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preencounter</td>
<td>25.24</td>
<td>5.16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Encounter</td>
<td>17.83</td>
<td>5.52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Immersion-Emersion</td>
<td>13.68</td>
<td>4.23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internalization</td>
<td>42.37</td>
<td>9.83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Problem-Focused</td>
<td>63.55</td>
<td>8.38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotion-Focused</td>
<td>51.24</td>
<td>11.89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Avoidance</td>
<td>51.89</td>
<td>11.87</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 2. Summary of Intercorrelations of study’s variables (n = 94)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
<th>8</th>
<th>9</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Retention</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>.012</td>
<td>.080</td>
<td>-.014</td>
<td>-.033</td>
<td>.249</td>
<td>-.242</td>
<td>.085</td>
<td>.011</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Resilience</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>.054</td>
<td>-.190</td>
<td>-.070</td>
<td>.075</td>
<td>.134</td>
<td>-.115</td>
<td>-.008</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Preencounter</td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.417*</td>
<td>.503**</td>
<td>.427*</td>
<td>-.099</td>
<td>.116</td>
<td>.096</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Encounter</td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.380*</td>
<td>.346*</td>
<td>-.082</td>
<td>-.022</td>
<td>-.061</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Immersion-Emersion</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>-</td>
<td>.478*</td>
<td>-.057</td>
<td>.002</td>
<td>-.009</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Internalization</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
<td>-.081</td>
<td>.067</td>
<td>.038</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Problem-Focused</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.263</td>
<td>.300*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Emotion-Focused</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.600**</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Avoidance</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Note. Higher scores indicate more extreme responding of the construct assessed. Significant correlations are indicated by * at the 0.05 level and ** at the 0.01 level.
Figure 1. Test of mediation model: Resilience and college retention mediated by the internalization stage of racial identity. Path values represent unstandardized regression coefficients. Values in ( ) are the standard errors. Values in { } represent the total effect. Values in [ ] represent the direct effect. * \( p < .05 \).
Figure 2. Test of mediation model: Resilience and college retention mediated by the problem-focused coping and emotion-focused coping. Path values represent unstandardized regression coefficients. Values in ( ) are the standard errors. Values in { } represent the total effect (i.e., c path). Values in [ ] represent the direct effect. * $p < .05$. 
Appendix A

Institutional Review Board Approval Letter

February 13, 2012

Tracey King
2804 A Colonial Ridge Court
Cincinnati, OH 45212

Dear Ms. King:

Re: Protocol #1142, Racial Identity, Resilience and Coping in African American College Students Attending a Predominantly White University

The IRB has reviewed the revised materials regarding your study, referenced above, and has determined that it meets the criteria for the Exempt from Review category under Federal Regulation 45CFR46. Your protocol is approved as exempt research, and therefore requires no further oversight by the IRB.

If you wish to modify your study, including the addition of data collection sites, it will be necessary to obtain IRB approval prior to implementing the modification. If any adverse events occur, please notify the IRB immediately.

We truly appreciate your efforts and attention to compliance within the spirit of human subject’s protection. We wish you great success with your research.

Sincerely,

Morell E. Mullins, Jr., Ph.D.
Chair, Institutional Review Board
Xavier University

MEM/sb

C: Cathy McDaniels Wilson, advisor
Summary

Title: Racial Identity, Resilience, Coping, and College Retention in African American College Students Attending A Predominantly White University

Problem: Today, it is more challenging to retain students, especially with the diversification of college student needs. Recently, concern has grown regarding the retention of African American college students, who have the highest drop out rate than any other ethnic group (US Department of Education, 2001). A person’s racial identity, resilience, and coping behaviors are believed to be associated to college student retention (Chavous et al., 2003; Graham, Baker, & Wapner, 1985; Oyserman, Bybee, & Terry, 2003; Spencer, Noll, Stoltzfus, & Harpalani, 2001). However, the current literature lacks agreement on how they are connected in African American college students. The primary purpose of this study was to further examine their relationship by testing the mediation effects of racial identity and coping on the relationship between resilience and college retention.

Method: The participants were 94 undergraduate African American students between the ages of 18-40, who attended a medium size, private, Midwest university. The mean age of the participants was 20 years old, with 61% of the sample being between 19-20 years old. The sample was made up of 60% females and 40% males. In regards to class standing, 18% were freshmen, 45% sophomores, 17% juniors, and 20% seniors. Participants’ mean grade point average (GPA) was 3.12, with 58% of participants having a 3.0 or higher GPA. Surveys were used to collect data, which included a demographic questionnaire, RIAS-B, RS, and the CISS. Preacher and Hayes (2008) bootstrapping technique was used to analyze the relationship between racial identity, resilience, coping, and college retention.

Findings: Results revealed a positive relationship between college retention and the internalization stage of racial identity (B = 0.89, z = 2.82, p = .005), and a negative relationship between problem-focused coping and college retention (B = -0.088, z = -2.24, p = .025). Bootstrapping analyses indicated no significant indirect effects for the internalization stage (point estimate = -0.0033, 95% BCA of -0.0173 to .0058), problem-focused coping (point estimate = -0.0055, 95% BCA of -0.0203 to .0027), or emotion-focused coping (point estimate = .0014, 95% BCA of -0.0028 to .0168). These findings indicate an absence of significant mediation in both proposed mediation models.

Implications: These findings revealed that resilience and college retention was not reliably related. Also, no significant mediation effects on the relationship between resilience and college retention by internalization, problem-focused, or emotion-focused coping was found. Despite the absence of significant mediation effects, these results only highlight the complex nature of these constructs and the continued need for further exploration into their relationship.