

**OVERCOMING OBSTACLES: EXAMINING CHALLENGES CONFRONTING  
UNDERSERVED HIGH-ACHIEVING STUDENTS OF COLOR IN EDUCATIONAL  
SETTINGS**

**A SCOPING REVIEW**

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## **Abstract**

This scoping review delves into the multifaceted challenges experienced by underserved high-achieving students of color within educational settings, incorporating the framework of oppression theory. Drawing upon this framework, the study explores the intricate interplay between systemic barriers, individual coping mechanisms and promising approaches to the problem. By synthesizing existing literature, this review aims to identify key stressors and impediments encountered by high achievers of color, shedding light on their unique experiences within educational contexts. The review examines various scholarly perspectives to elucidate pathways to help the students and their families overcome these obstacles while providing guidance to the institutions serving this demographic, and our government to do better. The findings contribute to a deeper understanding of the complex dynamics shaping the educational trajectories of underserved high achievers of color, with implications for policy, practice, and future research initiatives. Ultimately, this review underscores the imperative of addressing systemic inequities and promoting inclusive environments that nurture the academic and socio-emotional well-being of underserved students of color and their families.

*Keywords:* high achieving, minorities, education, identity-based trauma, systemic barriers

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## **Introduction**

The plight of high-potential students of color pursuing advanced educational goals is a greatly unaddressed issue. Everyday millions of students of color attend academic settings without the appropriate tools, support, and network to attain the promised educational foundation that will provide them with an optimal future. The report from the American Psychological Association (APA, 2012) highlighted the recurrent disparities in educational achievement between Caucasian and minority students, which persist from Pre-K to 12th grade. These markers transition into their college careers and negatively affect graduation rates, academic grades, future socioeconomic status, health, and behavioral adjustment, which create sizable obstacles as students of color pursue advanced education and appropriately remunerated job placement in adulthood.

Our profitable racially rigged system has created and perpetuated gigantic obstacles for people of color to pursuit their freedom and education since the inception of our country hood. Still, in our current times the standard for many students of color is to grow up in financially distressed communities, study in overcrowded classrooms, have exposure to complex trauma on ongoing basis, and develop their personhood surrounded by scarcity of viable community support networks. For many students of color these preset obstacles impede the fulfillment of appropriate milestones during elementary and high school education. The initial educational harm and setbacks greatly diminishes the number of students of color that are able and willing to pursue a higher education degree, and for many of the warrior-like high achieving students of color that aim to take the path the current system makes sure to widely make their transition to and retention in college settings extremely painful and remarkably difficult. During their transition to college, systemic racism, financial barriers, cultural differences, underdeveloped life

skills, and learned trepidation when interacting with those with perceived power further alienate many minority college students from securing the help they need or having the tools to hold peers, faculty, institutional stakeholders, and macro systems accountable.

The lack of appropriate academic foundation, culturally responsive emotional support, and life skills development hinders many minorities students' ability to partake as equals with peers and systems with further privileges, which taxes the minority students' ability to transition to college successfully. Currently in the United States half of the students who enter college drop out without completing a bachelor's degree. The dropout rate phenomenon disproportionately affects students of underrepresented backgrounds. Dropout rates are higher among underrepresented minority college students than among their non-minority peers (Patterson et al., 2021).

Issues related to racism, bias, and identity trauma further hinder the high achieving students of color ability to see themselves as assets for their communities and valuable contributors in their academic institutions. This challenging environment also affects the students' ability to uphold an appropriate level of functioning, decreases their physical health, and compromises their mental health. All these elements create the breeding ground for minority students to develop a thwarted sense of belonging, which is one of the pillars that drives their exodus out of schools and colleges before completing their education (Patterson et al., 2021). By synthesizing existing literature, the scoping review aims to identify some of these students' diverse challenges, from systemic barriers to individual experiences. Ultimately, this review seeks to provide insights into evidence-based interventions to address these obstacles and support the progress towards more equitable educational opportunities for underserved students of color and institutional awareness-based change.

## **Scoping Review Objectives**

This scoping review explores the challenges high-achieving students of color face while pursuing their education in educational institutions in the United States. Additionally, the review will share interventions that address the strategic support required to improve positive academic and mental wellness outcomes for high-achieving students of color to successfully attend schools and transition to the workforce with their health and upwardly mobile options intact. The scoping review looks to answer the following questions: What are the main obstacles that challenge the mental wellness and attainment of academic goals for underserved high-achieving students of color in advanced educational settings, and what evidence-based interventions exist to support them?

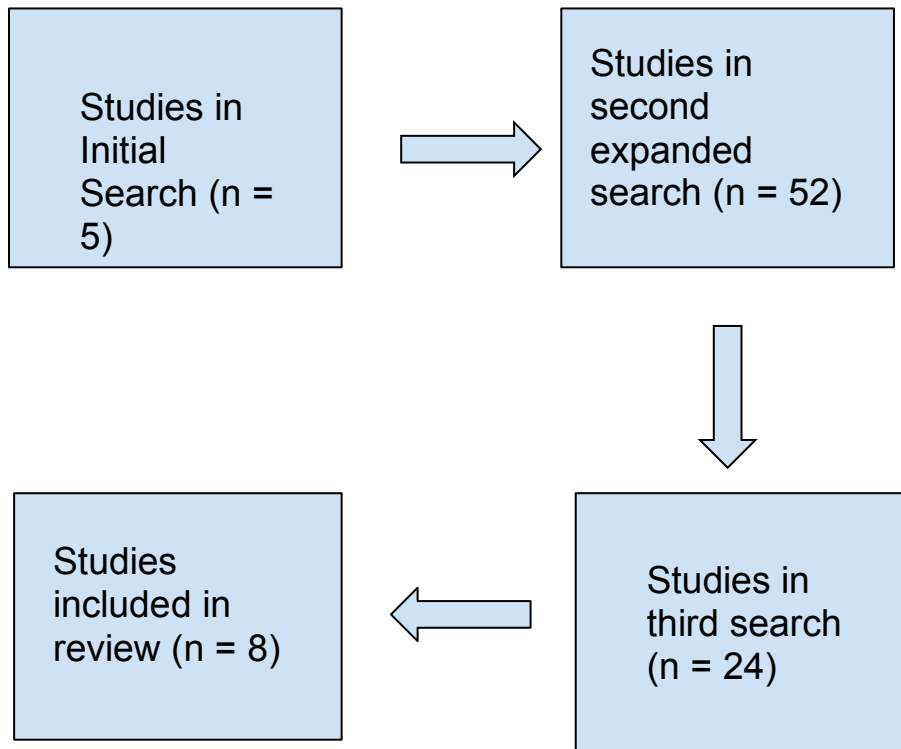
## **Methodology**

The review used the Peters et al. (2015) structure as the guiding outline. The literature search for this scoping review utilized the University of Alabama library system, primarily accessing the EBSCO database via advanced search functionalities. The search process involved iterative refinement to capture relevant literature about mental health, minority populations, and high-achieving students within educational contexts.

In the first search, keywords such as “mental health or mental illness or mental disorder or psychiatric illness,” “minorities or ethnic groups or race or racial or people of color or underserved or marginalized,” and “high achieving students or gifted students or honor students” were employed. Filters were applied to limit results to articles available online, written in English, and published between 2014 and 2024. This yielded a modest result of five articles, indicating the need for further exploration.

Subsequently, the second search parameters were adjusted to refine the focus. A narrower set of keywords was employed, targeting “mental health,” “minorities or ethnic groups or race or racial or people of color or underserved or marginalized,” and “high-achieving students or gifted students or honor students.” Filters were refined to include articles published between 2015 and 2022, peer-reviewed, available online, and from academic journals. This iteration produced a pool of 52 articles, from which four were deemed directly relevant to the study's population, with the remainder excluded due to a broader focus on student populations at large.

Recognizing the need for additional exploration to comprehensively cover the topic, a third search iteration was conducted. This time, the search was refined to specifically target the intersection of mental health, minority status, and high achievement. A broader search strategy using the terms “mental health,” “minorities,” and “high achiev\*” was employed, resulting in 211,868 articles. To manage this substantial volume, filters were applied to include articles published between 2015 and 2024, peer-reviewed, available in print or online formats, from academic journals, and written in English, bringing the results down to 32,450. Additional limitations like articles based on research in the United States of America, available online, and full text available brought the results to 373. Through manual screening and reviewing of the titles and abstracts of the articles, 24 articles were printed and read in their entirety (see Figure 1). A purposive sample of 8 articles was selected for the scoping review based on relevance to the study's objectives, population, and focus.

**Figure 1***Scoping Review Process***Selection Criteria**

This iterative search process identified and reviewed a diverse range of literature to inform the scoping review's analysis of the challenges confronting underserved high achievers of color in educational settings, particularly concerning mental health, goal attainment, well-being, institutional support, and academic success. The author performed all research for this scoping review and evaluated the suitability of each article for inclusion. The full text of the 24 articles was printed and reviewed based on the research questions established for the study. As such, eight articles were selected for the review.

## Scoping Review

In this scoping review, we delve into the multifaceted landscape of some of the obstacles faced by high-achieving minority students in educational settings. Through the analysis of eight pertinent articles, we have identified four key themes:

1. The perception of education as a pathway to the American dream
2. The impact of race and income inequality on educational outcomes
3. The psychological distress experienced by students of color while pursuing their education.
4. The significance of institutional culture and support in shaping student's success

Our exploration extends to promising interventions aimed at mitigating these challenges.

By synthesizing these findings, we aim to shed light on the complexities surrounding the educational experiences of underserved high achievers of color, offering insights for future research and actionable strategies for fostering their academic advancement and well-being.

Table 1 provides an overview of the articles that are included in the scoping review.

**Table 1**

*Scoping Review Article Summaries*

<b>Author(s)</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Journal Name</b>	<b>Study Type</b>	<b>Summary</b>
Bjorklund, P.	2019	Journal of Education for Students Placed at Risk	Qualitative study	The study explored the experiences and outcomes of Latinx students enrolled in Advanced Placement classes in majority White and Asian classrooms.

Collins, K. H., Coleman, M. R., & Grantham, T. C.	2022	Journal of Emotional and Behavioral Disorders	Qualitative study	The study utilized a bioecological approach to explore emotional/behavioral challenges of Gifted students of color taking into account support needed vs. support received.
Daniels, J., Bowers, L., Cook, M., D'Antonio, M., Foltz, A., McCombs, C., Sound, J., & VanCuren, J.	2019	Inquiry: The Journal of Virginia Community Colleges	Qualitative study	The study gathered information related to successful interventions that supported wellness and retention for minority students in college
Glickman, K. L., Smith, S. W., & Woods, E. C.	2023	Journal of the American College of Health	Quantitative study	The study explore the levels of psychological distress, attitudes toward seeking help and utilization of college counselling at a predominantly minority college.
Kundu	2019	The Urban Review	Qualitative study	The research explored college burnout from a social perspective, aiming to reignite agency of low income racial minority strivers



Langhout, R. D., Rosales, C. E., Gordon, D. L., Jr.	2022	Journal of Diversity in Higher Education	Quantitative study	The study researched the perceptions of success taking into consideration cultural differences and decolonizing perspective
Patterson Silver Wolf, D. A., Taylor, F., Maguin, E., & Asher BlackDeer, A.	2021	Journal of College Student Retention, Research, Theory &Practice	Randomized controlled trial	The study analyzed the challenges faced by underrepresented college minority students and the positive effects of social belonging interventions
Sabaner, C., & Arnold, K. D.	2021	Journal of College Counseling	Qualitative study	The study did a six month in depth research of the experiences of six low income high achieving students' mental health as they transitioned to their first semester of college

### Data Extraction

The literature was reviewed to determine if there are shared sets of elements that contribute to the endemic challenges that high-achieving students of color endure in academic settings. Due to the qualitative nature of the chosen articles examination of textual or visual data to uncover patterns, themes, and underlying meanings was necessary. As per Smith and Jones (2018), researchers can identify recurring themes and nuanced perspectives by employing

categorization techniques, enriching the analysis's depth and rigor while providing valuable insights into the subject matter.

## **Related Terminology**

### **Life Skills**

Life skills are “a group of psychosocial competencies and interpersonal skills that help people make informed decisions, solve problems, and think critically” (WHO, n.d.). Other skills identified include effective communication, relationship building, empathy, and developing coping skills.

### **Person of Color**

“A person who is of a race other than White or who is of mixed race” (Merriam-Webster, n.d.). For the purposes of this scoping review within the diaspora that encompasses people of color in the United States only articles related to Black and Latinx students experience met the criteria for inclusion.

### **The American Dream**

“The ideal that the United States is a land of opportunity that allows the possibility of upward mobility, freedom, and equality for people of all classes who work hard and have the will to succeed” (Britannica, n.d.).

### **Impostor Phenomenon**

Magro (2022) defined the impostor phenomenon as “an internal experience of intellectual phoniness” (Magro, 2019, p. 69).

### **Emotional Regulation**

Emotional regulation is the ability of an individual to modulate an emotion or set of

emotions. Emotion regulation requires conscious monitoring, using techniques such as learning to construe situations differently to manage them better. Explicit emotion regulation requires conscious monitoring, using techniques such as learning to construe situations differently in order to manage them better, changing the target of an emotion (e.g., anger) in a way likely to produce a more positive outcome, and recognizing how different behaviors can be used in the service of a given emotional state. Implicit emotion regulation operates without deliberate monitoring; it modulates the intensity or duration of an emotional response without the need for awareness. Emotion regulation typically increases across the lifespan and when there are applied evidence-based interventions (APA, 2022).

### **Identity-Based Trauma**

Identity-based trauma (IBT) is the psychological, emotional, or physical damage or response that results from experiences of discrimination, oppression, marginalization, devaluation, or assaults on one's identity or a core identity factor (Dixon, 2022). IBT exists because of systemic power imbalances and the societal structures and systems that create and enforce those power imbalances (Dixon, 2022). IBT can occur as a result of a single traumatic event or repeated exposure to systemic discrimination and other oppressions over time. IBT can debilitate various aspects of one's well-being, including mental and physical health, relationships, and self-esteem (Dixon, 2022). IBT may include but is not limited to Social Identities such as race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, disability, and others. This framework encompasses seldomly highlighted identity parts of the individual, which support the intersectionality of a broad category of individual identities. Variables like race, gender, political and other social affiliations, income, immigrational status, cultural background, medical status or health condition, level of education, weight, height, hair texture, skin tone, and body image are taken into account (Dixon, 2022).

## **Theoretical Framework: Oppression Theory**

The educational obstacles minority students face in the United States of America can be analyzed under the theory of oppression, defined as the social act of placing severe restrictions on an individual group or institution ("Definitions," n.d.).

Oppression theory, which examines the systemic disadvantages and social injustices faced by marginalized groups, has roots in the critical social theories developed in the 20th century. This theoretical framework was significantly influenced by the works of scholars like Paulo Freire, whose seminal book "Pedagogy of the Oppressed" (1970) introduced concepts of critical consciousness and the dehumanizing effects of oppressive structures. Freire's ideas were further expanded in the context of race and education by scholars such as Bell hooks and Kimberlé Crenshaw, who incorporated elements of critical race theory and intersectionality to highlight the multifaceted nature of oppression experienced by students of color. These contributions underscore the importance of examining educational disparities through a lens that acknowledges systemic inequities and the lived experiences of marginalized populations (Freire, 1970; hooks, 2022; Crenshaw, 1991).

## **Oppression Theory Application to Underserved Students of Color**

Most minority students enter educational settings as intersectionality-oppressed students. Educational oppression in schools challenges the underrepresented students' ability to enter, stay, and graduate from their Pre-K-12 studies and negatively compromises their ability to gain acceptance to and complete college. Oppression theory helps us understand the unique challenges that minority students face in the U.S. educational system. It shows how systemic inequalities and biases within schools contribute to ongoing disparities Patterson, et al. (2021). For example, many students of color attend schools that are underfunded and staffed with less

experienced teachers, which negatively affects their learning opportunities. The curriculum often overlooks their cultural backgrounds, making their education feel irrelevant and unwelcoming. Additionally, discriminatory disciplinary practices disproportionately target these students, leading to higher suspension and expulsion rates and feeding into the school-to-prison pipeline.

Even after defying the statistical odds and making it to higher education underserved students of color are affected by elements related to college student burnout or disengagement from a social perspective Kundu (2019). The health of minority college students was found to be highly compromised while largely not being addressed appropriately by the institutions and the government. Students of color face additional liabilities of personal and academic nature during their educational lifespan Kundu (2019).

The findings are even more disturbing since even while following the rules set by society to achieve educational success, and pursuing the path that promised them and their families a piece of the American pie minoritized students encounter systemic issues beyond their control. A vivid example of this, is the fact that Latinx students are taking more AP exams than in previous years, yet their passing rates remain lower than other participating groups. Due to systemic issues related to bias, sense of belonging, teachers' interest in students and lack of academic supports Bjorklund (2019).

In the individual level the effects of the compounding and intersectional challenges faced by minority students in our oppressive educational system negatively compromises their health, their access to desired professional careers, sense of safety and overall life experience. On a macro level, the educational disparities faced by minority students have profound implications for U.S. society. When large segments of the population are denied equal educational opportunities, it perpetuates cycles of poverty and limits economic mobility, leading to broader

social and economic inequality. This systemic inequity undermines the nation's workforce potential, innovation, and overall competitiveness. Moreover, it fosters social divisions and tensions, as marginalized communities continue to feel disenfranchised and underrepresented. Addressing these educational disparities is crucial not only for the well-being of minority communities but also for the health and progress of society.

### **Scoping Review Themes**

#### **The Pursuit of the American Dream and Education**

In the United States of America success is customarily gauged based on whiteness, neoliberalism, and colonizing practices that make little space for the students of color's beliefs and value systems. Some of the most limiting interpretations of personal value come through metrics of standardized and quantitative academic success, such as the testing required to gain acceptance into advanced or highly regarded educational systems. Other problematic stances are the highly publicized outcomes institutions use to position themselves amongst peer as an educational Shangri-La. A degree and pedigree acquired from certain institutions promises to bestow the student with prestige and exceptionality based on the school's acceptance rate, high earning power at graduation, degree completion time, etc. These are not only a flawed definition of academic and overall life success, but also potentially greatly harmful definitions of success to minority students (Langhout et al., 2022).

Taking into consideration that access to upward mobility, freedom and wellness are the cornerstones of the pursuit of the American Dream the access to education and academic positioning for everyone, including students of color should be an inalienable right for those engaging in this Hunger Games type of saga. For many high achieving students of color the pursuit of the American Dream was the engine that propelled their families history of

immigration, displacement and day to day choices. School systems, little towns, cities, states and countries were and are left behind by families and or students on ongoing basis for the search of this elusive goal.

The American Dream promises that with hard work and determination, anyone can achieve success and prosperity. However, for high-achieving students of color, this dream often feels hijacked and out of reach due to systemic barriers and inequities. Despite their talents and efforts, these students frequently lack access to the resources and opportunities that are essential for navigating the complexities of higher education and professional environments. The over emphasis on the need to have heroic grit and thick emotional skin underestimates the environmental factors that allow this to be a necessity in the first place (Kundu, 2019). In their developmental years most students of color attend under-resourced schools that fail to provide the support necessary for their academic and personal development. Additionally, societal biases and lack of representation limit their opportunities for professional advancement. As a result, even the most capable students of color face significant obstacles in their educational experience.

In addition, minority college students often enter the school with lives and experiences that are intrinsically different to their lives in their university, and based on their chronological age and level of awareness can feel, sometimes for the first time in their lives, the full force of tokenization, class differences and marginality, which can feed into feelings of isolation, otherness and lack of belonging (Sabaner & Arnold (2020).

Acknowledging the high cost and stressors on an already statistically fragile system (i.e., minority individuals and families) should be addressed as a complex moving target that requires commitment, investment, and ongoing institutional change, investment and upgraded cultural humility (Kundu et al., 2019).

Langhout et al. (2022) examined the concept of being an underrepresented and misrepresented student in college under the Borderland conceptual framework. A framework that refers to “the psychological struggle of people encountering or navigating two or more contradictory cultural worlds” (Langhout, 2022, p. 3). The scale examines the relevance of academic determination, social connectedness, and diverse citizenship. Considering the student's experiences and needs can provide institutions clarity when creating initiatives and support for underserved students of color and the community at large.

In ongoing research related to the educational challenges of students of color show that minority students' wellness, educational success and academic experience are also greatly affected by the competing demands on student's time due to family expectations, cultural differences and high stakes pressure to be successful in order to achieve a better level of living (Glickman et al., 2023).

### **The Role of Race and Income Inequality in Educational Outcomes**

The educational obstacles of high-achieving students of color have been a loud secret in the corridors of institutions worldwide. The United States of America disappointingly continues to be an integral player on this harrowing bias and rigged chess game instead of an exception and a role model to follow for other nations. Patterson, et al (2021) found that in the United States fifty percent of students entering college drop out without completing their bachelor's degree, and within that percentage minority students have a higher dropout rate than their non-minority peers. The United States continues to hold the heartbreaking first place with the highest percentage of college dropouts of any industrialized country in the world. These statistics have negative compounding effects due to the minority students elevated share in the attrition rate of the country.



Kundu (2019) studied the role of economics in relation to burn out and reigniting the agency of low income racial minority students in college and found that low income racial minority students may possess added issues related to barriers of entry and institutional racism over the span of their lives which creates additional liabilities related to expected levels of ongoing grit and resilience which open the door for mental health deterioration and disengagement. In many recorded instances once brilliant and striving students find themselves isolated and feeling academically worthless for the first time while in college. A great part of these feelings were found to be based on “educators’ implicit biases, tracking, and persistent microaggressions” (Kundu et al., 2019, p.680).

Additional issues were studied Collins, et al (2022) related to the challenges encountered in the process of high achieving students of color identity formation and the effect of the variables that occur between the environment and the gifted student of color using the Bronfenbrenner’s bioecological model of human development that includes examinations of self-concept, self-esteem and self-efficacy. The study found that while poverty is one of the most daunting factors that diminishes students of color well-being, racism is a suffocating interconnected layer that strengthen a viscous cycle of detrimental obstacles for students of color and their families.

Other systemic barriers to minority students' success were “inadequate financial support, unsolidified academic decisions, and a variety of life interruptions “(Daniels et al., 2019, p. 2). These challenges position many minority students arriving at college unprepared for the transition to the college lifestyle and college-level work. Students are often overwhelmed by too many options, lack of family guidance if first-generation college attendants, and faulty executive functioning skills taught in their previous years of schooling.

Sabaner & Arnold (2020) found that the college experience and the mental health of low-income high achieving students was greatly affected by factors like financial status, race, availability to counseling services and community assets. Furthermore, findings of their study state, “low income is associated with mood, anxiety and substance abused disorders, as well as other health concerning outcomes” Sabaner & Arnold (2020) p.18.

Patterson et al. (2021) found supporting evidence that the decline in college persistence in underrepresented minorities is also tied to a lack of social belonging. Minorities drop out of college because they doubt belonging or fitting in campus settings. Belonging is one of our highest human needs and in college researchers have found that is intertwined with students of color intention to persist, academic flourishing, institutional loyalty and positive health markers Paterson et al. (2021).

Bjorklund (2019) found that the negative experiences of Latinx students attending Advanced Placement and Honor classes affected their performance due to lack of sense of belonging and challenging relationship with their teachers and peers due to bias and marginalization. A dumfounding concept for a country that speaks of Liberty, Freedom and Justice for all. Latinx students in AP and Honor classes are actively left out and pushed out of since they are often not perceived to be a part of the extended culture of academic excellence in those environments, unlike their White and Asian counterparts Bjorklund (2019).

### **Students of Color and Psychological Distress**

Minority high achievers often confront heightened stress levels due to various factors, including socio-economic disparities and cultural expectations. Despite their potential, these stressors can hinder their academic and personal growth.

Glickman, et al (2023) reported that there has been a steep increase in college students who report having psychiatric disorders in recent years. The article cites a study performed by the American College Health Association (ACHA) which gathered a sample of 73,912 students in 140 schools nationwide and produced staggering data like: 43% of the students reported feeling so depressed that it was difficult to function, 64.3% felt overwhelming anxiety and 13% had seriously considered suicide in the year prior to study. The data also highlighted that being racial/ethnic group is a risk to exhibit greater distress compared to White students and higher levels of loneliness, depression and past suicide attempts.

Sabaner & Arnold (2020) found that low-income students of color that attended Primarily White Institutions could in addition be affected by culture shock when met in the intersectional marginality of being one of the few a people of color in the school and experiencing financial need which negatively affect their perception of self-worth and self-determination and can potentially deteriorate into acute and chronic health concerns.

Kundu (2019) examined factors related to college student burnout or disengagement from a social perspective with a population of low-income racial minorities striving towards achievement. The study found that the health of college students is being highly compromised while primarily not being addressed through recognition or treatment of the malady. The study further highlights the added liability for students of low-income racial minorities due to complex additional liabilities of a personal and academic nature. Feelings of isolation and mental health deterioration are added burdens to survive and thrive across their educational lifespan. The study offered causes and solutions for disengagement and severe burnout while attending college. Issues related to traumatic history, institutional racism, income stressors, isolation, and lack of support were the major themes within the causes of findings of academic burnout.

Bjorklund (2019) highlighted the described the potential for heightened stressors and possible dysregulation experienced by high achieving Latinx students while participating in Advanced Placement and Honors classes due to coming in contact with non-Latinx peers who they perceived don't respect them, and the lack of strong connections with their teachers which greatly affects their sense of belonging, academic motivation, and mental wellness.

### **The Influence of Institutional Culture in Student's Outcomes**

The articles showcased the challenges as multi-layered, complex, and morphing struggles that must be addressed with long-term tools and committed financial investment by the educational settings for minority students and future professionals to create a purposefully diverse society successfully. The scoping review provided relevant themes for further exploration of the holistic needs of underrepresented students regarding education.

Institutions need to care for their students in a way that is more nuanced and reflective of the multiple roles and burdens that minority students carry into the campus without using this as an excuse to diminish the students' talents and strengths (Patterson et al.,2019; Langhout, 2022; Kundu, 2019).

The institutional efforts for academic retention and psychological preventative services are of great importance not only looking at it from the space of institutional return on investment, as a social justice priority, but also as a matter of basic human decency. Glickman et al. (2023) stated that “of the 64% students who drop out of college due to mental illness, half of them do not access campus counseling services” (p. 765).

Research has solidly established that students view of themselves develops and morphs over the span of their educational lives based on the context and influences that surround them

Collins et al (2022). A great emphasis is placed in the studies on the significance of the opinion and investment of time by stakeholders whose opinion and mentorship are perceived to be valuable within the system Ex. Teachers, school leadership and coaches. The imbedded need for this connection in the real world often clashes with long held assumptions in the field of giftedness and the perceptions of educational ability that are biased, racist and oppressive and that have created a significant underrepresentation of BIPOC, socio-economically disadvantaged students within advanced educational options (Collins et al., 2022).

Daniels et al. (2019) inquired about the existing support systems that improve the college completion rates for underrepresented populations and their efficacy. The research concentrated on gathering data on successful programs that address the common challenges that underserved minorities face in higher education. The research group highlighted issues related to minority students not completing optional assignments and not seeking assistance during their educational careers. The aversion to help-seeking is rooted in seeking help being associated with “not belonging in college in the first place” (Daniels et al., 2019, p. 1).

The expressed challenges that high-achieving students of color experience while in high school and college are evidence to the need to support the use of interventions related to addressing issues like life skills, academic support, social justice-based self-mastery, and emotional regulation resources to further develop the minority student's holistic development, and self-agency to strengthen the success of underrepresented students attending college.

Daniels et al (2019) research highlighted that minority students who were able to tap into school resources, including student support and tutoring, were more likely to succeed. The research centered on the results of three Virginia community colleges and New York State publicly funded minority college programs. In Virginia, TRIO, Pathway to the Baccalaureate,

and Success Coaches increased structured contact between students and their institution's resources to decrease the stigma of help-seeking. The research supported applicable knowledge related to our student's need for academic and holistic support and make suggestions for expanding the offerings.

While discussing the influence of institutional support in student's outcomes it is important to call out the absurdity about these are challenges even having to be dealt with in a country that was founded on the premise of liberty and justice for all. It is important to highlight that this responsibility should lie squarely in the shoulders of our academic institutions, government and policymakers even before any of our students of any color, especially historically oppressed students of color set foot in their classrooms for their first educational system interaction. Superhero resilience, grit and exceptionality should not be the requirement in a system that deems itself as democratic, fair and humane. As Sabaner & Arnold (2020) discussed "our educational settings policies, practices, and structures lie outside of the student's control or even outside of their awareness" (p.20). Educational institutions reflect the society they largely belong to. These challenges and the onus to change are in great part fed by the notion of individuals having to pull themselves by their bootstraps when modern decision makers and historians know that said individuals were purposely set up to continue to fulfill this ask barefoot and hungry. Lack of appropriate educational options secure the funnel to modern day slavery and multi-generational suffering.

### **Promising Interventions**

To address the needs of minority students in academic settings, remove instances of educational oppression and challenges while transitioning to the workforce, researchers have conducted studies to test appropriate interventions and equip institutions, staff, and students with

relevant evidence-based data and tools. The scoping review found intersectionality in the successful interventions since they addressed the needs of the high achieving students of color from a holistic approach that takes into consideration the complex needs of the population.

Some of studies highlighted the importance of the creation of new scales to assess the needs of underserved parts of the population can expand the concepts of success, enlighten the journey towards actual vs. perceived need, and create a space where timely data and feedback are received in order to affect systematic programming and increase institutional accountability. Using population centered scoring instruments can allow for advantageous insight related to the turning points in students' paths and to get a better definition of what it means for schools to be responsive to our changing world needs Glickman, et al., (2023); Collins, et al (2022); Langhout (2022).

Glickman, et al., (2023) utilized high academic stress scoring instruments with a minority student population and found that managing academic demands is perceived as a significantly challenging endeavor that often exceeds the student's psychological resources. The research outcomes emphasized positive student outcomes after allocating institutional and governmental funds to increase the minority students' life skills, emotional regulation resources, and identity-based trauma interventions during their academic lifespan to better position them for success and health.

Important advances in this field of research like the development of the Borderlands scoring scale highlight the need and usefulness of instruments with cultural relevance to obtain information that standard scales might miss regarding the experiences and needs of minority populations, the Borderlands scoring scale provides an excellent window into nuanced lives and

needs of students of color in college. (Langhout, 2022). The Borderland scale was developed and administered to gauge how Latinx students interpret power, success, balance responsibilities of multiple contexts, and prioritize relationships and resources. In the specific case of using the Borderland framework, institutions can better grasp the Latinx students' definitions of success and a better view of creating safe spaces and initiatives that allow students to feel cared for, seen, and heard.

The development of the Collins' Culturally Responsive Multi-Tiered System of Supports (CR-MTSS) framework is a great resource that addresses the complex strengths and challenges that today's multicultural and minority students face while in school with a flexible continuum which include academic curriculum, social justice and flexible supports. Collins, et al (2022). The study found that systemwide additions to curriculums related to social-emotional learning, life skills, diversity, equity and inclusion will support students healing, appropriate retention, meeting graduation goals, fostering improved minority student moral and overall cultural environment in the institution.

A critical theme within all the articles is the need for the development and dissemination of tools centered around the acceptance and normalization of the college journey as a challenging path that can be successfully navigated by upgrading skills, reaching out to others, strategizing, and advocating for oneself. An additional theme within the research and initiatives is addressing the specific needs of the underrepresented population from a place of inclusive strengths, acknowledgment of societal barriers, and decolonizing perspectives. Society and the institutions of power within it must hold themselves accountable and do better faster (Patterson et al., (2019); Langhout, (2022); Kundu, (2019); Glickman, et al.,(2023); Collins, 2022).



Studies found successful interventions related to social-emotional instruction, imposter syndrome coaching, support for differentiated teaching needs, culturally responsive activities, diversity, equity, and inclusion resources are some of the tools that pave the way for success for schools, staff, and students.

Patterson et al. (2021) study suggested that social belonging interventions can improve academic retention in minority students. The intervention analysis showed that the intervention was significantly associated with the re-enrollment of students. Approximately 76.2% of the students in the experiment re-enrolled versus 58.8% of students in the control group. The interventions were reported to increase the student's ability to approach college education as a collectively arduous task, providing safe spaces for community proved beneficial and worth exploring on a grander scale (Patterson et al., 2021).

According to Kundu (2019) The interventions that were found to help address the burnout issues within the students in the study were access to guided self-reflections with mentors, culturally respectful allies, counseling, and mental health initiatives, as well as access to a diversity center.

Daniels et al., (2019) review found positive associations with initiatives rooted in expanding identity, belonging, and social-emotional mastery in supporting underrepresented students with school success, retention, and enjoyment. Providing wrap-around life skills and culturally competent services increased these subjects' ability to graduate on time, create bonds with academic staff, and see themselves as essential to their institutions (Daniels et al., 2019). ability to approach college education as a collectively arduous task, providing safe spaces for community proved beneficial and worth exploring on a grander scale (Patterson et al., 2021).

Daniels (2019) explained that multi-tier solutions were at the core of successful programs. Proactive advising was proven to reduce attrition and increase enrollment in underrepresented populations in college. Mandatory meetings, high-touch follow-ups, goal setting, and supplemental education provided students with personal support and strong connections to campus. Offerings like food pantries, financial aid workshops, financial emergency assistance, and self-care events create spaces for students to bond with staff and peers, resulting in improved student outcomes.

The research looked to build on best practices for improving college completion rates for underrepresented populations and achieved its goals by highlighting that the strengths of the programs are palpable. Overall, the program's results showed tangible gains like 3-year average retention rates, higher graduation rates than students not participating in programs, 98% of the students earning transferable credits in the first year of college, and 66% of deferral and stop-out students returning to college within one year. The resourcefulness of the program leaders and students was evident while developing guidelines and program structure to solidify academic and social gains. For example, mandatory tutoring, mandatory or highly encouraged preparation for placement tests, summer bridge or immersion program requirements, bringing tutoring and counseling services staff to participate in introductions or student activities to create familiarity.

The inquiry on improving the completion rates of underrepresented community college students in Virginia provided positive data on increased graduation speed, level of connectedness to school, and support service provision (Daniels et al., 2019). Culturally inclusive research that looked at minority college students from a holistic and complex lens successfully created growing knowledge and suggestions for further research and expansion of initiatives. Enriching

the fabric of student's lives and society at large. Studies should aim to expand the definition and resources related to students' success as a social justice endeavor Langhout (2022).

### **Implications for Practice and Policy**

The scoping review shows that academic institutions and society grapple with the need to improve educational systems and to train staff to address the learning loss, emotional stressors, and failure to launch minority students in their ranks can experience based on systemic issues.

While the rise of social justice movements nationwide in 2020 created greater public opinion oversight and pushed schools to do more. Social, emotional, and academic support initiatives were flourishing on campuses nationwide. Greater interest in diversity equity and inclusion (DEI) policies was palpable in the schools' budget allocations and marketing. Task forces were being created, and initiatives were being fast-tracked. Recent law based oppositional waves have risen in the last few months due to unthinkable legal rulings by the United States Supreme Court and several State legislative bodies have resulted in many of those initiatives being disbanded or greatly affected. These dantesque rulings added to the presidential election fervor and changes in public opinion further endanger equitable access to education and resources by minority students nationwide.

Copious research studies have found that many students seek counseling and support after psychological stress has become unbearable. Institutions need to work on find creative ways to increase the utilization of the current support services and the development of informal interventions and events that could be the entry point into higher level of services, if needed Glickman, et al (2023).

Future iterations of these studies should include more intervention frequency, a broader assessment of the socioeconomic and variable factors that influence positive outcomes, and a

more extensive and diverse sample to provide additional guidance on improving the persistence and retention of students of color in educational settings.

### **The High Achieving Student's Life after college**

One of the long-term goals of high achieving students of color enrolling in college is to better position themselves within the labor market and expand their career options. Based on the scoping review findings additional studies that explore how the college setting challenges negatively affect how underrepresented students transition to become young professionals will provide a better picture around this urgent need, and how to address it way before the students first educational contact, or at the very least in the first point of scholar-young adult contact the college campus.

Imposter phenomenon has become a buzz word that intends to explain the continued second guessing and doubt plaguing high achieving nontraditional/minoritized students throughout their career and in their personal life. A phenomenological study related to young minority professionals being coached for the impostor phenomenon proved to be an appropriate first step in studying the subject and learning about the efficacy of the intervention (Magro, 2022). This empirical study showcased that minority young professionals share many of the same challenges as minority college students related to their ability to self-advocate, compounded feelings of inadequacy, and sense of otherness. The study showcased the benefits of impostor phenomenon coaching for the participants, their willingness to share the skills learned with others, and their marked interest in continuing their healing path through coaching, public speaking, and other related disciplines (e.g., counseling, therapy). The study also found that impostor phenomenon coaching was not a strong enough intervention to address the issues in the

long term, and that more intensive psychotherapy-based interventions could be more appropriate (Magro, 2022).

The development of the Identity Based Trauma Framework (Dixon,2022) aims fill the gaps in the current available impostor syndrome interventions since it addresses identity as a holistic concept that is more intersectionality aimed and better suited for populations in which a complex array of variables based on systemic racism, income and possible trauma converge since it removes the onus from the victim, and places it back on the perpetrators and systems which allow individuals to regain self-mastery and determination by upgrading their skills and reprocessing their traumatic narrative. The studies performed to determine the evidence-based validity of the Identity Based Trauma framework were performed by Dr. Dixon at the University of Southern California during 2023-2024. The results indicated there is significant applicability for this population. The Identity Based Trauma framework should be the golden standard resource for scholars and providers interested in supporting this population and being part of the change, we want to see in society at large.

### **Conclusion**

To address the needs of high-achieving minority students in academic settings and to remove instances of educational oppression, researchers have conducted studies to uncover data about the challenges affecting the students and to develop guidance around appropriate interventions to equip students, families, staff and institutions with evidence-based interventions. The studies highlighted the sense of urgency for the needs of minority students to be revisited and addressed with well-funded and evidence-based initiatives that can help us create a more diverse scholarly setting, a more diverse workforce, and higher levels of wellness for our communities at large.

Interventions related to socio-emotional life skills instruction, impostor phenomenon coaching, differentiated teaching, academic support, culturally responsive activities, diversity, equity and inclusion resources and Identity Based Trauma interventions are proven methods to provide prevention and intervention support during minority students' educational careers in order to produce higher levels of individual minority high-achiever's wellness, academic success, and as a consequence strong institutional loyalty, and worldwide economic growth.

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