Demonstration of Meeting the 2014 Council for the Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs Core and the Student Affairs/College Counseling Specialty Standards via Five Major Artifacts

A graduate project submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Science in Counseling, College Counseling and Student Services

By
Armine Akopyan

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The graduate project of Armine Akopyan is approved:

_________________________________________  ____________________________
Armine Papazian, M.S.  Date

_________________________________________  ____________________________
Shari Tarver-Behring, Ph.D.  Date

_________________________________________  ____________________________
Merril A. Simon, Ph.D., Chair  Date

California State University, Northridge
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Abstract

Demonstration of Meeting the 2014 Council for the Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs Core and the Student Affairs/College Counseling Specialty Standards via Five Major Artifacts

By

Armine Akopyan

Master of Science in Counseling, College Counseling and Student Services

The aim of multiple artifacts is to examine the literature formed around diverse student populations, including LGBTQ students, sexual assault victims, veterans, undocumented students, and first-generation students. The following reviews of the literature are in response to prompts from the 2014 Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP) Standards.

In consideration of the various challenges the LGBTQ student population experiences, a literature review is used to propose the implementation of weekly intervention programs to facilitate psychological well-being, and lower physical safety concerns for LGBTQ students. These issues were explored with the use of Cass’s model of Homosexual Identity Formation (1984). Further implications were provided for student affairs professionals, including the importance of campus climate change for LGBTQ students.

Sexual violence can hinder the development of students across their life time. A review of the literature was explored to emphasize the importance of the availability of support services for college women who have experienced sexual assault in their
lifetimes. Implications indicate that the increase of empowerment and support services for these women can lower psychological distress, leading to higher retention rates and success in college.

The cognitive and psychological impairments of student veterans can be hindering to their employment outlook, therefore the implementation of Strength-Based Programming on college campuses can increase employment attainment for veteran college students. College counselors and student affairs professionals can promote employment attainment in student veterans by increasing their self-confidence through the use of positive psychology.

While working with undocumented students in community college or university settings, it is vital to understand characteristics and challenges that this at-risk and underrepresented student population faces. Factors such as financial concerns, equality and marginalization can be hindering to the educational attainment process of undocumented students. A review of current trends and literature highlights the various policies that can provide students with more opportunities in education.

First-generation college students may have lower academic preparation, exposure, and support while pursuing a higher education. An analysis of first-generation students proposed the implementation of intervention programs that incorporate adaptive coping strategies can increase retention rates among first-generation college students.
Implementation of Support Programs for LGBTQ Community College Students

Although systemic discrimination of sexual minorities is not as overt as it has been in the past, individuals from the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) community still face societal challenges in relation to their identity. The unique experiences of LGBTQ students, such as violence, discrimination, and marginalization can increase psychological distress, hindering them in their overall development. Student affairs professionals and college counselors can utilize Cass’s model of Homosexual Identity Formation (1984) to understand identity development that LGBTQ students experience, and implement appropriate interventions. Weekly intervention programs for LGBTQ students on community college campuses can help decrease psychological distress through the use of support groups, resources, and education on the college campus. The societal limitations that LGBTQ students face can cause psychological distress, impact their well-being, and safety, therefore increasing support on college campuses can contribute to an increase in the overall wellbeing of this population of students.

The societal discrimination of LGBTQ students may cause them to feel marginalized and vulnerable while attending college. In the past, this population of individuals has experienced unfair treatment, and has been devalued in society. It is also important to note that the first studies of same-sex attraction were conducted to find the causes of homosexuality, with the goal of finding a cure. This approach suggested that individuals of the LGBTQ community were considered to have a mental health condition, which could be cured over time.
The American Psychiatric Association considered homosexuality a psychiatric disorder in the third edition of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (Mondimore, 1996). The thought of homosexuality as a mental disorder shows that members of the LGBTQ community were stigmatized, and considered to be abnormal. Today, there is greater awareness and openness formed around diversity, and students who identify as LGBTQ, however discrimination and safety is still a concern for LGBTQ students. Author Mondimore (1996) argued that the way in which society reacts and treats individuals who are LGBTQ can determine their overall quality of life and individual experiences. As a result, when working with diverse populations of students in higher education, the way in which students, faculty members, and staff interact with individuals who identify as LGBTQ can be an indicator of their psychological well-being and safety. It is important to understand the oppressive experiences LGBTQ students may have encountered, in order to create an equitable and safe campus environment that addresses the needs of LGBTQ students.

When exploring diverse student populations on college campuses, it is important to consider what LGBTQ means. Different uses of terminology can vary depending on the subjective definition of what LGBTQ means, and can evolve with time. The term lesbian and gay are used to describe individuals who are attracted, both sexually and emotionally, to those of the same sex. Bisexuality describes individuals who are physically, romantically, and or emotionally attracted to both men and women. Transgender is the term used for individuals whose gender identity is different than the sex they were assigned at birth. The term queer is an umbrella term that entails a variety of sexual preferences, such as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, and can be
used to describe the whole LGBTQ community (Pride Center, 2013). Although there is appropriate terminology used to describe LGBTQ, these terms should not be generalized to all individuals.

The identity of an individual is hidden, but research provides insight into the various challenges that this marginalized population of students often face. An online survey by the Human Rights Campaign (2012) was used with 10,030 participants, with the goal of exploring key factors that can impact the lives of LGBT individuals. Different factors in the lives of LGBT individuals were investigated, such as:

- Sense of being accepted by family, peers, and the larger community;
- Access to LGBT affirmative support and services;
- Negative experiences such as verbal harassment, cyber-bullying, and exclusion from activities;
- Connection to a welcoming religious or spiritual community;
- Their level of optimism about the future and the ability to live a happy life as an “out” LGBTQ person (Human Rights Campaign, 2012, p. 1)

Results from a survey conducted by the Human Rights Campaign (2012), the largest LGBTQ civil rights advocacy group and organization, found that among non-LGBTQ students, 67% claim being happy while only 37% of LGBTQ report they were happy. This past research shows that individuals who identify as LGBTQ face different challenges, in comparison to their non-LGBTQ counterparts. When asked to describe the one thing that individuals from the LGBTQ population would like to change at the moment, 18% said they would like to change understanding, tolerance and hate from others. Along with this, 15% of LGBTQ youth also wanted to change their living arrangements, parent and family situations at home. This indicates that aside from the
lack of acceptance from society, these individuals also experience intolerance from family members and those with whom they live. When describing the most prevalent problem in their life at the moment, 26% reported it being non-accepting families. Along with this, 21% of individuals who identify as LGBTQ reported school and bullying issues as the most important problem they were facing at the moment. While students who identify as LGBTQ are concerned with safety, social acceptance, and intolerance, non-LGBTQ student’s issues were found to be around classes, exams, grades and career choice (Human Rights Campaign, 2012). As indicated by these findings, LGBTQ students face unique challenges in comparison to their heterosexual counterparts.

**Literature Review**

Although various issues can be generalized to college students, research has shown that students who identify as LGBTQ often times face specific challenges in relation to their identity. As presented by research through the Human Rights Campaign (2012), students who are LGBTQ attribute the challenges they face directly to their identity as someone who is LGBTQ. The differing experiences of LGBTQ students, in comparison to their non-LGBTQ counterparts, demonstrate the need for implementation of specific intervention programs for these students.

**Psychological Impact**

Students progress through college and experience personal growth and development throughout their lifetime. LGBTQ students often face inequality challenges due to the identity as LGBTQ. These students are often met with microaggressions on college campuses, which in turn has a negative effect on their psychological well-being.
Increased attention has been paid to the psychological impact on sexual minority individuals. Along with facing discrimination from others, LGBTQ students also experience emotional issues relating to their own identity formation. Research has shown that this stigmatized population of individuals often deals with shame, guilt, confusion, anxiety, low self-esteem, fear, self-stigma and depression (Pilkington & D'augelli, 1995; D'augelli, 2002; Herek, Gillis, and Cogan, 2009). A study by D'augelli (2002) used the Brief Symptom Inventory (BSI) to assess mental health problems for a group of 542 lesbian, gay, and bisexual individuals. The results provided evidence that LGB individuals had higher levels of mental health issues, such as somatization, obsessive-compulsiveness, interpersonal sensitivity, depression and psychoticism symptoms, in relation to a comparison group (D'augelli, 2002, p. 450). The psychological issues related to students who identify as LGBTQ can have a tremendous impact on their overall health and development.

Further research by Herek et al., (2009) introduced a social psychological framework for understanding sexual stigma against sexual minority individuals. Sexual stigma is considered to be the differential between status and power between those that are LGBTQ in comparison to their heterosexual counterparts (Herek et al., 2009). The institutional or structural stigma gives those from sexual minority groups a disadvantage as members of society (Herek et al., 2009). The research by Herek et al., (2009) used this conceptual framework in understanding the experiences of sexual minorities. Data was collected from a sample of 2,259 lesbian, gay and bisexual individuals who presented self-stigma because of institutional and societal oppression. Self-stigma suggests that individuals have negative attitudes and perceptions of themselves, and was assessed using
the Internalized Homophobia Scale (IHP-R). Findings from Herek and colleagues (2009) suggested that higher levels of self-stigma was associated with reduced self-esteem, and was associated with higher psychological distress (Herek et al., 2009). Along with the stigma from society, family and friends, these individuals also experience self-stigma that have an adverse effect on their overall emotional state.

**The Impact of Harassment on Well-being**

Living a life in fear of the repercussions of disclosing their true identity can cause immense distress for LGBTQ students. The microaggressions against LGBTQ students can hinder growth in college, as well as affect overall psychological well-being. Microaggressions towards LGBTQ students can cause psychological distress and cause students to fear their own safety. The prevalence of violence and harassment towards LGBTQ students has been a prevalent concern on college campuses (Ivory, 2005). Consequently, many of those who are a part of the LGBTQ community have a difficult time in disclosing their identity to others. The coming out process is a major part of the sexual identity formation process, resulting in selective disclosure to others. As LGBTQ students move through the various stages of identity formation, it is important to create an inclusive and supportive campus environment.

The profession of college counselors and student affairs requires the promotion of educational environments, as well as the development of students (Ivory, 2005). The campus environment can be crucial to the development, safety and overall well-being of unique student populations, such as LGBTQ students. A campus climate survey by Rankin (2003) found that 26% of participants feared for their physical safety and hid their sexual orientation or gender identity to avoid violent encounters with others. Many
individuals also avoid the coming out process due to the fear of intolerance, and being treated unfairly by others. Violence and harassment are prevalent concerns for individuals who identify as LGBTQ. One participant in the survey conducted by the Human Rights Campaign (2012) expressed, “I want to be able to go to school without being called a faggot or a dyke bitch. I don’t want to hide in the shadows about my sexuality because my safety is on the line” (Human Rights Campaign, 2012, p. 17). These experiences are common among individuals who identify as LGBTQ. Significant findings from a study showed that 19% of students reported that they were afraid of the physical repercussions of disclosing their sexual identity to others (Rankin, 2003). Therefore, educational institutions must implement support programs to meet the specific needs of LGBTQ students.

The Human Rights Campaign (2012) found that individuals who identify as LGBTQ are more than twice as likely (51%) to express being verbally harassed in school in comparison to non-LGBTQ students (25%). Although college campuses are attempting to address the challenges that students face, psychological distress and harassment are still continuing issues for these students. Therefore, the implementation of weekly intervention programs focused around support groups, resources and educating the public on LGBTQ issues can be an effective means of increasing the overall well-being of students who are a part of the LGBTQ community. One participant in the Human Rights Campaign (2012) study expressed, “It’s very easy to look at me and tell I’m gay and it makes me feel afraid to walk around knowing there are people here in my hometown that hate me, and people like me enough to attack me” (Human Rights Campaign, 2012, p. 8).
This statement shows that there are psychological and physical safety concerns for students who identify as LGBTQ.

The psychological and safety concerns for LGBTQ students cause them to refrain from disclosing their true identity, often living two lives. One participant from a study by the Human Rights Campaign (2012) expressed her experience hiding her identity by explaining, “the people in my community and my family aren’t really accepting of the LGBTQ community, and it’s hard for me to lie about who I am” (Human Rights Campaign, 2012, p. 13). Refraining from presenting one’s authentic self and living two separate lives can hinder development for individuals. As a result, it is important for professionals to implement weekly intervention programs through support groups, resources and education on college campuses that promote an inclusive and supportive environment for LGBTQ students

The Impact of Campus Climate for LGBTQ Students

Researcher Rankin (2003) introduced a study that focused on the importance of campus climate for LGBTQ students. A campus climate assessment tool was used in the form of a survey, to gather information on campus experiences, institutional actions, administrative policies, and academic initiatives in relation to LGBTQ issues. Campus climate is defined “as the cumulative attitudes, behaviors, and standards of employees and students concerning access for, inclusion of, and level of respect for individual and group needs, abilities, and potential” (Rankin, 2005, p. 17). The sample of 1,669 participants were from geographically representative institutions, including four private and ten public colleges and universities across the United States (Rankin, 2003). The participants of the study included undergraduate students, faculty, staff, administrators
and graduate students from various private and public institutions. With the use of a survey, researchers assessed the individual campus experiences of LGBTQ students, and their perception of campus climate (Rankin, 2003). The results demonstrated that of the 1,669 self-identified participants, 60% of participants revealed that they felt that “queer people were likely to be the targets of harassment on campus” (Rankin, 2003, p. 3). Another 43% of respondents felt the overall campus climate was homophobic, and 41% of respondents stated that the institution they were apart of was not addressing issues related to LGBTQ issues (Rankin, 2003, p. 5). Students may be reluctant to disclose their identity to those around them in fear of the consequences of doing so.

Consistent with the findings from Rankin’s campus climate survey (2003), another investigation of campus climate perceptions from LGBTQ individuals found that students had negative experiences that were attributed to the campus environment. Researchers Tetreault, Fette, Meidlinger and Hope (2013) conducted an online survey to assess experiences, perceptions and awareness of resources. Participants included 75 participants from a predominantly White, research university, which is a limitation of the study. Although the sample size is unrepresentative of the larger LGBTQ community, results indicated that the perception of the campus climate can be an indicator of how likely a student is to disclose about their identity (Tetreault et al., 2013). The results found that the majority of students in the study did not feel comfortable enough to disclose their identity to faculty members on campus.

**Vivienne Cass’s Model of Homosexual Identity Formation**

When working towards creating a supportive environment for many different populations of students, it’s important to understand the developmental stages that
individuals experience. Vivienne Cass (1984) introduced a six stage identity formation model of LGBTQ students. The different stages can contain characteristics that are specific to that stage, and provides professionals with awareness of the internal processes that individuals may be experiencing. With this, higher education professionals must have an awareness of the development that these students go through. Along with their development, higher education professionals must also be aware of the experiences these students face. The implementation of weekly programs around LGBTQ issues would increase awareness of the issues these students face, as well as provide these students with the support they need while they move through their personal development.

Vivienne Cass’s model of homosexual identity formation (1984) provides higher education professionals with a theoretical framework while working with LGBTQ students. Cass’s (1984) theoretical model also gives professionals the opportunity to view individuals who identify as LGBTQ from a developmental perspective. Understanding these stages and changes that students go experience can assist professionals in having a better awareness of the perspective of the individual at different stages in development. However, it is important to recognize that all LGBTQ individuals may not go through these developmental stages in a linear manner, or in a similar way.

Psychologist, Vivienne Cass (1984), described identity as ones cognitive perception of themselves and can be shown through ones self-image and attitude. Cass (1984) also described that an individual’s self-perception is “processed cognitively with images of sexual preference believed to be held by others” (Cass, 1984, p. 144). The negative image or perception others have of sexual minority individuals can hinder the personal development of these students.
Cass’s theory (1984) explains identity formation through six different stages of development. The first stage is called identity confusion, where the individual first experiences awareness that they may be LGBTQ. Different thoughts, feelings and actions occur which causes them to question their identity. In this beginning stage of identity formation, the individual either considers that they may be LGBTQ or they reject this possibility entirely (Cass, 1984). Stage two of Cass’s homosexual identity formation model (1984) is identity comparison, where the individual begins to accept the possibility of being LGBTQ. During this stage, the individual may have feelings of alienation and feelings of differentiation from others. Feeling different and alone causes the individual to further isolate themselves from others. Moving into stage three, called identity tolerance, there is exploration in identifying as someone apart of the LGBTQ community. During this stage, the individual makes an effort to have contact with others from the LGBTQ community, but limits disclosing their identity to them. Cass (1984) explains that individuals in this stage emphasize the maintenance of “two separate images: a public or presenting one (heterosexual) and private one” (Cass, 1984, p. 151). At this stage of identity formation, disclosure to heterosexuals is limited, and there is an emphasis on keeping their two identities separate from one another. When the individual attempts to keep these two identities separate, they can collide with one another, resulting in dissonance. The fourth stage is identity acceptance, where the individual is more accepting of their identity, rather than merely tolerating the idea of being LGBTQ. The person also begins to develop a network of friends who are a part of the LGBTQ community, rather than rejecting others. At this stage, there is an increase in disclosure to specific individuals in their life. Stages one through four describe the process from the
beginning of awareness of possibly being an individual apart of the LGBTQ community. In Cass’s heterosexual identity formation model (1984), when the individual moves into the fourth stage, individuals are more accepting of their identity, rather than rejecting it.

The fifth stage is described as identity pride, where the individual presents pride in their identity as an LGBTQ individual. During this stage, the individual also experiences anger towards society and those who do not identify as LGBTQ. They attempt to confront others with differing views than theirs, and limit their social networks to mostly those who are LGBTQ. Defensiveness and anger towards non-LGBTQ individuals can create tension since they separate LGBTQ from those who are heterosexual. Further exploration of the sense of self allows the individual to move into the last stage called identity synthesis. Cass’s (1984) describes this sixth stage as the awareness of the inaccuracy of separating themselves from those who are not from the LGBTQ community. There is also a better understanding that their identification as LGBTQ is not their only identity, but they also have other sides to their character (Cass, 1984, p. 152). During this stage, the individual finds themselves to be open to the support from non-LGBTQ individuals, and feels less threatened by them. The different developmental stages of identity formation can have an impact on the psychological well-being of LGBTQ students. Student affairs professionals must have the awareness of the developmental stages with the goal of implementing student development theory in weekly intervention programs.

**Interventions for the LGBTQ Student Population**

When moving through these various stages, the individual requires support according to the stage of identity formation development they are in. Therefore, assessing
the needs, and considering the identity formation developmental stages of LGBTQ students are important to be aware of when planning and implementing weekly programs on community college campuses. Support groups, resources, and educating the public would increase psychological well-being and safety for LGBTQ students.

Implementation of programs on college campuses will help LGBTQ students integrate into the campus community. Building an inclusive campus will also help decrease psychological distress for LGBTQ students. Psychological distress can be decreased when the individual has access to a welcoming and supportive environment that is accepting of their identity. Integration into the campus community is also vital to the well-being of LGBTQ students. Vincent Tinto’s student Integration Theory of Persistence (1975), was developed to highlight the importance of inclusion and the relationship between the individual and the institution. Tinto (1975) believed that the way in which students interact in the college environment can be directly correlated with persistence in college (Tinto, 1975, p. 93). The harassment, discrimination and isolation that LGBTQ students experience can be detrimental to their educational attainment. In consideration of the various challenges that LGBTQ students face, it is important that the campus environment is considerate of these challenges in order to assist them in reaching their educational goals.

Belonging and relating to other students with similar experiences can decrease feelings of marginalization and isolation. In the second stage of Cass’s theory of identity formation development (1984), the individual may begin isolating themselves from others. Peer mentors can be used to facilitate discussion and help establish a safe space for students to feel comfortable. Since previous research has shown that 18% of LGBT
individuals feel out of place or alone, support groups and discussions around LGBTQ issues can be used to show that students are not alone in their experiences (Human Rights Campaign, 2012).

Students who identify as LGBTQ may present various challenges that require further resources and information. These resources can include information on allies, the coming out process, policies and laws, campus resources, community resources, clubs and organizations, and psychological services. Making appropriate referrals to different resources is also an important way to support LGBTQ students.

Along with educating LGBTQ students on resources available to them, it is also important to educate non-LGBTQ students on community college campuses. This can create a shift in the campus climate and allow for a more welcoming and supportive environment for those who do identify as LGBTQ. As indicated earlier, researchers Tetreault et al., (2013) found that 65% of participants experienced unfair treatment from other students on campus. The incorporation of educating other students on campus on terminology use, perceptions, and diversity issues can increase awareness of students. Creating an environment of supporting diversity can increase the inclusiveness of students from different backgrounds. A study by the Human Rights Campaign (2012) study found that 27% of the 10,030 participants felt intolerance in the community, therefore, educating the campus community on diversity and LGBTQ issues can decrease intolerance.

Working collaboratively with other students on college campuses, and educating the overall campus population will allow for awareness of LGBTQ issues, and create inclusiveness for this hidden population of students. It is clear that this student population
needs support on college campuses, and a shift in campus climate. Data collected by Rankin (2003) indicated that LGBTQ students often lived oppressive experiences that “interfered with their ability to work or learn on campus” (Rankin, 2003, p. 24). Therefore, future direction should implement education of LGBTQ issues within the campus community to promote the overall well-being of LGBTQ students.

**Implications for Student Affairs Professionals**

Further implications for student affairs professionals are formed around campus policies, and a change towards a safe and supportive campus climate. Further research also should be done to assess other needs of this student population. Bringing more awareness to perceptions of campus climate from LGBTQ students can assist in future implementations of programs.

The implementation of a multicultural center would give students a safe space and facilitate a sense of community on community college campuses. One participant in a study by the Human Rights Campaign (2012) commented, “I wish I could meet more gay people to talk to and get to know” (Human Rights Campaign, 2012, p. 9). The inclusive environment will result in an increase in psychological well-being, and safety for LGBTQ students in college. Increasing the social networks on college campuses can be facilitated through the use of multicultural centers.

**Conclusion**

Introducing a brief explanation of various issues of LGBTQ individuals has been shown to increase awareness of this underrepresented student population. The psychological and safety concerns of students can hinder these students’ personal and academic goals, therefore requiring an implementation of interventions according to the
various barriers these students face is necessary. Support groups, resources and educating
the campus community can decrease psychological distress and safety concerns for
LGBTQ students.

With further research and comparison of LGBTQ students to different
populations of students, higher education professionals would have the opportunity to
gain insight of the unique needs of individuals who identify as LGBTQ. This population
of students face specific needs that faculty and staff must be aware of while working with
them. In the near future, community colleges should focus on allocating efforts towards
training staff and faculty members regarding LGBTQ issues. Appropriate terminology,
awareness of student development theory, and education of LGBTQ issues should be
implemented. Student development theories, such as Cass’s model of homosexual
identity formation, should be incorporated in trainings for staff and faculty. Having a
theoretical framework to work from will give higher education professionals a better
awareness of the interactions they have with students from the LGBTQ community.
The Effects of Sexual Assault on Women in College

Post-secondary institutions across the United States educate individuals from many different backgrounds and experiences. In order to provide appropriate services to diverse populations of students, appropriate programming and resources must be available. Appropriate programs would include support groups and resources for women who have experienced sexual assault. The amount of on-campus resources for state funded public colleges are dependent on various variables. The higher education budgeting processes, for the most part, is based on current costs, student enrollments and inflationary increases (Burke, 2002). Resources for college students also require the investigation of different student populations and the specific needs of that specific population. In 2012, 11,723,732 women, representing 56.8% of the total college population, were enrolled in postsecondary institutions, in comparison to 8,919,087 males (U.S Department of Education, 2013). There has been an increase in enrollment of women in college, as well as a high number of sexual assault and rape incidents in a woman’s lifetime. As a result, college campuses must explore the unique needs of women who have been victims of sexual assault and implement programs for students. As shown by data collected from 2011 shows that an estimated 13% of women have experienced sexual assault in their lifetime (Center for Disease Control and Prevention, 2011). In order to create an environment appropriate for women who have been sexually assaulted and raped, the implementation of support programs in college can be used to increase the social support networks available for college-aged women who have experienced sexual trauma. Through these programs, colleges can help facilitate an increase in the social, cognitive, and psychological well-being for this population. With
the use of empowerment and support services, there will be an increase of academic and personal success of women in college.

To gather information on the number of victimization cases on college campuses, the Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS) (2012) used a data collection method through the National Crime Victimization Survey (NCVS). Between 1993 and 2010, the NCVS collected self-reported data every 6 months to 3 years, from those who are 12 years old and older (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2012). The Bureau of Justice Statistics defined rape as:

Unlawful penetration of a person against the will of the victim, with use or threatened use of force, or attempting such an act. Rape includes psychological coercion and physical force, and forced sexual intercourse means vaginal, anal, or oral penetration by the offender. Rape also includes incidents where penetration is from a foreign object (e.g., a bottle), victimizations against male and female victims, and both heterosexual and homosexual rape. Attempted rape includes verbal threats of rape (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2012, p. 2)

The NCVS defines sexual assault as a range of victimizations that are separate from rape or attempted rape. Sexual assault may also include verbal threats, attacks or attempts of attacking a victim without their consent, with or without the use of force. (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2012).

The Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) collects data by using a survey called, the National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey (NISVS). Data collected from 2010 shows that nearly 1 in 5 women (18%) are affected by rape in their lifetime. These rates indicate that women suffer from sexually violent incidents at higher
rate than men, 1 in 71 of whom (1%) will experience sexual violence in their lifetimes (Center for Disease Control and Prevention, 2011). Data collected by the CDC in 2010 showed that 80% of the women experienced rape before 25 years old, similar to findings from the NCVS survey. Research shows that individuals between the ages of 18 and 24 were at high risk for violent victimizations, which is the traditional college age for women (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2012). Given that this population of students are at the highest risk for sexual assault, special needs programming should be directed towards this underrepresented student population.

**Literature Review**

**Impact of Sexual Violence**

Sexual violence is not always apparent when working with college students, but it is a concerning factor for women who may be attending college. Researchers, Thompson, Sitterle, Clay, and Kingree (2007), have found that college women who have been impacted by sexual violence are more likely keep their experience hidden from others, in comparison to women in the general population (Thompson et al., 2007). This shows that college women are reluctant to disclose their experience and are more likely to keep incidents hidden from peers, and faculty members in college. Thompson et al. (2007), presented different factors contributing to the low rates of reporting. Surveying 492 undergraduate women displayed various reasons for not reporting incidents. These included the thought that it “would be viewed as my fault, police could not do anything, scared of offender, not serious enough, shamed or embarrassed, did not want anyone to know, did not want police involved, and did not want offender to get in trouble” (Thompson et al., 2007, p. 280). The numerous reasons for the underreporting also varied
by the seriousness of the crime, victim-offender relationship, injury, weapon involved, location of the incident, and alcohol involvement (Thompson et al., 2007). The aspects of reporting the incident may decrease the recovery process for women, therefore indicating a change for on campus support resources.

Congruent with the data from past research, a study by Fisher, Daigle, Cullen, and Turner (2003), conducted research with 4,446 women participants in college. Their findings on the lack of reporting of sexually violent incidents were consistent with the study by Thompson and colleagues (2007). Only 2.1% of women reported to a police agency, and 4% reported to campus authorities (Fisher et al., 2003). A large number of women (approximately 70%) disclosed their experiences to a friend or family member more often than to authorities (Fisher et al., 2003). This shows that women often feel considerably more comfortable turning to friends or family for support.

**Disclosure of Sexual Violence to Others**

Although women may disclose their experiences to friends or family members at higher rates than to authorities, the reactions they receive from others can be vital for women who have been sexually assaulted. A study by researchers, Ullman and Peter-Hagene (2014), on 1,863 women who survived sexual assault, showed the significance of the reactions from others. Their findings show a correlation between these reactions and posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) symptoms. Symptoms of PTSD include recurrent memories, nightmares, negative physical symptoms such as numbness and distress, as well as an increased arousal response from external stimuli (NAMI PTSD, 2011). As shown in past research, the reactions and support from others can have the ability to either assist or hinder them in the recovery process (Ullman & Peter-Hagene, 2014).
Negative reactions from friends and family to disclosure can include, emotional withdrawal (i.e., spending less time with the victim), blaming the victim (i.e., they were not careful enough), and self-centered behaviors (i.e., placing their feelings before the victim’s) (Davis, Brickman & Baker, 1991). Measures of positive reactions to disclosure included providing emotional support (i.e., listening, and being there for the victim), practical daily assistance (i.e., helping with everyday tasks), and overall validation for the victim (Davis et al., 1991; Ullman, 2000). These reactions made a tremendous impact on the woman disclosing her experience with sexual assault. When women received negative reactions to their disclosure, they were more likely to have greater PTSD symptoms. Therefore, along with the traumatic experience of the sexual assault, the response from others can further their psychological symptoms, cause them to avoid seeking support from others, and engage in maladaptive coping mechanisms (Ullman & Peter-Hagene, 2014).

This research is consistent with findings from Frazier’s (2003) article, which suggested that if a woman disclosing an experience of sexual assault is met with blame from others, she is more likely to associate the assault with a sense of control of the event. This means that the woman who has experienced sexual assault will believe that she had control over the event, adding to further psychological distress (Frazier, 2003). Studies also suggest that women who have been sexually assaulted may also “feel their social networks are betraying them by responding negatively to their assault disclosure, they may engage in greater maladaptive coping to escape feelings of anger, sadness, or anxiety” (Ullman, Filipas, Townsend, & Starzynski, 2007, p. 497). The discouraging negative response from others can further impair the recovery process of women who
experienced sexual assault. These results show the importance of preparing higher education professionals and staff with the appropriate knowledge to work with students who have experienced sexual trauma in their life.

**Sexual Violence and Psychological Symptoms**

Although literature has shown that sexual assault is a prevalent concern in college aged women, there is a significant amount of under-reporting of incidents. With its prevalence, it is important to understand the various consequences of sexual assault for college women. The loss of control over one’s body can have various psychological repercussions for the individual involved. Post assault psychological distress can differ from individual to individual and present itself in various ways. The severity of post assault symptoms can also be dependent on characteristics such as personal traits, severity of the crime, memory of the crime, and perceived amount of control over the crime (Koss, Figueredo, & Prince, 2002; Frazier, 2003). Following the traumatic event, assault related symptoms can include an increase in panic, PTSD symptoms, shame, guilt, depression, substance abuse, and self-blame symptoms, which can be life changing for the individual involved (Koss et al., 2002). The psychological symptoms experienced post trauma can alter the life of that individual in many dimensions of their life, including their personal and academic development.

**Applicability of Bronfenbrenner’s Ecological Systems Theory of Development**

Women’s experiences with sexual assault can collide with other aspects of an individual’s life, including academics, work, and personal relationships. The result of this event can hinder growth and development in different areas of life as the victim progresses through them. Developmental psychologist Urie Bronfenbrenner (1994)
introduced the Ecological Systems Theory of Development to explain human development through the examination of the multiple contexts in which individuals live (Bronfenbrenner, 1994). Bronfenbrenner’s Developmental Theory (1994) emphasizes the importance of the individual’s life content, and proximal influences on the individual. His theory highlighted different contexts, or systems, including the Microsystem, Mesosystem, Exosystem, Macrosystem, and Chronosystem (Bronfenbrenner, 1994).

When examining post trauma psychological distress in an individual’s life, it may be found that many dimensions of their life are impacted, including their academic success.

**Academic Performance**

Assault related symptoms such as panic, PTSD, shame, guilt, depression, substance abuse, and self-blame place the individual at a higher risk of academic limitations in college. In a study by Combs, Jordan, and Smith (2014) researchers had a participant sample of 750 female college students with the primary goal of exploring the association of sexual assault and academic performance for women who had been sexually assaulted. Their research compared a sample of sexually assaulted women to women with no past experience of sexual assault, and found a difference in GPAs amongst the two groups. Women with prior sexual assault entered college with lower GPAs than non-victimized women and tended to receive lower grades through their first semester in college (Combs et al., 2014). These results show that academic success can be directly linked to grades earned by women who have been sexually assaulted (Combs et al., 2014, p. 196). Since this specific student population is at a disadvantage, in comparison to students with no victimization, additional resources and support should be provided in the higher education setting.
Vincent Tinto’s Student Integration Theory of Persistence

Suggestions from past research have shown that social integration has a major influence on persistence rates for college students (Tinto, 1975). A well-known example of this is provided through Vincent Tinto’s (1975) Student Integration Theory of Persistence, which highlights the importance integrating different student populations into the college, both academically and socially. Tinto (1975) proposed that the lack of integration can create low commitment to the institution, which leads to premature dropout (Tinto, 1975). The availability of appropriate social networks and support groups for women who have been sexually assaulted can increase integration and persistence in college. Appropriate resources, programs, and interactions can provide students with the opportunity to integrate into the campus community, along with interacting with others they can relate to.

Implications

Along with a supportive college environment, relating to others with similar experiences can help victims of sexual violence who often have feelings of loneliness, and marginalization on college campuses. Since about 70% of women who had been sexually assaulted disclosed their experience to a friend rather than authorities, these women may feel more comfortable sharing with those with similar experiences (Fisher et al., 2003). Creating a safe environment for college women can provide support that they may not have received previously.

Programs must be designed and tailored with the specific needs of this population. Assessing the effectiveness of programs must be done through the use of student learning outcomes, which serve the purpose of improving the delivery of the program. Assessment
will determine whether or not the program benefits the social, cognitive, and psychological well-being for the target population of college women who have been sexually assaulted.

**Conclusion**

Past research has presented various implications of sexual assault and the severe consequences it has for women. Although the repercussions of sexual assault have had a considerable amount of research, future research should focus on examining the direct impact of sexual assault and academic success. With the main goal of college being to educate and graduate students, under represented student populations may not be given appropriate pathways to assist them in their academic success, and overall well-being in college. The different systems involved in these women’s lives are impacted while they are not receiving help for post sexual assault symptoms, which in turn affects various aspects of their life. The importance of programs on college campuses can act as crucial support systems for women who may not have the support in their personal lives. Therefore, creating a positive and comfortable environment for women who have been sexually assaulted can be beneficial for their overall well-being, and recovery process.
The Importance of Strengths-Based Programs on Employment for Student Veterans

Veterans are a distinct group of individuals who enter college with unique experiences. Student veterans often face difficulties in academic and personal realms of life due to challenges associated with serving in the military. Consecutively, these students return from serving in the military with acquired cognitive and psychological impairments that may cause challenges in the search for employment. The implementation of Strengths-Based programming for student veterans with cognitive and psychological impairments resulting from military service will improve the post-graduation employment outlook for student veterans.

The U.S Census Bureau uses the American Community Survey to collect annual data on characteristics of the U.S population. Data collected in 2013 found an estimate of 19,588,586 veterans, majority of whom are males (92%), between the ages of 18-54 (U.S Census Bureau, 2013). The American Community Survey also found that 7,109,286 had some college education or an associate’s degree, in comparison to 54,113,436 nonveterans (U.S Census Bureau, 2013). The employment status of veterans showed an estimated 10% unemployment rate (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2013), which can be challenging for veterans who need to work to provide for themselves and their family.

Veterans receive benefits including financial, health and educational benefit services from the U.S Department of Veteran Affairs (VA). Veterans have opportunities of educational attainment through the Post-9/11 GI Bill program benefit packages. The Post-9/11 GI Bill is program that provides veterans who served on active duty after September 10, 2001, with educational benefits. Veterans have the opportunity to further their education and skills training through this program. According to the Department of
Veteran Affairs, approximately 754,229 used the Post-9/11 education benefits in 2013 (VA, 2013). Although students receive financial assistance and support to obtain an education, college campuses lack the use of strengths-based programming. Strengths-Based programming can be used to identify and focus on the strengths of an individual and thereby assist student veterans during the employment search process.

With an expected increase of 30% in enrollment into post-secondary education due to the use of educational benefits, student veterans require additional support in college while preparing for the workforce.

Student veterans have unique needs that should be addressed throughout their educational attainment process. It is important for higher education institutions to understand the different challenges that student veterans face in relation to their employment search. The post-graduation employment outlook for student veterans can be increased with the implementation of Strength-Based programs on college campuses. Along with understanding the needs and challenges of student veterans during the search for employment, higher education professionals must consider and have an understanding of the various transition processes that student veterans may be experiencing. Higher education professionals can utilize Nancy Schlossberg’s transition model (1984) as a framework while working with student veterans.

**Applicability of Nancy K. Schlossberg’s Transition Theory to Student Veterans**

In learning about the various barriers that this population of students face, a transition model such as Nancy Schlossberg’s (1984) transition theory can be utilized by higher education professionals while assisting veteran college students in the career development process. Schlossberg’s transition theory (1984) focuses on the transitional
issues that can impact individuals during a change that requires transitioning into. As defined by theorist Nancy Schlossberg (1984), a transition is defined as an event, or non-event, that causes a change in an individual’s life. Veterans experience multiple transitions in their life, including moving into the military service, returning back to civilian life, and transitioning into the work force. In order to effectively provide support for student veterans, student affairs professionals and college counselors must understand the different dimensions of transition that student veterans experience.

The model (1984) has four major components associated with a transition, which include transition identification, coping, and resources for individuals in transition. Identifying a transition is dependent on the subjective perception of the event. Schlossberg (1984) explains that how an individual perceives the transition can also change the degree of which they are impacted by the transition. Another factor that can increase the stress of veterans is dependent on the type of transition. Schlossberg (1984) such as anticipated (expected to occur) or unanticipated (not predicted, or planned) can also increase the distress involved with such transitions. Life altering transitions involved in a veteran’s life can produce stress and difficulties in adjustment. For instance, veterans can find their selves in transitions in unexpected deployment, and the transition back into civilian life.

In an effort to understand factors that influence the ability to cope with the transition, authors Anderson, Goodman, & Schlossberg (2011) introduce the four S’s. The four S’s include situation, self, support, and strategies. The situation involves the event itself, and characteristics such as the timing, duration and previous factors involved with the situation. The individual’s perception of control they had over the event can also
cause changes in the transitional process. The second “S” includes factors of the self, which are personal characteristics, and psychological influences of the individual. The third factor, support, includes the relationships, communities, and resources that can support the individual cope with the transition. Finally, strategies, are the ways in which the person actually copes with the transition (Anderson, Goodman, & Schlossberg, 2011). It is important to consider these different factors, since they can either assist in, or hinder the individual during various life events.

The Department of Veteran Affairs (2014) explains the various challenges associated with serving in the military. These include feelings associated with uncertainty, fear, family separation, and loss of societal relationships which can lead to lower levels of confidence. The repercussions associated with transitional issues experienced by student veterans can be hindering to their overall development in education, as well as the outlook of their employment attainment. Considering the various experiences of veterans, it is important for higher education professionals to support veterans with their unique needs while transitioning into the workforce.

**Service-related Disabilities**

Cognitive and psychological disabilities are prevalent among student veteran populations as a result of serving in the military. The United States Census Bureau states that a mental disability can occur because of a physical, psychological, or emotional condition that lasts 6 months or more, and causes difficulties in learning, remember, or concentrating (U.S Census Bureau, 2014). The American Community Survey collected data in 2012, and found that 20% of veterans had service-related disabilities. Comorbidity is also prevalent for veterans, where military service results in the acquisition of more
than one distinct condition (Comorbidity, 2010). The comorbidity of cognitive and psychological issues can impact various realms of a student veteran’s life. Given the serious nature of the cognitive and psychological repercussions of serving in the military, professionals must collaborate with other professionals in supporting student veterans.

Psychological disabilities, such as acquired brain injuries (ABI) and traumatic brain injuries (TBI), can hinder a student veteran’s cognitive growth and development. According to the Defense Centers of Excellence for Psychological Health & Traumatic Brain Injury (DCOE) (2010), brain injuries can be the result of external traumatic events, such as blasts, explosions, bullets, falls, or other forces obtained during experiences in the military. The trauma can be on the spectrum from mild, to severe and cause cognitive, speech, language and behavioral issues for veterans (“Brain Injury Pocket Guide”, 2010). Veterans can have altered concentration, attention, organization, planning, memory, thought processing speed, and self-awareness due to the brain injury. The repercussions of brain injuries can cause student veterans difficulties in the employment process, given that higher level functioning is a necessity for employment. These functional changes can cause productivity problems for veterans, such as memorization or completing a task.

The National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) (2011) shows that experiencing traumatic events can alter the way the brain works. As a result of serving in the military, veterans may have developed Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). The mental disorder can develop when the traumatic event threatens death or injury to the individual or others while serving in the military. Along with this, the severity of the mental disorder can depend on the severity and repeated exposure of the traumatic event (NAMI, 2011). PTSD can be a crippling mental condition given the symptoms involved, including fear,
heightened arousal and reactivity, helplessness, insomnia, or negative cognitions and emotional state (NAMI, 2011). The heightened arousal and sensitivity can cause difficulties in the workplace for student veterans, since stimulus from the environment can be emotional for veterans.

Symptoms involved with PTSD can affect one’s ability to perform, in comparison to individuals who do not suffer from PTSD symptoms in the workforce. The confidence levels of veterans are also impacted as a result of the various unstable psychological issues associated with PTSD, therefore the use of positive psychology can increase the overall psychological well-being of student veterans. Given the extent of the disability, career counselors and college counselors must collaborate to support and facilitate the development of the student veteran while in college.

**Literature Review**

Current literature provides background on the limitations that can impact the employment attainment for veterans. As shown by research, cognitive and psychological limitations such as PTSD symptoms can hinder the employment outlook for veterans (Larson & Norman, 2014; Erbes, Westermeyer, Engdahl, and Johnsen, 2007). Therefore implementing the use of positive psychology can increase the awareness of strengths, assisting veterans throughout the employment attainment process (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000).

**Functional Limitations**

Veterans have shown to experience functional problems and impairments across various domains of their lives. Researchers Larson and Norman (2014) found that Iraq or Afghanistan veterans had a difficult time in reintegrating into civilian life, due to their
experiences serving in the military. Participants included 2,116 veterans that were assessed before separation from the military, and followed up again during reintegration back to civilian life through a survey. Researchers hypothesized that PTSD symptoms can be predictors for the functional difficulties that veterans experience. Therefore, their research on the functional limitations of these veterans showed a correlation between levels of PTSD and work-related functioning. PTSD was a significant risk factor for financial problems, with results indicating that with “every 1 standard deviation increase in PTSD symptom score, the odds of having financial problems increased” as well as the “odds of having work-related problems increased” (Larson & Norman, 2014, p. 421). In comparison to non-veteran individuals, veterans have a disadvantage in mental health issues. Therefore, the use of strengths through positive psychology can increase the employment outlook for veterans. Utilizing a positive and strengths based approach can result in an increase in self-confidence for student veterans.

Consistent with these findings, another study by Erbes, Westermeyer, Engdahl, and Johnsen (2007) studied 120 veterans that returned from Iraq or Afghanistan. These veterans were evaluated based on their levels of PTSD, depression, alcohol abuse, quality of life, and mental health service utilization (Erbes et al., 2007). As expected, the study found that levels of PTSD had a high correlation with a reduction of overall quality of life across many dimensions (Erbes et al., 2007, p. 362).

Employment Outcomes of Student Veterans

A study by Faberman and Foster (2013) examined the relationship between recent veterans and employment outcomes. Researchers utilized the Current Population Survey assessment tool, which collects characteristics and employment data of individuals.
Researchers hypothesized that the increase of unemployment rates of recent veterans can be contributed to various factors. These factors include the age of veterans, since they tend to be younger and less educated than the average employee. The difference in the military versus civilian life is also expected to impact the employment outcome for veterans. High unemployment may be contributed cognitive and psychological trauma experienced by veterans during wartime (Faberman & Foster, 2013, p.12). Considering the negative employment outlook for veterans due to service-related factors, implications for professionals in the field of higher education include various methods of promoting success in finding employment.

Positive Psychology and Student Veterans

According to psychologists Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi (2000), positive psychology is a branch of psychology that builds off the positive qualities and strengths of individuals, rather than attempting to repair the negatives. The application of positive psychology can be beneficial for student veterans, given that the strengths of individuals are highlighted rather than their weaknesses. Utilizing the positive psychology approach can increasing the mental health state of veterans.

Assisting veterans with service-related disabilities should include the use of human strengths and the potential to use them as an advantage. Building off the positive qualities of individuals can help raise the level of functioning of that person. Authors, Sushok and Hulme (2006) believe in the need to “enable students to identify, understand, and leverage their talents, passions, and strengths” (Shushok & Hulme, 2006, p. 4). Given that higher education is not merely intended to promote learning in the classroom setting, Strength-based programming can facilitate the identification of strengths that may
not have been easily identified in other realms of a student veteran’s life (Shushok & Hulme, 2006).

Incorporating skills and experiences that veterans have gained from the military can be transferable to the workforce. According to the U.S Department of Veteran Affairs, veterans can bring valuable characteristics, skills and assets to the workforce. Veterans have characteristics which include a strong work ethic, strong team membership, sense of duty, self-awareness, flexibility, organization, adaptability, mission oriented, resiliency and creativity that can contribute greatly to the workforce (Crosby, 2010). Many of these characteristics may not be perceived as positive traits by student veterans, but a strengths-based approach can increase the self-awareness of student veterans. Consequently, facilitating the awareness of these traits can be utilized to increase their self-confidence in the employment attainment process.

The determination and persistence of veterans can be transferred into the world of work and be emphasized during the employment search process. Veterans possess the qualities that many employers value, including the ability to have a sense of direction and the ability to perform under various circumstances (Crosby, 2010). The orientation of a positive psychology model in programs for student veterans can increase awareness of these strengths. While veterans may have the valuable characteristics, they may not perceive them as positive strengths that can be highlighted. Considering the possible constructive impact of using a positive psychology approach with veterans, colleges must assist veterans in connecting them with their strengths. Assessment tools, such as StrengthsFinder, can be used to increase self-awareness throughout the employment attainment process (Rath, 2007).
StrengthsFinder

The importance of gaining awareness of the positive attributes that veterans possess can be found by using an assessment tool called StrengthsFinder. The Gallup Organization’s StrengthsFinder program is an individualized, online assessment tool that introduces individuals to the strengths they possess (Rath, 2007). This Strength-based approach de-emphasizes on the societal focus on negatives and weaknesses, and is used to assist individuals discover their many strengths. StrengthsFinder can be accessed online, and provides individuals with an overview and description of their top five strengths, out of a total of 34 strength themes (Rath, 2007).

Implementing a Strength-based approach to programming for student veterans can provide them with the awareness of strengths they may not have been aware of. For instance, veterans experience different environmental situations that require adapting to, which can be a relevant strength when entering the workforce. Adaptability is one of the StrengthsFinder themes, which is described as the ability to respond to the demands of the moment, even if they are sudden and not expected (Rath, 2007, p. 45). The combat experiences of veterans required adaptability to the demands of many events, therefore this skill can be transferred to the workplace. Another StrengthsFinder theme is responsibility, which is described as ones ownership and dependability in whatever the individual is committed to (Rath). Facilitating the discovery of different strengths can assist student veterans in understanding strengths that can make them valuable assets in the workforce.

These students can learn how to compensate for the limitations they face with the use of the strengths they possess. It is important to higher education professionals to use
positive psychology while working with students who have acquired brain injuries and psychological disorders, which result in functional limitations (Erbes et al., 2007; “Brain Injury Pocket Guide”, 2010; Larson & Norman, 2014; NAMI, 2011; U.S Census Bureau, 2014). Therefore, using strength-based programming can highlight the aspects of the individual that are right, rather than wrong (Shushok & Hulme, 2006).

**Limitations and Future Research**

Based on current literature, there is little research conducted on the effects of Strength-based programs on college campuses. Therefore future studies should assess the effectiveness of positive psychology used in programming for student veterans. Although various studies have examined the different cognitive and psychological repercussions of serving in the military, there has been little focus on accurate factors that impact the employment outlook for veterans. Further limitations are found in the lack of research conducted on veterans in the workplace. Research should include strengths that veterans possess and how these can be utilized in the workforce.

Furthermore, the current studies used have focused on the various symptoms that veteran’s experience, but have a limited sample size. A limited sample size can cause difficulties in generalization of results to diverse populations of individuals. Aside from this, many studies have a larger participant size of males, which is unrepresentative of experiences that women have in post-military service. The service-related experiences that women have can differ from males, as well as in their employment outlook due to gender differences. Furthering research should include a larger sample size that is representative of the larger veteran community.
Conclusion

Findings from various studies have examined the severe impacts that serving in the military can have on the personal, academic and professional development of student veterans. Connecting these symptoms with the employment outlook of veterans has shown that these students have many limitations. The implementation of Strength-Based programming on college campuses can give veterans the opportunity to have awareness and an understanding of the strengths they possess. Military service can provide veterans with traits that are needed for success. These traits include but are not limited to flexibility, compassion, team work, commitment, adaptability, strong work ethic, and resiliency (Crosby, 2010). The implementation of a strength-based approach can help build off of these skills, improving personal awareness for veterans.
The Attempt of Accessing Higher Education: Undocumented Students

With over 11.2 million undocumented individuals living in the United States (Educators for Fair Consideration, 2012), it is important to understand how undocumented students are hindered in their education due to their unauthorized immigration status. Of these, there were a total of 65,000 undocumented students who had lived in the United States for more than five years after graduating from high school (Educators for Fair Consideration, 2012). With 7,000-13,000 enrolled in college in the United States, the specific challenges that these students often face while pursuing higher education, including social and economic challenges, need to be considered while working with these students (Educators for Fair Consideration, 2012). Factors such as personal challenges, financial challenges, and overall access impacts undocumented students. With the continuous increase in undocumented students attending college, it is important that college counselors and higher education professionals have awareness of the various equity concerns that undocumented students face, with the goal of supporting undocumented students in college.

A large percentage of the undocumented student population strives to reach personal goals in higher education, but have a limited number of pathways when pursuing higher education. The limitations and challenges undocumented students struggle with can hinder them from pursuing college. According to data collected from the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), there is a national average college enrollment of 66%, whereas undocumented students enroll in college between 5-10% (NCES, 2007). With the lack of educational equality and access for this student population, there is a gap between potential and opportunity for these students.
The focus for undocumented students includes increasing access to enrollment and degree completion for these students by increasing support for this population students, as well as the implementation of programs targeting financial guidance throughout the college experience. Addressing the different obstacles that hinder undocumented students in educational attainment can allow for pathways and opportunities for these students. How a student’s documentation status affects undocumented students in the postsecondary education system will be addressed through examples of policies and implications. Undocumented students face specific challenges that their non-undocumented counterparts may not necessarily face. This gap of educational opportunities for these students restricts them from reaching their potential in personal and academic development. Higher education professionals should be aware of barriers and lack of equal access to education, with undocumented students in mind.

**Undocumented Students and Higher Education**

The Educators for Fair Consideration (2012) defines an undocumented student as an individual who originally entered from a foreign country illegally and without proper inspection, or entered the United States legally as a nonimmigrant but stayed in the United States without authorization (Educators for Fair Consideration, 2012).

Students who are undocumented often entered the United States at a young age, grew up without the knowledge of their immigration status, and believe that they are citizens with equal rights and access to education. These students are often unaware of their status until they are applying for a job, federal financial aid, college admission, or for a driver’s license (Nguyen & Serna, 2014). However, their lack of legal documentation restricts their access to the same opportunities in comparison to their peers.
with legal immigration status, including the opportunity of achieving the American Dream (Arriola & Murphy, 2010). The lack of resources and equity places these undocumented students at a disadvantage in comparison to documented students. According to Espinoza (2007), equity is “associated with fairness or justice in the provision of education or other benefits and it takes individual circumstances into consideration” (p. 345). This involves the suggestion that there is fairness and equality for those who are attempting to pursue a higher education.

Higher education is valued by many and is considered to be vital to the success of individuals in a democratic society; therefore, giving those living in the United States a belief in having the opportunity for upward mobility (Diaz-Strong, Gomez, Luna-Duarte, & Meiners, 2010). Arriola and Murphy (2010) define The American Dream as a system of aspirational beliefs held by those who “come to the United States from abroad, and through hard work and perseverance, achieve [their] dreams and realize success” (p. 27). This suggests that through hard work and commitment, individuals can achieve what they want to achieve. This is not the case for undocumented students who have much less access and fewer opportunities to higher education (Arriola & Murphy, 2010, p. 27).

Financial and personal challenges are often barriers for undocumented students who wish to obtain further education. According to Diaz-Strong, Gomez, Luna-Duarte, and Meiners (2010), undocumented students’ legal status makes them ineligible for any type of federal aid and most scholarships, therefore requiring them to pay out of pocket for tuition, often at higher out-of-state rates. Compared to the tuition paid by international students, undocumented students can be charged three to seven times more (Abrego, 2006).
Undocumented students are met with challenges of inequality because of their immigration status, which can create barriers when these students are attempting to reach their academic or personal goals. For example, an undocumented student named Ernesto told the story of his older brother, a high-achieving high school student, and his experience with attaining an education, a common experience among undocumented students (Abrego, 2006). Although Ernesto valued education, he was at a disadvantage because he couldn’t afford the non-resident tuition fee for college.

The lack of resources and support for this underrepresented student population creates a major barrier for them. According to Diaz-Strong and colleagues (2010), denial of access can be symbolic for keeping this stigmatized population further powerless and oppressed. This method of restraining access to higher education has been used historically to limit power to certain populations and communities (Diaz-Strong et al., 2010). Diaz-Strong and colleagues (2010), showed that these students often lack the ability to move up in the economy because of their restriction. Mario, a community college graduate, presented his frustration while explaining his experience as an undocumented student. He expressed, "There are so many things you can't do and so many limitations that make you feel out of place and make you feel like your arms and legs are tied up and you can't move” (Diaz-Strong et al., 2010 p. 30). Feeling different than their non-undocumented counterparts can cause difficulties for these students in all aspects of their life.

Although there are 65,000 undocumented students that have lived in the United States for five or more years after graduating high school, there are only 7,000-13,000 enrolled in college. With 7,000-13,000 enrolled in college in the United States, it is
important to understand the specific challenges that these students often face while pursuing higher education (Educators for Fair Consideration, 2012). As higher education professionals increase their knowledge of the challenges that undocumented students face, they become more likely to support, advocate for, and assist this student population. As previously shown, undocumented students face many challenges, but have a limited number of pathways when pursuing higher education. Those who do attend college are often at risk for disengagement and their immigration status may have an impact on their retention and graduation rates (Ellis & Chen, 2013). Their disengagement in college can be attributed to the awareness they have of their limitations, thus leading to a lack of motivation in school (Abrego, 2006). Without motivation, these students have a difficult time in persisting throughout college.

Undocumented individuals are ineligible for federal aid, drivers’ licenses, Social Security numbers, and legal work opportunities (AB 540, 2001). Obtaining basic essentials, such as a driver’s license, social security number, and the opportunity to work can be especially challenging since can impede day to day activities that are needed by individuals. When attending college, these daily tasks can be essential to success as a student. When higher education professionals can understand the challenges and barriers undocumented students face, they are better able to provide more resources that can benefit this population of students.

**Personal Challenges of Undocumented Students**

Undocumented students face multiple stressors, such as their illegal immigration status and the associated stigma, which other students do not necessarily face. Many undocumented students share feelings of marginalization because of the stigma
associated with being undocumented. Researcher Abrego (2008) interviewed an undocumented student, Elizabeth, who shared that she hated that she and her undocumented peers were called “illegal aliens” (p. 723). Their research also showed that this label caused undocumented students to feel, “a constant reminder that undocumented college students were different, vulnerable, and considered suspect” (Abrego, 2008, p 723). Undocumented students’ immigration status makes them feel marginalized, and as though they are a suspect in the eyes of society (Abrego, 2008).

Research by Ellis and Chen (2013) showed that not only does society stigmatize those who are undocumented, but that these individuals also have started to stigmatize themselves (Ellis & Chen, 2013). With the idea that these students are not wanted in society can arise feelings of guilt. For example, Nancy expressed how her status impacts her in every part of her life. Nancy said, “Sometimes I feel like I’m a burden. Sometimes I feel like I’m too much of a trouble, like I’m not worth it” (Ellis & Chen, 2013, p. 259). This blame and guilt can cause stress for students, and can hinder their success in their academics as well. Pepe, an undocumented student, shared how she felt the stigmatization, saying, “we have been stigmatized with these stereotypes that we’re here to take other peoples jobs and the opportunities of others” (Ellis & Chen, 2013, p. 259).

Along with these psychological feelings of marginalization, students also present feelings of fear and embarrassment related to their undocumented status. Mateo expressed feeling both embarrassed and fearful, often hiding this part of his life from others (Abrego, 2008). Undocumented students often live two lives, in which they are attempting to both fit in society, as well as keep secrets about themselves on a daily basis (Arriola and Murphy, 2010). Undocumented students also face the fear of deportation on a
daily basis. In relation to fear, Pepe said, ”unfortunately we, us, undocumented immigrants have this fear, this omen, that if you express yourself that you’re going to be kicked out of this country” (Ellis & Chen, 2013, p. 258). With blame, embarrassment, and fear, amongst other emotions, undocumented students live with limitations because of their undocumented status. With blame, embarrassment, and fear, amongst other emotions, undocumented students live with limitations because of their undocumented status. While working with these students, it is vital for higher education professionals to consider the multiple psychological symptoms undocumented students struggle with due to their immigration status.

**Financial Challenges of Undocumented Students**

Denial of access to higher education due to financial constraints is the biggest barrier for undocumented students. There is a denial of resources, such as financial aid, and limited eligibility for scholarships, which creates inequality and lack of upward mobility for these students (Díaz-Strong et al., 2010). As stated by Diaz-Strong et al. (2010), the majority of undocumented students pay for college out of pocket, with family assistance, and scholarships (Díaz-Strong et al, 2010). Although scholarships are available for students, they are often very limited for students who are undocumented. An interview with Lupe, a 23 year old student in a 4-year university, explained her experience with scholarships. She commented:

It’s competitive. There’s so many undocumented students graduating every year and they send us to like three names or three institutions and how do they expect that, I mean, it’s crazy. It’s very few organizations- all this cash for students who are undocumented- that’s not true. If you look at them and go through the [list],
there’s only like two that you can apply for because the rest are for people in California or people in very specific places (Diaz-Strong et al., 2010, p. 112).

Although there are opportunities to apply to scholarships, there is a limited amount for those who do not have a social security number (Diaz-Strong et al., 2010). The inequality of opportunities to obtain funding for college puts undocumented students at a disadvantage when attempting to pursue a higher education.

Undocumented students report financial difficulties as their biggest challenge while attempting to pursue higher education. Federal financial aid opportunities are not available; therefore, undocumented students generally turn to family support to pay for school. Family support is vital to undocumented students, and often impacts multiple family members who contribute to paying for college. In an interview with Diaz-Strong et al., Diana discusses her sisters’ and mother’s roles in helping her pay for college (p.113). Another student, Irene, discusses the difficulty of paying out of pocket for classes. She expressed, “I have to tell my dad in advance how much it’s going to be around approximately. So every week he has to put money aside. So I could only take two classes per semester, so unfortunately it keeps me slow” (Diaz-Strong et al., 2010, p. 113). Undocumented students must find different resources for paying for classes, which can cause them to remain part time students, impacting their retention and graduation rates. For students like Irene, taking two classes at a time can be challenging and make it a struggle to persist in college (Diaz-Strong et al., 2010).

Although four year universities do not ban undocumented students from applying to their campuses, community colleges are often the best option for undocumented students (Diaz-Strong et al., 2010). These students may find community college as the
most accessible and affordable pathway before starting their journey into higher education (Diaz-Strong et al., 2010). When conducting their research, Diaz-Strong et al. (2010), showed that participants wanted to attend a four-year institution but weren’t able to afford it. Students often expressed, “It wasn’t like I chose. It was more like I was forced. I actually wanted to go to a university, but I couldn’t afford it” (Diaz-Strong et al., 2010, p. 111). Tuition is a main factor when students are in the decision making process for college. Another student explained, “I went and applied to three universities, and I was accepted to all of them, and I just had to decide according to financial matters” (Diaz-Strong et al, 2010, p. 112). Experiences such as these are common at community colleges or universities. Students who may want to attend a four-year university are not able to because of lack of funding, and the inequality placed upon undocumented students for educational attainment.

**Laws and Policies**

The differentiation between documented students versus undocumented students is a major concern for stakeholders, including the community, students and professionals in the field of college counseling and student affairs. Harmon, Carne, Lizardy-Hajbi, and Wilkerson (2010) argued that the primary concern for practitioners should be to balance social justice, equity, and equality for undocumented students (Harmon, 2010). Undocumented students do not receive any federal aid, and are charged out of state tuition for most states, with only 18 states allowing students to pay in state tuition (Student tuition, 2014). One argument of those who are in opposition to undocumented students paying in-state tuition is that they do not believe it is an effective use of their taxpayer dollars (Harmon et al., 2010). However, Perry (2009) counters that education is
important in consideration of social mobility in a democratic society, and allows individuals to move forward (Perry, 2009). A democratic education is defined to be one that allows individuals to become free of oppression, with the idea that individuals are in control of their own learning (Perry, 2009). Without equal access to education, undocumented individuals have less flexibility to contribute to larger society. Perry (2009) shows that equality is considered to be one of the concepts involved in the democratic education policy. This concept entails that there is equal opportunity in regards to education; but when taking a closer look at the policies and experiences of undocumented students, equality is not shown to be a part of their experiences. Laws that allow for better access to higher education would contribute to both individual and societal development (Perry, 2009). When undocumented students can have the freedom to obtain a higher education, they would be able to provide a large contribution in society.

There are multiple laws that impact access to education for undocumented students, including Plyler V. Doe, AB 540, The DREAM Act (The Development Relief and Education for Alien Minors Act), Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA), and the California Dream Act. Plyler V. Doe (1982), provided access for undocumented students in the K-12 schooling system, no matter their immigration status. After the passing of Plyler v. Doe in 1982, states were prohibited from denying students access to public K-12 education and from discriminating against students based on their citizenship status. However, this law does not extend beyond the K-12 education system to higher and postsecondary education, which hinders the progress of many undocumented students (Nguyen & Serna, 2014).
Another bill that impacts undocumented students in California is Assembly Bill 540 (AB 540), which was passed in 2001. With certain requirements, the AB 540 law allows undocumented students to pay in-state tuition rather than out-of-state tuition. Requirements for eligibility include attending a high school in California for three or more full academic years, must graduate from a California high school or have a GED, must be enrolled in a higher education institution in California, must file an affidavit form which states the student will apply for legal residency, and must not hold a non-immigrant visa (AB 540, 2001). The AB540 legislation is intended to create more opportunities for undocumented college students.

The DREAM Act was created in 2011 to pave a path for undocumented individuals to obtain legal residency in the United States (Dream Act, 2011). Before the DREAM Act, those who arrived in the United States at a young age were only able to obtain legal residency depending on their parent’s immigration status. After the passing of the DREAM Act, undocumented students have had the opportunity to apply independently for temporary legal residency, which can lead to permanent legal status. To be eligible one must have come to the United States by at least age 15, stayed in the United States for at least five years, maintained good standing, earned a high school diploma or GED, and be under 32 years of age (Dream Act, 2011). Providing a path to legalization for undocumented students with the DREAM Act, gives these students more opportunity for economic freedom, and fewer legal limitations than individuals who have legal documentation. The DREAM Act benefits students since they would be legally able to work, drive, and go to school with less fear of deportation. Although financial aid
is still unavailable for undocumented students, they are eligible for work study as well as
loans (Dream Act, 2011).

In order to provide more equitable access for undocumented students to higher
education, other policies have also been introduced. A policy passed in 2012 by President
Obama was Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA), and was meant for those
who arrived in the United States as children, and have been shown not to pose a threat to
society. According to Schmid (2013), President Obama’s policy was passed to “allow
immigration enforcement officials to focus their resources on those who have committed
crimes, rather than deporting young people who actively participate in society and were
brought as children to the USA by their parents” (Schmid, 2013, p. 697). Individuals who
meet the requirements for DACA are able to avoid deportation for a period of two years
(DACA, n.d.). Undocumented students eligible for deferred action are also eligible for
employment during this period. Although DACA does not change immigration status, it
prevents the individual from being deported while deferred action is in effect. Those
approved for DACA can temporarily obtain authorization to work, a social security card,
and a California driver’s license (DACA, n.d.). This can be beneficial for undocumented
students since obtaining legal work and a driver’s license are important daily activities
for students and allow for some obstacles to be cleared for these students. With this
policy, students are able to obtain a driver’s license which can give them more stability in
their transportation to and from school. The ability to work can give undocumented
students more access to basic essentials needed for students. Although DACA provides
only temporary relief from deportation, it can put undocumented students at ease for two
years with a possibility of extension. DACA can provide undocumented students with a decrease in the financial burden as a result of the opportunity to work.

Although undocumented students are not typically eligible for federal financial aid, California is one of few states that allows undocumented students to be eligible for federal student aid if they meet certain qualifications for the California Dream Act. To qualify, students must have attended a minimum of three full years in a California public or private high school, must have passed the California High School Proficiency Exam (CHSPE) or earned a General Equivalency Diploma (GED), must be enrolled in a higher education institution, and must have submitted an affidavit form showing they will be filing for residency (California Dream Act, n.d.). California is one of five states that allows students who meet these qualifications to pay the same tuition as students with in-state resident status would for college, (Student tuition, 2014). While some states gives undocumented students the opportunity to apply for admission to college, some states such as, South Carolina, Alabama and Georgia completely ban undocumented students from attending any public college or university (Educators for Fair Consideration, 2012). Completely banning these students from obtaining any access to education displays the amount of inequality and discrimination this population struggles with.

**Application of Laura Rendón’s Theory of Validation**

Laura Rendón’s Validation theory (1994), was created specifically for non-traditional students, including women and culturally diverse students. Undocumented students can be included in this population based on similar characteristics they possess. These students are often underrepresented, marginalized and from low-income households, which puts them at a disadvantage from other students (Diaz-Strong et al.,
2010). Using Laura Rendón’s Validation theory (1994) when working with students who face such difficulties is needed, since validation is something that they may not experience in their lives. Laura Rendón (1994) shows that validation has various elements involved with it. For example, validation is used to empower and support students through their academics. Validating students through college assists them in increasing their self-efficacy and how capable they feel about learning. Rendón (1994) explains that validation can be used both inside as well as outside of the classroom and through various methods to empower students (Rendón, 1994, pp. 44-45).

The role of validation for non-traditional students is emphasized by this theory (Rendón, 1994). Validation also entails involvement in opportunities such as events on campus, which can also allow undocumented students to be a part of the campus community. Their personal experiences can be used to show that they are capable of being successful in a learning environment. Faculty and higher education professionals should make personal connections with students, and work collaboratively with students, showing that they are cared about by faculty and staff on campus.

**Implications**

With careful consideration of the challenging experiences undocumented students face, higher education professionals are better able to serve and empower this student population College counselors and student affairs professionals gaining a better understanding of an undocumented student’s worldview can allow for better interactions with students from this population. Additionally, higher education professionals can more successfully advocate for policy changes and further opportunities for these students based on their increased understanding. As argued by Ellis and Chen (2013), serving as a
voice for this marginalized population and providing different resources should be the
goal for professionals. It is often that undocumented students are not aware of the effects
of being undocumented until attempting to gain entrance to college, when they are met
with various challenges. It is important to connect students with resources and other
advocates in order to provide them with different options they may have for more access
to college.

Through research by Abrego (2006), it was shown that although many students
may face similar challenges, undocumented students face legal and financial barriers that
citizens may not. According to Abrego (2006), these barriers can, “lower the aspirations”
(p. 217), and lower the chances of persistence for students. Since the undocumented
student population is at risk for lower persistence and premature disengagement,
professionals in the field must take this in consideration when working with
undocumented students. Creating support programs specific support programs for
undocumented students on college campuses would be beneficial since they would cater
specifically to this underrepresented and at-risk student population.

Ellis and Chen (2013), showed that participants in their study presented positive
personal attributes, despite the legality struggles they had. These students used these
positive attributes, and they, “reframed their experience in a positive light” (p. 260).
These researchers showed that educators working with undocumented students can focus
on success and accomplishments, which can help prevent disengagement. Harmon et al.,
(2010), argued that rather than considering undocumented students as “illegals”, they
should be provided with support to emphasize their strengths and cultural diversity
Harmon et al., 2010). Using this strengths based focus can help students in their future as well as facilitate their contribution within society (Harmon et al., 2010).

Gildersleeve (2010), emphasized the impact college counselors and admission officers have on the lives of undocumented students. He argued that the job of student affairs professionals is to assist in increasing college opportunities for undocumented students (Gildersleeve, 2010). With access to college being a political battle for these students, student affairs professionals need to advocate and support students who have less advantage when pursuing higher education (Gildersleeve, 2010). With advocacy, mentorship can be used to facilitate further support for undocumented students. Mentors can provide guidance and help students navigate higher education, as well as lessen the feelings of marginalization (Perez, 2010).

Higher education administrators, counselors and student affairs professionals make a major impact on the lives of students. These members on college campuses have direct contact and communication with students, and can make a significant impact on the lives of students. Harmon, Carne, Lizardy-Hajbi, and Wilkerson (2010) demonstrated the impact a counselor could make on an undocumented student. For example, when participant Sara was applying to college, her counselor insisted she could not be helped since she was undocumented. Although Sara’s persistence allowed her to continue on to earn two Associates degrees, invalidating experiences like these can often discourage students. Harmon et al. (2010) asserts that higher education administrators, counselors, and student affairs professionals should move towards creating more equality and advocating towards justice for undocumented students (Harmon et al., 2010). These
culturally and ethically relevant strategies should be enforced on college campuses, creating a more supportive environment for students.

Supporting undocumented students should be a goal for professionals in the higher education field. One method of support, called Safe Zones, has been created on many college campuses to allow for a more supportive and welcoming environment for this marginalized student population. According to Martínez-Caldero (n.d.), these Safe Zones provide students with the opportunity to share their experiences as well as have a nonjudgmental environment to turn to.

Through interviews conducted by Martinez-Caldero (n.d.), it was found that undocumented students found a caring environment to be an important factor that contributed to their success. Lola, an undocumented student explained how supportive counselors and professors made a positive impact on her:

Here [at Napa Valley College] I found counselors and professors that really care about me and not my papers. They see that I am a hard worker and that I want to do well in life. They are always here to help me in whatever I need. They are always keeping me informed of scholarships and laws that are out there that could help me. Like for example, thanks to my college counselor, I found out I could come to college and he helped me fill out all the paperwork…and then sometimes I have had to explain to my teachers that I won’t be able to afford my books till later in the semester, and they always give me copies of the readings or let me borrow the books while I save enough money to buy my own (Martínez-Caldero, n.d., para. 22).
California State University Fullerton is the first in the CSU system to open a center that is specific to serving undocumented students (Kopetman, 2014). The center helps with financial assistance and is a comfortable environment for students, as well as families. One student expressed their satisfaction with the center, saying, “The fact that Cal State Fullerton is giving us a resource center says ‘We’re here for you. We accept you. We want you to graduate.’ That’s the biggest statement a university can make” (Kopetman, 2014, para 8). Providing a center for students who have limited awareness of resources available to them, provides a pathway to better success for undocumented students. Since undocumented students do not receive financial aid, higher education professionals should be aware of any private funding that may be available to undocumented students (Perez, 2010). Centers that are specifically for this student population can focus on providing resources and information for undocumented students who may not necessarily be aware of them.

**Conclusion**

Thousands of undocumented students are restricted from higher education. Without proper access and opportunities for these students, many are left behind. Counselors and student affairs professionals must have awareness of laws, scholarships and resources for students that are undocumented. Being advocates and providing resources for students can help serve this population that is prohibited equal access to higher education.
Coping of First-generation College Students and Academic Retention

Stressors in college can be formed around the transition into college, fears of social acceptance, lack of college readiness, difficulties navigating college, and financial concerns. Current research shows that the generational status of students can exacerbate these experiences, particularly for first-generation students in college (Phinney & Haas, 2003; Chen, 2005; Engle & Tinto, 2008; Soria & Stebleton, 2012). The individual characteristics of students prior to college enrollment, such as different genders, abilities, races and ethnicities can have an impact on their persistence and retention in college (Tinto, 1975). Such experiences can also have a negative effect on the psychological health of first-generation students, which can lead to institutional departure (Tinto, 1988).

Upcraft and Schuh (1996) define persistence as “the ability to pursue a degree to graduation or achieve personal education objectives” (Upcraft and Schuh, p.155). The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) defines retention as “a measure of the rate at which students persist in their educational program at an institution (National Center for Education Statistics, n.d). Therefore, the background characteristics of first-generation students can provide professionals with insight of the unique factors that can impact their persistence and retention in college.

Demographically, first-generation students are more likely to be older, female, suffer from a disability and originate from underrepresented minority backgrounds (Engle & Tinto, 2008). First-generation students are also more likely to delay their education after high school, and work while enrolled in college (Engle & Tinto, 2008). These factors can delay a student’s education, given that first-generation students may also come from low-income households, where family income is below $25,000. Students
reported a low familial income and worked full time while enrolling in college part time. The characteristics of first-generation students places them at-risk for institutional departure.

While much attention has been given to the persistence of first-generation students through college environmental factors, and campus engagement of first generation students, little research has focused on the cognitive processes of first-generation students in relation to persistence in college. The lack of college preparation, support systems, and adjustment issues can lead to increased levels of psychological symptoms, such as an increase in stress while in college. These factors can contribute to lower retention rates, therefore, the implementation of cognitive behavioral therapy groups can positively impact the success of first-generation students.

Cognitive behavioral therapeutic treatment groups can be used as a brief treatment option for first-generation college students suffering from psychological symptoms in college. Equipping first-generation students with adaptive strategies to cope with the various challenges they face in college can decrease psychological stress, leading to raise the retention rates of these students. Therefore, the implementation of cognitive behavioral therapy groups that focus on teaching students adaptive coping strategies and increasing their self-efficacy can increase their persistence in college.

Current literature suggests that first-generation student face challenges that can be stressful and hindering to their educational attainment (Chen, 2005; Engle & Tinto, 2008; Soria & Stebleton, 2012). With awareness of the multiple challenges first-generation students experience, it is important to implement programs that offer adaptive strategies to cope with these challenges. A significant factor that contributes to the low persistence
rates of first-generation students is their lack of familial and institutional support. As Tinto (1988) suggested, students need to successfully progress through stages of separation, transition and incorporation into the college to reach their degree attainment. This process can cause stress and disorientation in college, potentially constraining student persistence in college (Tinto, 1988, p. 443). Therefore, cognitive behavioral therapeutic groups can teach students coping strategies that they may not have awareness of.

**Application of Vincent Tinto’s Theory of Student Departure**

Vincent Tinto’s Theory of Student Departure (1988) provides a framework to understand student retention in college. Tinto provided further exploration of student persistence through three stages; separation, transition, and incorporation. Tinto believed that students must successful pass through these three stages in order to complete their educational goals. The stage of separation consists of separating from their past community. For instance, first-generation students may be separating from their local community of high school and transitioning into college. The stage of separation may be a stressful period for this at-risk population of students, and result in institutional departure. As stated by Tinto (1988), this period of transition is somewhat stressful for all students, but some students may experience heightening stress and disorientation (Tinto, 1988, p. 443).

The second stage of Tinto’s (1988) theory of student departure considers the transition into college. This time in a student’s development consists of a movement from the past and into the new environment of college. The sense of loss, and psychological symptoms of stress, anxiety, and depression that may accompany the transition into
college can cause departure from the institution. According to Tinto (1988), if students do not receive institutional assistance through support, integration, and coping strategies, individuals may have premature institutional departure.

The various challenges first-generation students face while moving through the three stages, can increase the psychological symptoms of stress, which can contribute to the departure from the institution. Therefore, providing students with the tools necessary to manage their stress can raise the retention rates of first-generation students.

The final stage of Tinto’s (1988) theory of student departure consists of the incorporation into college. During this stage in Tinto’s (1988) theory of student departure, students successfully adapt to the new environment of college and have a better understanding of its navigation. It is important to foster the development of first-generation students, with the goal of incorporating them into the college environment. These students often require additional support throughout their college education. Given that first-generation students often lack external agents, such as family support, during their academic endeavors, professionals must also use validation to increase, integrate, and incorporate students into the institution.

Laura Rendón (1994) highlights the importance of providing a fostering and supportive environment for at-risk students, such as first-generation students. According to Rendón (1994) “validation is an enabling, confirming and supporting process imitated by in- and out-of class agents that foster academic and interpersonal development” (Rendón, 1994, p. 44). Rendón’s (1994) validating model considers the unique needs of non-traditional students, such as first-generation students, and promotes the growth and development in all areas of their lives. Increasing support for non-traditional student
populations, such as first-generation students, can have a positive impact on their self-efficacy in college.

Psychologist Albert Bandura (1993) proposed that a student’s belief of their efficacy can have a direct impact on their learning, aspirations, motivations and academic accomplishments. The self-efficacy of individuals can impact the challenges they undertake and their perseverance during challenging experiences, which can be hindering to their performance in college (Bandura, 1989).

An individual’s self-efficacy can be a determinant of environmental factors, such as parental support (Blackwell & Pinder, 2014). First-generation students often lack the support and encouragement from family, therefore intervention programs must facilitate a student’s self-efficacy while in college. Cognitive behavioral therapeutic groups that facilitate adaptive strategies to cope with challenges can increase the self-efficacy of first-generation students, and decrease departure rates. For instance, intervention programs that aim at increasing cognitive behavioral patterns, such as the skills training program, can assist students utilize adaptive coping patterns and deal with challenges proactively, rather than avoiding them (Kadhiravan and Kumar, 2012). It is important to implement programs that focus on developing coping skills for students who are at-risk for institutional departure.

**Literature Review**

**First-generation Students in Postsecondary Education**

Current literature on first-generation students highlights the various challenges that this student population faces in relation to their academics. The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) conducted an analysis on the academic and personal
characteristics of first-generation students in postsecondary education (Chen, 2005). The NCES conducted a longitudinal study with approximately 9,600 students that were enrolled in post-secondary education between 1992 and 2000. The analysis utilized student transcripts to gather comprehensive information on class enrollment patterns of first-generation students. The NCES gathered subjective data through transcripts, which can also be a limitation of the study that lacked qualitative data.

The personal characteristics of these students, such as low-income status, weaker academic preparation, and minority background, can contribute to their success in college. According to results on first-generation enrollment patterns, 43% of students who enrolled in post-secondary education dropped-out of college without a degree by 2000 (Chen, 2005). According to research findings, first-generation students lacked college readiness with 55% in remedial courses in college, in comparison to 27% of their counterparts (Chen, 2005). First-generation students also experienced stressors in choosing a major which was hypothesized to be as a result of their lack of guidance (Chen, 2005). Overall, the analysis may not be reflective of first-generation students today, but it can be used as a foundation for understanding the challenges that these students face.

Consistent with findings from the NCES report from 1992-2000 (Chen, 2005), researchers Engle and Tinto (2008) found that generational status of college students can play a role in the retention rates of these students. Engle and Tinto (2008) analyzed data collected by the U.S. Department of Education’s National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) to explore characteristics, experiences, and academic outcomes of first generation students. Findings indicated that low-income, first-generation students were
four times more likely, than their counterparts, to drop out from college. Six years after beginning college, 43% of first-generation students dropped out of college without degree attainment, and 60% of these students dropped out during their first year (Engle & Tinto, 2008). Given the various barriers that can hinder the educational attainment for first-generation students, data collected by the NCES can be used as an indicator of the additional support that first-generation students need.

**Coping Strategies of First-generation Students**

The challenges that first-generation students experience can be formed around the barriers they face in educational attainment. Researchers Phinney and Haas (2003) examined the stressful situations experienced by first-generation students, strategies of coping, support resources, and their individual characteristics that impact the coping process of first-generation college students. Researchers conducted the study at an ethnically diverse university, where minority students face less marginalization. This can be considered a limitation of the study as the sample group is not representative of students from less ethnically diverse campuses.

A mixed methods, qualitative, and quantitative study was used to discover the ways of coping of the first-generation students. The participants included thirty freshmen, with 21 females and 9 males between the ages of 18 and 19. The unequal sample of size of genders can be a limitation given the different coping styles that differ between genders. Female sources of stressors can be greater for “familial relationships, finances, daily hassles, and social relationships than college men” (Brougham, Zail, Mendoza & Miller, 2009). Researchers Brougham et al. (2009) also found that women utilized greater
emotion-focused coping than males who utilize greater problem-focused coping strategies.

Phinney and Haas (2003) utilized a survey to gather student demographic and background information, such as “ethnicity, gender, birthplace, and parental education” (Phinney & Haas, 2003, p. 10). Student coping methods were measured with a qualitative assessment method that required students to write a journal entry once a week for three consecutive weeks (Phinney & Haas, 2003). Researchers created journal coding categories to describe the different ways of coping, including “proactive, seek support, distancing/avoidance, acceptance, positive reframing, and no coping needed” (Phinney & Haas, 2003, p. 6).

With the use of narratives, findings indicted that of those who rated high in coping demonstrated the belief of having the ability to succeed and utilized proactive coping styles. Proactive coping included “doing something to try to solve the problem, such as planning and organizing, working harder, staying up later, going to a library or finding resources” (Phinney & Haas, 2003, p 6). Students with higher coping success reported higher self-efficacy, and the belief that they can be successful in college.

An in-depth analysis of six students focused on three participants that scored high on coping, and three that scored very low (Phinney & Haas, 2003). The analysis revealed that the students with low success in coping were found to have low self-efficacy. Participants also reported feelings of being overwhelmed and resort to the avoidance of problems (Phinney & Haas, 2003, p. 8).

For instance, one participant explained “I bought time from my sleep; I barely slept. The assignments were so overwhelming and far from reach that I just didn’t do it…
I did whatever I can, and if not, then I just ignored it” (Phinney & Haas, 2003, p. 8). The reported maladaptive coping styles of participants indicate a sense of inadequacy in their academic goals, which can have an impact on their levels of stress while in college. Therefore, implementing a cognitive behavioral therapeutic group can equip students with adaptive coping mechanisms that can increase persistence and retention rates in college. Phinney and Haas (2003) suggest that those who have high self-efficacy also have successful coping during stressful times. Facilitating the overall coping methods of first-generation college students can increase their overall functioning, self-efficacy, persistence, and retention in college.

**Coping Skills Intervention Program**

Researchers Kadhiravan and Kumar (2012) implemented a skills training intervention program to promote proactive coping strategies with the goal of increasing self-efficacy. Proactive coping can include goal setting, utilization of resources, and positive emotional strategies (Kadhiravan & Kumar (2012). Researchers sought to uncover the effectiveness of the coping skills intervention program with the use of a quasi-experimental design. The sample consisted of 88 students that were randomly assigned to either a control or experimental group (Kadhiravan & Kumar, 2012). Students in the control group did not receive coping skills training, while participants in the experimental group received training for 21 days. Researchers hypothesized to see a difference in perceived stress, enhance proactive coping and self-efficacy of college students as a result of the intervention (Kadhiravan & Kumar, 2012). Researchers utilized standardized tools such as, the Perceived Stress Scale (PSS), Proactive coping Inventory (PCI), and the General Self-efficacy Scale (GSE) to collect student data.
The skills training program intervention was used to increase skills, such as “critical thinking, problem solving, decision-making, communication, interpersonal skill and self-regulation” (Kadhiravan & Kumar, 2012, p. 51). These adaptive coping strategies can help students during stressful times. As a result of the training, students will learn about stress, and its consequences, as well as raise awareness of maladaptive coping patterns. Another student learning outcome of the skills training program includes building the self-efficacy of college students. Self-efficacy can help individuals preserve during challenges, therefore implementing programs to raise self-efficacy can enhance their functioning in college.

The pre-test of the quasi-experimental study revealed similar participant characteristics such as perceived stress, coping styles, and self-efficacy, in both the control group and experimental group. The results of the post-test of design indicated “a significant difference between experimental group, and control group in proactive coping, reflective coping, and general self-efficacy (Kadhiravan & Kumar, 2012, p.53). Teaching students adaptive mechanisms for coping can be an effective method of increasing the persistence and retention of first-generation students. Although the study investigated the effect of a coping skills training intervention program, further studies should focus on the longitudinal effects of cognitive behavioral programs on college campuses.

**Implications and Future Trends**

There are various implications found for student affairs professionals and college counselors, in particular at two-year colleges since a large number of first-generation students begin their education at a two-year institution (Engle & Tinto, 2008). The implications of this analysis reveal the need to identify the factors that can hinder the
academic success of first-generation students. Current research outlines predictors of retention, such as lack of academic preparation, financial disadvantages, and lack of support for first-generation students (Chen, 2005). Research should be formed around providing students with appropriate coping skills that they may not learn in any other dimensions of their life.

Further research should focus on cognitive behavioral factors that contribute to a student’s retention in college and how professionals can assist in the personal and academic development of first-generation students. The implementation of programs, such as cognitive behavioral therapeutic groups, can provide assistance for students who suffer from stress in college. As stated by Tinto (1988), students need assistance to persist and cope with stress. Tinto (1988) believed that without this additional assistance, students withdraw from college early in the academic year (Tinto, 1988, p. 444).

Kadhiravan and Kumar (2012) suggest the implementation of programs that challenge the maladaptive coping patterns of students can benefit students during stressful times. In addition, researchers Kadhiravan and Kumar propose that students can be provided with “a sense of competence through the coping skills training programs, they will become more proactive which in turn will help them to prevent various stress related and dysfunctional coping” (Kadhiravan & Kumar, 2012, p. 54). Student affairs professionals and college counselors can contribute to the personal and academic development of first-generation students through intervention programs that can be implemented to increase persistence and decrease institutional departure. Professionals in higher education must collaboratively consider the individual and institutional factors that contribute to the academic departure of students.
Conclusion

Higher education can be a pathway to achieving personal and academic goals for college students. It is important to consider unique factors that can impact the persistence and retention of at-risk student populations such as first-generation students. The academic, personal, and financial disadvantages students face due to their generational status can be hindering to the success of first-generation students. Furthermore, studies have been formed around student retention, but further studies should focus developing the cognitive functioning of students in relation to stressors in college. Cognitive behavioral therapeutic programs can provide first-generation students with the exposure and tools necessary to persist and be successful in higher education.
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