




Examining Nationality, First-Generation Status, and Academic Identity Status as a Lens Into Student Achievement

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Abstract

This study investigates the relationship between academic identity statuses and academic achievement at a U.S. northeastern college where 55% of the population is first-generation students. Using Was and Isaacson's (2008) Academic Identity Measure, I assessed four identity statuses (achieved, foreclosed, diffused, and moratorium) among 424 students. Multiple linear regression analysis revealed that achieved identity status had the strongest positive effect on grade-point average (GPA), while diffused identity status showed the most significant negative impact. Additionally, birthplace and mother's educational status emerged as significant demographic predictors of academic achievement. The findings suggest that students with foreclosed or diffused identities struggle with decision-making and often employ ineffective academic strategies. These results underscore the need for targeted interventions to help students develop an achieved academic identity while considering their social identity intersections.

Keywords: *academic identity, achievement, first-generation college students, identity development*

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Introduction

This study's primary objective is to examine the impact of academic identity statuses on the academic achievement of students attending a Predominantly Black Institution (PBI)¹ in an urban area in the Northeastern United States. Fifty-five percent² of students at the institution are first-generation college students

¹Predominately Black Institutions (PBI) primarily serve Black American students but do not meet the legal definition of Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) established prior to 1964 with the main mission to educate Black Americans (National Center for Education Statistics, n.d.).

² Student-reported parent education level from the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA).

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(FGCS), the first in their family to attend college. The Higher Education Act of 2008, section 318(b), defines a PBI as a college or university where 40% or more of enrolled students identify as African American and at least 50% are considered low-income or first-generation college students (Higher Education Act, 2008).

Despite recent improvements, postsecondary retention and graduation rates for FGCS continue to be challenging for higher education institutions (Whitley et al., 2018). Explanations for the achievement gap that exists between them and their continuing generation peers include the lack of parental knowledge about the college-going experience, financial barriers, and lower levels of academic preparedness resulting from attending under-sourced high schools (Pascarella et al., 2004; Pyne & Means, 2013; Toutkoushian et al., 2018). Currently, 73% of colleges and universities in the United States provide campus interventions to narrow this achievement gap (Whitley et al., 2018). These interventions often share common core design elements that focus on helping students acquire skills to become autonomous, self-directed learners. Researchers argue that this focus on privileged independent norms that emphasize autonomy and individualism creates a cultural mismatch in the college environment for FGCS who tend to have minoritized identities and value interdependence (Chang et al., 2020; Stephens et al., 2012a; Stephens et al., 2012b).

Entering college begins an individual's establishment of an identity that guides their social and academic interactions. Identity development may be particularly difficult for marginalized individuals like FGCS with intersecting roles in different situations (Williams et al., 2022). Since FGCS are the first in their families to attend college, they often struggle to develop a sense of self and who they want to be within the context of higher education. There is ample evidence in the literature to illustrate the trajectory of these students and the intersection between race, class, and first-generation status (Allen-McCombs, 2022; Engle & Tinto, 2008; McCoy, 2014; Mehta et al., 2011; Nguyen & Nguyen, 2018). Yet, research that explores the correlation between identity and academic achievement is largely missing from the literature. For some, PBIs can offer a racially affirming environment that fosters a strong sense of cultural identity and community, leading to the development of an academic identity that is well-integrated with one's racial and cultural identity, allowing for greater academic engagement and achievement (Grier-Reed & Wilson, 2016).

Research has shown that individuals with a well-developed academic identity are less likely to develop self-handicapping skills (procrastination and avoidance of academic tasks) in educational settings (Chorba et al., 2012; Smith et al., 2019). Additionally, students with a positive academic identity are more likely to participate in various educational opportunities, form healthy relationships with peers and faculty, and cope with academic-related problems (Ajayi et al., 2021; Syed et al., 2011). These findings indicate the importance of exploring the role of academic identity in enhancing academic achievement for FGCS. Since there is a gap in the knowledge that examines the relationship between academic identity status and achievement for FGCS, the findings from this research may help improve interventions by shaping informed policies to increase educational outcomes. This analysis will inform the creation of better school environments and opportunities available to first-generation students by enhancing the understanding of identity factors that shape student performance. According to Kroger and Marcia (2011), one of the most significant developments in identity research has been the advent of interventions to promote identity development in young adults. The current study explores the research question: Do FGCS and continuing generation (non-FGCS) experience differences in the relationship between academic identity and achievement? I also investigate the sub-question: How do race, gender, and cultural identities impact an individual's academic identity and achievement?

Literature Review

Identity Development and FGCS

FGCS face unique challenges as they navigate higher education, with many considered “non-traditional” due to their part-time enrollment, dependent children, and full-time employment status (Froggé & Woods, 2018).

These students are more likely to be over 24 years old, come from low-income backgrounds, and belong to minoritized racial groups (RTI International, 2021; US Department of Education, 2020; Whitley et al., 2018). According to the US Department of Education (2020) National Postsecondary Student Aid Study, 54% of participants reported that their parents lacked a 4-year degree, with 56% being the first sibling in their family to pursue college education. These students often experience significant cultural and social adjustments as they enter academic environments that may differ substantially from their family backgrounds (Stephens et al., 2012). For FGCS, the challenges go beyond sorting out their perceptions of who they are and what they want to be, and they include overcoming negative stereotypes others hold about them based on their first-generation status, ethnicity, age, or income. These multidimensional intersecting identities are often grounded not in emotional or psychological development but in internalized role expectations like parenting, caregiving, and work responsibilities. This distinctive positioning often requires these students to adapt their sense of self to survive within the established academic culture (Badenhorst & Kapp, 2013).

Many FGCS are only aware of their first-generation identity when they arrive on campus to find programs, interventions, and other institutional efforts that amplify this identity (Bettencourt et al., 2020). Colleges and universities have historically viewed the “first-gen” identity through a deficit lens and frequently aimed interventions and research at finding solutions to encourage prosocial behaviors rather than recognizing systemic inequities that contribute to poor outcomes (Baldwin et al., 2021; Whitley et al., 2018). Since individuals see themselves differently in different situations, it is essential to understand how identities intersect to influence decisions and behaviors in higher education. The most salient identity drives behaviors and represents the most prominent internalized schema that serves as the individual’s guide to interpret situations and cues for behavioral expectations (Maehler, 2022; Stryker & Burke, 2000).

The formation of a stable ego identity is a process in which one remembers the individuals they admired in their earlier development and then matches those desires and goals with the opportunities society provides (Erikson, 1968, 1980; Kroger, 2007; Williams et al., 2022). But what if no college-going or career-exploration examples exist in their developmental process? The process of identity development becomes particularly complex for FGCS as they must reconcile their family’s cultural values and expectations with the new academic culture they encounter in higher education (Covarrubias & Fryberg, 2015). Many first-generation students report feelings of cultural mismatch and imposter syndrome, which can significantly impact their sense of belonging and academic identity formation (Davis, 2010). These students frequently navigate competing pressures between maintaining family relationships and meeting new academic demands, which can create internal conflicts in their identity development process (Badenhorst & Kapp, 2013). The challenge of straddling two potentially divergent worlds—their home community and the academic environment—can lead to what researchers term “cultural homelessness” or feelings of not fully belonging in either space (Goode et al., 2020, p. F3).

Early Identity Research

Early identity research laid a crucial foundation for understanding psychological development, with seminal work focusing on the adolescent period when individuals actively shape their sense of self. Erikson’s (1950) influential psychosocial development theory introduced the concept that psychological strengths, or ego, emerge during adolescence and early adulthood as individuals cope with various life challenges. This developmental process is influenced by factors such as gender identity, personal interests, and social environment, which contribute to ego formation (Erikson, 1950, 1968, 1980). Building on Erikson’s foundational work, Marcia (1966, 1980, 1987) developed a more nuanced framework that identified four distinct identity statuses (achieved, foreclosed, diffused, and moratorium). His research demonstrated that individuals progress through various developmental stages based on their experiences with psychological challenges or crises, ultimately shaping their decision-making abilities and level of personal investment in their chosen paths. Marcia’s work was particularly significant because it highlighted how identity formation is

not a linear process but rather a dynamic journey influenced by how individuals navigate and resolve critical life decisions.

Academic Identity

Was and Isaacson (2008) adapted Marcia's broader identity status paradigm to focus specifically on how students develop their academic self-concept and approach educational decision-making. Their work demonstrates that Marcia's four identity statuses—achieved, foreclosed, diffused, and moratorium—manifest distinctively in academic settings and influence how students engage with their educational journey, described in Table 1. The connection between Was and Isaacson's academic identity theory and Marcia's identity status framework represents an important theoretical bridge between general identity development and specific academic contexts. While Marcia's framework examines identity development broadly across multiple life domains, Was and Isaacson's application narrows this lens to examine how students navigate academic choices and commitments. For instance, in the academic context, an achieved identity status manifests as a student who has actively explored various academic paths and has made conscious, informed decisions about their educational goals (Was & Isaacson, 2008). These students typically display higher levels of academic engagement and resilience because their educational choices align with their personal values and aspirations.

Table 1. *Identity Statuses¹*

Identity Status	Description of student's experience or situation
Achieved identity	Individuals in this status have explored various options and made commitments aligning with their values and interests. Students in this status tend to have a strong, coherent academic identity. They will likely be highly motivated, engaged, and persistent in their studies because their academic pursuits align with their personal goals and self-concept. They typically have clear career aspirations and a sense of purpose regarding their education.
Identity foreclosure	Academically, students in this status might pursue specific fields of study or career paths without personal interest or exploration, potentially leading to lower intrinsic motivation and satisfaction. They might excel in their studies due to external pressure but may lack genuine interest or passion.
Identity diffusion	Individuals in this status lack a clear sense of identity and have not made significant commitments to roles or values. Regarding academic identity, students may lack direction, motivation, and engagement in their studies. They might struggle to see the relevance of education to their future and may not have clear academic or career goals.
Identity moratorium	This status is characterized by actively exploring different identities and roles without making a firm commitment. Academically, students in moratorium may experiment with various subjects and activities, seeking to understand their interests and strengths. This status may cause a student crisis because they cannot find a compromise between their wishes, the demands of their families, and societal expectations.

According to Was and Isaacson (2008), the academic interpretation of foreclosed identity status appears in students who commit to academic paths without meaningful personal exploration, often following predetermined routes set by family or external expectations. This differs from Marcia's general foreclosed status by explicitly focusing on how this lack of academic self-exploration impacts educational outcomes and satisfaction. Students in academic identity diffusion often procrastinate and struggle with course selection, major decisions, and academic commitment, while those in moratorium actively grapple with competing

¹ As defined in Marcia (1987) and Was and Isaacson (2008)

academic possibilities but struggle to make definitive choices (Was & Isaacson, 2008). The individuals in this category are in crisis because they cannot find a compromise between the demands of their families, society, and their desires.

This academic-specific interpretation of identity development provides educators and researchers with a framework for understanding how identity development influences educational outcomes and student success and why some students thrive in academic settings while others struggle, even when their academic abilities are similar. The adaptation of Marcia's framework to the academic context offers valuable insights for developing targeted interventions and support strategies that consider students' identity development stages in their educational journey. Still, more research is needed on identity development that occurs past young adulthood. A meta-analysis revealed that only one-third of individuals between the ages of 21 and 29 and nearly one-half of individuals between the ages of 30 and 36 have an achieved identity status (Kroger et al., 2010). Additionally, a review of several longitudinal studies found that two-thirds of traditionally aged (18 to 22) college students had not constructed their own identities and were not in the process of doing so (Fadjukoff & Kroger, 2016; Kroger, 2007).

Methods

The Academic Identity Measure

Consistent with Marcia's theory of identity, Was and Isaacson (2008) developed the Academic Identity Measure (AIM) to be used as a self-report tool to capture respondents' views related to their motivation to attend college, academic attention and interest, coping with disappointment, priorities, and educational goals. The tool consists of "four subscales, each with ten items to measure four academic statuses [moratorium, foreclosed, diffused, and achieved]. The ten items within each status subscale represent each of the key topics of concern" (Was & Isaacson, 2008, p. 99). An analysis of correlation coefficients for the current study indicates good internal consistency. Cronbach's alpha values indicate good internal consistency with items measuring diffusion (.76), achieved (.77), foreclosure (.70), and moratorium had a high alpha value (.88). Table 2 provides two examples of items from each subscale.

Table 2. *Examples of Academic Identity Measure (AIM) Items*

Identity Status Subscales	Examples of Academic Identity Measure (AIM) items
Achieved identity	A college education is a high priority for me, and I am willing to make sacrifices. I know why I am in college, and I have clear goals I want to achieve.
Foreclosed identity	Good grades have always been important to me because I like to make my parents proud. When I do poorly on tests I get upset and worry what friends and family might think of me.
Diffused identity	In class, my mind often wanders, and I often wish I were somewhere else. Most of the material I am asked to learn in class is boring.
Identity moratorium	I want a college education but sometimes I'm not sure I can make the commitment. Sometimes I am interested in what is being discussed in class, but other days, I'm bored.

Participants

Data was collected using a convenience sample from an urban PBI. Overall, 424 students completed an online version of the AIM and a survey that collected demographic information. Participants were enrolled in undergraduate courses, including psychology, occupational therapy, nursing, and social work, and were given course credit as an incentive for completing the survey. Participants provided informed consent. The Institutional Review Board (IRB) provided ethical approval for the study.

Since grade-point average (GPA) is a key study variable, the researcher removed surveys with no GPA provided ($n = 78$) from the analysis. Five students reporting having a GPA below the college's passing range (1.0–4.0) were also excluded. The remaining ($N = 341$) were included in the analysis. Of those, 79% ($n = 300$) were first-generation college students. Nearly 83% of students identified as female, 17% as male, and less than 1% as non-binary. When asked to identify their race/ethnicity, 37% of participants indicated Black, 30% indicated Hispanic, 18% indicated Asian, 4% indicated White, and 12% indicated Multiracial or Other (see Table 3). All participants in each race category fit into the ethnicity/nationality listed in the same row in Table 3. Sixty percent were born in the United States. The mean age was 22 ($SD = 7.11$). Most students were single/never married (86%). Over half (55%) reported a family income below \$50,000.

Table 3. Demographic Data

Race	Frequency	Reported Ethnicity/Nationality (Country of Origin)
Black (non-Hispanic)	37% ($n = 126$)	African–American, African (Nigeria, Senegal, Gambia), Caribbean (Haiti, Jamaican)
Hispanic	30% ($n = 101$)	Dominican, Puerto Rican, El Salvadorian, Ecuadorian
Asian	18% ($n = 60$)	Chinese, Filipino, Pakistani, Bengali, Indian
White (non-Hispanic)	4% ($n = 14$)	Yemeni, Egyptian, Afghan, Irish, Italian, Uzbek
Multiracial or other	12% ($n = 40$)	Trinidadian, Guyanese

Procedure

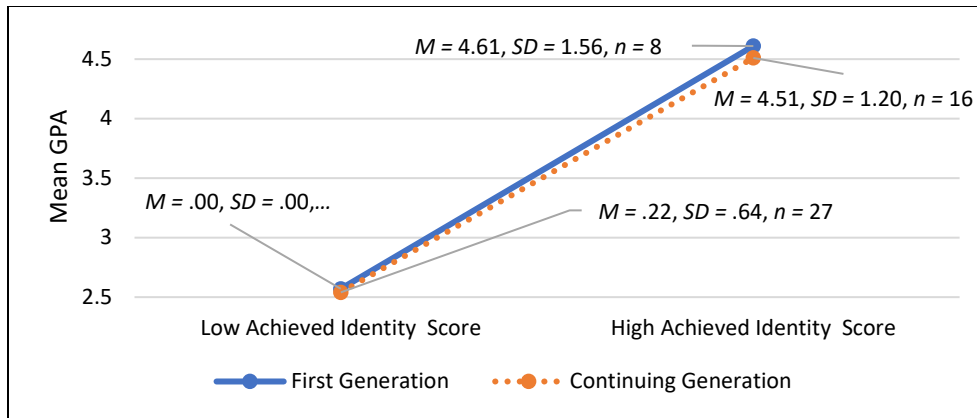
I conducted analyses using SPSS 29 and generated descriptive statistics for all variables. I used bivariate correlations to investigate the research question and conducted a one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) to evaluate the relationships between FGCS status and identity status and FGCS status and GPA. Further, a multiple linear regression analysis assessed the strength of the direct effects and most robust predictors of GPA. A regression model showed whether changes observed in GPA are associated with changes in one or more of the independent variables (age, race, gender, income, birthplace, mother's education, father's education, identity status)

Results

An online version of the AIM, developed with permission by its creators, was used in the current study to capture responses to the research questions. Participants responded to each AIM item on a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from “not at all like me” to “very much like me.” Higher scores reflect stronger levels within each status. The mean scores for the foreclosure, diffused, achieved, and moratorium subscales were 2.79 ($SD = .69$), 1.97 ($SD = .66$), 3.64 ($SD = .70$), and 2.66 ($SD = .97$, respectively). No significant difference was found between FGCS and continuing generation students when considering how their status moderates the relationship between identity status and GPA. Notably, when both groups demonstrated high achieved

identity scale scores, they also had significantly higher GPAs. Similarly, low scores on the achieved identity subscale are correlated with lower GPAs (see Figure 1).

Figure 1. Interaction Effects



The correlation analysis in Table 4 reveals that scores on the diffused and moratorium subscales of the AIM were small, statistically significant, and negatively correlated with GPA scores ($r = -.183, p > .001$ and $r = -.211, p > .001$, respectively). Scores on the achieved subscale were small, statistically significant, and positively correlated with GPA scores ($r = .213, p > .001$). These results show that the responses of participants with lower GPA scores were more closely related to diffused and moratorium identities, and those with higher GPA scores were more closely associated with an achieved identity. The correlation analysis for the foreclosed subscale was not statistically significant and excluded from the final regression model. Reliability for the subscales was measured using Cronbach’s alpha, a statistical test routinely conducted for reporting attitudinal constructs (Gagnon et al., 2017; Taber, 2017).

Table 4. Intercorrelations Among GPA and Academic Identity Subscales

	GPA	Foreclosure Scale	Diffusion Scale	Achieved Scale	Moratorium Scale
GPA	1	-.018	-.211**	.213**	-.183**
Foreclosure scale		1	.313**	.209**	.282**
Diffusion scale			1	-.390**	.721**
Achieved scale				1	-.343**
Moratorium scale					1

Note: ** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Regression Model

Academic achievement was measured using self-reported overall GPA. The variables “Birthplace” (born in or outside of the United States) and “MothersEd” (whether the mother had a 4-year degree) showed significance when the key variable, GPA, was compared to all other study variables (age, race, income, gender, birthplace, mother’s education, father’s education, identity statuses). The underlying relationship between each predictor variable and GPA appeared to be linear. Significant predictor variables were Birthplace ($p = .035$), MothersEd ($p = .043$), Diffusion Scale ($p = .020$), and Achieved Scale ($p = .010$). Therefore, I included these variables in

the stepwise regression model. The dependent variable (GPA) regressed on the predicting variable (achieved status, diffused status, Birthplace, and MothersEd). The independent variables significantly predict GPA, $F(4, 335) = 8.000, p < .001$, which indicated that the four factors in the model have significant impacts on GPA. Moreover, the $R^2 = .087$ depicts that the model explains 8.7% of the variance in GPA. Table 5 shows a summary of the findings.

Table 5. Multiple Linear Regression Analyses Predicting GPA.

Variables	β	R^2	t	p
Achieved status	.113	.045	2.588	.010
Diffused status	-.109	.064	-2.336	.020
Birthplace	.123	.076	2.119	.035
Mother's ed	-.108	.087	-2.031	.043
F	8,000			

Note: $P < .001$

Mother's Educational Level

The current study measured FGCS status by asking participants whether either parent had earned a 4-year degree. The analysis did not find a statistical significance between participants' GPA and their fathers' education levels (FathersEd). However, there was a significant correlation between participants' GPA and their mothers' educational levels (MothersEd). Those who reported their mother's degree status as "unknown" had the lowest numerical GPA mean ($M = 2.87$). Participants who reported that their mothers had obtained a 4-year degree were associated with the highest numerical GPA mean ($M = 3.15$). A between-groups ANOVA with Bonferroni posthoc was performed to test whether having a mother with a 4-year degree affected a student's GPA. Results indicate that GPA was significantly higher in the Yes group ($0.2868, M = 3.15, SD = .489, p = .05$) than those reporting Unknown ($M = 2.87, SD = .52$)

Birthplace

The variable "Birthplace" captured whether participants were born inside or outside the United States. Those born outside ($N = 136$) were associated with a GPA $M = 3.20$ ($SD = .56$). By comparison, those born inside the US ($N = 205$) were associated with a numerically smaller GPA $M = 3.04$ ($SD = .51$). To test if birthplace was associated with statistically significantly different mean GPA scores, an independent sample t -test was performed. The assumption of homogeneity of variance was tested and satisfied with Levene's F test, $F(339) = 3.47, p = .063$. The independent samples t -test was associated with a statistically significant effect, $t(339) = 2.73, p = .007$. Thus, those born outside the United States were associated with a statistically significantly higher GPA than those born in the United States. Cohen's d was estimated at .53, a large effect size based on Cohen's (1992) guidelines.

Discussion

The current study examined the impact of academic identity statuses on students' academic achievement. I administered the AIM to assess four identity statuses: (a) achieved, (b) foreclosed, (c) diffused, and (d) moratorium. As outlined previously, models were tested to assess the direct effects of different identity statuses on participants' GPAs. Results revealed that mean scores for the foreclosure and achieved scores were slightly higher but not statistically significant for those who indicated neither parent had a 4-year degree. Overall, the academic identity achieved status had the strongest positive direct effect, and the academic identity diffused status had the strongest negative direct effect on GPA compared to the other statuses. These findings are not surprising considering an individual who is said to have an achieved academic identity has undergone a period of exploration and is committed to a set of academic values, while an individual who has a

diffused academic identity is often known to lack commitment and frequently procrastinates when making academic decisions (Chorba et al., 2012; Marcia, 1987; Was & Isaacson, 2008).

Moreover, literature has shown that an achieved identity is closely linked with stronger self-awareness and may operate as a protective factor for individuals who face challenges to their intersecting identities in other areas of life (Ickes et al., 2012; Kelly et al., 2020). Consistent with the present study's findings, Was and Isaacson (2008), in their development of the AIM, found that students with an identity achieved status received higher grades. Subsequently, Chorba et al. (2012) found that university students with an identity-achieved status were less likely to adopt self-sabotaging academic behaviors. There have been mixed results in recent research that have examined the relationship between race, culture, the intersection of identities, and academic achievement (e.g., Cokley & Chapman, 2008; Worrell, 2007; Berkowitz, 2021; Ogunyemi, 2017).

In a multivariate context, two demographic variables had a significant relationship with academic achievement as measured by GPA: birthplace and mother's educational status. In the current study, the variable "race" had no direct effect on academic achievement, but results show that foreign-born participants had significantly higher GPAs than those born in the United States. One could analyze this finding through the lens of Ogbu's (1981) cultural-ecological theory, which posits a dichotomous classification of immigrant populations: voluntary and involuntary minorities. Voluntary minorities are individuals or descendants of those who independently chose migration to their host nation, while involuntary minorities are those whose ancestors were forced to relocate to the host society through coercion, enslavement, or military subjugation (Ogbu & Simons, 1998). Ogbu and Simons (1998) maintain that voluntary minorities demonstrate more favorable dispositions toward educational institutions, pedagogical authority figures, and academic content since they have a positive dual frame of reference when considering their host society and their country of origin. As a result, they are more likely to tolerate difficult conditions to achieve their educational goals.

Since ethnicity, culture, and nationality are often incorrectly used interchangeably, it is important to distinguish that national identity develops independently of ethnic identity and emerges from a sense of collective identity based on membership in a country (Barrett et al., 2004; Phinney & Ong, 2007). Daoud et al. (2018) found significant differences in how academic motivation was shaped by social identities between native-born and immigrant Black students. Native-born Black students reported being motivated by a desire to challenge racial stereotypes and overcome barriers, reflecting a resistance-based response to external prejudices. In contrast, immigrant students drew motivation from their ethnic and immigrant identities, with their family histories and pursuit of the American Dream through education serving as primary motivating factors. Additionally, Deaux et al. (2007) found that first-generation Afro-Caribbean students exhibited "stereotype lift" and enhanced academic performance in defiance of negative racial stereotypes about Black students.

First-Generation Status and Academic Achievement

The results showed no significant difference in GPA for those whose fathers completed a 4-year degree and those who did not. Interestingly, participants who reported that their mother completed a 4-year degree had significantly higher GPAs when compared to those who did not know their mother's educational status or those who reported that their mother did not complete a 4-year degree. Research claims that college-educated mothers may be better educational advocates because they socialize their children to value education, provide a social context of high attainment, and better understand educational bureaucracies (Anderson, 2020; Harding, 2015). Thus, subsequent academic achievement may result from environmental influence and reinforcement of educational expectations. Children who witness a parent sacrifice to prioritize education may feel obligated to perform better academically to honor their sacrifice, similar to how minoritized immigrants are willing to tolerate hardship to achieve academic success (Monaghan, 2017). Supporting parental college enrollment and completion may be an effective strategy for simultaneously increasing the academic achievement of two generations and decreasing educational disparities over time. The point at which mothers

of participants in the current study obtained their 4-year degree was not assessed in the study. It is unknown whether growing up with a college-educated mother affects academic identity development or achievement differently than having a mother who recently earned a degree.

Implications for Theory and Practice

The current study suggests that students with a foreclosed or diffused identity who show no evidence of utilizing decision-making skills and lack a commitment to an occupation or ideology are likely to adopt ineffective strategies that negatively impact academic achievement. Therefore, colleges must identify these students early in their academic journeys and take steps to help them develop an academic identity that helps them adjust to changes without becoming overwhelmed, thereby improving academic outcomes. To this end, I suggest colleges assess students for academic identity status along with the typical academic assessments that occur when students first arrive on campuses. College advisors, mental health counselors, and social workers should develop targeted interventions to facilitate exploration and move students towards a more achieved academic identity while considering the intersection of their social identities. By centering students' intersecting social identities, colleges can create holistic support systems that foster a strong, achieved academic identity grounded in students' lived experiences and empower them to thrive in higher education. Academic Identity-focused advising would help first-generation students, and all students navigate university systems and develop an "achieved" identity. Advisors must guide these students in exploring the intersection of their social and academic identities, validating their experiences, and providing strategies to overcome systemic barriers. For students in the foreclosed identity status, who have adopted the beliefs and attitudes of their family or community without critical examination, identity-focused academic advising can help them explore their academic identity in a structured way, challenging them to question assumptions and develop a more autonomous sense of self. Identity-focused interventions would allow students with a moratorium identity status to engage with peers, reflect on their experiences, and work towards a more coherent understanding of self (Cokley, 2007; Cross & Flagen-Smith, 2001; Tatum, 2017). Workshops on decision-making skills for students with a diffused identity status who have not yet explored or committed to an identity would teach strategies for effective goal setting, time management, and problem-solving—all crucial for students still trying to find direction. These targeted interventions can empower first-generation students to take ownership of their educational journey and develop a secure, autonomous sense of themselves as successful college students.

The integration of services represents another crucial policy component. Successful institutions have developed coordinated systems where mentoring, mental health, and social work services work together rather than in isolation (Nair & Otaki, 2021). This integration requires robust case management systems and clear referral protocols that allow students to access the support they need seamlessly. Interventions like workshops on imposter syndrome and impostor phenomenon, which disproportionately impact students of color and first-generation learners, can help participants recognize and reframe self-limiting beliefs, moving them towards an achieved academic identity characterized by confidence and a belief in one's rightful place on campus. Successful mentoring policies encompass several critical components working in concert. Institutions must allocate dedicated funding for faculty mentor training to ensure mentors are equipped with the necessary skills and cultural competency to guide their mentees effectively (Hamilton et al., 2019). Structured peer mentoring programs create a supportive network where upper-level students share their experiences and strategies with newer students, fostering a sense of belonging and academic confidence (Collier, 2017). Career development workshops and undergraduate research opportunities further enhance mentoring relationships by providing practical applications of academic knowledge and professional development (Mondisa & Adams, 2022). Regular assessment and accountability measures ensure these programs remain effective and responsive to student needs. This includes ongoing program evaluation, detailed tracking of student outcomes, and regular assessment of cultural competency among service providers.

Limitations

Self-reported GPAs present significant methodological challenges in research studies examining the relationship between academic identity statuses and academic performance among college students (Caskie et al., 2014). A limitation of this study is the use of self-reported measures, which may have introduced a response bias. Some research suggests that college students have moderate to highly reliable ratings of self-reported GPA (Nofle & Robins, 2007; Wu, 2019). GPA provides insight into academic performance but may not adequately account for emotional and multiple intelligences or a student's capacity for success. When students are asked to report their own GPAs, they may either overestimate or underestimate their true academic performance, introducing systematic bias that can skew research results (Caskie et al., 2014). To overcome these limitations, using official institutional records would provide more accurate and unbiased measures of academic performance than relying on self-reported data.

Future research should use a mixed-methods approach to explore more representative measures of achievement and examine the effect of social desirability. Furthermore, a qualitative study on students' perceptions of their academic abilities would also help gain additional insights into the indirect impact of identity on academic achievement. While the present study provides evidence of the relationship between identity statuses and achievement, a causal direction cannot be assumed. Future researchers should conduct longitudinal studies to obtain evidence regarding the direction of causality.

Of significant importance is the finding that students who reported their mother's degree status as "unknown" also had the lowest mean GPA. This finding warrants further exploration and begs the question of whether the relationship or knowledge regarding the mother significantly impacts academic achievement. Further qualitative research is needed to assess the meaning students ascribe to parental educational attainment and its effect on academic behaviors and achievement. Notably, participants in the current study were not asked if their immigration status or nationality impacted their identity development. The meaning ascribed to nationality and the intersection of culture and ethnicity warrants further qualitative exploration concerning academic achievement.

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