

# Evolutionary Progression for All People of Color as We Approach the 22nd Century

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All people of color currently function in today's educational world in isolation. Due to the contemporaneous environment in which we exist, conflicting modalities of thought can cause cognitive dissonance for many. Resiliency theory will be discussed regarding creating a sense of well-being and positive thinking for all. The functionality of the roles of counselors will be addressed regarding the most advantageous manner to approach learners to ensure that they believe their educational goals can be obtainable with the implementation of positive thinking using the model of resilience theory. The conclusion will invoke readers with pointed questions everyone should ask themselves. Excellence in education should be available for everyone, regardless of the color of one's skin color.

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## Infancy

Innately infants are born innocent, non-discriminatory, and ready to embrace the world in which they will exist. Their minds are pure, like a blank slate that becomes etched by those surrounding the newborn child. An infant has no preconceived notion about their new existence nor how they were conceived. The reproductive process could involve up to three biological parents in a situation that involves a father's sperm germinating with an egg donor and a surrogate mother, therefore, producing an infant with multiple parents (Madrigal, 2014). The only concerns for the infant are to be fed, sleep, and have their diapers changed.

Additionally, they need to be nurtured to allow them to develop a sense of well-being and security. Not long after birth, the infant begins to experience the world they now live in. As time passes from days to weeks to months and eventually years, more and more of their cognitive senses become stimulated, finally allowing them to be fully aware of their existence and ready to explore the world in which they were born. Infants do not care about the socioeconomic status of those around them; they do not recognize that those taking care of them may have a skin tone different from their skin (What to Expect, 2019). They do understand, at an extremely young age, how they feel and the way they are being treated. Regardless of an individual's age, how they are treated is an instinctive trait identified as an invariant, innate characteristic of their reality. Enculturation of the world becomes their way of life, behaving like those around them. The beliefs, values, thoughts, and even physical appearance are replicated as the child grows into a young adult.

## Childhood

As the child develops into adulthood, life becomes far more complex. The development of our minds causes

us to act in various behaviors depending upon the situation experienced at any given moment. This socialization is a phenomenon that occurs for anyone living in a social environment. Should the existence of an individual be one of tranquility, bliss, and peaceful coexistence, the individual's actions from such a background would be in alignment with their environment. By and large, the individual raised in this manner would be considered nirvana.

At the same time, some individuals exist in a contemporaneous environment. While one individual enjoys tranquility and peace, others thrive on being contentious, vehement, and disputatious. Existence in the latter of these two environments causes the individual to behave in a destructive manner which causes those electing to live a nirvana existence much anguish, torment, and distress. These two opposing philosophies of thought can cause aggressive behaviors due to incompatible and irreconcilable differences between these two modalities of cognition (Guiffrida, 2006). Unfortunately, this scenario exists on many college campuses regarding ethnicity (Walters, 1997).

### College

Attending a four-year college can be intimidating for a young adult, especially those who have lived in rural before this lifestyle change. Tinto's (1993) theory of student development helps to explain this phenomenon. He contends that those entering an institution of higher education bring their preconceived thoughts, socioeconomic culture, and family experiences with them upon entering the world of academia. Additionally, as documented by Guiffrida (2006), Michael Rutter discovered that resilience theory speaks to the correlation between risk and protective factors experienced by an entry-level freshman in a four-year college environment. This theory is built on the premise that there is heterogeneity in an individual's response when interacting with others. This effect is demonstrated when individuals have encountered an experience they recall as painful. Their reaction can be either growth from the experience or reclusion to avoid the negative feelings experienced. Rutter's (2012) findings concluded that both outcomes foster resilience; it is just that the way this is formulated differs.

Richardson and Waite (2002) are a resiliency of education specialists whose beliefs are grounded in the theory of resilience based upon being positive in relationship to biopsychosocial factors. His belief system acknowledges that personal strengths can help individuals weather the storms in their lives by having a positive attitude and surrounding themselves with others with a positive mindset. Richards has found that "The metatheory of resilience and resiliency is presented here as three waves of inquiry: (1) identification of resilient qualities; (2) the resiliency process; and (3) resilience as a motivating force" (Richardson & Waite, 2002, p. 65). Implementation of the resilience theory helps the student new to the university setting because it improves psychological states of well-being and academic persistence.

Maintaining enrollment at four-year colleges is an ongoing process throughout the academic school year and during breaks such as winter, spring, and summer. New students must be continually recruited from high schools around the United States (Marcus, 2019). First-year students are the best recruits since their enrollment will be more than likely at least four years at the college. To ensure the college will be able to continue to operate successfully concerning academics, athletics, keeping dorms at total capacity, and all the other businesses that exist on campus running smoothly to earn revenues, counselors play an essential part in the retention of students.

Due to the enrollment responsibility placed on the counselors, they sustain a significant role in any anti-discrimination challenges within the college environment since they are the first to meet incoming first-year students, helping map out their academic future. The role of the counselor is critical regarding academics. Equally important is the ability of the counselor to identify other barriers that might exist for the student. "Title VI of the

Civil Rights Act of 1964 protects students from discrimination based on race, color, or national origin in programs or activities receiving Federal financial assistance” (U.S. Department of Education, 2018, p. 2). This Act protects the rights of those attending college to education nondiscrimination in relationship to the counseling they receive. This includes, however, is not limited to providing reading skills, mental health issues, interpersonal relations, social adjustment, career planning, and seeking employment. The goal of counselors is to help under-represented populations such as students of color, disabled students, and women. By taking proactive steps to ensure that the counseling materials are free from bias and allowing students to have the academic freedom to pursue what they want to do with their education, all students have a fair and equal chance to develop to their fullest potential.

A qualitative study by Greyerbiehl and Mitchell (2014) revealed an example of this behavior. Black women who attended predominately white colleges would seek to join African-American sororities rather than white ones because the researchers determined that black women envisioned themselves on a lower level than their white counterparts. The black women’s decisions depended on their families, being role models in their community, academic pressure, and developing high standards. Additionally, a phenomenological project study conducted by Janelle Simmons (2017) interviewed white students attending historically black colleges and universities (HBCUs). This study addressed the white population of students concerning why they attended HBCUs. The white students were hoping to get a higher GPA which would allow them to further their education.

Implications for developing a research study to ensure that students receive information in a fair and just manner cause the college administration to set specific guidelines for counselors, instructors, students, and administration to follow (Hurtado, Griffin, Arellano, & Cuellar, 2008). Issues that deal with students’ mental health and the relationship between resilience regarding overcoming these issues can change the student’s life. While students of color may feel intimidated at the onset of their college experience, this is overcome with proper support from the university. Counselors who understand the complexity of diversity and embrace working with all learners will help rectify the situation. Diversity is the way of the future because more and more people are marrying outside their race (Kotkin, 2019).

### **Resilience Theory**

Resilience is a powerful source of energy that individuals can draw from within themselves, allowing them the determination and fortitude needed to surge ahead on their career path regardless of the turbulence within the academic environment (Rutter, 2012). For those students of color entering a four-year college, issues such as mental health, interpersonal relations, social adjustment, career planning, and seeking employment must become a moot point allowing a new scheme of existence to shine through. Nancy Walters conducted a study in 1997 which sought to determine what was affecting the retention of minority students attending graduate school. What was discovered supported Tinto’s findings that social integration exceeds student persistence. This was possible and attainable, providing the student with the support they needed along with instructors and counselors who supported their decisions regarding their educational options.

The ability for an individual to rebound from a significant negative situation with the individual being able to recover quickly and surge ahead would be resilient. While many may give up after being demeaned, the resilient individual will continue to forge ahead. When students of color enter college, they may feel a push-pull structure in their environment. To put this into academic terms, the push more than likely comes from peers regarding having fun and not working on their academic endeavors; however, the pull that voice inside them says your studies need to go first. Rutter (2012) stated that resilience is about overcoming pain and disappointment

without letting them crush your spirit. This is what the college freshman often experiences, more than likely too often causing failure. We all fail at one time or another. The difference between those who take this failure to heart as opposed to others that find this to be motivational is the power of resilience.

President Trump rescinded President Obama's efforts to have colleges embrace diversity regarding enrollment during his current term as President. President Trump's stance was very bold, causing animosity between those of color and the white populations at colleges. The statistics are alarming for the differences between students of color and white students. For example, 42 percent of white students were enrolled, while only 34 percent of students of color were enrolled (Marcus, 2019). These students of color were both black and Hispanic. Students of color had grade-point averages of at least 3.5 compared to the white students, where only 22 percent had grade-point averages this high. Graduation rates are also proportionately skewed, with 72 percent of whites graduating as compared to 56 percent of Hispanic and only 46 percent of blacks graduating. What is most frightening is to think that this type of thought process seems fine with the person who runs the United States (Marcus, 2019). The more divided we become, the less productive we will be as a nation. This is not what people want for generations to come. However, it has been predicted that the future population growth will be the world's poorest nations (Browne, 2000).

Intellectual inquiry suggests that we must consider where we go from here. How can the United States ensure education for everyone who desires to attend college? Is competency-based instruction in high school going to allow this transformation from high school to college? If so, is that excellent? On the other hand, what can be done to balance the scale if this is impossible? How can all students who desire a college education be afforded the opportunity to do so regardless of their cognitive capabilities or skin color (Vestberg & Verizon, 2016)?

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