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A Mixed Methods Examination of First Year College Students: The Impact of Ethnic Studies on Post-Secondary Education Experiences

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A MIXED METHODS EXAMINATION OF FIRST YEAR COLLEGE STUDENTS:
THE IMPACT OF ETHNIC STUDIES ON POST-SECONDARY
EDUCATION EXPERIENCES

By

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ABSTRACT

Across the United States, fewer high school students are enrolling in university and completing university. Scholars have suggested that ethnic studies may positively influence student engagement and potentially increase university enrollment. This dissertation will discuss the literature related to ethnic studies and critical race theory in relation to frameworks that have been positively associated with student retention. The study described in this dissertation explored if ethnic studies taken prior to attending university is related to positive student experiences during university. The aims of the study were to (1) test the relationship between ethnic studies and positive student experiences (i.e., critical consciousness, school engagement, social support, sense of community, and sense of belongingness) using quantitative data, (2) explore notable findings from the quantitative data through interviews to understand prominent factors that contribute to positive student experiences in ethnic studies, and (3) generate findings useful to educators, policymakers, and researchers interested in ethnic studies. The results of this sequential mixed methods study found that the more ethnic studies that students had taken, the more likely they were to report higher levels of critical consciousness, school engagement, and social support. Path analyses was conducted to explore how sense of community and sense of belongingness mediated the relationship between ethnic studies and dimensions of critical consciousness, school engagement, and social support. Lastly, qualitative findings that emerged from thematic analyses elucidated factors that contribute to positive student experiences, institutional barriers to learning ethnic studies, and student generated recommendations for improving classroom environments.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Can school curriculum play a role in the promotion of student success by increasing personal connections and decreasing factors that contribute to attrition? A strengths-based approach to mitigating the multifaceted challenges associated with student attrition has been extensively studied in schools that have been acclaimed as sanctuaries for students due to their attention to how socioecological factors within these educational spaces shape student experiences (O'Gorman et al., 2016). It has been suggested that the socioecological factors that shape student experiences and promote safe spaces in schools are the product of theoretical frameworks related to social support, sense of community, student engagement, and affirmations of racial and ethnic diversity among students (Kuh et al., 2008; O'Gorman et al., 2016; Ozer, 2017). Drawing from these suggestions, it is pivotal to delve further into how emerging courses in K-12 education, particularly ethnic studies from a critical race perspective, contribute to these socioecological factors that are potentially related to decreased attrition rates.

A Nevada statewide law to include ethnic and diversity studies as a course requirement to graduate in high school has been passed and was implemented beginning with the Class of 2018 (National Education Association, 2021). These ethnic and diversity studies are meant to highlight perspectives of racial and ethnic groups that are typically underrepresented in United States social sciences curriculum. Under this approved bill (SB 107), school districts have been granted the autonomy to design ethnic studies curricula that are relevant to local communities across the state. Furthermore, Nevada has introduced an additional law (AB261) that requires schools to include educational material that

highlights contributions to society that were spearheaded by marginalized people such as racial and ethnic minorities, sexual and gender minorities, and people with disabilities (Prevatt, 2021).

Despite these progressive legal changes, research and media have highlighted the political struggles that educators have faced as they tried to incorporate in their teaching the experiences of underrepresented groups during historical events such as protests from community members and contentious backlash from students' parents (Marrun et al., 2022; Reeder, 2022). Local journalists in the valley of Southern California, where ethnic studies are required by the law, have recently reported on the community tensions that have surfaced in light of critical race theory being taught in K-12 schools. Notably, members of their school board have concluded that youth are not capable of learning these ethnic studies concepts and should “not be one that asks us to critically find racism in every aspect of society” (Reeder, 2022, p. 1). Tensions regarding critical race theory in the classroom have also been encountered in the state of Nevada, where educators and advocates for ethnic studies using a critical race lens have experienced pushback from the public (Metz, 2021). While the research of ethnic studies and the use of critical race theory for these courses have highlighted positive outcomes in California, these experiences may differ in state legislatures with opposing leadership and lack of standards in place (Sleeter, 2011). For instance, in the state of Nevada, catalysts for change in social studies curriculum where ethnic studies could be taught have been met with resistance local lobbying groups who have attempted to implement laws that enforce monitored classrooms and ban discussions on critical race theory, and school boards that have banned critical race theory in county-specific schools (Goldberg., 2023; Hales, 2022). In light of these details,

this dissertation raises the importance of understanding the impact of ethnic studies in regions where these tensions exist. It is important to explore how ethnic studies within these specific social environments influences student development of concepts associated with student retention and achievement (Sleeter, 2011).

A qualitative report has noted the increase in requests for antiracist classroom resources across the United States (Agarwal & Sen, 2022). Specifically, Agarwal and Sen (2022) have highlighted the need for courses with a focus on ethnic studies that would include a review of the history and lived experiences of multiple ethnic and racial groups. This ongoing and growing movement in policy changes towards a critical pedagogy has progressed in response to the challenges faced in academic settings amongst historically marginalized communities with the goal of influencing nationwide curriculum changes. Additional support for these changes in educational policy has been evident in academic literature as multiple scholars have stressed the positive relationships between enrollment in courses with a focus on ethnic studies during high school, and reduced dropout rates and increased college enrollment (Bonilla et al., 2021; Sleeter, 2011).

Ethnic studies have been conceptualized in the literature as curriculum with a specific focus on “minorities in American society” and “groups of color” (Hu-DeHart, 1993, p.52), which aim to acknowledge perspectives and contributions in history that have been overlooked. Related to this, critical consciousness theory has posited that student engagement with curriculum that celebrates the history of minorities in American society is strongly predictive of academic benefits (Freire, 1970; Heberle et al., 2020). Benefits related to the inclusion of ethnic studies in high school education have included increases in high school graduation rates (Bonilla et al., 2021), class attendance (Dee & Penner,

2017), and academic achievement (Duncan, 2012). Given the goal of previous research efforts to address inequities in education through an inclusion of ethnic studies curriculum in secondary school pedagogy, the overarching aim of this study is to examine the impact of ethnic studies on post-secondary student experiences, namely, school engagement, current academic and social networks, and critical consciousness.

School engagement is conceptualized as multifaceted in three dimensions: behavioral, emotional, and cognitive (Fredricks et al., 2004). The fusion of these dimensions has been shown to provide researchers a richer understanding of student relationships with teachers, classmates, and the overall classroom structure. By exploring and working to gain a deeper understanding of the social structures of classroom settings, this study will investigate and verify if greater exposure to ethnic studies prior to college enrollment predicts higher levels of post-secondary school engagement. Social support theory postulates that individuals can depend on their social networks to provide four dimensions of support (i.e., informational, emotional, instrumental, and appraisal) in order to navigate unfamiliar and potentially stressful situations (La Gaipa, 1982). Drawing from a social support framework, this study will examine the relationship between ethnic studies courses and academic networks (i.e., with classmates and faculty). Lastly, the theoretical framework of critical consciousness (i.e., conscientization) focuses on raising awareness and developing solutions to inequities for marginalized populations, particularly in the context of the educational field (Freire, 1970). De los Ríos and colleagues' (2015) analysis of high school curriculum case studies has prompted a strong push to develop and provide culturally relevant curriculum as a means to prepare students “academically, socially, and culturally for the world today” (de los Ríos et al., 2015, p. 198). Given these critical

implications for improving upon the student experience in secondary and post-secondary education, this dissertation will focus on using existing theories related to perceived sense of community and sense of belongingness for understanding the relationship between ethnic studies related courses and factors related to enhanced academic experiences (i.e., school engagement, social support, and critical consciousness), which have been historically associated with student attrition (O'Gorman et al., 2016; Ozer, 2017).

The next chapter of this dissertation will review and discuss relevant literature, and how it relates to the purpose of this study. First, the literature review will discuss ethnic studies and how educators have relied on theories of critical race and critical consciousness to develop meaningful and impactful classes on ethnicity and race. In contradistinction to how health scientists have emphasized the need to distinguish and establish ethnicity and race as two separate concepts in healthcare research and practice in order to ensure accurate assessments of individual health and the services available to specific subpopulations (Ford & Kelly, 2005), the education sector has historically used the term “ethnic studies” to include both ethnicity and race when describing these courses in academic literature (Tintiango-Cubales et al., 2014). It is important to note that for the purposes of this dissertation, “ethnic studies” will likewise encompass and refer to courses that discuss both ethnic and racial identities, as well as relevant history and culture, in relation to systems of power and privilege.

In light of the political tensions related to critical race theory in education, this dissertation will explore the challenges that students and teachers have faced while learning from and teaching ethnic studies. The concept of critical consciousness in ethnic studies will also be discussed in the literature review, along with the essential components that

contribute to the theory of critical consciousness (i.e., critical motivation, reflection, action, and online action) (Diemer et al., 2016; Wilf & Wray-Lake, 2023). The positive youth development benefits of ethnic studies that surface in relation to critical race theory and critical consciousness will be presented, supported by arguments for their value in the promotion of student success. Subsequent sections of the literature review will then discuss school engagement, the dimensions of school engagement, and the evidence that illustrates how key components of ethnic studies and culturally responsive classrooms could contribute to student engagement across each dimension. Lastly, Social Support, Sense of Community, and Sense of Belongingness will be discussed in relation to student success, and as key constructs with potentially important relationships with ethnic studies.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Ethnic Studies

Ethnic studies has been described as an interdisciplinary field that examines the culture, history, and experiences of different racial and ethnic groups in the United States, particularly people of color and other historically marginalized groups (Kowarski, 2022). Beyond examining multiple aspects of ethnicity, race, and history, ethnic studies also analyzes power structures and the intersections of culture with gender, sexuality, and class. An ethnic studies curriculum in education has been defined as a pedagogy that is culturally responsive, celebrates the history of marginalized groups, critiques systems of oppression, and reflects on systems of power within classroom spaces (Tintiango-Cubales et al., 2014). This pedagogy serves a purpose, “ARC”, in which access to education is increased, relevant classroom material includes marginalized perspectives, and community involvement is encouraged as a means to work towards bettering the lives of underserved populations and igniting social change (Tintiango-Cubales & Duncan-Andrade, 2021, p.5).

Instructors who teach ethnic studies aim towards fostering spaces that promote respectful discussions for students to critically explore topics that may raise tensions (Kolluri & Edwards, 2023). These courses with a focus in ethnic studies have often been influenced by important frameworks reflective of critical race theory (Sleeter & Zavala, 2020), or drawn from Paulo Freire’s (1970) concept of critical consciousness. This section of the literature review will discuss ethnic studies and its relationships with critical race theory, critical consciousness, and related concepts in educational settings.

Ethnic Studies and Critical Race Theory

Critical race theory has been used as a framework in educational research to understand how race is related to the lived experiences of students of color, challenge traditional forms of research (e.g., positivist scientific philosophies), and highlight the overlooked strengths of marginalized students through interdisciplinary knowledge drawn from ethnic studies, gender studies, and humanities (Bell, 1995; Delgado & Stefancic, 2023; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). Theorists of critical race in education have conceptualized how racism is part of the United States history and can be critiqued through using multiple perspectives to avoid omitting and invalidating others' experiences (i.e., through counternarratives, storytelling) (Ladson-Billings, 2021). Given how the objectives of critical race theory places a spotlight on history and civic engagement, educational research has sought out the possibilities of applying critical race theory to classrooms that discuss social sciences (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995).

In order to seamlessly implement ethnic studies into curriculum, particular attention has been focused on possible opportunities to utilize a race-based perspective in United States history classes (Chandler, 2010). For instance, a World History high school teacher in a Latino/a community within Los Angeles County, California, United States, was able to design a course that was reflective of the local students' cultural backgrounds (de los Rios et al., 2015). This case study on Roosevelt High School has shared how social sciences teachers can increase access to education that is culturally relevant to underrepresented groups. The students had developed community-based projects with the intention of identifying and organizing local resources for the benefit of their community. Students

identified art hubs, local historians, and fitness centers to actively engage with the wider community and increase participation at these centers' community events. Students also worked with leaders of these centers to advertise their skills and empower those seeking to contribute to the community (i.e., artists, historians, physical trainers). Recent critiques of teaching ethnic studies have highlighted the need for a balanced curriculum that reviews the oppression that marginalized groups encounter, as well as celebrates their cultural strengths (Kolluri & Edwards, 2022). This case study on Roosevelt High School has demonstrated how educators can successfully serve the purpose of ethnic studies using a critical race theory framework that is empowering for students (de los Rios et al., 2015).

Despite the utility of critical race theory in education and teachers' use of ARC to guide ethnic studies in classrooms, criticism of teachers' use of ARC to guide ethnic studies in elementary, secondary, and postsecondary institutions has been prominent across media and political spaces (Benson, 2022a). According to Education Week, an independent organization that covers K-12 education news in the United States, 42 states have introduced bills to propose the ban of critical race theory in classrooms (Schwartz, 2021). Critics of critical race theory have spurred national division on education that has been observed in the remarks of former President Trump, who had publicly denounced the educational framework as toxic (Miller et al., 2023). Further, campaigns to remove the discussion of anti-racism in education have offered alternatives that instead highlight the United States history in positive representations in order to emphasize "patriotic education" (Ujifusa, 2020). These proposed executive orders to remove discussions in classrooms that critique United States history have been highlighted in former president Trump's re-

election campaign and have been reported as instrumental to the development of state-level reformations in education (Reed et al., 2022).

Ultimately, nationwide recognition of change in education and discussion of anti-racism efforts via critical race theory has impacted how educators' approach social studies in class (Teitelbaum, 2022). Caution and frustrations with these legislative changes have been expressed by teachers, students, and researchers who have shared how these changes work to silence marginalized groups and threaten the progress of human rights (i.e., reproductive rights, same sex marriage) (Creedon & Wackwitz, 2022; Marrun et al., 2023; Morgan, 2022; Reed et al., 2022). These threats to the progress of human rights have become more apparent in Florida's most recent proposed bill that calls for the removal of "any major or minor in Critical Race Theory, Gender Studies, or Intersectionality, or any derivative major or minor of these belief systems" (HB 999, p.3). Essentially, citizens of Florida have suggested that the passing of HB 999 would also remove student centers that support underrepresented students and social activism (i.e., racial minority centers or LGBTQ+ centers). This would be based on elements of the proposed bill that prohibits state funds from supporting campus activities and programs that "advocate for diversity, equity, and inclusion", "promote or engage in political or social activism", and "provide special benefits to individuals on the basis of race, color, national origin, sex, disability, or religion" (HB 999, p.13).

Current fears and challenges have surfaced amongst educators and students who teach and take social sciences and ethnic studies courses (Morgan, 2022, Palomar et al., 2022). Qualitative research on Asian-American children learning about racism has posited that youth are interested in learning about their racial identities in predominantly white

spaces and discussing their experiences of racism (Wee et al., 2023). For instance, Asian American participants had revealed how important it was for them to discuss the uptick of violence towards the Asian community during the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic. Participants notably disclosed how discussing these sensitive topics was beneficial to their positive self-identity. However, these discussions have been increasingly difficult for educators to host, so youth have sought out these conversations amongst their families (Kolluri & Edwards, 2023; Wee et al., 2023). In line with the purpose of ethnic studies and the goals of critical race theory in education, researchers have suggested that banning critical race theory in classrooms leaves room for missed opportunities for positive youth development and addressing racism (Gomez & Cammarota, 2022; Wee et al., 2023).

Similar challenges related to the prohibition of discussing racism, privilege, and power in classrooms has surfaced in research that has explored the perspectives of teachers (Murran et al., 2022). Murran and colleagues (2022) conducted a thematic analysis across interview data with teachers and their perceptions of teaching critical race theory. Although the discussion of critical race theory is not prohibited in Nevada, teachers who work in the state had revealed their discomfort with discussing topics of race and critical analyses of the government from a race perspective due to the ongoing national tensions (Murran et al., 2022). Instances that heightened the Nevada teachers' discomfort in teaching critical race theory were further prompted by schoolwide policies that prohibited classroom discussions of the January 6, 2021, United States Capitol Building riots in Washington, D.C. Specifically, teachers had disclosed how these conversations were important for students in order to understand their current government, but the barriers that were placed had prevented students from learning about national events (Murran et al., 2022). Similar

challenges have been reported by teachers in political contexts (i.e., red states) where these discussions are politically fraught (Jochim et al., 2023). A survey has revealed that public school teachers and principals have considered leaving their positions due to the harassment they received when they taught on race and racism (Jochim et al., 2023). Murran and colleagues' (2022) qualitative research highlighted comparable incidents in which educators have revealed how dialogues on systemic racism have led to the removal of students from their classes and acrimonious confrontations with parents.

Despite the challenges they have experienced related to their ability to discuss racial injustice and critical analyses of the government from a critical race perspective, teachers have sought out underground work to deliver meaningful lessons (Jochim et al., 2023; Murran et al., 2022). Uniquely, educators had shared how they discuss topics of slavery from a counternarrative without specifically announcing that they are using critical race theory to guide their lessons (Murran et al., 2022). Students have also engaged in participatory work outside of their school where community organizations offered opportunities for youth to engage in youth-led research and explore research related to local community problems (Cammarota, 2017). Students had engaged in projects that explored the missing counternarratives in their social studies classes that are relevant to their community. These community organizations also reviewed the opportunities for students to participate in local politics in order to initiate change.

Explorations of ethnic studies through a critical lens has overlapped with the construction of civics courses (Haduong et al., 2023; Ito & Cross, 2022; Kwon & de los Rios, 2019). Civic education teaches students about their community or government, and the steps they can take to improve upon local issues (Kahne & Middaugh, 2008). These

courses have highlighted the importance of youth engagement, racial and ethnic identity, and systems change in developing civic education for youth through a critical lens (Ito & Cross, 2022). Due to an overlap of elements of critical race theory present in both ethnic studies and civics courses, Ito and Cross (2022) have observed that educators are able to construct a civics course utilizing frameworks primarily rooted in ethnic studies. For example, the Democratic Knowledge Framework encourages educators to attain a mastery of knowledge and engagement in civics projects through the exploration of the resources that ethnic studies provides in order to expand on the experiences of racial and ethnic minorities (Haduong et al., 2023) The goal of this framework is to encourage the development of youth's civic identity through ethnic studies and encourage change on social issues. Similar to Haduong and colleagues' (2023) proposal of ethnic studies as a critical component to encouraging skills that influence action, the current dissertation will add to our understanding of ethnic studies and development in relation to critical consciousness and critical action.

Ethnic Studies and Critical Consciousness

Current research has highlighted how critical consciousness is frequently associated with positive youth development (Maker Castro et al., 2022). Conceptualizations of critical consciousness have proliferated since Paulo Freire first introduced the theory in the 1970s (Diemer et al., 2016). Critical consciousness has been described to have three dimensions, including a person's: (1) motivation to create change (i.e., critical motivation); (2) awareness of social inequalities and oppressive environments (i.e., critical reflection), and (3) involvement in remedying injustices (i.e., critical action), (Diemer et al., 2020). These

three dimensions of critical consciousness have been observed in relation to positive youth development and as an outcome of engagement in ethnic studies (Diemer et al., 2021).

This dissertation will build upon our understanding of critical race theory in ethnic studies by examining the relationship between ethnic studies and dimensions of critical consciousness using quantitative and qualitative data as suggested by previous research (Diemer et al., 2021). Related to this, Diemer and colleagues (2021) have called for research that highlights the role of social media when examining how youth engage in critical action. In light of the ubiquitous presence of social media, a scale to capture levels of youth sociopolitical engagement has been recently introduced by Wilf and Wray-Lake (2023), and implores future studies to explore socioecological factors (i.e., post-COVID peak and online schooling) that may influence critical action on social media. Therefore, this dissertation will also explore and examine how youth engage in critical action both in offline and online spaces.

Ethnic Studies and Critical Motivation

Critical motivation, also referred to as political efficacy, has been conceptualized as how an individual perceives their ability to effectively advocate for social justice and sociopolitical change (Diemer et al., 2016). It has been observed that youth with higher levels of political efficacy are more likely to be civically engaged, while youth who report lower levels of political efficacy are less likely to feel a sense of empowerment or more likely to believe that their efforts in sociopolitical change are not impactful (Zimmerman & Rappaport, 1998). Critical motivation has also been discussed as an important component of empowerment, and consequently, research has called for steps to be taken in order to promote empowering spaces for youth (i.e., youth participatory action research classrooms)

(Branquinho et al., 2018; Frasquilho et al., 2018; Maker Castro et al., 2022). For instance, Frasquilo and colleagues (2018) have reported on the positive youth development outcomes of a youth participatory action research project where students enrolled in a class that was designed to promote civic engagement and feelings of empowerment. Students who participated in this project reported feelings of empowerment following their involvement in activities such as participating in national conferences with ministers of health and education, organizing youth-led research teams, and critically analyzing the needs of their local communities (Frasquilho et al., 2018). These efforts towards initiating social change through youth-led organization contributed to positive youth development and critical motivation in interviews where youth reported a greater sense of political empowerment (Branquinho et al., 2018).

The understanding that empowerment plays a role in critical motivation amongst youth is also evident in educators who have reported that their ethnic studies courses are designed with the intention of developing empowering spaces that encourage youth to engage in meaningful dialogue (Kolluri & Edwards, 2023). Notably, values in ethnic studies curriculum have called for empowering material and developing spaces for students to integrate their lived experiences into ethnic studies curriculum (Green et al., 2020). These values are reflective of the purpose of the pedagogy for ethnic studies, ARC, which has specifically called for relevant material to be taught on counternarratives. Given how academic literature has largely conceptualized empowerment as instrumental to critical motivation, this dissertation will explore critical motivation and its relation to ethnic studies from a critical race perspective (Beaumont, 2010; Christens & Peterson, 2012).

Ethnic Studies and Critical Reflection

A review exploring critical consciousness in youth has aimed to determine the complexities that influence both critical consciousness and youth development (Maker Castro et al., 2022). One common observation from this review is that critical motivation tends to be a predictor of youth's critical reflection. Critical reflection has been operationalized as the analysis of social, racial, economic, and gender inequalities from a systemic perspective (Watts et al., 2011). Studies that have assessed for critical reflection from a youth's viewpoint have captured instances where youth demonstrated youth-led discussions and evolutions of school inequality from a critical race lens (Aldana et al., 2021; Bañales et al., 2021; Cammarota & Fine, 2010; Hope et al., 2015). A participatory approach has been used to encourage youth to explore inequalities from a systemic perspective, in which discussions from photovoice sessions helped youth understand the impact of racial segregation on school funding, and take action against inequality in their community (Bañales et al., 2021). Notably, these findings have highlighted the importance of discussing the lived experiences of youth and how inequalities in education are rooted in racism as a means to engender their development of critical reflection and encourage civic engagement.

In an attempt to engender critical reflection in classrooms, educators have relied on ethnic studies to introduce discussions that analyze how systems of oppression operate in the United States (Chapman et al., 2020; Ito & Cross, 2022; Nojan, 2020; Sacramento, 2019). For instance, a California middle school was evaluated for the effectiveness of an ethnic studies course and youths' development of critical reflection (Nojan, 2020). Qualitative reports were analyzed and Nojan (2020) found that students expressed interest

in learning about racial justice in relation to their identity due to personal experiences with injustice. Following their participation in a curriculum that was culturally reflective of their backgrounds, students participated in surveys in which over 90% of students reported awareness of inequalities in the United States. Additional research has noted how youth who learn about social, ethnic, racial, economic, and gender inequalities from a systemic perspective also report increased levels of academic achievement, wellbeing, and civic engagement (Sleeter & Zavala, 2020; Cabrera, 2014).

Ethnic Studies and Critical Action

Civic engagement, or critical action, has been predicted to follow the development of youths' critical awareness and critical motivation (Zimmerman & Rappaport, 1988). Critical action has been conceptualized as the individual or collective action taken in order to challenge or transform systems of oppression (Watts et al., 2011). These actions can be done in offline and online capacities, such as voting, protesting, attending town halls, or sharing online resources for impacted communities. Researchers have explored the unique ways that youth engage in critical action with their local communities (Diemer et al., 2016; Kornbluh, 2023). For instance, Worker and colleagues (2023) have observed the outcomes of youth engaged in participatory studies aimed at addressing racial and social injustices in their schools and community. Notable projects have included: adding ethnic studies to high school curricula, updating curricula to include Native American perspectives and accomplishments, and addressing racism in their communities (Worker et al., 2023). Researchers discussed how the results of the thematic analyses of interviews with youth throughout the stages of their action-based projects included outcomes related to positive youth development, such as feelings of empowerment, confidence, and civic engagement.

Notably, these projects that have emphasized the importance of critical action have also leveraged the ubiquitous presence of social media or broadband services to scale up civic engagement efforts (Gibbs et al., 2020). Diemer and colleagues (2021) have called for researchers to observe the ways in which youth engage in online civic participation. Consequently, Wilf and Wray-Lake (2023) have recently developed a new scale to assess the level of critical action youth engage online. Prior to the development of this scale, Wilf and Wray-Lake (2021) had purposefully selected and interviewed youth who engaged with activist media online and their reasons for relying on online forms of civic engagement, such as the heightened potential of being recognized and heard by those in positions of power. Further, youth have disclosed the importance of building an online community and emotional support when providing counternarratives and advocating for social change in online spaces.

This dissertation will build upon current literature's understanding of the unique strategies that youth employ in order to build their civic engagement online and promote social justice in relation to their ethnic studies education in Nevada. Prior studies have emphasized the emergence of critical action after adolescents' involvement in ethnic studies (Nevárez, 2023, Nojan, 2020). Accordingly, this dissertation will contribute to the advancement of our comprehension of critical race theory and ethnic studies by examining their impact on online civic engagement.

Drawing from all the previously described complexities of critical consciousness, researchers in education have leveraged these components of the critical consciousness model to promote empowerment amongst marginalized students (Heberle et al., 2020). For example, Cadenas and colleagues (2018) have found a significant relationship between

critical consciousness and undocumented students' motivation to persist through college. In their respective articles, Uriostegui and colleagues (2021) have highlighted how the development of critical consciousness amongst Black and Latinx youth predicted higher levels of engagement in academics, while Seider and colleagues (2020) have pointed out that youth participation in elements of the critical consciousness model predicted higher SAT and GPA scores. In light of the new requirement set for providing ethnic studies in high school and the general education degree in Nevada, this study will add to the literature on critical consciousness by investigating the relationship between ethnic studies and critical consciousness (Kwon, 2021). This dissertation aims to examine how ethnic studies taught in Nevada schools has impacted youths' development of critical consciousness by highlighting youth voice and their lived experiences across each of the three domains of critical consciousness under a critical race lens.

Benefits of Ethnic Studies

A review of the social and academic value of ethnic studies in K-12 education has discussed how student discussions of race and inequality can be beneficial (Sleeter, 2011). This section will review how research has observed the relationship between ethnic studies and academic achievement and attrition in high school. This section will also review the social-emotional development of students who have taken ethnic studies and the approaches ethnic studies teachers have used to support this development.

Ethnic Studies and Academic Achievement

In order to challenge the deficit-based approaches that are typically used to address gaps in academic achievement, qualitative research has examined the impact of adapting curricula to include culturally relevant material for historically excluded students (Hall &

Martin, 2013). Prominent themes of the latter approach have included the relationships between school engagement and class attendance with culturally relevant material. Using a critical race theory framework, Hall and Martin (2013) had found that culturally relevant material encouraged college students to participate in classroom discussions on racism and sexism, as well as create a space for students to be heard.

Similar reports of school engagement that lead to academic achievement have been documented amongst high school students enrolled in a Mexican American Studies course, where students from Arizona learned about their non-Eurocentric narrative in history, and the important role of Mexican Americans in the United States (Cabrera, 2014). Cabrera's (2014) analyses included a comparison of math, reading, and writing standardized testing scores between groups who were enrolled in the Mexican American Studies course and those who were not. The results suggested that high school students who learned culturally relevant material also scored higher in all categories of standardized testing than students who did not enroll in the Mexican American Studies course. Although Cabrera's (2014) empirical work demonstrated the educational advantages of offering culturally relevant courses, Arizona authorities introduced new regulations that prohibited the continuation of the Mexican American Studies course and any related courses (Saathoff, 2017).

Since then, efforts to support the inclusion of ethnic studies in high school have proliferated and educational researchers have contributed to building evidence that suggests the positive relationship between ethnic studies and academic achievement (Sleeter & Zavala, 2023). A review of the impact of ethnic studies curricula and culturally relevant material has highlighted increases in academic achievement, graduation rates, critical thinking skills, math and science scores, and class attendance (Sleeter & Zavala,

2020). Additionally, Bonilla and colleagues (2021) have followed student progression throughout high school and college after students completed ethnic studies during their first year of high school in California. Results of their regression-discontinuity analysis have indicated that completion of ethnic studies in high school significantly increased the probability of graduating high school among underperforming students (i.e., GPA below 2.0), and subsequently enrolling in college.

Suggestions for future empirical exploration have highlighted the need for research that explores ethnic studies through quantitative methods (Blazar, 2021; Bonilla et al., 2021). Researchers have indicated the need for additional work that upholds the theoretical assumptions of the beneficial outcomes related to critical race theory in ethnic studies, such as academic achievement and social emotional development (Saathoff, 2017; Sleeter 2011). The staunch argument for ethnic studies has expressed the importance of continuing the conversation of how these changes in education can “serve as both a catalyst for societal change and collective healing” and recognize how “the power of acknowledging the experiences of people who were previously silenced can be transformational for everyone.” (Saathoff, 2017, p.7). Uniquely, research has demonstrated tensions in Nevada related to critical race theory in education,

“Systemic racism in the district is replete, deeply embedded, and evident in teacher and administrative hiring practices, professional development priorities, student and teacher disciplinary policies, curricular and pedagogical praxes, as well as in school climate and culture, especially as these relate to the benevolently racist, non-, and hostile engagement of the family and extended community members of Students of Color. Despite the

persistence of long-standing racial segregation and heightening and widening of racial injustices more recently, the district has generally not responded at all, or has under-responded.” (Marrun et al., 2023, p.9)

Building from these implications, this dissertation will employ a sequential mixed methods approach to further develop knowledge about the impact of ethnic studies on student engagement.

Ethnic Studies and Social-Emotional Development

In addition to academic benefits related to ethnic studies, research has highlighted the social-emotional outcomes that youth develop from taking these courses. Notable outcomes have included a sense of empowerment, the development of an ethnic identity, the practice of self-reflection, learned collaborative skills, and feelings of motivation (de los Ríos et al., 2015; Howard, 2008; Sleeter & Zavala, 2020). Notably, students have explored these aspects of social-emotional development within the context of their classrooms, wider school, families, and communities when learning about ethnic studies. This exploration of social-emotional development in ethnic studies has been possible due to the introduction of overlooked historical perspectives that offer counternarratives students can identify with and find meaningful (de los Ríos et al., 2015).

A study of high school students and their experiences in ethnic studies had employed a sequential mixed methods design to capture students’ sense of ethnic identity (i.e., sense of belongingness to their ethnic group and pride with their cultural background) before and after taking an ethnic studies class (López et al., 2022). Quantitative results highlighted growth in the variable *sense of ethnic identity* over time, and their preliminary results were later elucidated in student interviews where researchers inquired youth on

questions such as “How do ethnic studies courses play a role in filling basic psychological needs that center race and racialized experiences?” (López et al., 2022, p. 8). Students reported how their English class that utilized ethnic studies materials offered them the opportunity to engage in behaviors reflective of critical consciousness (i.e., exploring social issues relevant to their identity), and independently select which social issues were essential for learning.

An intersectional lens in critical theory has also been observed amongst high school students and their experiences in ethnic studies. Moorhead and Jimenez (2020) have interviewed students following their involvement in an LGBTQ+ ethnic studies course. Students reported instances of learning social skills and managing conflict while engaging in conversations about same-sex marriage and trans issues. For instance, students who grew up in conservative households had discussed how the class broadened their perspectives on human rights, recognition of marginalized groups, and demonstrating compassion to trans communities (Moorhead & Jimenez, 2020). Studies have argued for increases towards combining LGBTQ+ studies into ethnic studies due to the shared theoretical frameworks and beneficial outcomes in social-emotional development (Cohen, 2011; Snapp & Russell, 2016; Moorhead & Jimenez, 2016).

Evidence of social-emotional development in youth who have taken ethnic studies has been highlighted in academic literature, yet teachers and students have expressed concern about the political tensions regarding critical race theory. López (2022) has invited and challenged educational psychologists to address racial injustice in education, and contribute to our understanding of how ethnic studies may potentially shape the student

experience. Compellingly, López (2022) has suggested with the intention of inspiring future research:

“With the understanding that the aims of education have important consequences for society, educational psychologists can either work toward contributing to the greater good or the demise of education and the future of society” (p. 125).

This dissertation hopes to add to the growing scholarship on anti-racist approaches in education by being (to the best of my knowledge) the first to explore ethnic studies in relation to school engagement, social support, sense of community, and sense of belongingness.

School Engagement

School Engagement History

The concept of school engagement has frequently been explored in research and has been found to be associated with positive academic outcomes (Fredricks et al., 2004; Yazzie-Mintz & McCormick, 2012). Researchers have defined school engagement as a multifaceted concept in order to capture the psychosocial distinctions related to engagement: cognitive, behavioral, and emotional (Fredricks et al., 2004). Since the debut of the psychological distinctions of school engagement in the 1980s (Natriello, 1984), researchers have explored how they could address student disengagement and school dropout rates (Li, 2011). Early studies have distinctively focused on student disengagement and deficiencies that exacerbate unsuccessful school outcomes (Finn, 1989). Over the next decade, research had emphasized a new focus that highlighted strategies for fostering school engagement for at-risk students (Wagonlander, 1997). This newer approach to the

construct of fostering school engagement has been used to identify environmental antecedents and the outcomes that are contingent upon varying levels and psychosocial distinctions of school engagement (Fredricks et al., 2004). The emerging psychosocial distinctions have included how well students can regulate their personal motivations to learn (i.e., cognitive engagement), adherence to school-related activities (i.e., behavioral engagement), and emotions that are experienced in the classroom (i.e., emotional engagement).

The literature of school engagement in the 21st century has grown from the field's pioneer studies that emphasized student deficiencies to research that has now highlighted inclusive work through prioritizing the lived experiences of marginalized groups (Kornbluh et al., 2022), celebrating cultural differences (Moreno & Gaytán, 2013), and empowering youth voices in the assessment and transformation of classroom experiences (i.e., youth participatory approaches) (Ozer, 2017). Scholars studying school engagement have applied methods commonly used in community based participatory research (CBPR) to address and combat the social injustices that influence school engagement (Kornbluh et al., 2015; Krauss et al., 2017; O'Toole & Due, 2015). These social justice centered initiatives that have been applied in order to improve upon and heighten our understanding of school engagement through a CBPR approach have been observed across the three psychosocial distinctions that construct the concept of school engagement. This dissertation will examine how students experience school engagement following their completion of courses that implement culturally relevant material and discuss social justice related topics.

Cognitive Engagement

The first distinction of school engagement, cognitive engagement, assesses the self-regulation and investment a student puts towards their learning (Fredricks et al., 2004). Students may practice cognitive self-regulation by intentionally integrating and building upon previous knowledge as a means to strategically deepen their understanding of math, sciences, or reading. Wang and Eccles (2011) have discussed the positive relationship between student autonomy and grade point average. Notably, this positive relationship has emphasized the importance of assessing for metacognitive strategies and fulfilling autonomy needs within an academic environment (Fredricks et al., 2004).

Given the focus on self-regulation, cognitive engagement is very similar to metacognition. Metacognition, the management and process of cognitive activity when learning, has been assessed in order to accurately reflect student comprehension and learning outcomes (Flavell, 1979). The cognitive processes that encompass the construct of metacognition include cognitive knowledge and cognitive regulation. Schraw and colleagues' (2006) review of self-regulated learning has highlighted how knowledge of cognition refers to the level of awareness an individual has about themselves as learners (i.e., declarative knowledge), the unique learning strategies individuals develop to navigate new material (i.e., procedural knowledge), and the awareness to apply unique learning strategies to specific situations in order to maximize learning and minimize effort (i.e., conditional knowledge). Taken together, the first subconcept of metacognition, cognitive knowledge, describes how individuals can contain a level of awareness for how they organize and activate learning strategies.

The second component of metacognition includes the planning, monitoring, and evaluation of learning (i.e., cognitive regulation of knowledge). The regulation of knowledge has been observed amongst children in school in order to capture instances of setting goals (i.e., planning), self-commentary on progress (i.e., monitoring), and displaying competence of learned material (i.e., evaluation) (Whitebread et al., 2009). For instance, researchers have observed classroom video recordings of instances where children would pause during activities to assess their progress and redirect their actions, if necessary (i.e., monitoring). Behavior-related evaluations have also been made for instances where children displayed successful physical movements of operating scissors or shovels. These types of classroom observations have significantly contributed to the development of codebooks that researchers and teachers could use to assess for metacognition (Gascoine et al., 2017; Robson, 2009; Zachariou et al., 2022).

Based on the theoretical model of metacognition and its overlap with the concept of cognitive engagement, researchers have tested for factors that foster and challenge the development of cognitive engagement in students (Fredricks et al., 2004). Conceptualizations of the factors that influence the development of cognitive engagement include frameworks regarding: (1) environments, (2) individual attributes, and (3) biological and neuropsychological processes. Environmental contexts have been studied using naturalistic methodologies, in which observations of classrooms had revealed that children displayed more self-regulation behaviors when teachers granted students autonomy during activities (Zachariou et al., 2022). Students with teachers absent indicated the most instances of self-regulation behaviors, compared to having the teacher involved in the activity; and the fewest instances when the teacher was present but not involved.

Zachariou and colleagues (2022) had operationalized self-regulation behaviors as verbal or behavioral performances that had displayed direction of the team, reviewing teammate performances, or communication corrections to teammates. Overall, students' frequency of displays of self-regulated behaviors were contingent upon the instructional characteristics of the teacher (i.e., teacher absent, teacher involved, and teacher present).

Individual attributes and the goals of students have been studied to understand their relationship with cognitive engagement. Research has shown that goal-oriented students with mastery-centered mentalities (i.e., seeking personal accomplishments rather than social approval) have scored higher on assessments of self-regulation behaviors and cognitive engagement (Meece et al., 1988). Cross sectional survey results amongst students' motivations for learning and self-regulation behaviors have also yielded a significant positive relationship between these two concepts. These findings suggest that students may benefit from instructional contexts where intrinsic value is emphasized in learning. Empirical research has consistently supported this positive relationship between mastery-centered mentalities and self-regulation (Corno & Mandinach, 1983; Pintrich & De Groot, 1990).

Lastly, neuropsychological reinforcements have been influential in the development of cognitive engagement. Particularly, executive functioning has been documented as a set of higher order cognitive processes guided by the frontal lobe that are critical to mental skills such as working memory, planning, organization, and self-control (Ashcraft & Radvansky, 2010). These mental skills derived from executive functioning are reflective of the behaviors that the literature has attributed to the concept of cognitive engagement (e.g., metacognition). Therefore, a review of cognitive development has postulated how

executive function and metacognition may be mutually dependent upon each other (Roebbers, 2017). Empirical links between executive function and metacognition have suggested that the two concepts share developmental timetables that have been observed amongst children reviewing their own classroom performances and creating learning strategies (Roebbers & Feurer, 2016). For instance, Marulis and colleagues (2016) had found that children's understanding of planning and reviewing classroom puzzles has correlated with higher executive function scores. Given the shared theoretical features between executive function and metacognition, research has studied how age-related deterioration in the frontal lobe may influence cognitive engagement (Calso et al., 2019). In a similar vein, traumatic brain injuries to the frontal lobe have also been found to influence the metacognitive abilities of individuals (Fitzgerald et al., 2022). Tasks that have been impacted by traumatic brain injuries to the frontal lobe have included memory recall, sustained attention to tasks, and evaluation of task performance. Consequently, the physical changes to the structure of the frontal lobe may influence executive functioning and metacognition behaviors, which can also be measured through assessments of cognitive engagement.

This dissertation will explore if ethnic studies that discuss critical race theory positively influence students' cognitive engagement. Ethnic studies, which utilizes critical race theory as a framework for teaching, posits that students benefit from taking classes that offer new perspectives to current materials such as learning and challenging systems of power through student-led discussions (Ladson-Billings, 2021; Nojan, 2020). In order to develop cognitive engagement in students, researchers have emphasized the importance of environmental factors that bolster self-regulation via independent activities and learning

through critiquing existing knowledge. Therefore, this study explores how the educational purposes of ethnic studies (ARC) encourages the development of cognitive engagement in learners.

Behavioral Engagement

Behavioral engagement has been assessed through the examination of students' interactions and practices within the classroom. Observations have typically defined instances of behavioral engagement as student participation, compliance to classroom rules, completion of assignments, and attendance (Lester, 2013). These behaviors have been measured using subscales regarding classroom conduct and participation (Fredricks et al., 2004). Classroom conduct and participation scales were developed initially to capture student disengagement (i.e., absenteeism, distracted attention). However, research has shifted away from focusing on student deficiencies, and have recently begun to encompass empirical work on environmental influences that contribute to student engagement (Li, 2011). For instance, more recent scales of behavioral engagement that assess for classroom conduct have included items that measure classroom habits such as how closely students follow classroom procedures in relation to environmental influences (i.e., teacher and peer social support) (Wang & Eccles, 2012). Longitudinal data has suggested that student behavioral engagement is positively influenced by the type of peer influence that students include in their network. To illustrate, students who have been found to comply with classroom policies and socialize with likeminded peers were more likely to also report higher scores of behavioral engagement, whereas a negative association with behavioral engagement has been predicted amongst students who socialize with peers with antisocial classroom behaviors (i.e., classroom misbehavior). Green and colleagues (2008) have

surveyed the interactions between students and teachers in relation to assignment completion and classroom attentiveness over a three-year period. When students reported higher levels of perceived social support from faculty, they also reported higher levels of behavioral engagement. Given this understanding of how social networks developed in school can influence the behaviors of students in classrooms, researchers have advocated for studies to integrate socioecological frameworks and school engagement conceptualizations in order to further understand the features and processes of student development (Lawson & Lawson, 2013).

In addition to understanding socioecological factors like teachers and peers, the influence of organizational structures and instructional design on behavioral engagement has also been examined (Noetel et al., 2021). A review of multimedia learning and the impact of video-centered instructional design has concluded that videos have provided more opportunities for interactions between students and teachers (Noetel et al., 2021). Students learning mathematics have displayed elevated levels of attention and completion of assignments when they interacted with multimedia formatted tools for computer assisted learning (i.e., educational video games) (Deater-Deckard et al., 2014). Another form of increasing student behavioral engagement has been through the use of student-led discussions. Behavioral engagement in student-led discussions can be impactful and manifested through vocal participation (i.e., asking questions, speaking up about relevant topics) or through silent participation, where students demonstrate listening behaviors (i.e., active listeners, prepared to participate, if needed) (Frymier & Houser, 2016; Shi & Tan, 2020). Overall, a socioecological framework for transforming the classroom has been beneficial to the development of students' behavioral engagement.

Instructors in ethnic studies have sought out activities that provide learners a respectful and safe space to engage in conversations with peers. These activities have been critical to maintaining student-led discussions and encouraging participation. For instance, elementary school teachers in Los Angeles, California, United States, have successfully designed class projects that encouraged student dialogue through discussions on counternarratives reflective of the student population (i.e., Latin American, Indigenous, and African American) (Valdez, 2020). Other forms of behavioral engagement in ethnic studies classrooms have been observed amongst teachers who have relied on media tools to promote learning (Prelitz et al., 2023). A qualitative study had interviewed ethnic studies teachers and their experience with using media to increase student participation. Prelitz and colleagues (2023) had found that teachers have deliberately sought out and shared relevant forms of media with students in hopes of immersing students into the subject and increasing their attention. This dissertation will expand on these findings and explore this relationship between ethnic studies and elements of behavioral engagement through quantitative and qualitative methods.

Emotional Engagement

Emotional engagement has been assessed through the examination of students' feelings of belongingness and the levels of affective value placed on their school environment (Fredricks et al., 2004). The relationship between the two concepts, sense of belongingness and students' level of emotional engagement, has been observed in educational research due to its positive impact on academic performance (Gillen-O'Neal, 2021; Lee, 2014). These findings have warranted the development of interventions aimed at increasing student engagement through fostering supportive school environments and

incorporating relevant academic experiences for students using a socioecological framework (Poling et al., 2022). Research on the impact of the affective value placed on students' school environment has also been noted as critical to the development of emotional engagement (Skinner et al., 2008). A qualitative study that had interviewed adolescents and their emotional experiences with their education posited that autonomy in education contributed to their emotional engagement (Symonds & Hargreaves, 2016). For instance, students reported the importance of having a balance between supportive teachers and restricted independence while learning. These findings have contributed to the importance of developing empowering educational spaces that provide space for students to engage in self-regulating activities (Alderman et al., 2015).

In a similar vein, ethnic studies' three central pillars (i.e., ARC) and critical race theory have emphasized the importance of incorporating community voice into curricula. (Murphy & Levinson, 2023; Somerville et al., 2023). While, to the best of my knowledge, there have been no studies that have explicitly examined the relationship between emotional engagement and ethnic studies, Kornbluh and colleagues (2021) have assessed the relationship between perceived social support and emotional school engagement amongst minority and first-generation college students using a critical race theory framework. Results of their regression analysis have indicated that higher reports of perceived social support significantly increased the probability of higher levels of emotional school engagement. Further, interviews from the same study had expanded on these findings where students had shared the importance of meaningful relationships and cultural capital (i.e., having spaces on campuses to celebrate and acknowledge students' ethnoracial identities). Additional research that explores the specific relationship between

emotional engagement and ethnic studies is needed to further examine critical race theory in relation to student performance.

Taken together, the literature on school engagement has supported the notion of examining the unique contexts that influence student experiences across cognitive, behavioral, and emotional dimensions (Yazzie-Mintz & McCormick, 2012). In order to further develop understandings of school engagement, previous research has called for future work to expand on quantitative findings in school engagement through mixed methods approaches under a social support perspective (Dotterer & Lowe, 2011; Green et al., 2008). This dissertation will explore the relation between emotional engagement and social support through a critical race lens using a mixed methods approach.

Social Support, Sense of Community, and Sense of Belongingness

Social Support

The conceptual framework of social support in educational research has been distinguished from its often entangled relationship with the concept of social networks by being defined as the positive functions or outcomes of one having social networks (Mishra, 2020). Social networks theory has been conceptualized as the specific relationships and their characteristics within an individual's socioecological system that influence one's social support provision (Borgatti & Ofem, 2010; Heaney & Israel, 2008).

Prior research on student engagement has highlighted the role of social support in successful school completion and involvement (Daly et al., 2008; Green et al., 2008; Kornbluh et al., 2021). By and large, the literature has emphasized the relationship between social support and various research topics such as protective factors during stressful events (Hefner & Eisenberg, 2009); cognitive functioning (Seeman et al., 2001); school

satisfaction (Hamre & Pianta, 2005); student engagement (Daly et al., 2008); emotional regulation (Wei et al., 2016, Woods-Jaeger et al., 2016); stigma and racism (Christie, 2021; Seawell et al., 2014); and self-esteem (Hobfoll et al., 1986). These psychosocial contextual factors have been observed across academic networks, namely with classmates and professors, in order to gauge student performance and success (Mishra, 2020). This section of the dissertation will focus specifically on the role of social support in students' academic networks and its anticipated relationship with ethnic studies.

Social support, the positive functions and outcomes from one's social network, has been categorized into four dimensions: informational, emotional, appraisal, and instrumental (Heaney & Israel, 2008). Among the four dimensions, informational and emotional support, have been strongly related to reducing the risk of failure in classrooms among marginalized students by providing students opportunities to engage in culturally relevant discussions and having instructors who attended to the emotional and social needs of students (Enriquez, 2011; Hamre & Pianta, 2005; Ramsay et al., 2007). Enriquez (2011) has observed the lived experiences of immigrant youth and how their academic networks, faculty, and classmates, have contributed to fulfilling informational support needs and promoted the empowerment of marginalized students. Findings from qualitative data have pointed to how culturally relevant resources for undocumented students has been critical to promoting emotional support and higher education retention. For instance, Enriquez (2011) has reported how undocumented students in higher education have successfully navigated institutional barriers due to learning about resources for undocumented individuals via their homogeneous social networks (i.e., peers). This finding suggests the importance of

academic peer networks for navigating higher education and also warrants a deeper understanding of how institutions can promote the development of these peer networks.

Similar findings have been noted from a critical race perspective in which researchers have explored emotional support amongst Chicana students (Villalpando, 2003). Villalpando's qualitative study has suggested the importance of students having supportive networks amongst students from similar backgrounds as a means to combat racism in classrooms or celebrate their cultural heritage despite the challenges present in higher education.

Relevant frameworks used in higher education have suggested the importance of classrooms that emphasize behaviors that bolster students' perceptions of emotional support (i.e., empathetic listening and encouragement) in order to establish supportive relationships (Crisp & Cruz, 2009). To clarify, emotional support has been operationalized as a student's perception of the level of care they receive from their academic networks, whereas appraisal support has been documented as instances of feedback being exchanged across relationships (Malecki & Demaray, 2003). Feedback for students may come in the form of sharing words of kindness to lift wounded spirits (Wilcox et al., 2005) or providing reasonable advice to students seeking help (Schrag & Edmond, 2018). In interviews, appraisal support amongst first year university students was frequently reported as beneficial to navigating the challenges and stress of a new environment (Wilcox et al., 2005).

Social network characteristics have been explored in order to understand the relationships that contribute the most to emotional and appraisal support. Malecki and Demaray's (2003) development of a widely used social support scale in education had

found that emotional and appraisal support from peers were less valued in comparison to receiving appraisal support from teachers. Additionally, university students with close-knit networks composed of university agents, friends, and family members have reported receiving emotional and appraisal support from their network more frequently than students with networks consisting only of family members (Wittner et al., 2020).

Recent research has explored how these social networks can be constructed for students who may not have the privilege to easily obtain connections with university agents or classmates (Hurd et al., 2018; Kornbluh et al., 2021; Tan et al., 2019). In the aforementioned research, students have reported the importance of cultural capital (i.e., diverse forms of knowledge, support, or skills one can obtain from networks) amongst peers from similar backgrounds (Kornbluh et al., 2021). To illustrate, first generation Black students have shared in focus groups the importance of having connections with other Black students in order to navigate their new environments (Kornbluh et al., 2021). Research has posited that cultural capital through academic networks with peers with similar ethnoracial backgrounds have been beneficial to students in predominantly white campuses where faculty are historically white (Mitchell & Means, 2014; Orta et al., 2019). Studies have specifically explored the concept of appraisal support amongst underrepresented students at predominantly white campuses and have reported that students with supportive feedback from and relationships with peers and other underrepresented students were more likely to report fewer depressive symptoms (Tan et al., 2019). Drawing from the evidence suggested from cultural capital and critical race theory, this study will explore how dimensions of social support from academic networks (namely peers and faculty) are related to students' exposure to ethnic studies.

Sense of Community

Sense of community has been conceptualized as the collective feeling an individual perceives based on their sense of belongingness, if their needs are being fulfilled, having a sense of influence in their group, and having a sense of safety in vulnerability (McMillan, 1996). Sense of belongingness can contribute to one's sense of community since the concept of sense of belongingness has been defined as an individual's emotional satisfaction with regards to being embraced or fitting into their social environments. Typically, assessments of sense of belongingness explore an individual's perceived levels of enjoyment or happiness with their social environment (Vural et al., 2013), whereas measurements for sense of community have included items asking participants about their sense of needs being fulfilled, membership and recognition from others, or emotional connection (Peterson et al., 2008). The order of discussion in this section will begin with describing sense of community, followed by sense of belongingness.

Sense of community has been associated with academic and developmental benefits for youth (Jacobs & Archie, 2008; Pretty et al., 1996). Educators, parents, and students have reported the specific youth developmental benefits such as dimensions of social support, happiness, life satisfaction, self-efficacy, self-esteem, and social capital (Garcia-Reid et al., 2013; Jacobs & Archie, 2008; Pretty et al., 1996; Vieno et al., 2007). For instance, Garcia-Reid and colleagues (2013) have found that youth who reported higher levels of sense of community in their neighborhood were more likely to report higher levels of self-esteem. Further, the researchers used a path model to additionally test the relationship between sense of community and mental health outcomes, namely, anxiety and depression. Using self-reported measures for this path model, researchers had demonstrated

that a sense of community had a direct, negative effect on depression, and an indirect negative effect on anxiety through its influence of self-esteem (Garcia-Reid et al., 2013).

Research has suggested that environmental characteristics can contribute to sense of community (Roeser et al., 1996). The extent of literature has explored the community-centered solutions to fostering a sense of community in order to encourage positive youth development in neighborhoods and their wider communities (i.e., social organizations, healthcare services, schools) (Ballard & Syme, 2016; Garcia-Reid et al., 2013; Minkler et al., 2008). These critical environmental characteristics that contribute to a sense of community may include having a safe space to congregate with likeminded individuals, opportunities to engage in social justice initiatives, and a reliable network where youth can express their emotions freely and be vulnerable with others. (Pretty et al., 2003; Reed & Miller, 2016; Reich, 2016).

Such characteristics that have been found impactful for promoting a sense of community have also been explored in educational settings. Specifically, community-based solutions to promoting a sense of community within schools have been evaluated and found effective for youth development (Malorni et al., 2022). A youth participatory action research project had intentionally explored student-generated recommendations for school practices and policies that would heighten a sense of community amongst students (Welton, 2011). Welton (2011) had reported the results of student interviews, finding that factors that contributed to a sense of community notably included classrooms that invited and recognized the identities and cultural values of students.

These findings are also similar to research that has explored the building of sense of community in youth-centered organizations. Evans (2007) had conducted interviews with

youth to uncover factors that promote sense of community in organizations that serve the wellbeing of youth. Youth had shared the importance of environments that promote their voices, where they are heard by people from positions of power (i.e., adults, politicians, program directors); opportunities to engage in meaningful and impactful civic work (i.e., participate in social change that impacts their neighborhoods); and having adults or leaders who support their ideas and encourage them to create change in their communities (i.e., adults who provide critical feedback on student-led recommendations). These factors that promote a sense of community in schools and youth-centered organizations have important overlaps with the goals of ethnic studies such as providing culturally relevant curricula, encouraging youth-led discussions on inequalities, and promoting action from critical reflections of systemic inequalities (Tintiangco-Cubales et al., 2014).

In relation to the ethnic studies, research has discussed the impact of ethnic studies beyond academic outcomes (Halagao, 2004; Vasquez et al., 2005; Wiggan & Watson-Vandiver, 2019). A review of the personal impact of ethnic studies on marginalized students has identified outcomes related to empowerment, self-concept, and ethnic identity (Sleeter & Zavala, 2020). More recent studies have posited that youth may feel more included and recognized by their peers if schools provided curricula based on counternarratives (Sleeter & Zavala, 2020). For instance, a review of strategies to develop inclusive learning environments for LGBTQ+ adolescents suggested that youth would benefit from school climates that teach LGTBQ+ curricula (Chan et al., 2022). Similarly, previously mentioned factors that promote a sense of community also posit that youth were more likely to feel heard and respected in classrooms that discussed their culture or identity (Welton, 2011).

Halagao (2004) has reported on how providing curricula from a multicultural perspective enhanced students' academic network with classmates and faculty. Students participated in interviews and reported on dismantling stereotypes following exposure to culturally relevant history. Research on the impact of ethnic studies has encouraged future work to investigate the broader impacts of ethnic studies across a diverse group of identities and urban populations (Halagao, 2004; Wiggan & Watson-Vandiver, 2017).

One way in which ethnic studies might positively impact a student's perceptions of social support is through a sense of community and a sense of belongingness. For instance, a sense of community has been reported as critical for Black student success in higher education (Edman & Brazil, 2009). Fries-Britt and Turner (2002) have highlighted qualitative themes that have described how Black students have relied on developing a sense of community as a protective factor towards stereotypes and as a means to enhance a student's academic networks.

Therefore, this dissertation will build upon the theoretical framework of social support and investigate its relationship with ethnic studies by examining potential mechanisms behind the impacts of social support. Namely, having sense of community and sense of belongingness in higher education.

Sense of Belongingness

The importance of students' sense of belongingness is evident in the associated outcomes that have been documented by research, including academic achievement, school engagement, social support, school retention, and overall wellbeing (Freeman et al., 2007; Juvonen, 2006; Pendergast et al., 2018). Sense of belongingness has been conceptualized as the subjective experience of enjoyment, pride, or acceptance of others in their school

environments (Vural et al., 2013). A review of school engagement has discussed how school environments can be a caring and supportive space for youth where educators respect the autonomy of students and encourage self-motivating behaviors (Juvonen, 2006). Notable findings from Juvonen's (2006) review of school climate have discussed how environmental characteristics in classrooms that encourage and support youth-led decision-making has been associated with feelings of enjoyment in classes and sense of belongingness.

Universities have implemented programs to bolster a sense of belongingness through culturally relevant programs, spaces, and curriculum. For example, Kornbluh and colleagues (2021) examined quantitative and qualitative data from Black, Asian, and Latiné students using a longitudinal approach to capture the impact of multicultural centers on campuses. Findings indicated significant differences in averages of school engagement scores from longitudinal surveys taken before and after participation in the university multicultural center. Themes from interviews with students elucidated the quantitative findings, and specifically addressed the importance of how having a space to connect, learn, and celebrate their cultural background and identities contributed to their overall sense of acceptance and emotional engagement (Kornbluh et al., 2021).

Studies that have examined the impact of ethnic studies on sense of belongingness have largely explored the reciprocal relationship between the two constructs. For example, Hurtado and Carter (1997) have found that students' sense of belongingness during college is impacted when taking ethnics studies during college. Hurtado and Carter (1997) have argued for the importance of examining the temporal sequence of antecedents (e.g., culturally relevant courses or multicultural programs) that influence college experiences of

students. To further explore this phenomenon from a socioecological perspective, we can consider Bronfenbrenner's (1977) model of socioecological systems theory, and how different systems influence development. Thus, we can argue for the importance of also examining how politically tense legislative changes in curriculum requirements for high school education over a chronological period may influence the collegiate experiences of students entering university. For instance, a study of students who have taken ethnic studies during high school has reported on how youth experienced benefits to these courses, which were simultaneously evident in their high school academic achievement scores. Therefore, this dissertation posits that ethnic studies taken during high school may have a temporal sequencing impact that Hurtado and Carter (1997) discovered amongst college students.

It is important to note that, to the best of my knowledge, current academic literature has not specifically examined ethnic studies in the manner and from the perspective that Tintiangco-Cubales and colleagues (2014) have operationalized ethnic studies and its purposes, particularly in relation to sense of belongingness through a sequential mixed methods approach. Therefore, we hope to explore the relationship between ethnic studies, sense of community, sense of belongingness, social support, and school engagement by triangulation of quantitative and qualitative data from multiple sources.

The Present Study

The purpose of this literature review was to discuss the benefits derived from various educators' use of critical race theory as a framework to discuss race, ethnicity, power, and privilege. Educators have expressed concern for the future of their careers in relation to the ongoing attempts legislators have made to prohibit class discussions on

racial injustice in the United States. Researchers have addressed the misconceptions of critical race theory that have spread rapidly and largely (Benson, 2022b). However, additional work is needed to further understand how critical race theory and ethnic studies contribute to our understanding of positive youth development and academic achievement to ultimately target student retention. In light of present-day challenges, this review has also discussed how frameworks for student success such as critical consciousness, school engagement, social support, sense of community, and sense of belongingness, may be related to ethnic studies. Therefore, this dissertation asks:

- 1) How might young people's enrollment in ethnic studies prior to university prepare them for collegiate commitments in terms of their development of critical consciousness, school engagement, social support, sense of community, and sense of belongingness?
- 2) If students have not had the opportunity to participate in ethnic studies prior to university, how might young people's enrollment in ethnic studies during their first year of university prepare them for collegiate commitments in terms of their development of critical consciousness, school engagement, social support, sense of community, and sense of belongingness?
- 3) How might young people who have had no exposure to ethnic studies prior to or during their first year of university perceive and support their development of critical consciousness, school engagement, social support, sense of community, and sense of belongingness?

CHAPTER 3

METHOD

Research Design

The research study described in this dissertation investigated factors that impact the reduction of attrition amongst first year college students and the promotion of their wellbeing, as well as predictors of increased levels of school engagement during post-secondary education. Specifically, the study explored the influence of ethnic studies courses completed prior to college on critical consciousness, school engagement, perceived social support, sense of community, and sense of belongingness among students enrolled in university. This study used a sequential mixed methods design (Creswell & Clark, 2018; Tashakkori & Teddlie, 1998), in which the quantitative data analysis preceded the qualitative procedures. Mixed methods designs in research allow for both the confirmatory scientific method and the exploratory scientific method to be followed. Typically, quantitative approaches have been used to test generalized hypotheses and theories, which are then further explored and viewed at a local and relevant level in qualitative approaches (Ivankova et al., 2006). The quantitative results from phase one of the study were explored further through the qualitative inquiry in the study's phase two to allow for data triangulation, a higher saturation of findings, and a deeper exploration of relevant psychosocial and cultural explanations and contexts that could prospectively elicit more impactful social change in education. This use of triangulation in research is valuable due to its ability to strengthen and ensure the accuracy of findings from multiple sources of data (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2010). This study used qualitative data and member checking as a means to validate and expand on its quantitative findings. Member checking is a form

of data validation in which feedback and discussions of the qualitative findings were held with undergraduate students (Simpson & Quigley, 2016).

For the first phase of the study, cross-sectional surveys were made available to first year college students through the SONA system of the University of Nevada, Las Vegas (UNLV), to collect data from the middle of the Fall 2022 semester until the end of the Spring 2023 semester. For the second phase of the study, semi-structured interviews were conducted for triangulation purposes, following up on preliminary quantitative findings, and uncovering the subjective experience of participants within the context of the quantitative findings. Participants received \$50 gift cards upon completion of their interview. Together, both phases of the study had examined how the constructs of critical consciousness, school engagement, perceived social support, sense of community, and sense of belongingness are related to courses with a focus on ethnic studies (see Figure 1 for an overview of the data collection design). The study had been approved by the UNLV Institutional Review Board (IRB #: UNLV-2022-237) prior to its conduct.

Figure 1. Overview of Sequential Mixed Methods.



Hypotheses and Research Questions

The following hypotheses and research questions were constructed based on the body of literature that suggests the academic and social value of ethnic studies (Sleeter, 2011). The following hypotheses and research questions are listed below with Table 1, which details the analyses performed to capture each proposition and inquisition.

Hypothesis 1a (H1a): In a sample of first year college students, greater experience with ethnic studies and related courses prior to college will be related to higher ratings in the dimensions of school engagement.

Hypothesis 1b (H1b): Additionally, students who report experience with ethnic studies and related courses prior to college will score higher in the dimensions of school engagement compared to those who have not.

Hypothesis 2a (H2a): In a sample of first year college students, greater experience with ethnic studies and related courses prior to college will be related to higher ratings in the dimensions of perceived social support.

Hypothesis 2b (H2b): Additionally, students who report experience with ethnic studies and related courses prior to college will score higher in the dimensions of perceived social support compared to those who have not.

Hypothesis 3a (H3a): In a sample of first year college students, greater experience with ethnic studies and related courses prior to college will be related to higher ratings in dimensions of critical consciousness.

Hypothesis 3b (H3b): Additionally, students who report experience with ethnic studies and related courses prior to college will score higher in the dimensions of critical consciousness compared to those who have not.

Hypothesis 4 (H4): Sense of community and belongingness mediates the relationship between ethnic studies experience and school engagement.

Hypothesis 5 (H5): Sense of community and belongingness mediates the relationship between ethnic studies experience and perceived social support with academic relationships, namely with faculty and classmates.

Research Question 1 (RQ1): How do students describe a sense of community and a sense of belongingness in the university if they have taken ethnic studies in high school?

Research Question 2 (RQ2): How do students describe a sense of community and a sense of belongingness in the university if they have *not* taken ethnic studies in high school?

Research Question 3 (RQ3): Based on the post-secondary education experiences of the participants, what factors could promote sense of community and sense of belongingness, particularly as mediators of the impacts of ethnic studies on theoretical frameworks related to academic achievement, such as school engagement and social support?

Table 1. Planned Analysis for Hypotheses and Research Questions

| | |
|-----|-------------------------------------|
| H1a | Correlation and Multiple Regression |
| H1b | T-Test |
| H2a | Correlation and Multiple Regression |
| H2b | T-Test |
| H3a | Correlation and Multiple Regression |
| H3b | T-Test |
| H4 | Mediation Model |
| H5 | Mediation Model |
| RQ1 | Thematic Analysis |
| RQ2 | Thematic Analysis |
| RQ3 | Thematic Analysis |

Positionality Statement

Gray and colleagues (2018) have identified and summarized strategies for researchers to consider when conducting culturally and politically inclusive research in educational settings. Notably, recognition (and disclosure) of the self-identified position(s) of researchers is recommended in order to transparently “validate and give voice to people who have often been silenced, misinterpreted, misrepresented, and placed on the margins” (Milner, 2007). The findings of the study described in this dissertation will be analyzed through the lens of multiple identities from Dr. Renato Liboro’s research laboratory team,

including bi-racial, ethnically diverse, cisgender, sexual minority, nonbinary, and first-generation students.

Participants

The current study had included first year college students enrolled at UNLV. In order to recruit a large number of participants from this specific population, this study had employed a non-probability sampling method. Specifically, the convenience sampling technique had allowed for a large number of participants in a short amount of time. The limitations of this sampling method, namely the lack of random selection, were considered when interpreting the quantitative results.

Survey responses included 306 university students between the ages of 18 to 42 ($M=19.18$, $SD = 2.64$). The majority of participants identified as female (57.8%, $n = 177$), and less than 3% ($n = 8$) identified as non-binary. The participants identified as Latina/o/é (27.1%, $n = 83$), White (25.5%, $n = 78$), Asian (17.3%, $n = 53$), African American/Black (13.7%, $n = 42$), Bi-Racial (6.5%, $n = 20$), Multi-Racial (5.6%, $n = 17$), Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander (3.6%, $n = 11$), or Indigenous/American Indian/Alaskan Native (0.7%, $n = 3$). Of the 306 participants, 63% ($n = 192$) of students held first-generation status and 23% ($n = 72$) of students do not primarily speak English at home. Students who have taken ethnic studies prior to college included 122 participants.

Additionally, the qualitative portion of this study had employed a nested sampling method, which had included a subset of participants from the quantitative portion (Mertens & Wilson, 2019). Participants in the interviews had included 17 students between the age of 18-22 ($M=18.71$, $SD = 1.12$). The interview participants identified as Latina/o/é (64.7%, $n = 11$), White (11.8%, $n = 2$), African American/Black (11.8%, $n = 2$), Bi-Racial (5.9%, n

= 1), and Asian (5.9%, n = 1). Of the 17 interview participants, 52.9% (n = 9) of students held first-generation status. Demographic information about the primary language spoken at home was not collected during interviews.

Settings

The study was conducted at UNLV during the 2022-2023 academic year. Participants were recruited through campus listservs, Psychology classes, and first year student seminar classes. UNLV is accredited as a Minority Serving Institution with a Carnegie R1 Classification of Institutions of Higher Education. In particular, UNLV is classified as a Hispanic-Serving Institution (30.9%) and Asian American and Native American Pacific Islander-Serving Institution (15.5%) (UNLV Facts and Stats). Furthermore, in the United States, only 16 out of 131 universities that are Carnegie classified as R1 have a Minority Serving Institution status. Therefore, it is important for its educators and university administrators to understand how critical race theory and ethnic studies shapes the student experience at a collegiate level.

Quantitative Analysis

Survey Overview

In order to gauge levels of exposure to ethnic studies during their secondary education, the quantitative portion of this study had collected survey data amongst students enrolled at UNLV. Cross-sectional surveys were administered during the students' first year of college to examine sense of community, sense of belongingness, school engagement, perceived social support, and critical consciousness. The qualitative portion of this study had built on the results of the quantitative analyses of its survey data to

strategically develop further understanding of students' subjective experiences through the semi-structured interviews.

Students had completed a demographics questionnaire at the beginning of a 30-minute anonymous electronic survey that had asked for items such as the participant's gender, age, ethnic/racial background, household income bracket, parental education attainment, high school grade point average, Nevada residency, and ethnic studies related course history and experience.

Ethnic Studies and Social Studies Interest

Ethnic studies and social studies interest was captured using an adapted version of Wang and colleagues' (2016) Student Interest Scale. The Student Interest Scale assessed for student interest, attention, and willingness to learn more following the completion of the class. Measuring for course experience using the Student Interest Scale allowed for this study to control for these additional variables that may influence how much a student paid attention or had interest in their ethnic studies related courses. This 24-item scale has previously been administered to high school students (Wang et al., 2016) and college students (Wang et al., 2021). Participants were asked to rate items such as, "I concentrated on the topic of this class," and "I value every opportunity to appreciate/learn about the topics covered in this class," using a five-point Likert scale ranging from Strongly Disagree (1) to Strongly Agree (5).

The scores for this scale included 24 items that were averaged and coded so that higher scores indicated higher levels of student interest in either ethnic studies or social studies. The reversed items were recoded accordingly. The creators of the scale have cautioned future studies of the construct validity of the Student Interest Scale since not all

components of the scale or prior knowledge were accounted for in the scale. Wang et al. (2016) scale's internal reliability has exhibited acceptable reliability ($\alpha = .89$). See Appendix A for the full demographic measure.

Sense of Community

To measure Sense of Community, the 8-item Brief Sense of Community Scale (BSCS) was used (Peterson et al., 2008). This scale consists of four subscales that will measure: Fulfillment (2 items), Group Membership (2 items), Influence (2 items), and Emotional Connection (2 items). Participants were asked to rate items such as, "I can get what I need in this community," and "I have a good bond with others in this community," using a five-point Likert scale ranging from Strongly Disagree (1) to Strongly Agree (5).

The scores for this scale included eight items that were averaged and coded so that higher scores indicated higher levels of students' sense of community at the university. No reverse items were present in this scale. Peterson et al. (2008) BSCS's overall internal reliability has exhibited acceptable reliability ($\alpha = .92$). Construct validity for the BSCS has been established using the Sense of Community Scale by McMillan and Chavis (1986). Peterson and colleagues (2008) have not reported on the convergent or divergent validity of this scale. See Appendix B for the full scale.

Sense of Belongingness

To measure Sense of Belongingness, a subscale from the Sense of Belongingness to School was used (Akar-Vural et al., 2013). The subscale consists of five items to measure a student's sense of belongingness. Participants were asked to rate items such as, "I am proud of my school," and "If I had the chance, I would choose to go to another school," using a five-point Likert scale ranging from Strongly Disagree (1) to Strongly Agree (5).

The scores for this scale included five items that were averaged and coded so that higher scores indicated higher levels of students' sense of belongingness at the university. The reversed items were recoded accordingly. Akar-Vural et al. (2013) Sense of Belongingness to School's overall internal reliability has exhibited acceptable reliability ($\alpha = .86$). Construct validity for the measure Sense of Belongingness has been established. See Appendix C for the full scale.

School Engagement

To measure the first dimension of School Engagement, cognitive engagement, a subscale from the Approaches to Learning Instrument (Greene et al., 2004) was used. The 12-item subscale, Meaningful Cognitive Strategies, has been administered to high school (Greene et al., 2004) and college students (Marchand & Gutierrez, 2017). Participants were asked to rate items such as, "I plan my study time for this class," and "I answer practice problems to check my understanding," using a five-point Likert scale ranging from Strongly Disagree (1) to Strongly Agree (5). The scores for this scale included 12 items that were averaged and coded so that higher scores indicated higher levels of students' cognitive engagement. No reverse items were present in this scale. Greene et al. (2004) scale's internal reliability has exhibited acceptable reliability ($\alpha = .88$). See Appendix D for the full scale.

The second and third dimension of school engagement had measured emotional and behavioral engagement using the 9-item subscale, Affective Engagement, and the 12-item subscale, Behavioral Engagement, from the Student Engagement in School (SES) Instrument (Lam et al., 2004). This survey has previously been administered to high school (Lam et al., 2004) and college students (Wong & Kaur, 2018). Participants were asked to

rate items such as, “I like what I am learning in school,” and “If I have trouble understanding a problem, I go over it again until I understand it,” using a five-point Likert scale ranging from Strongly Disagree (1) to Strongly Agree (5).

The scores for Affective Engagement included nine items that were averaged and coded so that higher scores indicated higher levels of students’ sense of emotional engagement at the university. No reverse items are present in the Affective Engagement scale. The scores for Behavioral Engagement included 12 items that were averaged and coded so that higher scores indicated higher levels of students’ behavioral engagement at the university. The reversed items were recoded accordingly. These surveys consisted of items from pre-existing scales commonly used in school engagement literature (Finn et al., 1995; Hill & Werner, 2006; Miller et al., 1996; Rao & Sachs, 1999; & Skinner & Belmont, 1993). Lam et al. (2004) SES Instrument’s internal reliability has exhibited acceptable reliability ($\alpha = .80 - .84$). See Appendix E and F for the full scales.

Perceived Social Support

To measure Perceived Social Support, dimensions (i.e., emotional, informational, appraisal, and instrumental) of teacher and peer support were measured using the 12-item subscale, Teacher Support, and the 12-item subscale, Classmate Support, from the Children and Adolescents Social Support (CASS) Scale (Malecki et al., 2000). Participants were asked to rate items such as, “My classmates give me ideas when I don’t know what to do,” and “My teacher helps me solve problems by giving me information,” using a six-point Likert scale ranging from Never (1) to Always (6).

The scores for this scale included 12 items that were averaged and coded so that higher scores indicated higher levels of students’ sense of social support. This procedure

was completed for both assessments of supportive relationships between (1) faculty and (2) peers. No reverse items are present in the Perceived Social Support scale. Malecki et al. (2000) scale's internal reliability has exhibited acceptable reliability ($\alpha = .88 - .95$). See Appendix G for the full scale.

Critical Consciousness

To measure Critical Consciousness, the 13-item short Critical Consciousness Scale (Short CCS) was used (Diemer et al., 2020). This scale consists of three subscales that had measured: Critical Motivation (4 items), Critical Reflection (4 items), and Critical Action (5 items). This survey has previously been administered to high school (Diemer et al., 2020) and college students (Maker Castro et al., 2021). Participants were asked to rate items such as, "Poor people have fewer chances to get ahead," and "It is important to correct social and economic inequality," using a six-point Likert scale ranging from Strongly Disagree (1) to Strongly Agree (6).

Each subscale for critical consciousness was computed using the average score and coded so that higher scores indicated higher levels of each domain of critical consciousness. No reverse items are present in the Short CCS. Diemer et al. (2020) Short CCS's internal reliability has exhibited acceptable reliability ($\alpha = .77 - .93$). Construct validity for the measure Sense of Belongingness was established using the original Critical Consciousness scale, yet Diemer and colleagues (2020) encourage further testing of construct validity since critical motivation was not accounted for in each phase of the study. Additionally, convergent, divergent, and test-retest reliability estimates were not acquired in the development of the CCS. See Appendix H for the full scale.

Youth Sociopolitical Action Scale for Social Media

To measure critical action in social media, the 15-item Youth Sociopolitical Action Scale for Social Media scale (SASSM) was used (Wilf & Wray-Lake, 2023). This scale consists of three subthemes that had measured: Restorying, Building Community, and Taking Collective Action. Participants were asked to rate how often they engaged in behaviors such as, “Provide encouragement or support to others on social media,” and “challenge stigmas, stereotypes, or prejudices on social media,” using a five-point Likert frequency scale ranging from Never (1) to Daily (5).

The scores for this scale included 15 items that were averaged and coded so that higher scores indicated higher levels of students’ sociopolitical action online. No reverse items are present in the SASSM scale. Wilf and Wray-Lake’s (2023) SASSM scale has been tested and has established convergent validity using scales on critical reflection and critical motivation. See Appendix I for the full scale.

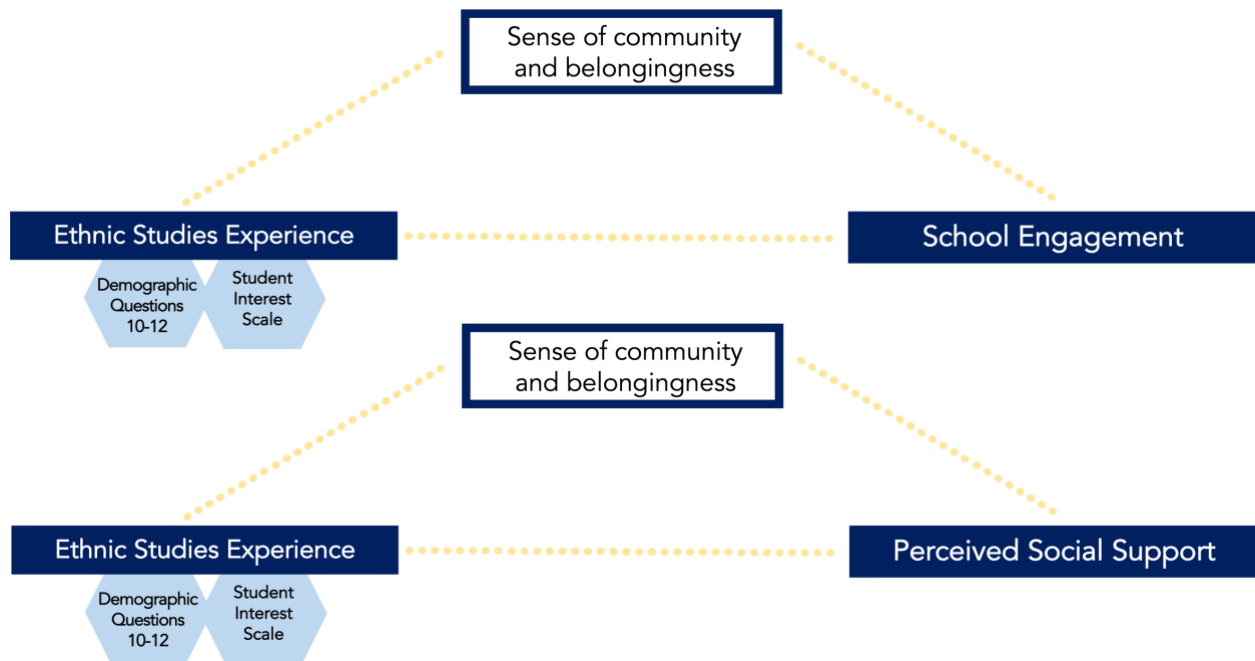
Survey Data Planned Analysis

The quantitative data of the proposed dissertation was analyzed using descriptive statistics, ordinary least squares multiple regression models, and path analyses to test potential mediators. A multiple regression model was used to estimate the regression coefficients for each of the three target variables (i.e., school engagement, social support, and critical consciousness). In other words, the dependent variables included three dimensions of “School Engagement”, “Social Support from Classmates” and of “Social Support from Faculty”, and four dimensions of “Critical Consciousness Development”. Relevant demographic variables, such as ethnic and racial background, and first-generation status were also included with the variable “ethnic studies” in these regression models to

control for them and dummy coded as appropriate. These analyses were run using IBM SPSS version 23.

In order to test H4 and H5, the direct path between ethnic studies interest and school engagement (H4), and ethnic studies and perceived social support from academic relationships will be tested in a path model. Sense of community and belongingness will serve as a mediator in both path models (see Figure 2 for model). The path model analyses were run using the R Studio program and PROCESS package to assess potential mediators of school engagement and social support (Hayes, 2012).

Figure 2. Path Model for Hypothesis 4 and Hypothesis 5.



Missing data were excluded list wise, so a participant with missing data for the relevant hypothesis was excluded from the corresponding analysis. Findings were used to develop interview questions to produce qualitative data that can elucidate the quantitative results.

Qualitative Analysis

Semi-Structured Interviews

In order to answer the exploratory research questions (i.e., RQ1, RQ2, and RQ3) presented in this dissertation, the second phase of this sequential mixed methods study had explored the lived experiences of students enrolled in college through the use of one-on-one, confidential, semi-structured interviews during the Spring 2023 semester. Participants for this portion of the study were recruited from voluntary students who indicated interest to participate in the interviews following their completion of the survey, and were compensated for their time. The nested sampling technique was used to select a subset of participants from the quantitative portion that had represented the qualitative portion (Mertens & Wilson, 2019). The purposes of this portion of the study were to expand on key findings from the quantitative portion by: (1) describing the student experience of taking ethnic studies in Nevada, and (2) exploring the facilitators or barriers to fostering school engagement, social support, and critical consciousness. The semi-structured interviews had reviewed the impact of ethnic studies during the students' collegiate experience. Interview questions had been modified to build on the survey results following the cross-sectional survey data collection. For instance, a smaller subset of participants had been asked to share insights on survey findings regarding how they perceive a sense of community in classes that discuss race or social injustice. Interviews were digitally

recorded with the participants' explicit written consent and transcribed verbatim. See Appendix J for the interview questions.

Interview Data Planned Analysis

Thematic analysis was employed to analyze the qualitative data (Braun & Clark, 2006). First, the lead researcher of this study familiarized themselves with the data, by conducting all the interviews, transcribing recordings, and quality checking transcriptions. The undergraduate student research team also familiarized themselves with the data, by transcribing recordings, and quality checking transcriptions. The second step in thematic analysis was to generate initial codes. The research team used an inductive approach to conduct open coding, in which team members had independently coded transcripts without trying to fit the data into an expected coding frame. Inductive approaches to thematic analysis are beneficial when additional information on a construct is needed as compared to testing theories (i.e., grounded theory) (Azungah, 2018). Grounded theory principles assert that theoretical understandings of phenomenon can be pronounced through the evolving research questions and explorations, which are made possible through inductive approaches to thematic analysis (Green & Thorogood, 2018).

Following the open coding, team members had met virtually to conduct axial coding using Google Jamboard (Stafford, 2022). Google Jamboard allows for researchers to brainstorm in a virtually interactive space and visually organize the wealth of codes that team members had initially discovered. Because of the undergraduate researchers' expertise and experience with the project's focus, the undergraduate researchers were encouraged to facilitate the axial coding session and organize the codes, which they had

conducted while openly discussing emerging themes. See Figure 3 for a demonstration of the student led axial coding session that was used in the study described in this dissertation.

Themes and a codebook were reviewed by the team before coding the 17 transcripts. A second step to developing the codes was implemented by the lead researcher by using a deductive approach in which the generated themes were compared to the theoretical framework for ethnic studies (i.e., critical race theory). This procedure allows for additional data to be analyzed (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Thus, the codebook for the study described in this dissertation includes codes developed from both an inductive and deductive approach in collaboration with undergraduate researchers. Cognitive research posits that studying with color themed notes aids in the memorization of complex material (Block, 2006), therefore the codebook for the study described in this dissertation was created using a color-coding scheme in order to stimulate metacognition thinking skills.

All members of the research team participated in the coding of the transcripts and met weekly to discuss findings and uncertainties until a consensus was reached. The study described in this dissertation used latent coding approaches to analyzing the data, in which coding can be assumed and interpreted (Gray & Densten, 1998). In order to verify latent themes, coding was verified through member checking strategies, in which undergraduate researchers were asked to verify assumptions and uncertainties of the data. A table of the codes is provided in Appendix K.

Figure 3. Axial Coding Led by Undergraduate Researchers on Jamboard.



Note. Each color (i.e., pink, blue, orange, yellow, and green) represents an individual's coding experience. In the earlier stages of the Jamboard session, the colors are grouped based on an individual coder. In the final stage, the colored notes are no longer grouped by the individual coder, but rather represent themes the undergraduate research assistants determined as salient.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

Preliminary Quantitative Results

Correlation Analysis

To assess relationships across the variables that were probed in this dissertation, Bivariate Pearson correlations were run. The results of these correlations are presented in Table 2. Of the eleven relationships between number of ethnic studies related courses taken and the assessed variables that were statistically significant, two relationships were not (i.e., critical motivation and perceived social support received from professors). The number of ethnic studies students had taken prior to attending university was significantly related to all three dimensions of perceived school engagement during university: cognitive engagement ($r = .114, n = 306, p = .046$), emotional engagement ($r = .198, p < .001$), and behavioral engagement ($r = .323, n = 306, p < .001$). Additionally, a significant positive correlation was found between perceived social support from peers and the number of ethnic studies students had taken prior to attending university ($r = .183, n = 306, p < .001$). Lastly, a significant positive correlation was found between the number of ethnic studies students had taken prior to attending university and three out of four dimensions of critical consciousness, namely critical reflection ($r = .117, n = 306, p = .041$), critical action ($r = .287, n = 306, p < .000$), and online critical action ($r = .307, n = 306, p < .000$). These findings contributed to the further analysis of the hypotheses using t-tests and multiple regressions.

Table 2.
Means, Standard Deviations, and Correlations with Confidence Intervals. (N= 306)

| | Variable | <i>M</i> | <i>SD</i> | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | 11 |
|----|------------------------|----------|-----------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| 1 | Ethnic Studies | 0.79 | 1.22 | – | | | | | | | | | | |
| 2 | Sense of Community | 3.50 | 0.69 | .26** | – | | | | | | | | | |
| 3 | Sense of Belonging | 3.56 | 0.70 | .18** | .56** | – | | | | | | | | |
| 4 | Cognitive Engagement | 3.79 | 0.61 | .11* | .43** | .33** | – | | | | | | | |
| 5 | Emotional Engagement | 3.52 | 0.64 | .20** | .51** | .47** | .59** | – | | | | | | |
| 6 | Behavioral Engagement | 3.32 | 0.53 | .32** | .40** | .23** | .57** | .62** | – | | | | | |
| 7 | Supportive Professors | 4.40 | 1.02 | .03 | .47** | .29** | .40** | .46** | .31** | – | | | | |
| 8 | Supportive Peers | 3.93 | 1.13 | .18** | .46** | .26** | .32** | .40** | .35** | .48** | – | | | |
| 9 | Critical Reflection | 3.89 | 1.35 | .12* | .004 | .01 | .06 | .09 | .04 | .002 | .05 | – | | |
| 10 | Critical Motivation | 4.90 | 0.90 | -.09 | .16** | .09 | .22** | .27** | .11 | .14* | .12* | .37** | – | |
| 11 | Critical Action | 1.50 | 0.74 | .29** | .13* | .01 | .001 | .18** | .31** | .007 | .13* | .18** | -.01 | – |
| 12 | Critical Online Action | 2.01 | 1.12 | .31** | .11* | -.006 | .06* | .22** | .30** | .04 | .17** | .18** | .15** | .65** |

Note. *M* and *SD* represent the mean and standard deviation, respectively. * indicates $p < .05$; ** indicates $p < .01$.

Hypotheses 1b, 2b, & 3b Quantitative Results

T-Test Analysis

Independent sample t-tests were conducted to compare the dimensions of school engagement amongst students who have reported taking ethnic studies prior to college and those who have not. A Levene's test for equality of variances was conducted and the results presented in this section include the adjusted degrees of freedom for the variables "behavioral engagement", "critical reflection", "critical action", or "online critical action" due to the violation of the assumption of homogeneity of variance.

Hypothesis 1b (H1b): Students who report experience with ethnic studies and related courses prior to college will score higher in the dimensions of school engagement compared to those who have not.

To test H1b, an independent samples t-test was conducted to compare cognitive and emotional engagement between these two groups of students. The results indicated a statistically significant difference between the two groups, $t(304) = 1.45, p = .05$, in which participants who have taken ethnic studies reported higher levels of emotional engagement ($M = 3.60; SD = 0.62$) than those who have not ($M = 3.46; SD = 0.62$). No significant differences between the two groups were found when comparing them for cognitive engagement. To address the violation of unequal variances between the two groups, an adjusted degrees of freedom was considered for the behavioral engagement. The results indicated a statistically significant difference between the two groups, $t(226) = 3.45, p < .001$, in which participants who have taken ethnic studies reported higher

levels of behavioral engagement ($M = 3.45$; $SD = 0.58$) than those who have not ($M = 3.23$; $SD = 0.48$).

Hypothesis 2b (H2b): Students who report experience with ethnic studies and related courses prior to college will score higher in the dimensions of perceived social support compared to those who have not.

To test H2b, an independent samples t-test was conducted to compare perceived social support from professors and peers between these two groups of students. The results indicated a statistically significant difference between the two groups, $t(304) = 2.52$, $p = .012$, in which participants who have taken ethnic studies reported higher levels of perceived social support from peers ($M = 4.10$; $SD = 1.21$) than those who have not ($M = 3.80$; $SD = 1.08$). No significant differences were found when comparing perceived social support from professors between these two groups of students.

Hypothesis 3b (H3b): Students who report experience with ethnic studies and related courses prior to college will score higher in the dimensions of critical consciousness compared to those who have not.

To test H3b, an independent sample t-test was conducted to compare dimensions of critical consciousness between these two groups of students. No significant differences were found when assessing for critical motivation. However, to address the violation of unequal variances between the two groups, an adjusted degrees of freedom was

considered for the variables “critical reflection”, “critical action”, and “online critical action”. The results indicated a statistically significant difference for critical reflection between the two groups, $t(291) = 1.93, p = .055$, in which participants who have taken ethnic studies reported higher levels of critical reflection ($M = 4.06; SD = 1.18$) than those who have not ($M = 3.77; SD = 1.45$). Additionally, the results indicated a statistically significant difference for critical action between the two groups, $t(193) = 3.96, p < .000$, in which participants who have taken ethnic studies reported higher levels of critical action ($M = 1.71; SD = 0.87$) than those who have not ($M = 1.35; SD = 0.59$). Finally, significant differences were also found for online critical action between the two groups, $t(200) = 4.31, p < .000$, in which participants who have taken ethnic studies reported higher levels of online critical action ($M = 2.36; SD = 1.31$) than those who have not ($M = 1.77; SD = 0.93$).

Hypotheses 1a, 2a, & 3a Quantitative Results

Regression Analysis

Hypothesis 1a (H1a): In a sample of first year college students, greater experience with ethnic studies and related courses prior to college will be related to higher ratings in the dimensions of school engagement.

A multiple regression analysis was conducted to examine if the number of ethnic studies courses taken prior to attending university was predictive of scores in behavioral engagement during university while controlling for race, language spoken at home, and first-generation status. The model indicated a significant predictive relationship between

ethnic studies and behavioral engagement, $F(10, 294) = 5.63, p < .000$. Approximately, 16% of the variance in behavioral engagement can be accounted for by these variables. Students who had reported taking more ethnic studies in high school were more likely to report higher levels of behavioral engagement ($B = .132, SE_{ethcours} = 0.25, t = 5.38, p < .000$, 95% CI [.084, .180]).

Another multiple regression analysis was conducted to examine if the number of ethnic studies courses taken prior to attending university was predictive of scores in emotional engagement during university while controlling for race, language spoken at home, and first-generation status. The model indicated a significant predictive relationship between ethnic studies and emotional engagement, $F(10, 294) = 4.90, p < .000$.

Approximately, 14% of the variance in emotional engagement can be accounted for by these variables. Students who had reported taking more ethnic studies in high school were more likely to report higher levels of emotional engagement ($B = .092, SE_{ethcours} = 0.03, t = 3.04, p = .003$, 95% CI [.032, .151]).

A third multiple regression analysis was conducted to examine if the number of ethnic studies courses taken prior to attending university was predictive of scores in cognitive engagement during university while controlling for race, language spoken at home, and first-generation status. Similar to the preliminary correlation and t-test analyses, ethnic studies did not predict cognitive engagement scores.

Hypothesis 2a (H2a): In a sample of first year college students, greater experience with ethnic studies and related courses prior to college will be related to higher ratings in perceived social support from professors and peers.

A multiple regression analysis was conducted to examine if the number of ethnic studies courses taken prior to attending university was predictive of scores in perceived social support from peers during university while controlling for race, language spoken at home, and first-generation status. The model indicated a significant predictive relationship between ethnic studies and perceived social support from peers, $F(10, 294) = 1.86, p = .05$. Approximately, 6% of the variance in perceived social support from peers can be accounted for by these variables. Students who had reported taking more ethnic studies in high school were more likely to report higher levels of perceived social support from peers ($B = .175, SE_{\text{Ethcours}} = 0.055, t = 3.156, p = .002, 95\% \text{ CI } [.066, .283]$).

The last multiple regression analysis was conducted to examine if the number of ethnic studies courses taken prior to attending university was predictive of scores in social support from professors while controlling for race, language spoken at home, and first-generation status. Similar to the preliminary correlation and t-test analyses, ethnic studies did not predict social support from professors scores.

Hypothesis 3a (H3a): In a sample of first year college students, greater experience with ethnic studies and related courses prior to college will be related to higher ratings in dimensions of critical consciousness.

A multiple regression analysis was conducted to examine if the number of ethnic studies courses taken prior to attending university was predictive of scores in critical action during university while controlling for race, language spoken at home, and first-generation

status. The model indicated a significant predictive relationship between ethnic studies and critical action, $F(10, 294) = 5.112, p < .000$. Approximately, 15% of the variance in critical action can be accounted for by these variables. Students who had reported taking more ethnic studies in high school were more likely to report higher levels of critical action ($B = .157, SE_{ethcours} = 0.034, t = 4.576, p < .000, 95\% \text{ CI} [.089, .224]$).

Another multiple regression analysis was conducted to examine if the number of ethnic studies courses taken prior to attending university was predictive of scores in online critical action during university while controlling for race, language spoken at home, and first-generation status. The model indicated a significant predictive relationship between ethnic studies and online critical action, $F(10, 294) = 6.25, p < .000$. Approximately, 17% of the variance in online critical action can be accounted for by these variables. Students who had reported taking more ethnic studies in high school were more likely to report higher levels of online critical action ($B = .264, SE_{ethcours} = 0.051, t = 5.153, p < .000, 95\% \text{ CI} [.163, .365]$).

The last two multiple regression analyses were conducted to examine if the number of ethnic studies courses taken prior to attending university was predictive of scores from (1) critical reflection and (2) critical motivation, while controlling for race, language spoken at home, and first-generation status. Compared to the preliminary analyses using correlations and t-test, scores from critical reflection were no longer significantly related to ethnic studies. Similar to the preliminary correlation and t-test analyses, ethnic studies did not predict critical motivation scores.

Hypotheses 4 & 5 Quantitative Results

Path Analysis

Hypothesis 4 (H4): Sense of community and belongingness mediates the relationship between ethnic studies experience and school engagement.

Hypothesis 5 (H5): Sense of community and belongingness mediates the relationship between ethnic studies experience and perceived social support with academic relationships, namely with faculty and classmates.

Drawing from the results of the regression models, this dissertation further probed into the significant relationships between ethnic studies and dimensions of school engagement, namely emotional and behavioral engagement (see Figure 4). The path model tested if sense of community or sense of belongingness mediated the relationship between ethnic studies and school engagement. The confidence intervals for the direct and indirect effects of the size models are displayed in Table 3.

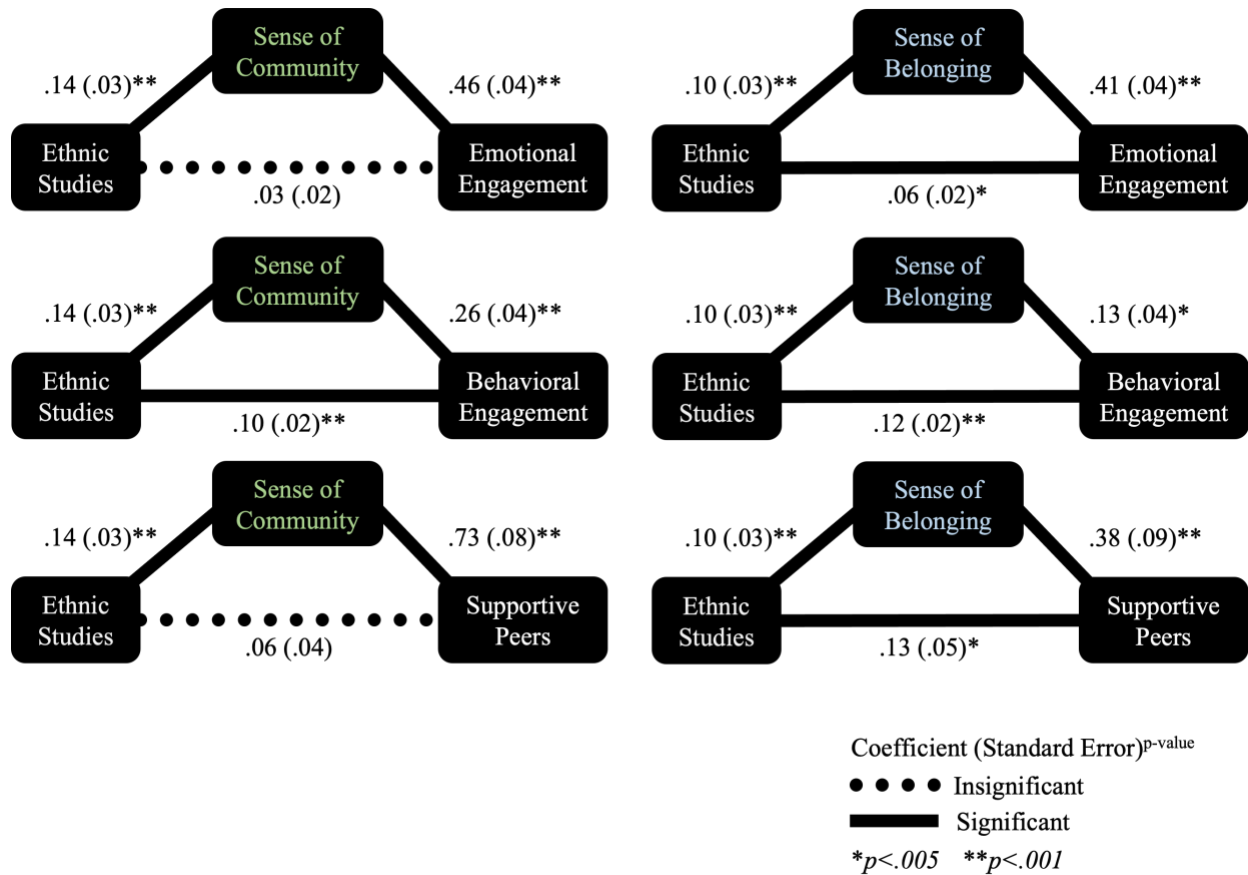
Table 3. Direct and Indirect Effects of Path Models.

| Relationship | Direct Effect | Indirect Effect | Confidence Interval | | t-statistics | Conclusion |
|--|--------------------|--------------------|---------------------|-------------|--------------|-------------------|
| | | | Lower Bound | Upper Bound | | |
| Ethnic -> Community-> > Emotional | 0.0355 (0.0270) | 0.0691 (0.0691) | 0.0338 | 0.1071 | 1.3178 | Full Mediation |
| Ethnic -> Community-> > Behavioral | 0.1017 (0.0230) | 0.0392 (0.0119) | 0.0174 | 0.0645 | 4.4147 | Partial Mediation |
| Ethnic -> Community-> > Support Peers | 0.0608 (0.0489) | 0.1088 (0.0287) | 0.0529 | 0.1661 | 1.2448 | Full Mediation |
| Ethnic -> Belonging-> Emotional | 0.0629 (0.0271) | 0.0417 (0.0147) | 0.0135 | 0.0709 | 2.3194 | Partial Mediation |
| Ethnic -> Belonging-> Behavioral | 0.1272 (0.0237) | 0.0137 (0.0067) | 0.0030 | 0.0289 | 5.3717 | Partial Mediation |
| Ethnic -> Belonging-> Support Peers | 0.0284 (0.0275) | 0.0287 (0.0107) | 0.0090 | 0.0506 | 1.0303 | Partial Mediation |

The first path of the mediation analyses revealed a significant positive relationship between ethnic studies and sense of community ($\beta = .14, = p < .001$). When examining the path from ethnic studies to emotional engagement, sense of community was significantly related to emotional engagement ($\beta = .26, = p < .001$), whereas the direct path from ethnic studies to emotional engagement was not significant. This model suggests that sense of community had a full mediation between ethnic studies and emotional engagement. Sense of community also had a full mediation between ethnic studies and supportive peers ($\beta = .73, = p < .001$). Lastly, the path between ethnic studies and behavioral engagement was tested, where sense of community was a partial mediator between the two variables ($\beta = .26, = p < .001$).

Similarly, a sense of belongingness was observed as a partial mediator between ethnic studies and emotional engagement ($\beta = .41, = p < .001$). When testing the model for outcomes, supportive peers ($\beta = .13, = p < .005$), and behavioral engagement ($\beta = .38, = p < .001$), sense of belongingness was also suggested to be a partial mediator.

Figure 4. Path Models.



Qualitative Results

This dissertation was guided by a sequential mixed methods approach (Creswell & Clark, 2018; Tashakkori & Teddlie, 1998) in which the quantitative analysis informed the development of the qualitative interview questions. Therefore, the interview questions (see Appendix J) aimed to elucidate the relationship between a sense of community, belongingness, and ethnic studies that was demonstrated in the path models. The interviews explored facilitators, barriers, and student generated recommendations to improve on sense of community and belongingness in relation to their academic experiences. These interview questions aimed to answer the exploratory component of this dissertation,

Research Question 1 (RQ1): How do students describe a sense of community and a sense of belongingness in the university if they have taken ethnic studies in high school?

Research Question 2 (RQ2): How do students describe a sense of community and a sense of belongingness in the university if they have *not* taken ethnic studies in high school?

Research Question 3 (RQ3): Based on the post-secondary education experiences of the participants, what factors could promote sense of community and sense of belongingness, particularly as mediators of the impacts of ethnic studies on theoretical frameworks related to academic achievement, such as school engagement and social support?

From the qualitative analysis of the 17 semi-structured interviews, three prominent themes were identified: (1) opportunities for peer-to-peer learning, (2) barriers to learning from ethnic studies, and (3) student-generated recommendations. For each of these three main themes, two to three subthemes were also identified, and are described below in detail with relevant quotes to illustrate the lived experiences of Nevada youth. Additionally, each interview was coded for the level of exposure one had to ethnic studies. From the 17 participants, five subcodes were generated, including (1) high school ethnic studies course with a critical race framework, (2) high school discussions related to a critical race framework, (3) university class discussions related to a critical race framework, (4) university organizations that use a critical race framework, and (5) no exposure, described in Table 4. No participants reported taking classes in university that were exclusively reserved for ethnic studies.

Table 4. Qualitative Findings on Participants' Level of Exposure to Ethnic Studies in High School and in University.

| | | |
|---|--|--------------|
| High school ethnic studies course with a critical race framework | Student has taken a high school course in which the class focused on historically excluded narratives and discussed topics through a critical lens. | <i>N</i> = 4 |
| High school discussions related to a critical race framework | Student has taken a course in which the class occasionally held discussions on historically excluded narratives and discussed topics through a critical lens. | <i>N</i> = 3 |
| University class discussions related to a critical race framework | Student has taken a university course in which the class occasionally held discussions on historically excluded narratives and discussed topics through a critical lens. | <i>N</i> = 4 |
| University organizations that use a critical race framework | Student has participated in a university organization that discusses race from a critical lens. | <i>N</i> = 4 |
| No exposure | Student has not had any exposure to these classes or discussion in high school or at university. | <i>N</i> = 6 |

Note. Some participants were doubled coded for their involvement in multiple educational settings.

Opportunities To Promote Peer-To-Peer Learning

The first theme that was identified was the opportunities for peer-to-peer learning that were related to ethnic studies, sense of community, and/or sense of belongingness. This theme appeared across most of the interviews when students discussed their experiences with ethnic studies and included subthemes such as (1) in-class, teacher-facilitated, student-led learning, and (2) university-sanctioned student organizations.

In-Class, Teacher-Facilitated, Student-Led Learning. Students who had taken ethnic studies in high school commonly reported feeling heard and respected when they engaged in classroom discussions reflective of their identity and racial background. Students described how supportive environments, emotional connections, help seeking behaviors, and feelings of vulnerability were possible in classes that encouraged students to take the lead in discussions about racial injustice and systems of oppression. When students who took ethnic studies during high school were asked how they perceived their teachers who spoke about racial injustice and systems of oppression, they had shared how these teachers could be a relatable connection in school.

I feel like certain topics like Black injustice, immigration injustice, everything that was talked about in that topic in both of those classes show good character...I feel like if they have compassion for a general population, why not go to them [teachers who teach about racial injustice] with a problem? I could connect with them [and join their discussions in class] because of their take on social issues. (Female, 18, Native Hawaiian and Filipina, First-Generation Student, Straight, High school ethnic studies course)

For some students, classes on both ethnic studies and educational material on LGBTQ literature were offered in their high schools. These classes were described as beneficial for their peer relationships and supporting their friends even outside of the classroom. Students recognized the controversy related to discussing sexual orientation in education, and therefore appreciated the efforts teachers made in class to facilitate and encourage social environments that students can be open and vulnerable with peers.

I think it's good to kind of pause for a second and get to know yourself. I think the school itself wasn't really [as] open to the idea. Some teachers didn't [encourage you to get to know yourself], some did. I'm really thankful that I did have teachers who encouraged that...it was really, really nice and comforting knowing that there were people who would support me no matter who I was. It really benefited a lot of other students who weren't as comfortable with themselves or weren't as familiar with who they really are... there were definitely people in my classroom who I was not expecting to be part of the LGBTQ community. For example, one of my friends, she had never really talked about herself and her sexuality all that much. Turns out, she's lesbian and she had a girlfriend, which I did not know any of that. We talked it out [in class], she said that she just didn't really feel comfortable coming out like that yet, but with the teacher supporting her, she felt safer to tell everyone. We're actually still friends. I think it has improved our relationship overall because it's made us more comfortable telling each other about things no matter what. (Female, 19, Latina, Straight, High school ethnic studies course)

In addition to feeling comfortable discussing these topics, students also stressed the importance of building a sense of community through peer-to-peer learning and student-led discussions. Notably, class discussions of racism were often from the perspectives of students and their lived experiences, in which classes often became spaces for students to be heard and validated, and feel that they belonged. Opportunities for students to lead discussions and hold a level of influence in their group contributed to their emotional satisfaction and connection with peers in their ethnic studies classes in high school.

We really connected over that stuff, over of these opinions, and how racism was really not okay. Some people felt different too because of their own backgrounds and maybe they wouldn't say that they agree with what you're saying "this sucks", so we would try to like communicate to them and say how it isn't okay to really think so ignorantly. We were comfortable with talking with each other... I feel like, not being the race that a lot of the conflict is inflicted upon, I obviously wouldn't know as much. And from people who've had experiences in their lives...Black students experiencing it in their lives, I definitely understood more about what not to say, what to say, how to be compassionate, how to educate other people who may be ignorant, or who may not have the opportunity to talk to students. (Female, 19, Latina, First-Generation Student, Bisexual, High school ethnic studies course, University class discussions related to a critical race framework)

Students who were not offered ethnic studies in high school and have since enrolled in classes where discussions of race from a critical lens are held in university have also described the importance of student-led discussions in order to learn about historical

perspectives that aren't typically covered in classes, and develop supportive relationships with their peers. These shared experiences and instances of being vulnerable, without the professor interrupting the discussion, was also critical to their motivation to participate in classroom discussions.

Opening up at the beginning where we were told to give information about ourselves that we were willing to give. So, hearing where everyone was from, people were more in depth about themselves and not necessarily surface level topics like, "Oh, my favorite color is blue." Instead, it would be, "I come from a one parent household with five other siblings." and it was that initial connection between everyone and how we all would talk as a community. We were given the opportunity in every single class to just talk amongst ourselves, and the professor would listen in and intervene [only] when need be. So yeah, that initial [first semester] class, got us connected a little bit. Over time, it was more group work than just solo work or lecture, lecture, lecture. (Female, 18, Latina, Straight, University class discussions related to a critical race framework)

Lastly, some students showed interest in engaging in action-related topics discussed in their high school ethnic studies classes. Students recognized how their experiences in high school could apply to their experiences in university when exploring how they can contribute to social justice on their campus. For instance, the narratives they heard from their peers in high school has influenced their commitment to educating others in college on racism.

Education is the first step. And then, you know, with education comes self-awareness and where you're at on your own knowledge, and understanding of certain things...then with that comes self-development of like, "Okay, I've learned this. I'm aware of my own stance, and then here's my self-development of how I can show up and do better in this space"... (Female, 22, Latina, First-Generation Student, Straight, High school ethnic studies course).

University-Sanctioned Student Organizations. Students who have not taken ethnic studies in high school have described how university-sanctioned, ethnic- or race-centered student organizations have contributed to their development of social networks and supportive relationships, as well as fostered their peer-to-peer learning. These organizations sanctioned by and offered at the university have provided students who did not have opportunities to enroll in ethnic studies during high school a space to engage and lead in discussions, access to resources, and challenge racism in classrooms.

They hold like different meetings and stuff just for kids who are African American. It's really helpful to hear their perspective and it helps with like college and having that older mentor. One of the things that we really talk about is like how it feels to go to like a PWI [predominantly White institution] and how it feels to kind of, like, you know, be comfortable sharing our story. And that's kind of one of our safe places that you could go if you're ever feeling like that, and they advocate for you as well. It's nice just because, like, in high school, I didn't have that. At UNLV it's like...they are trying to make sure you don't go to that same situation that they [the senior students] went through. They kind of use their voice when you don't really have one I guess, if that makes

sense. There was a situation that happened with one of my professors, and I think he said something that like really offended me or whatever, and I didn't want to come off like being rude...it was something about like, a race fitting that stereotype... but, one of my sisters at that club went and told me how to go through the situation so I ended up sending them [the professor who had said something about a race fitting a stereotype in class] an email [about how they felt as a student hearing that statement]. (Female, 18, African American, First-Generation Student, Straight, University organizations that use a critical race framework)

Interest in the content of ethnic studies and overcoming barriers related to racial injustice was described amongst students who have only participated in university-sanctioned, ethnic or racial minority student organizations once they reached a university setting. Students have recognized the importance of acknowledging their racial background and exploring the relevant resources that contribute to their needs to be a successful student. University-sanctioned, ethnic or racial minority student organizations have offered students a safe space to connect with peers and navigate the systemic barriers that exist for students from marginalized backgrounds.

I have been actively a member of Future Latinas in Medicine...Meeting other students that are [planning to be] in the same profession as you, it's very encouraging because you just, you have that equal understanding because of your background or because of your future interest. We're all going into medicine, most of us are first generation. I think all of us are first generation. We have so many things to relate on, and I think that's awesome. Because we

are Latinos in it, a minority group...we went over like how few Latinos are in medicine, and how Latinos are perceived in the field of medicine. And just with that information alone, I was able to add that to my personal statement on why want to become a doctor. It just gives me more motivation to fight the social injustices that are in the field of medicine because I think right now there is only 2% of Latinos currently in medicine, and then even fewer are female. (Female, 18, Latina, First-Generation Student, Straight, University organizations that use a critical race framework)

Several students who have not taken ethnic studies prior to university and have instead participated in ethnic- or racial-centered university student organizations have discussed how these spaces have offered them the opportunity to belong and contribute to the wellbeing of their community, share resources, and spread awareness of social injustices. Students reported emotional satisfaction in relation to the ability to participate in cultural organizations that address social issues related to their identity.

I do feel like I belong here, especially because there's just so many groups to choose from, like, clubs, activities. I think there's something for everybody. I have found...the Muslim Student Association [MSU]...It's been a good experience so far. For example, women who don't want to wear hijabs there's a special foundation to help those women, and they become refugees here in America. MSU sends that link through WhatsApp and it's different ways about how you contribute to helping them find refuge in another country or how to help them in general, so I think that's good. (Female, 18, Biracial, Straight, University organizations that use a critical race framework)

Barriers To Learning From Ethnic Studies

The second identified theme introduces how barriers to learning from ethnic studies or within the ethnic studies classes exists for students in Nevada. Students have expressed interest in learning about underrepresented perspectives in social sciences classes through ethnic studies.

Both groups of students, those who have taken ethnic studies prior to university, and those who have not, reported the positive outcomes associated with taking these classes and the salient barriers to learning from ethnic studies.

Lack of Institutional Support. A commonly mentioned barrier was the lack of institutional support for these movements towards promoting ethnic studies in high schools. The institutional practices that eliminated or withheld classes like ethnic studies were interpreted by students as unsupportive and untrustworthy despite the perceived benefits reported from taking those classes. For instance, one student recognized the impact of teachers who taught ethnic studies, but was not able to take the course due to the course being removed from the available classes in high school education.

One class specifically, the cultural studies class, was taught by a Hispanic woman, and she was very connected with her students of all races, and it was amazing. She was a very nice woman. And when they fired her and took away the specific course, it was kind of weird, considering she had been [positively] impacting all the students and leaving such a big mark on all of them going up into sophomore year, junior year. So, it was a little weird, and it did make me question a little bit what the school's priorities were, considering we had other things that they were putting, for example, money towards or more time and

attention to. (Female, 18, Latina, Straight, University class discussions related to a critical race framework)

Students had also described how the lack of institutional support for ethnic studies was apparent in classes that were intended to discuss counternarratives and critiquing systems of oppression. For instance, a few students had described how some high schools provided health-centered courses for those interested in pursuing medical careers. These courses were taught with the intention of also addressing the ethnoracially diverse population of the Nevada region where students would potentially be serving. However, the lack of support from both school administrators and the larger educational system was discussed when students critiqued the quality of the material available to them in these classes that were designed to discuss race. Ultimately, student interviewees did not feel that these high school courses had discussed social injustice related to race in depth due to the lack of support from higher levels of power.

It was kind of hard because a lot of the times the textbooks really wouldn't have different skin colors... So it was mainly just based off of like one race in our textbooks. So a lot of times our nursing teacher would have to refer to a video or something other than what was provided for us in class. Most of the time it was just hard... pretty much looking at other references and other sources than the ones that are school gave us, really. The teacher tried her best, if anything. I feel like having that stuff given to us by our school would have been better just because it's more convenient. Most of the time, we'll talk about side effects and stuff for like a patient, and it will refer only to patients to like a certain race.

(Female, 18, African American, First-Generation Student, Straight, University organizations that use a critical race framework)

Lastly, students recognized the political climate of Nevada and the tensions across the state, "...especially in Nevada it's been hard and some parts are very excluding of others..." (Male, 20, Latino, First-Generation Student, Gay, No exposure), and discussed how these classes provided students a space to explore opportunities for civic engagement in their community. However, in relation to the institutional barriers educators face, students have recognized how the opportunities they get aren't enough, "...school also played a part, but I feel like they don't really do that enough..." (Male, 20, Latino, First-Generation Student, Gay, No exposure), or how the wider school board was unsupportive of youths' political engagement. Students have described how their interest in political action was mostly maintained through personal friendships outside of the classroom or in social media spaces where educators are not present.

It started on social media, where people started posting about a walkout during school. Some of the teachers encouraged us, but the school itself was kind of weird about it. We didn't get detention or anything, but it was more of like, 'we're not responsible for anybody that gets hurt'. They sent like an email to the parents saying that they're not affiliated with anything that the students did. So they weren't the most encouraging about it. Like my science teacher was really big on equality...said something like "there will be a walkout, I'm not saying that you guys should do it or not. But if you are free, then go ahead". Basically, like a little side comment about it...I feel like they're [teachers are] kind of

restricted to that. (Female, 18, Native Hawaiian and Filipina, First-Generation Student, Straight, High school ethnic studies course)

Need For Better Teacher Leadership And Training. Another barrier that was salient in classes that taught ethnic studies was the lack of safe spaces where students could comfortably voice their experiences and be heard by those who don't share similar experiences. This barrier to having a safe space to be vulnerable and recognized was specifically related to teachers talking over students, teachers being dismissive of students' identity, or not having teachers who advocated for them. Students voiced how their decisions to participate in class or seek help from a teacher was influenced notably by the perspectives their teacher held in regard to racism, sexual orientation, and women's rights.

We would talk a lot about that [racial injustice in the Unites States] because that's when all of the Black Lives Matter stories started popping up. We had to stop because one of my teachers, he was White and he had very strong, separate opinions than us. And things got pretty bad. He got pretty bad. He kept saying, that the police has the right to shoot, you know, a Black student. A lot of people, especially the Black students, they were really upset about that. So was I, but of course, they had more of a right to argue. So we just let them argue and he [the teacher] eventually kicked one of the students that was arguing out of the meeting because she wouldn't let him talk. We no longer talked about topics like that because of that one incident. Students seemed really passionate about it. He's [the teacher] known to be really opinionated. He [the teacher] has like, a framed picture of Donald Trump in his classroom. I would never be comfortable telling him something, although he didn't seem to judge us, he would verbally

say in front of all of us all his opinions. I remember he said that he was upset that his daughter was a lesbian in front of all of us. I was just like, 'whoa,' because I'm bisexual. It really made me uncomfortable that 'oh, I wouldn't really talk to him about certain stuff that I'm feeling'...(Female, 19, Latina, First-Generation Student, Bisexual, High school ethnic studies course, University class discussions related to a critical race framework)

Many participants reported how some teachers were ill-equipped in teaching ethnic studies, or probably shouldn't be teaching ethnic studies, at least not without more educator training on the purposes and conduct of teaching ethnic studies. Some students made a case for district school boards investing in professional development courses for and periodic evaluations of ethnic studies teachers.

Lack Of Role Models. In addition to the role of the teacher in classes where discussions related to ethnic studies were held, students also reported how they were still learning how to navigate difficult conversations about race with their peers. While most students have expressed interest in learning from their peers in classroom discussions, students have also shared how these conversations can be challenging for youth who have not had opportunities to take ethnic studies related courses in high school or college and may not have had role models who successfully demonstrate civil conversations, youth who have not discussed these topics at home, or youth who may feel anxious about critiques of privilege.

[Ethnic studies and racial injustice topics] isn't at all schools. I've noticed [ethnic studies and racial injustice topics] weren't really something that was encouraged [in my high school]. But our teacher really was the one that

encouraged it. There were times where some of us didn't really want to learn about certain things. Like one of my classmates, he was typical White, very sweet, very kind. However, he really didn't like certain discussions, he felt like it was an attack on him. Sometimes with how we lead the discussions, it can sort of feel that way, sometimes, as bad as it sounds. He was very sweet. He was nice. He was able to get over it, and able to talk about his feelings about it. But most of the time, we were all pretty much okay with the discussions we were having. (Female, 18, Latina, First-Generation, Questioning, High school discussions related to a critical race framework, University class discussions related to a critical race framework)

Some participants suggested that students could learn a lot more from having difficult conversations that were facilitated or led by people who could serve as role models. These role models could come in the form of well-informed, civil, and respectful peers, former students, teachers, staff, and school administrators that students could resonate with and emulate. There was still a lack of role models both during the time they were in high school and while they were already in university.

Student-Generated Recommendations

The last theme that was identified was the recommendations from students for improving how classrooms can encourage sense of community, belongingness, and supportive relationships.

The Need For Ethnic Studies In Secondary and Post-Secondary Schools. Sixteen out of the seventeen students recommended the inclusion of ethnic studies in the curriculum for both high school and college students. Some of the reasons in support of

ethnic studies both in high school and university included how having a personal connection to the course material was critical to feeling accepted, respected, and understood by their peers who don't share the same experiences.

Seeing like, firsthand experience with my own family members of what they went through, and my ancestors as well, like, especially with my Native American side. Just seeing what they went through, them telling me their experiences and stories and, you know, makes you want to show up in that space, and just be like, a voice for them. Even though like, I luckily, haven't experienced that myself, thankfully and gratefully, but for someone who has, I want to be a voice for them and show up and just give them my full support. And that's why, like, I think it is so important for you guys to have those classes, because the first step is literally just educating someone, and having those discussions and having it in the right place, like school, because you're gonna learn and grow, individually and academically. So that's why those things are important to have. (Female, 22, Latina and Native American, First-Generation Student, Straight, High school discussions related to a critical race framework).

Students who were not exposed to discussions or courses on ethnic studies during high school and university had also recognized the social and academic value of having discussion of social injustice from a critical lens.

Social issues need to be addressed more in classrooms for others to feel more accepted and comfortable to even talk or participate in class. The group chats are also so beneficial. And just joining organizations or using the social services

I feel like it's a good way to be connected and not feel so alone. (Female, 18, White, Queer, No exposure).

The Importance of University-Sanctioned, Ethnic- and Racial-Centered Student Organizations. Students also shared the importance of university-sanctioned, ethnic or racial minority student organizations since these organizations overlap with their classroom experiences. Notably, first year students mentioned how difficult it is to build new connections with peers and faculty at university, but participation in clubs may alleviate those challenges through building meaningful connections with peers from similar backgrounds, as well as building on what they have learned from ethnic studies.

I think it's very important. A lot of people don't take into consideration that you know, like, seeing your community with you really does matter. Seeing other people who look like you who have had the same upbringing, it's that sense of community, and common interest of, "hey, we share a lot of similarities, and I understand exactly where you're coming from, and I know how you feel because I've had such a similar experience." That just brings more connection to all of us together as students and with the professor. So it's a key thing to have. Because if we ignore each other, like we're not humans, and we don't go through different experiences, that's where that disconnect is. It just makes you not want to be there. So, I would say that that's why that is important. (Female, 18, Latina, First-Generation Student, Straight, University organizations that use a critical race framework).

Special Topics Of Interest. When students were asked about which topics they would like to have discussed in classes, the areas of interest included topics in gender

studies, queer studies, and ethnic studies. Most students reported how important it was for their peers to learn about the diverse community in Nevada as a means to build community, combat racism, and promote the wellbeing of marginalized groups. Notably, several students showed interest in discussing prominent social issues like abortion, drag bans, police brutality, and Asian hate. Students reported how discussing relevant topics amongst peers was important for building a student-generated critique of social injustices. These topics were sorted into gender studies, queer studies, and ethnic studies in Table 5.

Table 5. Qualitative Findings on Class Subjects Related to Critical Theory That Pique Students' Curiosity and Interest for Learning.

| | |
|-----------------------|---|
| <p>Gender studies</p> | <p>Internal misogyny in women and how women are perceived, or stereotypes of women and how women are treated in different environments. I want to learn more about where it started because this is something that's been going on forever, and it's we're still doing this. History repeats itself, so we have to be aware of it, we have to know about it. So that's why I want to learn more about it because I just want this cycle to stop. (Female, 18, Latina, First-Generation Student, Straight, University organizations that use a critical race framework)</p> <p>So one topic I'm interested in hopefully getting the chance to research and argue about is going to be Roe v. Wade (Female, 18, Latina, First-Generation Student, Questioning, High school discussions related to a critical race framework, University class discussions related to a critical race framework)</p> <p>Women's rights or queer rights...particularly women's rights, abortion rights, that has been a topic for a while. Laws have changed about that, I am a woman myself and I do care about it. It's important for everyone to be educated. Of course, I would want everyone to just be supportive of human rights and that would make me feel more comfortable on campus. (Female, 18, White, Queer, No exposure)</p> <p>Gender equality. If it's a topic where I could relate it to me a little bit it just makes it easier to like, raise my hand and talk about it rather than</p> |
|-----------------------|---|

| | |
|-----------------------|---|
| | <p>something where like, I don't really relate to it and understand it as well. (Female, 18, Latina, First-Generation Student, Straight, No exposure)</p> <p>Abortion rights and making abortion accessible to anybody who need it because I'm very, very pro-choice. So if that would be covered more, that'd be nice. I feel like there are a lot of people uneducated on the topic. It's a very sensitive topic. Any type of discussion like that could get very out of hand quickly. I think it's better to have a lesson to be taught like the history, and then from there, a discussion where people could voice their opinions because I think the biggest problem is people aren't educated on stuff like that. They go out and talk, but they don't know what they're talking about. They need to be educated first. (Female, 18, Latina, First-Generation Student, Straight, No exposure).</p> <p>I think that would be very helpful just to discuss like Roe v. Wade, and police brutality, things like that, just to see if everyone is aware of it, because some people may not be aware, so I think it would be very helpful to bring it to their awareness (Female, 22, Latina and Native American, First-Generation Student, Straight, High school discussions related to a critical race framework)</p> |
| <p>Queer studies</p> | <p>I think they could be definitely covered in class more, since it's still like, it's just ongoing, like, issues with just people not accepting them, or people in the queer community. (Female, 18, African American, Straight, No exposure)</p> <p>The history of people who were queer and probably how their efforts of the LGBTQ movement affects us today and how we're allowed to do more things today because of them. Basically, like credit, those people because I feel like a lot of times people are pushed to the side, and I don't know these people, so I would have really liked to know. And be like, "oh, because of these people, you know, we have pronouns." (Female, 19, Latina, First-Generation Student, Bisexual, High school ethnic studies course, University class discussions related to a critical race framework)</p> <p>The challenges or mishaps that the LGBTQ community faces. (Male, 20, Latino, Gay, No exposure).</p> |
| <p>Ethnic studies</p> | <p>Me being Latina, like they're giving Latin culture classes, if I knew that class will count as an elective, I will take that. But since they weren't offered in the first place, then I didn't really have that much option, but I definitely would have loved that. (Female, 18, Latina, Straight, No exposure)</p> <p>How undocumented people are treated, I think that's a big part of like my, you know, my community... I've heard about how Ukrainian people will</p> |

come to America and you know, fix like, their citizenship residency or whatever in matter of days, when this takes Hispanic people or Asian people, or just undocumented people overall, many years. It just like, it doesn't seem fair, because you could kind of see who they would favorite more like...It's not fair when there's people who have been waiting for years to get it to America...I think discussions will be good. (Female, 18, Latina, Straight, University organizations that use a critical race framework)

Learning other people's culture, it does educate you. I feel like it would help out, especially with everything that's going on politically and socially. In the United States, I feel like it will help the new generation learn about different cultures and that would be a big factor of also ending or decreasing the racism that's going on. Some people are afraid of who they really are and hide if they're Latino, Asian, Black...So I feel like if, if I did learn more, it would definitely help out to be more open, like being able to speak on it more. (Male, 18, Latino, Straight, No exposure)

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

Overview

Sense of community and sense of belongingness have both been explored as key facilitators in students' academic journeys and social-emotional development. The findings from the study described in this dissertation contributed to the literature with a richer description of the impact of ethnic studies and inclusive learning spaces (i.e., university-sanctioned, ethnic- or racial-centered student organizations) in relation to critical consciousness, school engagement, social support, sense of community, and sense of belongingness. This study focused on the experiences of first year students since it has been documented by research that dropout rates are as high as 30% during the freshman year of university/college (Henson, 2021).

Reflecting on the results of the surveys and interviews, this section of the dissertation will highlight the study's findings and their real world implications, which could potentially be important to reducing first year college student attrition. Based on the study's findings, first year college attrition could potentially be reduced by promoting school engagement and youth participation, enhancing social connections in academic spaces, and informing college course development for first year students. Further, ethnic or racial minority student organizations play a critical role to the post-secondary experiences of students who did not get to enroll in ethnic studies related courses in either high school or in college. The post-secondary education experiences described by the participants, in-class, teacher-facilitated, student-led peer-to-peer learning; university-sanctioned, ethnicity- or race-centered student organizations; systematic solutions to overcome

institutional barriers to learning from ethnic studies; opportunities to raise student voices using social media; etc. are important factors that promote sense of community and sense of belongingness, particularly as potential mediators of the impacts of ethnic studies on school engagement and social support.

Critical Consciousness

The results from the survey of this study demonstrated the relationship between ethnic studies and critical consciousness, namely critical action and online critical action. The quantitative findings of this study suggested a positive significant relationship between all dimensions of critical consciousness except critical motivation. When controlling for demographic variables, significant findings suggested that the more ethnic studies courses students had taken, the more likely they were to report engagement in politics both through in person and online capacities. The interviews of this study explored the methods students use to engage in politics and how their education has shaped these experiences. Student interviewees expressed their use and interest of social media to organize collective action amongst their peers. Additionally, students had discussed how the use of social media to explore opportunities for civic engagement, organize protests, and raise awareness for social injustices was beneficial due the lack of support for these activities in their school. Overall, the majority of student interviews had discussed how critical action was not supported by their schools despite their strong interests in becoming civically engaged. Thus, students had largely relied on alternative options outside of the classroom (i.e., social media) to seek opportunities for critical action.

Additionally, while the quantitative results of this study had demonstrated insignificant results for critical motivation and critical reflection, student interviews had

further validated and explored these findings by discussing the challenges in learning ethnic studies and participating in politics. Students had expressed interest in exploring social injustices through a critical race and critical consciousness framework; however, a lack of institutional support, the need for better teacher training, and the lack of role models was apparent as students exerted their efforts. This gap in between critical consciousness and ethnic studies demonstrates the need for student-led trainings in which youth have the space to inform the development of ethnic studies curriculum in order to ensure the inclusion of both a critical race and critical consciousness framework. When students are provided the opportunity to inform the development of curriculum and self-select the topics that are important to discuss in classrooms (i.e., community-based approaches, youth participatory action research approaches), research has found that these approaches to learning are related to positive youth development and higher student retention rates (Ozer & Douglas, 2013).

Similar to how students of the current study expressed a strong interest in student-led civic engagement opportunities in the classroom, community-based designs have been adopted in classrooms in order to promote youth agency (de los Rios et al., 2015, Nevárez, 2023). Nevárez (2023) conducted a qualitative study to explore the longitudinal impact of youth participation in ethnic studies that encourage youth to engage in dialogue with their peers and organize action to combat social injustice. The study's findings illustrated how youth described a sense of agency when organizing community-based solutions to combat racism in their neighborhoods and schools (Nevárez, 2023). While youth in the current study demonstrated interest in combatting social injustices, youth had also recognized

institutional barriers and how schools and teachers were not fully equipped with adequate training and materials to explore ethnic studies related to their interests and identity.

The quantitative results of this study did not find a significant relationship between critical motivation and ethnic studies. The interviewees of this study had suggested the importance of having discussions on special topics that weren't included in their high school curriculum in order to confidently participate in conversations of social injustice, feel heard, and increase their belief in youths' ability to create social change. Despite the students' desires to have these discussions, students also recognized the political tensions related to these topics that were apparent in classrooms where these conversations were shut down or avoided.

Some of the topics that youth have expressed interest in addressing in classrooms that critique systems of oppression include the lived experience of the LGBTQ+ community, gender equity issues, and the impact of legislative changes on human reproductive systems. In light of the lack of content in classrooms related to the students' interests, students reported how they have often used social media to learn about how these injustices impact their communities, people they care about, and engage in online critical action. Previous research has discussed how youth often engage with social media posts that combat social injustices and spread awareness if the content comes from people they consider close friends or family (Middaugh et al., 2022). Contrastingly, the same study found that some youth recognize the importance of spreading awareness of social injustices online, yet they also feared the negative attention they may receive from sharing politically tense posts (Middaugh et al., 2022). The interviewees of the current study had shared how difficult it is to navigate these conversations. They believe that learning to have civil

discussions in ethnic studies classes about relevant issues (i.e., LGBTQ+ and women's rights) would play an important role in the development of their sense of agency and the facilitation of cognitive processes that would help them determine how they could strategically encourage conversations about injustice and generate mutually agreed upon community-centered solutions.

Sense of agency is broadly defined as one's cognitive capacity to organize one's thoughts (e.g., metacognition) and make progress towards personal goals (Snyder et al., 2002). Developmental research has suggested that youth who achieve a sense of agency are more likely to demonstrate academic outcomes that have been associated with higher retention rates, such as, behavioral engagement, emotional engagement, academic self-regulation, higher test scores, and higher attendance rates (Dixson, 2019; Farnsworth et al., 2022; Ribeiro, 2009). The qualitative findings from this study demonstrated how students recognize the opportunities to develop a sense of agency through critical action in their ethnic studies. Although the current study produced quantitative findings related to sense of community and sense of belongingness, it did not quantitatively capture students' sense of agency. Therefore, future studies should consider sense of agency as an important factor within classes like ethnic studies that utilize a critical consciousness framework. Ethnic studies have typically included curricula on civic engagement and encourage students to participate in local politics to better their community and family. Consequently, ethnic studies has often relied on a critical consciousness framework where students can reflect on social issues relevant to their community and family, and take critical action to address these problems (Ito & Cross, 2022). Therefore, it is important for future research to consider how classes on ethnic studies and civic engagement can implement a social media

component for youth to leverage the potential opportunities in online critical action and apply relevant lessons to their everyday lives.

School Engagement

Emotional and behavioral engagement have been observed under a critical race lens, and the results of this study suggested a positive significant relationship between these dimensions of school engagement and ethnic studies. Notably, when controlling for demographic variables, significant findings suggested that the more ethnic studies courses students had taken, the more likely they were to report higher levels of emotional and behavioral engagement in classes. The path analyses that examine potential mediators between school engagement and ethnic studies are discussed in the subsequent section. The interviews for this study further explored how students experienced emotional and behavioral engagement, and how these two dimensions of school engagement were related to ethnic studies. Student interviewees expressed the importance of building a sense of community by learning about the lived experiences of their classmates and their local community. Similarly, students noted the importance of being heard by their peers through sharing their own accounts or the perspectives of their family heritage (i.e., Native American, Latino). Overall, the majority of students described these ideal contexts for ethnic studies as peer-to-peer learning, in which students have the power to lead the class discussion and influence others in a safe space. Previous research has shared how participatory approaches in classrooms that use strategies like peer-to-peer learning, student-led discussions, or limited teacher dependency, has been related to higher levels of student retention, interest, confidence in material, social support, and critical thinking skills (Anyon et al., 2018; Laal & Ghodsi, 2012; Ozer & Douglas, 2013; Stone et al., 2013).

This study has added to our understanding of how classes that discuss race and power within the United States impact students' level of participation and emotional connectedness to their classes. This finding may be explained by the purpose of the ethnic studies pedagogy (i.e., ARC) that guides teachers in this field of social sciences (Tintiangco-Cubales & Duncan-Andrade, 2021). Tintiangco-Cubales and colleagues (2015) described the components that contribute to an effective pedagogy and how to support instructors for these classes. Their review summarized the importance of creating a curriculum that centers the lived experience of the students, addressing the needs of the students, and generating student-led solutions to student needs. A study that had examined the experiences of youth in classes that were "rooted in the experiences of Black, Asian American, and Latina/o/x students" had posited that cultural relevancy was critical to hold students' interest in the class (Falkner, 2023, p.15). Falkner (2023) had employed a qualitative analysis and determined that youth expressed curiosity and engaged in dialogue due to the relevance of the classes' content on racism and inequality to their lives. In the current study, it was observed that students showed a keen interest in discussing social injustices with their peers, even though they might feel uncomfortable during these conversations. Interviewees of the current study had strongly believed that these conversations amongst their peers via student-led classroom discussions were critical to combatting social injustice.

The results of the current study further support the aims of ethnic studies that employ participatory methods in order to encourage student engagement (de los Rios et al., 2015; Lozenski, 2019; Nevárez, 2023). While it is unclear how much power was distributed to students in their previous ethnic studies (i.e., determining ethnic studies curriculum,

identifying challenges in their community, and discussing relevant solutions), future studies may want to explore dimensions of school engagement in ethnic studies where participatory approaches can be captured and students lead the classroom. Further, previous research has suggested that classrooms that engage in participatory approaches to learning have documented outcomes related to critical thinking, cognitive skills, and cognitive management (Ozer, 2017). The current study found no relationship between ethnic studies and cognitive engagement. Therefore, this relationship warrants further examination using a participatory approach to research and ethnic studies.

Overall, the quantitative results of this study have suggested a positive significant relationship between ethnic studies taken during high school and school engagement during the first year of college. This relationship was further examined in interviews to understand the factors that contribute to this relationship. Taken together, interviewees have strongly recommended participatory approaches in classrooms that discuss race and systems of oppression in order to build emotional connections with other students and encourage discussions that are not typically held. Previous research has suggested the importance of mitigating risks associated with attrition and first year university students through increasing behavioral engagement and fostering connections with peers (Sidle & McReynolds, 2009; Turner & Thompson, 2014). The integration of participatory approaches to learning in classrooms where students can be heard and recognized as a valuable member of the discussion may enhance how engaged students are in university and decrease student disengagement.

Social Support, Sense of Community, and Sense of Belongingness

Using a sequential mixed methods approach allowed for the research team to further understand the role of sense of community and sense of belongingness as a mediator between ethnic studies and theoretical frameworks related to academic achievement, namely social support, emotional engagement, and behavioral engagement (Wang & Eccles, 2012). These findings were illustrated in the qualitative analysis where students reported on how feeling a connection to their classmates and instructors was important for participating in discussions or feeling safe to seek help. The findings derived from the path models suggest a promising avenue for educators and researchers to examine the underlying mechanisms of how ethnic studies facilitates the enhancement of student engagement and social support. Future investigations along this inquiry could benefit from a closer examination of the crucial role of sense of community and sense of belongingness that is fostered within ethnic studies. The current study does not claim causal findings, but rather suggests a direction for future research to explore and potentially manipulate educational spaces in order to amplify sense of community and belongingness in these spaces.

From a general education perspective, these findings correlate closely with much of the previous literature on how feelings of inclusiveness and supportiveness in classrooms were related to academic performance (Garcia-Reid et al., 2005; Kutsyuruba et al., 2015; Wang & Eccles, 2012). The literature has also suggested that ethnic studies has provided similar social emotional outcomes for students (i.e., sense of community, sense of belongingness); however, this study has added to our understanding of sense of community

and sense of belongingness as mediators between ethnic studies and school engagement (Sleeter, 2011).

The qualitative findings of this study described how students demonstrated behaviors of emotional and behavioral engagement in ethnic studies in relation to positive youth development outcomes. These behaviors and positive outcomes have been observed heavily in youth participatory action research centered classes (Mirra et al., 2015; Ozer et al., 2020; Voight & Velez, 2016). In Voight and Velez's (2016) examination of positive youth outcomes following the completion of a high school class on health disparities and community-based solutions, the researchers found that attendance rates and reading scores increased after completing the class.

Research has suggested that strides in social justice from a youth-led approach is plausible when considering the support of youth autonomy in education (Greene et al., 2018). This dissertation finds this claim significant when considering how students from the current study had frequently mentioned the importance of discussing relevant social issues in classrooms in order to foster productive environments and civil dialogue. These study findings accentuate the importance of participatory approaches to ethnic studies in order to encourage the development of "dual subjectivity" (Lozenski, 2019, p. 27) where students study culturally relevant perspectives and explore their lived experiences in empowering spaces to gain increasing levels of social support. This position of power in participatory approaches is exhibited in instances where youth lead the identification of gaps in curriculum, needs of their community, and discuss potential solutions that are relevant to their lived experiences (Langhout et al., 2011). Teachers have recognized the importance of acknowledging the lived experiences of students and the socioecological

factors that contribute to their education, Rochelle Ramay (1998) has shared, “To try to prepare these students for ‘real life’ ignores the real life they now experience.” (p.8)

Ethnic studies uses both a critical race and critical consciousness framework that centers the lived experiences of students and informs the development of the class (Ito & Cross, 2022). Previous literature has recognized how students benefit from having safe spaces where their identities are recognized and respected (Yosso, 2005). Therefore, this study adds to these understandings, specifically how ethnic studies in K-12 education is related to positive college experiences and students’ development of critical consciousness, school engagement, social support, sense of community and sense of belongingness. Students have voiced their needs and have provided valuable recommendations regarding critical factors related to increasing student engagement. Particularly, discussions of race and power are beneficial when students can take the lead, explore the topic as it relates to their identity, and feel heard and valued by their peers. Additionally, having role models who demonstrate civil behaviors could assist students in navigating the challenges that arise in classrooms during politically tense conversations. These are the types of conversations students desire in order to foster a sense of community and sense of belongingness, and ensure that their social-emotional needs are met. By implementing these approaches to learning, students are likely to experience higher levels of engagement, thus reducing the risks of student attrition.

Ethnic Studies

Previous research has implored future studies to identify additional factors that have important relationships with sense of community among first-year college students in order to address student retention (Jacobs & Archie, 2008). Altogether, this study has

demonstrated a significant relationship between ethnic studies and heightened levels of emotional engagement and positive peer relationships, with sense of community as a prospective and critical mediator of the impacts of ethnic studies on school engagement and social support from peers. Since school engagement and social support have been documented by prior research as established factors that facilitate student retention and success, the key finding of this study is, indirectly, ethnic studies is beneficial for student retention and success.

Given these findings, it is crucial to explore the underlying mechanisms by which ethnic studies curriculum fosters lasting positive outcomes. Specifically, by inquiring into the psychological constructs cultivated in ethnic studies during high school, this study presents advantages for students during their collegiate journey. The results of this study provide a strong indication that the development of sense of community and critical consciousness are pivotal factors in this process. Previous research has found lasting results for students who were enrolled in ethnic studies that persisted through their education over a six-year longitudinal study and has suggested that ethnic studies curriculum offers students a unique educational space to flourish (Bonilla et al., 2021).

Ethnic studies present students with intensive and multifaceted practices for learning and engaging that aren't typically possible for students (Bonilla et al., 2021). These courses typically offer students the opportunity to learn and celebrate their identity with their academic community. Further, students are presented with opportunities to engage in civics that impact their family and friends (i.e., critical action) while in ethnic studies. Similar to theories on civic engagement, the role of empowerment in youth civic development may explain how youth remain "critically hopeful" when making a huge

transition from high school to college (Christens et al., 2018). This notion of critical hopefulness suggests that despite the challenges students face, the development of critical consciousness may contribute to feelings of empowerment and resiliency (Christens et al., 2018). Future studies ought to explore the interplay between psychological empowerment and ethnic studies. In short, ethnic studies courses have long-term benefits for students by increasing sense of community and critical consciousness.

Limitations

Despite these promising results and the lessons that can be learned from them, some caution is needed given the limitations of this study. First, working with youth to understand their experiences would have been better understood with full youth involvement rather than a consultation approach that was used when analyzing and interpreting the qualitative portion of this study. According to Ozer et al.'s (2020) map of youth participation in research and the distinct features that defines approaches to youth-led research, this project falls under a partial branch of participatory research. In the current study, youth voices were at the forefront in the creation of the codebook, the main focus of the interpretation of the results, and sought out for member checking. Simply put, this study leaves room for future research to incorporate youth voice across all dimensions of research (i.e., determining research questions, data collection, data analysis, data interpretation, and dissemination). For instance, youth involvement in identifying gaps in how ethnic studies courses are developed would be advantageous in determining meaningful research questions. Participatory approaches in designing studies could provide researchers an even deeper understanding of how students determine and define factors

related to academic success (i.e., critical consciousness, school engagement, social support, sense of community and sense of belongingness).

While this study offers a window into the relationship between ethnic studies and positive student outcomes, some of the measures used to capture sense of community may not have reflected the identities and experiences that the population that the current study assessed. Peterson et al.'s (2006) Sense of Community Index was developed using a largely White population aged older than 25. It is important to note that not only slightly over 25% of the population in this study identified as White, but also the average age of participants in the study was 19.18. This suggests that the instruments used in the study were not as appropriate and reflective of the identities or experiences of participants who were recent high school students. Another measure that may need to be looked into for further consideration is the Children and Adolescents Social Support (CASS) Scale. This measure has also mostly been used with White students in elementary and high school. Since only slightly over 25% of the participants in this study identified as White, the study population race and ethnicity demographics needs to be taken into consideration when interpreting the assessment of social support amongst professors and peers.

Furthermore, a longitudinal design should be used to further explore these variables to identify long-term trends via multiple survey periods that were not possible in this cross-sectional design. Additionally, self-selection bias may have been a contributing factor to the results and may have affected the generalizability of the findings, with some students not being required to take ethnic studies in high school, possibly coming into these courses and this study with pre-existing interests in these topics. Thus, a randomized controlled trial would help minimize self-selection bias and determine cause and effect relationships

(i.e., ethnic studies, critical consciousness, school engagement, social support, sense of community and sense of belongingness). Lastly, attention to reducing type I error by implementing a larger sample size and recruiting diverse populations (i.e., additional states with varying laws regarding ethnic studies in high school) would be beneficial for future research to consider.

Conclusion

As the United States continues to make strides and overcome challenges for ethnic studies in high schools, the importance of exploring ethnic studies in relation to existing frameworks in education becomes critical. This study specifically examined how these existing frameworks used in education (i.e., critical consciousness, school engagement, social support, sense of community, and sense of belongingness) are related to ethnic studies using a sequential mixed methods approach. The results of this study sought to provide educators, policymakers, and researchers a deeper understanding of how youth experience ethnic studies, and has subsequently indicated that the predicted outcomes from the survey and the described experiences from the interviews may benefit the future steps that the United States will need to take towards transforming education. Altogether, this study found that the benefits associated with ethnic studies that recognize the lived experiences of youth and their identities in the classroom include higher levels of emotional engagement, behavioral engagement, social support amongst peers, and more engagement in critical action. By recognizing the lived experiences of students and their identities in the classroom, ethnic studies in a K-12 education has the potential to foster a sense of community and belongingness amongst students and mitigate the risks associated with retention. The implications of these findings provide valuable insight for educators,

school boards, and researchers seeking strategies to transform existing educational frameworks and reduce attrition through ethnic studies.

Key Take Aways

Based on the recommendations provided by the students, this dissertation ends with a summarized list for moving education in the United States forward while simultaneously challenging systems of oppression.

1. Participatory approaches with a focus on student-led classes with an emphasis on peer-to-peer learning when teaching ethnic studies or related courses is beneficial to promoting discussion, building community, and exploring relevant solutions to student needs.
2. Youth have recognized the lack of discussion in classrooms related to the LGBTQ+ community and women. Thus, they are interested in discussing the celebrations and challenges that transpire for these historically underrepresented groups.
3. Acquiring skills to engage in civil discussions is important for students to feel comfortable enough to lead discussions and feel respected in both in person and online capacities.
3. Schools that may not have the liberty of providing ethnic studies to students may want to explore the potential of student organizations that center the narratives of underrepresented groups in the community.
4. Social media and the boundless possibilities for connecting, learning, and taking action on social issues is a strong interest of youth who seek out engagement in local and national politics, particularly as an extension of the opportunities they gain

from taking ethnic studies and participating in university-sanctioned student organizations that promote their critical consciousness, school engagement, and perceived social support, sense of community, and sense of belongingness.

APPENDICES

Appendix A

Demographic Questions

1. Gender _____ (short answer)
2. Birthdate/Month/Year
3. Race
 - African American
 - Asian
 - Indigenous/American Indian/Alaska Native
 - Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander
 - White/Caucasian
 - Bi-Racial
 - Multi-Racial
 - Other (self-describe)
 - Prefer not to say
4. Ethnicity
 - Non-Hispanic
 - Hispanic
 - Judaism
 - Tamil
 - Other (self-describe)
 - Prefer not to say
5. Is English the language you speak at home?
6. What is your annual household income?
 - Less than \$25,000
 - \$25,000 - \$50,000
 - \$50,000 - \$100,000
 - \$100,000 - \$200,000
 - More than \$200,000
 - Prefer not to say
7. What is your parent or guardian's highest level of education?
 - Did not finish high school
 - Graduated from high school or equivalent (GED)
 - Graduated from a two-year school (vocational or technical school, community college)
 - Some college
 - Graduated from a four-year university
 - Graduated from a graduate school
 - Don't Know
8. What courses are you enrolled in currently?
9. *During High School*, how many classes did you take that focused on race, multicultural, or ethnic curriculum? (such as: Hispanic Studies, Chicano Studies, Asian American and Pacific Islander Studies, Native American Studies)

Appendix A (continued)

Demographic Questions

IF MORE THAN ZERO:

10. What grade(s) did you receive in that course(s)?
11. Was this course(s) required or an elective?
12. Did this course help you explore your own identity?

If you have taken a class that reviews race, multicultural, or ethnic curriculum, please answer the following questions in regard to that course (included as Appendix A)

IF ZERO, SEND TO APPENDIX B.

Appendix A (continued)

Student Interest Scale

(Wang et al., 2016)

Instructions: How much do you agree that the following statements accurately describe your learning experience regarding your **high school courses on race, multicultural, or ethnic curriculum?**

| Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Neutral | Agree | Strongly Agree |
|-------------------|----------|---------|-------|----------------|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

1. I concentrated on the topic of this class.
2. I thought the topic was interesting.
3. This class appealed to me.
4. I could not concentrate on reading in this class.
5. **I felt bored reading in this class.**
6. I found important knowledge in this class.
7. I thought what I was reading was important.
8. I found the content of this class personally meaningful.
9. The content was so interesting that I would focus on the class even if an interruption happened.
10. What the class reviewed is closely related to my future life/study.
11. I would search for more resources about this topic out of school.
12. **I am not satisfied with what I learned only from this class.**
13. I think I have learned something from this class and I will remember for a long term
14. I valued this learning opportunity.
15. I would read other articles about this topic if I got a chance
16. I have several further questions about this topic out of my curiosity
17. I would make effort to learn again to better understand the content of this passage
18. I found the learning of this class enjoyable.
19. **This class topic just does not appeal to me.**
20. I have a considerable amount of knowledge about this class topic.
21. I value every opportunity to appreciate/learn about something related to this class topic.
22. I feel effortless when I try to learn something related to this class topic.
23. I think what I learned from this class is worthwhile.
24. I value that I have substantial knowledge from this class.

Appendix B

Brief Sense of Community Scale

(Peterson et al., 2008)

During College: How much do you agree that the following statements accurately describe your learning experience in this semester?

| Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Neutral | Agree | Strongly Agree |
|--|----------|---------|-------|----------------|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 1. I can get what I need in this school. | | | | |
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 2. This neighborhood helps me fulfill my needs | | | | |
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 3. I feel like a member of this school. | | | | |
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 4. I belong in this school. | | | | |
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 5. I have a say about what goes on in my school. | | | | |
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 6. People in this school are good at influencing each other. | | | | |
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 7. I feel connected to this school. | | | | |
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 8. I have a good bond with others in this school. | | | | |
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

Scoring

Reverse coding: No reverse coded items.

Scales: Needs Fulfillment, mean of items 1 & 2; Group Membership, mean of items 3 & 4;

Influence, mean of items 5 & 6; Emotional Connection, mean of items 7 & 8.

Appendix C

Sense of Belongingness at School Scale

(Akar Vural et al., 2013)

During College: How much do you agree that the following statements accurately describe your learning experience in this semester?

| Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Neutral | Agree | Strongly Agree |
|--|----------|---------|-------|----------------|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 1. I am glad to be at this school. | | | | |
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 2. I feel lucky to be a student of this school. | | | | |
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 3. I am proud of my school. | | | | |
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 4. I am unhappy at this school. (R) | | | | |
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 5. If I had the chance, I would choose to go to another school. (R) | | | | |
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

Appendix D

Meaningful Cognitive Strategies

(Greene et al., 2004)

During College: How much do you agree that the following statements accurately describe your learning experience in this semester?

| Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Agree | Strongly Agree | |
|--|----------|-------|----------------|---|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | |
| 1. Before a quiz or exam, I plan out how I will study. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 2. When I finish working practice problems or homework, I check my work for errors. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 3. I plan my study time for this class. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 4. I have a clear idea of what I am trying to accomplish in this class. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 5. If I have trouble understanding something I go over it again until I understand it. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 6. I try to plan an approach in my mind before I actually start homework or studying. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 7. When learning new information I try to put the ideas in my own words. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 8. When doing an assignment I make sure I know what I am asked to do before I begin. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 9. When I study I am aware of the ideas I have or have not understood. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 10. It is easy for me to establish goals for learning in this class. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 11. I answer practice problems to check my understanding. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 12. I make sure I understand the ideas that I study. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |

Appendix E

Affective Engagement Subscale from the Student Engagement in School (SES) Instrument (Lam et al., 2004)

During College: How much do you agree that the following statements accurately describe your learning experience in this semester?

| Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Neutral | Agree | Strongly Agree |
|---|----------|---------|-------|----------------|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 1. I am very interested in learning. | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 2. I think what we are learning in school is interesting. | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 3. I like what I am learning in school. | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 4. I enjoy learning new things in class. | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 5. I think learning is boring. (R) | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 6. I like my school. | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 7. I am proud to be at this school. | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 8. Most mornings, I look forward to going to school. | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 9. I am happy to be at this school. | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

Appendix F

Behavioral Engagement Subscale from the Student Engagement in School (SES) Instrument (Lam et al., 2004)

During College: How much do you agree that the following statements accurately describe your learning experience in this semester?

| Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Neutral | Agree | Strongly Agree |
|-------------------|----------|---------|-------|----------------|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

1. I try hard to do well in school.
2. In class, I work as hard as I can.
3. When I'm in class, I participate in class activities.
4. I pay attention in class.
- 5. When I'm in class, I just act like I'm working. (R)**
- 6. In school, I do just enough to get by. (R)**
- 7. When I'm in class, my mind wanders. (R)**
8. If I have trouble understanding a problem, I go over it again until I understand it.
9. When I run into a difficult homework problem, I keep working at it until I think I've solved it.
10. I am an active participant of school activities.
11. I volunteer to help with school activities.
12. I take an active role in extra-curricular activities in my school.

Appendix G

Children and Adolescents Social Support (CASS) Scale

(Malecki et al., 2000)

Instructions: On the next two sections, you will be asked to respond to sentence about some form of support or help that you might get from either a teacher or classmate during college.

| | | Never | Almost Never | Some of the Time | Most of the Time | Almost Always | Always |
|-------------------------|--|-------|--------------|------------------|------------------|---------------|--------|
| My teacher(s)... | | | | | | | |
| 1. | cares about me. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| 2. | treats me fairly. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| 3. | makes it okay to ask questions. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| 4. | explains things that I don't understand. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| 5. | shows me how to do things. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| 6. | helps me solve problems by giving me information. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| 7. | tells me I did a good job when I've done something well. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| 8. | nicely tells me when I make mistakes. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| 9. | tells me how well I do on tasks. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| 10. | makes sure I have what I need for school. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| 11. | takes time to help me learn. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| 12. | spends time with me when I need help. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| My classmates... | | | | | | | |
| 1. | treat me nicely. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| 2. | like most of my ideas and opinions. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| 3. | pay attention to me. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| 4. | give me ideas when I don't know what to do. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| 5. | give me information so I can learn new things. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| 6. | give me good advice. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| 7. | tell me I did a good job when I've done something well. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| 8. | nicely tells me when I make mistakes. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| 9. | notice when I have worked hard | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| 10. | ask me to join activities. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| 11. | spend time doing things with me. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| 12. | help me with projects in class. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |

Appendix H

Short Critical Consciousness Scale (ShoCCS)

(Diemer et al., 2020)

Instructions: Please respond to the following statements by circling how much you agree or disagree with each statement.

| Strongly Disagree | Mostly Disagree | Slightly Disagree | Slightly Agree | Mostly Agree | Strongly Agree |
|---|--------------------|----------------------|-------------------|-----------------|-------------------|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| CCR1. Certain racial or ethnic groups have fewer chances to get good jobs | | | | | |
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| CCR2. Certain racial or ethnic groups have fewer chances to get ahead | | | | | |
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| CCR3. Women have fewer chances to get ahead | | | | | |
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| CCR4. Poor people have fewer chances to get ahead | | | | | |
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| CCM5. It is important for young people to know what is going on in the world | | | | | |
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| CCM 6. It is important to correct social and economic inequality | | | | | |
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| CCM 7. It is my responsibility to get involved and make things better for society | | | | | |
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| CCM 8. People like me should participate in the political activity and decision making of our country | | | | | |
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |

Appendix H (continued)

Short Critical Consciousness Scale (ShoCCS)

(Diemer et al., 2020)

Instructions: Please respond to the following statements by circling how often you were involved in each activity in the last year.

| Never did this | Once or twice last year | Once every few months | At least once a month | At least once a week |
|--|----------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|-------------------------|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 9. Participated in a civil rights group or organization | | | | |
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 10. Participated in a political party, club, or organization | | | | |
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 11. Contacted a public official by phone, mail, or email to tell him/her how you felt about a particular social or political issue | | | | |
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 12. Joined in a protest march, political demonstration, or political meeting | | | | |
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 13. Participated in a human rights, gay rights, or women's rights organization or group | | | | |
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

Appendix I

Youth Online Sociopolitical Action Scale (Wilf & Wray-Lake, 2023)

During College: How much do you agree that the following statements accurately describe your learning experience in this semester?

| Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Neutral | Agree | Strongly Agree |
|-------------------|----------|---------|-------|----------------|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

1. Raise awareness about a social or political issue on social media.
2. Educate your followers about a social or political issue on social media.
3. Discuss or debate a social or political issue on social media.
4. Share a different perspective on history than what you were taught.
5. Challenge stigmas, stereotypes, or prejudices on social media.
6. Share information on perspectives the media isn't covering about a social or political issue.
7. Promote a new way of thinking or a new narrative about a social or political issue that more people need to know about.
8. Create and share infographics or art (poetry, paintings, etc.) about a social or political issue on social media.
9. Provide encouragement or support to others on social media.
10. Tell your personal story on social media to empower others with similar identities or experiences.
11. Encourage your followers to take social or political action (online or in-person).
12. Stand in solidarity/allyship with others on social media.
13. Amplify the voices of people who need to be heard on social media.
14. Share links to donate on social media for a social or political cause.
15. Call out injustice on social media to hold individuals or institutions accountable for their actions.

Appendix J

Interview Questions

Interview Questions if student has taken ethnics studies related courses during high school:

Research Question: Drawing from the perspectives of students, how can universities support the development of student engagement and critical consciousness? Additionally, how does ethnic studies related courses play a role in the development of student engagement and critical consciousness?

1. First, could you describe what your experience has been like during your first year of college?

Probe: Could you tell me more about your classroom experiences?

2a. If you had to pick one class you learned from the most about diversity during high school, could you tell me about what it was like when you first started that course?

Probe: How did you decide to take that course?

2b. If you had to pick one class you learned from the most about equity during high school, could you tell me about what it was like when you first started that course?

Probe: How did you decide to take that course?

3. How was your experience when (1: interacting with the instructor and/or classmates; 2: learning) in this course during high school?

4. How do you think these (1: interacting with the instructor and/or classmates; 2: learning) experiences during high school impact your overall college experience?

Follow up: How do you think these can be improved?

Follow up: Are there any challenges that were present when trying to participate or communicate in other classes during high school?

5. What did you learn about inequality, inequity, and injustice that you did not know before during high school?
6. Could you describe your experience with engaging in classroom discussions about social justice issues during high school?
7. *Next*, Critical consciousness is defined as one's ability to reflect, learn, and take action on social injustices or systems of oppression. Has your education in high school helped foster this feeling? What about in college?
8. Do you ever critically reflect on how the different domains of your identity (e.g., race, gender, social class) will impact your experience in college? If so, please explain.

Appendix J (continued)

Interview Questions

Interview Questions if student has taken ethnics studies related courses during college:

Research Question: Drawing from the perspectives of students, how can universities support the development of student engagement and critical consciousness? Additionally, how does ethnic studies related courses play a role in the development of student engagement and critical consciousness?

1. First, could you describe what your experience has been like during your first year of college?

Probe: Could you tell me more about your classroom experiences?

2a. If you had to pick one class you learned from the most about diversity during college, could you tell me about what it was like when you first started that course?

Probe: How did you decide to take that course?

2b. If you had to pick one class you learned from the most about equity during college, could you tell me about what it was like when you first started that course?

Probe: How did you decide to take that course?

3. How was your experience when (1: interacting with the instructor and/or classmates; 2: learning) in this course during college?

4. How do you think these (1: interacting with the instructor and/or classmates; 2: learning) experiences during college impact your overall college experience?

Follow up: How do you think these can be improved?

Follow up: Are there any challenges that were present when trying to participate or communicate in other classes during college?

5. What did you learn about inequality, inequity, and injustice that you did not know before during college?
6. Could you describe your experience with engaging in classroom discussions about social justice issues during college?
7. *Next*, Critical consciousness is defined as one's ability to reflect, learn, and take action on social injustices or systems of oppression. Has your education in high school helped foster this feeling? What about in college?
8. Do you ever critically reflect on how the different domains of your identity (e.g., race, gender, social class) will impact your experience in college? If so, please explain.

Appendix K

Codebook

| Factors related to Ethnic Studies that Influence Sense of Community Having increased feelings of belongingness, supportive relationships, connectedness, a member of the campus, can be vulnerable with others, expresses values/identities/opinions. <i>Sometimes students don't have access to these courses, so they rely on student activities that discuss social issues, race, or center the narratives of marginalized groups (i.e., BSO org)</i> | |
|---|---|
| Taking Ethnic Studies in High School Participant expresses 1) taking an ethnic studies or related course in high school or having in class discussions of related topics and 2) describes how this has positively impacted them. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Peer to peer learning • Authenticity makes professors more approachable • Discussed topics that are relevant • Having discussions of social issues • Peers/professors support parts of their identity • Positive professor/teacher experiences • Increased interest in new topic • Autonomy to select topics that were relevant to their identity • Found the class interesting or valuable • Learned something new • Gained interested in learning about local community |
| Taking Ethnic Studies in College Participant expresses 1) taking an ethnic studies or related course in college and 2) describes how this has positively impacted them. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Building supportive relationships with peers or faculty • Some students have relied on cultural organizations • Increased interest in new topic • Discussed topics that are relevant • Found the class interesting or valuable • Learned something new • Gained interested in learning about local community • Peers/professors support parts of their identity |
| Barriers to Sense of Community Institutional barriers related to ethnic studies | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Negative experiences in courses that reviewed ES • Lack of knowledgeable instructors • Discomfort with professors that have opposing views • Removal of ES • Lack of support from faculty/administrators • Did not learn as much as they wanted |

| | |
|--|--|
| <p>Recommendations for ES</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Policy or requirement change • Increased student engagement • Wants to include discussions of social injustice in education • Safe environment to have discussions • Judgmental free classroom |
| <p>Development of Critical Consciousness – Action ONLY</p> | |
| <p>Critical Action In-Person Movements and activities taken towards addressing inequality in person (protest, rally, etc.).</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Protest • Rallies |
| <p>Critical Action Online Movements and activities taken towards addressing inequality online (sharing posts about inequality, virtual dialogue, sharing resources).</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Signing petitions • Using social media to educate others • Sharing social media posts about injustice • Sharing resources online • Liking or following content about injustice |
| <p>Barriers to Critical Consciousness ACTION Participant describes the reasons why they do not do any of the options. Some participants may state they are interested but must also explicitly state the barrier that keeps them from developing CC.</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of organizations on campus related to social injustice • Lack of time, energy, or interested friends • Fear of backlash from others |

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CURRICULUM VITAE

SHERRY BELL
SBELL@UOREGON.EDU
4505 Maryland Pkwy. Las Vegas, NV 89154

EDUCATION

Doctoral Candidate, Psychological and Brain Sciences – July 2023

University of Nevada, Las Vegas

Concentration in: Quantitative and Community Psychology

Dissertation: *A mixed methods examination of first year college students: The impact of ethnic studies on post-secondary education experiences*

Committee Members: Dr. Renato Liboro (chair), Dr. Gwen Marchand, Dr. Lianne Barnes, & Dr. Rachael Robnett

Master of Arts, Psychological Science - 2019

California State University, Chico

Thesis: Using social networks to explore and foster meaningful change among adolescents.

Committee Members: Dr. Mariah Kornbluh (chair) & Dr. Patrick Johnson

Bachelor of Arts, Psychology - 2016

California State University, Chico

Minor: Family Relations

ARTICLES IN PEER REVIEWED JOURNALS

1. **Bell, S.**, & Kornbluh, M. (2019). Networking in the digital age: Identifying factors that influence adolescents' online communication and relationship building. *Applied Developmental Science*, 26(1), 109-126.
2. Gibbs, L., Kornbluh, M., Marinkovic, K., **Bell, S.**, & Ozer, E. J. (2020). Using technology to scale up youth-led participatory action research: A systematic review. *Journal of Adolescent Health*, 67(2), S14-S23.
3. Kornbluh, M., **Bell, S.**, & Vierra, K. (2021). Resistance capital: Cultural activism as a gateway to college persistence for minority and first-generation students. *Journal of Adolescent Research*, 37(4), 501-540.
4. Liboro, R., Despres, J., Ranuschio, B., **Bell, S.**, & Barnes, L. (2021). Forging resilience to HIV/AIDS: Personal strengths of middle-aged and older gay, bisexual, and other men who have sex with men living with HIV/AIDS. *American Journal of Men's Health*, 7(2), 129-144.

5. Liboro, R. M., Yates, T. C., **Bell, S.**, Ranuschio, B., Da Silva, G., Fehr, C., Ibañez-Carrasco, F., & Shuper, P. A. (2021). Protective factors that foster resilience to HIV/AIDS: Insights and lived experiences of older gay, bisexual, and other men who have sex with men. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 18(16), 8548.
6. Liboro, R., Ranuschio, B., **Bell, S.**, Yates, T., Barnes, L., Fehr, C., Da Silva, G., Despres, J., Ibañez-Carrasco, F., Eaton, A., Sedere, A., Puno, T., Shuper, P., & Ross, L. (2021). Mitigating risks and building resilience to HIV/AIDS: Perspectives of HIV-negative, middle-aged and older men who have sex with men. *Community Psychology in Global Perspective*, 7(2), 129-144.
7. Liboro, R. M., **Bell, S.**, Ranuschio, B., Barnes, L., Despres, J., Sedere, A., Puno, T., & Shuper, P. A. (2021). Barriers and facilitators to promoting resilience to HIV/AIDS: A qualitative study on the lived experiences of HIV-positive, racial and ethnic minority, middle-aged and older men who have sex with men from Ontario, Canada. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 18(15), 80-84.
8. Middaugh, E., **Bell, S.**, & Kornbluh, M. (2022). Think before you share: building a civic media literacy framework for everyday contexts. *Information and Learning Sciences*, 123(7/8), 421-444.
9. **Bell, S.**, Ranuschio, B., Waldron, J. M., Barnes, L., Sheik-Yosef, N., Villalobos, E., Wackens, J., & Liboro, R. M. (2023). Pandemic upon pandemic: Middle-aged and older men who have sex with men living with HIV coping and thriving during the peak of COVID-19. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 20(11), 5979.
10. **Bell, S.**, Liboro, R., & van den Berg, M. (in press). Training to be a community psychologist in the age of a digital revolution. *Engaged Scholar Journal: Community-Engaged Research, Teaching, and Learning*.

BOOK CHAPTERS

1. **Bell, S.**, & Middaugh, E. (under review). Misinformation, Disinformation, and Mental Health. In. Harrison, V., & Collier, A., Adelsheim, S. (Eds.), *Social Media and Youth Mental Health: A Public Health Perspective*. Washington, DC: American Psychiatric Association.

MANUSCRIPTS UNDER REVIEW

- Bell, S.**, Liboro, R., & van den Berg, M. (under review). Employing dissonance-based interventions to promote health equity utilizing a community based participatory

research approach and social network analysis. *Frontiers in Psychology: Public Health*.

PRESENTATIONS

Fraga, B., **Bell, S.**, Navara, R., Puno, T., Ribeia, A., Sheik, N., Villa., E., Wackens, J., & Liboro, R. (2023). *Awareness of HIV-associated neurocognitive disorder among healthcare and service providers in Southern Nevada: An exploratory study*. Poster presented at the Biennial Conference of the Society for Research on Adolescence, Atlanta, GA.

Bell, S., Fraga, B., Navara, R., Puno, T., Ribeia, A., Sheik, N., Villa., E., Wackens, J., & Liboro, R. (2023). *Urban city development recommendations for promoting resilience to HIV: A qualitative analysis of perspectives on healthcare and social services in the Southwest United States*. Poster presented at the Biennial Conference of the Society for Research on Adolescence, Atlanta, GA.

Bell, S., & Middaugh, E. (2023). *Investigating the relationship between climate action online and social anxiety*. Paper presented at the Biennial Conference of the Society for Research on Adolescence, San Diego, CA.

Middaugh, E., & **Bell, S.** (2023). *Teaching and engaging with students' emotions as they navigate social media*. Paper presented at the American Educational Research Association Annual Meeting, Chicago, IL.

Middaugh, E., **Bell, S.**, & Kornbluh, M. (2022). *Young people and news in a digital world: Local and global perspectives*. Paper presented at the 72nd Annual International Communication Association Conference, Paris, France.

Bell, S., Ranuschio, B., & Liboro, R. (2022). *The resilience of middle-aged and older men who have sex with men to HIV/AIDS during COVID-19*. Poster presented at the American Psychological Association, Minneapolis, MN.

Bell, S., Liboro, R., & van den Berg, M. (2022). *Cognitive dissonance, social network analysis, and community-based participatory research approaches for HIV treatment adherence interventions*. Paper presented at the 13th Annual Community Research and Action in the West (CRA-W).

Middaugh, E., Kornbluh, M., & **Bell, S.** (2022). *Mixing network analysis and qualitative approaches in identifying adolescents' online communication strategies*. Paper presented at the Biennial Conference of the Society for Research on Adolescence, New Orleans, LA.

- Sheikr, R., Lopez, B., Salcedo, J., Mekonnen, S., Stephens, K., **Bell, S.**, Wong-Padoongpatt, G., & Nelson, P. (2021). *Challenging the narrative: A participatory action research study understanding the career development of undergraduate psychology students*. Poster presented at the 18th Biennial Conference of the Society for Research and Action, Virtual.
- Bell, S.**, Ranuschio, B., & Liboro, R. (2021). *Perspectives of racial and ethnic minority older men who have sex with men on barriers and facilitators that foster resilience to HIV/AIDS in the 21st Century*. Poster presented at the 18th Biennial Conference of the Society for Research and Action, Virtual.
- Ranuschio, B., **Bell, S.**, & Liboro, R. (2021). *Coping styles and specific coping strategies for promoting resilience to HIV/AIDS: A qualitative study on the lived experiences of older gay and bisexual men*. Poster presented at the Western Psychological Association Conference, Virtual.
- Kornbluh, M., & **Bell, S.** (2021). *Mixing network analysis and qualitative approaches in identifying adolescents' online communication strategies*. Paper presented at the Biennial Conference of the Society for Research in Child Development, Virtual.
- Bell, S.**, Vierra, K., Jones, C., & Kornbluh, M. (2019). *Elevating leadership and community: A mixed method approach to evaluating a university multicultural center for students of color*. Poster presented to the 17th Biennial Conference of the Society for Community Research and Action, Chicago, IL.
- Bell, S.**, Kornbluh, M., & Vierra, K. (2019). *Claiming space for critical consciousness building: An evaluation of a cross-cultural leadership program for first-generation minority students*. Paper presented to the 17th Biennial Conference of the Society for Community Research and Action, Chicago, IL.
- Kornbluh, M., & **Bell, S.** (2019). *Bringing PAR to campus: Fighting for social justice within institutions of higher education*. Paper presented to the 17th Biennial Conference of the Society for Community Research and Action, Chicago, IL.
- Gibbs, L., Kornbluh, M., Marinkovic-Chavez, K., **Bell, S.**, & Ozer, E. (2019). *Scaling-up youth led participatory action research: The potential of online mediums a meta-review*. Paper presented to the 17th Biennial Conference of the Society for Community Research and Action, Chicago, IL.
- Kornbluh, M., Fernandez, J. A., **Bell, S.**, Green, A., Jones, C., & Vierra, K. (2018). *Critical consciousness development through cultural leadership training and*

community building: Examining minority first-generation college students' health and well-being. Paper presented at the American Psychological Association, San Francisco, CA.

Bell, S., Kornbluh, M., Fernandez, J.A., Green, A., Jones, C., Peterson, K., & Tonga, K. (2018). *Exploring pathways towards sense of community: Examining the leadership experiences of Latinx college students.* Paper accepted at the Community Research and Action in the West Conference, Pacifica Graduate Institute, Santa Barbara, CA.

Kornbluh, M., **Bell, S.**, Fernandez, J.A., Green, A., Jones, C., & Vierra, K. (2018). *Investigating the relationships between culturally reflective leadership, community building, and empowering outcomes for college students of color.* Paper presented at the Western Psychological Association Conference, Portland, OR.

Kornbluh, M., & **Bell, S.** (2017). *The power of connections: Using social networks to explore and foster meaningful change.* Paper presented at the 16th Biennial Conference of the Society for Community Research and Action, University of Ottawa, Canada.

Bell, S., Kornbluh, M., Fregoso M., & Jones C. (2017). *Exploring factors that influence online communication among adolescents.* Poster presented at the College of Behavioral and Social Sciences Student Research and Scholarly Work Symposium, California State University, Chico.

Bell, S., Grabin, K., Pelton, A., & Morgan, T. (2015). *Memory and laughter: The effect of emotion on memory recall.* Peer-reviewed poster presented at the College of Behavioral and Social Sciences Student Research and Scholarly Work Symposium, California State University, Chico.

PUBLIC REPORTS

Bell, S., Waldron, J., Barnes, L., Ranuschio, B., Despres, J., Puno, T., Sedere, A., Sheik Yosef, N., Villalobos, E., Wackens, J., & Liboro, R. (2022). *The resilience of middle-aged and older men who have sex with men to HIV/AIDS: Southern Nevada stakeholder perspectives in the 21st century* [Community report]. Submitted to the University of Nevada, Las Vegas. <http://dx.doi.org/10.34917/29488636>

Ranuschio, B., Waldron, J., Barnes, L., **Bell, S.**, Puno, T., Despres, J., Sedere, A., Sheik Yosef, N., Villalobos, E., Wackens, J., & Liboro, R. (2022). *Awareness and knowledge of aging and HIV-Associated Neurocognitive Disorder: Service user and provider perspectives in Southern Nevada* [Community report]. Submitted to the University of Nevada, Las Vegas. <http://dx.doi.org/10.34917/29486317>

Liboro, R., **Bell, S.**, Fraga, B., Despres, J., Puno, T., Sedere, A., & Barnes, L. (2020). *Resilience to the clinical and social impacts of HIV/AIDS: Perspectives of middle-aged and older men who have sex with men – a community report* [Community report]. Submitted to the University of Nevada, Las Vegas: Las Vegas, Nevada, USA. https://issuu.com/championmhlab/docs/mao_msm_r2ha_-_community_report_-_unlv

Bell, S., & Kornbluh, M. (2018). *Evaluation of the Cross-Cultural Leadership Center* [Community report]. Submitted to the California State University, Chico.

Bell, S., & Kornbluh, M. (2018). *Evaluation of the Pipeline Through College Mentorship Program* [Community report]. Submitted to the California State University, Chico.

AWARDS

Psychology Department Travel Award – CSU Chico: \$500 - May 2017

Spencer Grant – Research Assistantship – CSU Chico: September 2017

Recruitment Award – UNLV: \$1000 August 2020

Edward Lovinger Award – UNLV: \$1450 October 2020

Barrick Graduate Fellowship – UNLV: Finalist not funded May 2023

Summer Doctoral Research Fellowship – UNLV: \$7750 May 2023

Patricia Sastaunik Scholarship – UNLV: \$2500 May 2023, Declined award due to early graduation

INVITED TALKS

Bell, S. (2022, February). *Navigating a doctoral program*. Presented at the 13th Annual Community Research and Action in the West Conference (CRA-W).

Bell, S. (2022, March). *Instagram engagement strategies and climate action*. Presented at Portland State University.

Middaugh, E., & **Bell, S.** (2022, May). *Memes are the way into my heart: Learning from youth as they use social media for civic inquiry, dialogue and expression*. Presented at National Writing Project Webinar.

Bell, S. (2022, September). *Disinformation and health*. Presented at California State University, San Jose.

Bell, S. (2021, October). *Social network analysis and community psychology*. Presented at University of South Carolina.

PROFESSIONAL SERVICE

Society of Community Research and Action Executive Committee

Student Representative for the Western Region, August 2022 - August 2023

Outreach Undergraduate Mentoring Program – UNLV

Graduate Student Mentor for three students, September 2021– May 2022

Graduate Student Mentor for two students, September 2020 – May 2021

Psychological and Brain Sciences Student Committee – UNLV

Graduate Student Representative for Quantitative Area, September 2021 – May 2023

Inclusion, Diversity, Equity, Access, and Solutions Committee Representative – UNLV

Graduate Student Representative, September 2020 – May 2021

Teaching Assistant – CSU Chico

Honors Seminar in Psychology I, August 2017 – May 2019

Honors Seminar in Psychology II, August 2017 – May 2019

Elements of Learning and Behavior Human Lab, August 2017 – December 2017

Cognition, January 2017 – May 2020

Environmental Psychology, August 2018 – January 2019

Human Subjects Review Committee – CSU Chico IRB

Graduate Student Representative, August 2016 – May 2019

PROFESSIONAL AFFILIATIONS

APA Division 27: The Society of Community Research and Action (SCRA)

RESEARCH EXPERIENCE

Graduate Assistant, University of Nevada, Las Vegas – August 2020

PI: Dr. Renato Liboro

The Resilience of Middle-Aged and Older Men Who Have Sex with Men to HIV/AIDS

Purpose: A Community-Based Participatory Research project to conduct a stakeholder-engaged, mixed-methods study to examine factors that build and promote resilience to HIV/AIDS among middle-aged and older (MAO) men who have sex with men living with HIV/AIDS (MSMLWH) in Southern Nevada.

Skills developed: Organizing IRB documentations, developing a new survey instrument, forming interview questions, and writing a manuscript.

Graduate Assistant, University of Nevada, Las Vegas & Boston University – August 2021

PI: Dr. Keith Whitfield and Dr. Paula Sebastiani

Study of Longevity & Stress in African Americans

Purpose: Examine similarities and differences in stress and coping, and health status among sibling pairs and across generations within families. Examine and estimate the relative contribution of genes and environmental factors in patterns of stress and longevity. Compare the concordance of health status among siblings with varying levels and patterns of stress and coping.

Skills developed: Organizing 700+ of participant data, data management, data analysis using R, and networking with faculty outside of UNLV.

Graduate Assistant, University of Oregon & San Jose State University – June 2021

PIs: Dr. Mariah Kornbluh and Dr. Ellen Middaugh

Navigating an online public sphere: Youth experiences with civic inquiry and expression through social media.

Purpose: Applying a sociocultural approach to examine emerging practices related to civic identity development as youth engage with civic issues via social media.

Skills developed: Developing a new survey instrument and networking with faculty outside of UNLV.

CO-PI, Master's Thesis Project, CSU Chico - September 2016 - September 2017

PI: Dr. Mariah Kornbluh

Evaluation of the Youth Research Hub: Exploring Online Social Networks

Purpose: Assessed youth's online social network using network snapshots, coding social media, and qualitative interviews. Qualitative analysis consisted of an inductive and deductive approach.

Skills developed: Creating network matrices, social networking analyses using UCINET, developed a qualitative codebook, mentoring three undergraduate students, leading biweekly codebook trainings, and conducting qualitative data analysis.

Graduate Project Manager, Grant-Funded Research Assistantship, CSU Chico - September 2017 – September 2019

PI: Dr. Mariah Kornbluh

Exploring Pathways to Sense of Community: Examining Leadership of Minority College Students

Funded by the Spencer Foundation Small Grants Program, New Civics Initiative

Purpose: Utilizing a mixed methods approach to evaluate minority college student's sense of community and leadership roles through focus groups, photovoice, ethnographic observations, and longitudinal surveys. Disseminated findings through the creation and distribution of infographics evaluation reports, and videos.

Skills developed: Moderating focus groups, conducting photovoice sessions, transcribing qualitative interviews, qualitative coding, ethnographic observations, data collection, data management, data dissemination, video and infographic designing, and mentoring seven undergraduate students.

Graduate Assistant, University of Melbourne, Australia - September 2018 – November 2019

PI: Dr. Lisa Gibbs

Scaling-Up Youth Led Participatory Action Research: The Potential of Online Mediums a Meta Review

Purpose: A systematic review of the literature to identify publications related to YPAR and the use of digital technology across geographic regions.

Skills developed: Writing literature review, synthesizing content, and identifying arguments.

SKILLS

Social networks

- Presented data (i.e., sociograms) at an international conference
- UCINET and Visone software (running network measures betweenness, centrality, etc.)

Quantitative methodology and software

- Advanced coursework and applied experiences
- SPSS software
- Inferential statistics
- Ordinary least square regression

Qualitative methodology and software

- Ethnographic Observations
- Inductive and Deductive Content Coding
- NVIVO Software
- Dedoose Software
- KH Coder Software
- Photovoice (i.e., Facilitation, Photography Training, and Data Analysis)

Other Software

- Adobe After Effects
- Adobe InDesign
- Adobe Photoshop
- Adobe Premiere Pro