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Examining Black and Latinx College Students' Perceived Stress, Resilience, and Networking Efficacy from a Social Capital Perspective

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ABSTRACT

Black and Latinx college students often have disparate access to social capital opportunities and experience more stress in than their White counterparts. However, many students are resilient. A social capital lens was used to examine the relationship between perceived stress, resilience, and networking efficacy in a sample of predominantly Black and Latinx students ($N = 114$). The results indicated that resilience mediated the negative influences of perceived stress on networking efficacy. Implications are discussed for how college career counselors can (a) help Black and Latinx students increase resiliency, (b) address stress, and (c) build social capital.

Keywords: Stress, social capital, resilience, networking, Black and Latinx college students



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Introduction

Disparate rates of college degree and career attainment are concerning because of an increased need for emerging adults to achieve post-secondary education to gain economic stability (Arnett, 2014). Specifically, Black and Latinx students are underrepresented in university settings (de Brey et al., 2019). For example, in 2018, 42% of White students were enrolled in college compared with 37% and 36% of Black and Latinx students, respectively (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2020). As of 2016, the percentage of Black (21%) and Latinx (15%) college students who completed a bachelor's degree was lower than that of their White (35%) and Asian (54%) counterparts.

One factor that plays a role in college and career attainment is social capital. Social capital influences career outcomes such as employability, employment status, and job quality (González-Romá, et al., 2018). Providing racially minoritized students with increased access to social capital can help facilitate education and career success by improving degree completion and career outcomes (Museus & Neville, 2012). To better inform how career counselors on college campuses can support Black and Latinx college students' career development, we use a social capital lens to examine the relationships between perceived stress, resilience, and networking efficacy in Black and Latinx college students.

Social Capital Theory

Social capital theory suggests that building meaningful relationships provides value to members of a network by affording them access to social resources (Bourdieu, 1985). Social capital is defined as the sum of resources generated from the characteristics, qualities, and structures of social relationships (Coleman, 1990). Bourdieu (1985) discussed how the volume of social capital that one has is related to (a) the size of their social networks and (b) the amount of resources possessed by the individuals belonging to those networks. Almeida et al. (2021) found that grit does not significantly impact first-generation college students' GPA yet, social capital with faculty and staff does. The more social capital connections first-generation college students have with faculty and staff, the higher their college GPA.

The Search Institute (2022) conducted the social capital and learning for equity (SCALE) project to develop social capital measures that practitioners can use to assess how social capital and peer relationships help youth and young adults secure education and employment opportunities. The young people in the SCALE project tended to experience the most social capital from near peer relationships, which provided participants with the most valuable resources for reaching their education and career goals (Search Institute, 2022).

Counselors and Building Social Capital

Counselors can play a critical role in (a) supporting Black and Latinx students' mental health and (b) helping students increase their social capital. Farmer-Hinton and Adams (2006) used social capital theory to explore the role of counselors in fostering college access for Black first-generation high school students. The results of Farmer-Hinton and Adams (2006) qualitative study suggested that allowing students' access to counselors helped them build social capital and provided them with resources to support their college plans. To highlight the role of counselors in building social capital, Bryan et al. (2011) found that Black and Latinx students who contacted their school counselors for college information were more likely to apply to multiple universities and have positive academic outcomes. Edeburn and Knotts (2019) discussed the role of counselors in assisting Latinx students' in their transition from eight to ninth grade. In providing recommendations for school administrators, Edeburn and Knotts (2019) discussed the important role that counselors play in deepening students' access to social capital resources and educational opportunities. These studies discuss building the social capital of Black and Latinx students at the K-12 level and the role of counselors. However, there is a need to further explore aspects of social capital within Black and Latinx college student populations and discuss the role of college career counselors in addressing social capital.

Social Capital and Higher Education

Palmer and Gasman (2008) found that social capital is embedded in Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs). Specifically, factors such as mentorship; support from community and administration; peer motivation, and strong relationships with faculty are unique features of HBCUs when compared to the lack of support Black students receive at Predominantly White Institutions (PWIs; Palmer & Gasman, 2008). Unfortunately, at PWIs, there are inequities in racially minoritized students' access to social capital (Museus & Neville, 2012). For instance, many racially minoritized college students do not have equal access to either informal (e.g., social capital resources gained from friends, family, neighbors, etc.) or formal (e.g., social capital resources gained from organizations and institutions) social networks that serve as pipelines to college and career opportunities (Gonzalez et al., 2003). Inequity in social capital during college hinders career and educational outcomes and can negatively affect students' mental health (Ahnquist et al., 2012; Lindstrom, et al., 2012). Limited access to social capital is associated with poor psychological health and increased stress (Ahnquist et al., 2012; Lindstrom, et al., 2012). The underrepresentation of Black and Latinx college students and disparities in their degree completion present unique challenges that are often overwhelming and limit access to social capital. Some of these challenges include: language barriers, financial hardship, racism, anxiety, and stress (Terrell & Strayhorn, 2010; Unidos US, 2020).

Stress and Career Development in Black and Latinx College Students

This study focuses on stress as a challenge to Black and Latinx college students' career development. Perceived stress is one's subjective assessment of an experience as being likely to exceed their ability to respond effectively (Cohen, et al., 1983). Stress is not always a negative experience and, in some cases, can help students reach their goals (Eustis, et al., 2017). However, increases in perceived stress are associated with individuals having a limited ability to respond to stressful events (Cohen, et al., 1983).

Generally, college students' stress levels are concerning. In 2018, the American College Health Association (ACHA) reported that most undergraduate students experience symptoms of stress and that stress is a major impediment to their academic performance. For college students, stress can be overwhelming, hinder academic achievement, and distort their self-efficacy beliefs or their belief in their ability to perform a task (Amirkhan, 2018; Bandura, 2008). In college student populations, increases in stress are associated with low self-esteem, life satisfaction, optimism, and self-efficacy (Saleh et al., 2017).

For many racially minoritized college students, stressors are both interpersonal and systemic at the institutional level (Pittman et al., 2017). For instance, racially minoritized college students are likely to perceive their college experience as stressful (Wei et al., 2010) because of experiences with microaggressions or having to internalize of their psychological distress (Bissonette & Szymanski, 2019). Cokley et al. (2013) found that Black college students experienced significantly higher levels of minority stress than their Asian and Latinx counterparts. Jimenez (2014) examined the association between minority stress and depressive symptoms in a sample of Latinx undergraduate students on a diverse college campus and found that higher levels of Latinx minority stress were associated with increased depression. In addition, racially minoritized college students often experience somatic or physical manifestations of stress, including: increased heart rate, sweating, restlessness, and insomnia (Torres-Harding, et al., 2020).

In relation to stress and career development, Bullock-Yowell et al. (2011) explored the relationships among career and life stress, negative career thoughts, career satisfaction, and career decidedness. Increases in life stress were associated with lower levels of career decision-making and satisfaction with career choice. Stress also impacts students' career goals. Hu et al. (2018) found that stress, along with receiving negative career feedback, had detrimental impacts on college students' career goals. Whitman et al. (2017) explained that for first-generation college students, increased stress levels are negatively associated with academic and career decision-making self-efficacy.

Regarding Black and Latinx college students in particular, stress can further exacerbate negative college and career outcomes. For instance, Arbona (2016) examined whether college self-efficacy moderated the relationship between minority stress and persistence intentions. College and minority stress were negatively related to persistence among Latinx college students with low self-efficacy. Bentley-Edwards et al. (2016) explained that among Black college students, increases in race-related stress presented barriers to achieving academic and career goals. In addition, stress can make racially minoritized students question their career path. McGee (2018) explained that Black college students who are interested in careers in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) experience stress and anxiety related to race-based stereotypes. This increased stress and anxiety can make it more difficult for Black students to continue in their chosen STEM career (McGee, et al., 2018).

Resilience, Social Capital, and Self-Efficacy

Although Black and Latinx students may experience high levels of stress, many show resilience, or the ability to bounce back from adverse experiences (Bukoski & Hatch, 2016; Southwick et al., 2014). For many young adults, peer and social networks foster resilience (Botrell, 2009). Increased social capital can counteract the negative impact of stress on racially minoritized college students by enhancing their resilience (Ledogar & Flemming, 2010). Resilience built from social capital can occur at the individual or community level (Sherrieb et al., 2010). At the community level, social capital can help develop social support, social participation, and community bonds among Black and Latinx communities. At the individual level, social capital can enhance resilience related to economic development and growth.

Self-efficacy is also an important aspect of resilience (Bandura, 2008; Terrell & Strayhorn, 2010). Terrell and Strayhorn (2010) discussed that for racially minoritized college students, increases in self-efficacy can facilitate higher levels of resiliency and result in positive academic and career achievements. Wang et al. (2018) explored the relationships among resilience, social support, and self-efficacy in early career nurses and found that social support had a positive impact on nurses' resilience

and self-efficacy. Furthermore, Sidiropoulou-Dimakakou et al. (2015) found that among Greek college students, perceived career self-efficacy, resilience, and career adaptability are all interconnected. Further Sidiropoulou-Dimakakou et al. (2015) explained that college students who have a higher sense of control and exploration of their environment tend to exhibit more resilient career behaviors.

Although the relationship between resilience and career self-efficacy has been explored in the literature, no studies have examined the relationship between resilience, perceived stress, and networking efficacy in Black and Latinx college students. Career search efficacy is a person's belief in their ability to accomplish career-related tasks such as searching for a job, networking, exploring their personal interests, and interviewing (Solberg et al., 1994). The networking efficacy domain of career search efficacy is related to social capital. Networking efficacy refers to one's belief in their ability to build professional relationships with others (Solberg et al., 1994). In a previous study, Cabell and Gnilka (2021) explored the impact of perceived stress on the career search efficacy of undergraduate engineering students and found that increases in students' perceived stress were associated with decreases in their career search efficacy. However, this study did not include the role of resilience and analyzed data from a majority of White college students.

The Present Study

Because much of the literature on the role counselors play in fostering social capital is focused on the K-12 setting (Bryan et al., 2011; Edeburn & Knotts, 2019; Farmer-Hinton & Adams, 2006), the present study seeks to expand the literature on Black and Latinx college students by examining the relationships between perceived stress, resilience, and networking efficacy in these college students. Doing so, can inform interventions used by college career counselors when working with Black and Latinx students to reach their college and career goals. We hypothesized that perceived stress is a negative predictor of networking efficacy, and that this relationship is mediated by resilience. In this study, networking efficacy was used to measure social capital. Claridge (2017) explained that there is no universal way to

directly measure social capital. However, measures such as the career search efficacy scale, which aims to assess networking beliefs, can address social capital.

Methods and Materials

Procedures

The university's institutional review board approved this study as exempt because no identifying information was collected. Purposive sampling was used to recruit Black and Latinx undergraduate students. Black and Latinx undergraduate students were sent recruitment emails using the Black and Latinx undergraduate email listserv from the university's Office of Multicultural Student Affairs. In addition, Black and Latinx undergraduate students were sent recruitment emails from undergraduate email listservs of Black and Latinx student organizations. Three recruitment emails were sent to these listservs with information on the study and the online link for self-identified Black and Latinx undergraduate students to participate. Data were collected using Research Electronic Data Capture (REDCap), a secure web-based application designed to support data capture for research studies (Harris et al., 2009). Participants could voluntarily opt in to complete the survey by clicking on a link in the recruitment email. After clicking on the link, participants were shown the informed consent before answering any of the survey items. Participants were then directed to answer the survey questions which took approximately 15 minutes to complete. Only participants who were at least 18 years old could participate in the study.

Instruments

Career search efficacy scale (CSES; Solberg et al., 1994)

The CSES measures a person's belief in their ability to participate in career selection and search using four subscales: networking efficacy, job search efficacy, personal exploration efficacy, and interviewing efficacy. The CSES is a 35-item Likert-type scale instrument that asks participants to rate, on a scale of 0 ("very little") to 9 ("very much"), how confident they are in their ability to complete career-related

tasks. The Networking Efficacy subscale specifically asks questions related to an individual's networking beliefs (e.g., *"use social networks for job opportunities," "meet new people in careers of interests," "solicit help from an established person," etc.*). Evidence for convergent validity was established the association of the CSES with the Career Decision Making Self-Efficacy scale (Solberg et al., 1994). In Solberg and colleagues' (1994) study with a college student sample, the Cronbach's coefficients alpha was .97 for the full scale. In the current sample, the Cronbach's coefficients alpha was .92 for the Networking Efficacy subscale.

Perceived Stress Scale (PSS-4; Cohen, et al., 1983). The PSS-4 measures one's perception of stress over the past month. The PSS-4 is a four-item Likert-type scale instrument that asks participants to rate on a scale from (*"0-Never"*) to (*"4-Very Often"*), how frequently they experience stress-related symptoms (e.g., *"how often have you felt that you were unable to control the important things in your life?"*). The PSS is the most commonly used measurement of perceived stress. The concurrent validity of the PSS-4 scale was established by its correlation with life event scales. The PSS Cronbach's coefficients alpha typically ranges from .84-.86 in college student populations and the PSS-4 sometimes has a lower reliability when compared to the full scale. The Cronbach's coefficients alpha in this sample was .79.

Brief Resilience Scale (BRS; Smith et al., 2008). The BRS is a 6-item Likert-type scale instrument that allows participants to respond from 1 (*"strongly disagree"*) to 5 (*"strongly agree"*) on items that indicate resilience (e.g., *"I tend to bounce back quickly after hard times"*). The BRS measures a person's ability to bounce back after experiencing stress. The reported Cronbach's coefficients alpha of the BRS typically ranges from .68-.91 in undergraduate samples. Convergent validity was established because the BRS was positively correlated with other measures of resilience, optimism, and purpose in life (Smith et al., 2008). The Cronbach's coefficients alpha for the BRS in this study was .85.

Statistical Methods

Preliminary Analysis

First, an *a priori* power analysis with a .80 power level, three predictors, a medium effect size (.15), and a .05 *p*-value was conducted using G*Power 3 to determine the adequate sample size needed to detect a medium effect size (Faul, et al., 2007). The power analysis revealed that a sample size of 74 would be sufficient to detect a medium effect size. Subscale scores were examined for univariate and multivariate outliers as well as for the distribution of scores (Aiken & West, 1991). Next, to determine if various demographic variables had significant relationships with any of the study variables, analysis of variance (ANOVAs) and independent *t* tests were conducted for categorical demographic data, and bivariate correlations were conducted for continuous demographic data. Any demographic variables that were found to be significant predictors were added as covariates to the main analyses. In addition, bootstrapping was used to address any non-normality in the data. However, no significant outliers were found, and there was no evidence of multicollinearity in the data. Finally, bivariate correlations were calculated for all study variables. The bivariate correlations are detailed in Table 1.

Table 1. Correlations among Variables (N = 114)

	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	α	1	2	
1. Perceived Stress	2.01	0.68	.79	--		
2. Resiliency	3.18	0.72	.85	-.66*	--	
3. Networking	5.35	1.65	.92	-.33*	.40*	

Note. Perceived Stress = PSS, Resiliency = BRS, Networking = Networking Efficacy Subscale **p* < .05

Tests of mediation

The effect of perceived stress on the networking efficacy through resilience was assessed using the SPSS macro PROCESS (Hayes, 2017) to calculate the indirect effect. Specifically, the indirect effect

of the independent variable (perceived stress) on the dependent variable (networking efficacy subscale) and was defined as the product of perceived stress to the resilience path (a) and the resilience to the networking efficacy path (b), or the indirect path ab .

The PROCESS macro allows for bootstrapping, which is a non-parametric approach that does not rely on the assumption that the variables are normally distributed. Bootstrapping has been found to have significantly higher power for studies with smaller sample sizes than other tests of mediation (e.g., Sobel Test; Baron & Kenny). The bootstrapping method creates multiple similarly sized samples from the original dataset, sampling with replacement and calculates an indirect effect for each sample. A total of 5,000 bootstrap samples were taken. When creating 95% bootstrapped confidence intervals (CIs), the indirect effect estimates are sorted from lowest to highest. The indirect effect is significant when zero is not located within the 95% CI.

Sampling

Participants were 114 undergraduate students at an urban Mid-Atlantic PWI. Some participants did not complete all the demographic questionnaire items; therefore, totals may not all equal 114. The sample included freshman ($n = 6$), sophomore ($n = 22$), junior ($n = 28$), and senior ($n = 44$) undergraduate students. The mean age of the participants in the sample was 21.34 years old, ($SD = 3.43$). Participants identified as Black ($n = 86$) and Latinx ($n = 12$). The sample included females ($n = 84$) and males ($n = 14$). Most of the participants were full-time students ($n = 96$). Some of the participants identified themselves as first-generation college students ($n = 40$).

Findings

First, preliminary data analyses were conducted for univariate and multivariate outliers. No cases were found to be univariate outliers ($z \pm 3.0$). Based on Mahalanobis and Cook's distances, no multivariate outliers were detected (Pallant, 2010). Bivariate correlations revealed that perceived stress was

significantly associated with resilience and networking efficacy, these relationships were negative in direction. Resilience and networking efficacy had a significant, positive relationship.

Next, several bootstrapping analyses were conducted in order to test if resilience mediated the relationship between the stress and networking efficacy variables. The results of the analysis are detailed in Table 2. The results of the bootstrapping analyses showed that resilience significantly mediated the relationship between perceived stress and the networking efficacy subscale ($p < .05$), as noted by zero not being in the 95% CI. The mediating relationship resilience had with perceived stress and networking efficacy was positive, indicating that higher levels of resilience mediated the negative relationship between perceived stress and networking efficacy. 17% of the variance in networking efficacy scores was explained by the mediating relationship between resilience and perceived stress, indicating a medium effect size.

Table 2. Hierarchical Multiple Regression Results for Simple Mediation on the Networking Efficacy Subscale ($N = 114$)

Overall Model	Path/effect	B	SE	95% CI
$R^2 = .171^*$	C	3.563*	1.283	
$F(2, 112) = 11.53^*$	a (PSS → RES)	-0.700*	0.747	
	b (RES → NET)	0.743*	0.262	
	c' (PSS → NET)	-0.286*	0.278	
	a X b	-0.520	0.242	-1.0423, -.0805

Note. PSS = perceived stress; RES = resilience; NET = networking efficacy; For paths, C = total effect of independent variable (IV) on dependent variable (DV); a = IV to mediators; b = direct effect of mediator on DV. c' = direct effect of IV on DV; a X b = indirect effect of IV on DV through mediator. CI = confidence interval. * $p < .05$

Discussion

Overall, resilience and perceived stress are interconnected, and shape Black and Latinx students' networking efficacy. In support of our hypotheses, the results of the study indicated that resilience mediated the relationship between perceived stress and networking efficacy. Specifically, resilience buffered students from the harmful effects of stress on networking efficacy. Networking efficacy is a domain of career search efficacy related to social capital.

These findings suggest that resilience is an important factor in Black and Latinx college students' networking beliefs. Networking efficacy is a crucial aspect of career exploration and the job search process (Solberg et al., 1994). In addition, networking efficacy addresses individuals' ability to know themselves and interact with others on an exploratory basis.

Networking involves building personal and professional relationships with others to garner career information, contacts, and support (Batistic & Tymon, 2017). For the Black and Latinx students in this study, social capital helps to explain the relationship between stress, resilience, and networking self-efficacy. Building social capital can enhance one's resilience and career development (González-Romá et al., 2018; Sherrieb et al., 2010). Furthermore, a critical aspect of resilience is building networks, and the resilience developed from social capital can occur at the individual or community level (Holdsworth et al., 2018). Thus, the Black and Latinx students in this study may have developed resilience through (a) their individual experiences of navigating college, (b) the social support that they have in their local communities, and/or (c) the college community supports that were available to them.

Experiencing stress does not always have to be negative (Eustis, 2017); however, perceived stress is a type of stress that is overwhelming and inhibits a person's ability to use their resources to problem solve (Cohen, 1983). Therefore, in the present study, it is not surprising that perceived stress had a negative relationship with resilience and networking efficacy. The results of the present study suggest that once stress levels reach beyond Black and Latinx college students' ability to cope, their ability to bounce back from challenges or believe in their ability to build networks may be negatively affected.

Black and Latinx students who have access to networking opportunities with professionals in their career of interest may be in a better position to develop the resiliency that is helpful in combating stress and developing self-efficacious networking beliefs. This, in turn, may result in lower perceived stress and increased resilience and networking self-efficacy. Alternatively, Black and Latinx students who

have limited opportunities to develop professional networks may struggle to (a) navigate stress, (b) develop resilience, and (c) believe in their ability to network.

Implications for Practice

Students who are more resilient to stress may be more likely to approach networking with self-confidence and better tolerate unsuccessful attempts (e.g., rejection) to network during the career search process. Additionally, students who have more access to opportunities to build social capital may be in a better position to respond to stress and develop resiliency. However, Black and Latinx college students often have limited opportunities to build social capital (Ahnquist et al., 2012; Lindstrom et al., 2012). Bryan and et al. (2011) highlighted how instrumental counselors are to the development of students' social capital by (a) providing students with information regarding college and (b) helping students to develop social networks. Museus and Neville (2012) also explained that employees at universities can connect racially minoritized students with the information and support to broaden their social networks. Career counselors can help Black and Latinx students develop social capital during college. The Christensen Institute (2022) recommends five steps to help students build social capital. These steps include: learning who students have in their lives, helping students build a support system, using students' interests to expand their networks and opportunities, using educational technology that helps students connect with professionals; and helping students build lasting networks.

In practice, counselors in career services can implement these steps by helping Black and Latinx students develop a LinkedIn profile to build professional networks and conduct informational interviews with individuals in their potential career paths. Further, career counselors in college settings can help students to connect with Black and Latinx alumni to expand their social and professional network and develop resilience through connections with the larger college community. Career counselors can also help students prepare for opportunities that enhance their social capital. For instance, career counselors can utilize role plays to help prepare students for conversations at networking events or help students meet more students from similar racial backgrounds in professional

organizations that align with their career goals. Career counselors can normalize the challenges that Black and Latinx students face when navigating college and address the college-level and employment-level systemic barriers to building social capital. Specifically, career counselors can advocate for their university to have campus events aimed at increasing Black and Latinx students' social capital and facilitating their career development. For instance, career counselors on college campuses can invite employers to career fairs that are inclusive, value building relationships, and offer opportunities to Black and Latinx college students. In alignment with the findings from the Search Institute's (2022) SCALE project, career counselors can help Black and Latinx college students foster near peer relationships by establishing or promoting affinity groups that build their social capital and access to valuable career resources.

In relation to addressing the stress of Black and Latinx students, career counselors can teach students somatic healing practices to use during their career exploration (Caldwell, 2018). For example, counselors can teach Black and Latinx students progressive muscle relaxation techniques to utilize before entering spaces where networking opportunities exist. Learning somatic practices can help Black and Latinx students address the physical symptoms of stress such as sweating, increased heart rate, and trouble breathing (Torres-Harding, et al., 2020)

Black and Latinx students might also experience stress due to having to navigate racial microaggressions. Counselors in college career centers can teach students the importance of being aware of how their stress manifests in their body and using self-care strategies when negative racial experiences occur. In addition, career counselors can broach the topic of race with students and explore the impact of race on students' stress. Understanding the interconnectedness of resilience, stress, and networking efficacy can help counselors take a more holistic view of students and their career needs-attending to both their professional and mental health needs.

Limitations and recommendation

Although this study contributes to the literature on the social capital (e.g., networking beliefs) of Black and Latinx students, it has several limitations to this study. First, data were collected from one university in an urban setting, which limits the generalizability of the study. Future studies can explore the study's constructs at multiple universities in both urban and rural settings. Doing so, would also increase the sample size of the study. Additionally, most of the participants in the study were juniors and seniors in college and likely had experience related to networking. Exploring the relationships among this study's variables with students who are further along in their college experience might not accurately capture the experiences of first- or second-year students regarding stress, resilience, and networking efficacy. Future studies can specifically explore the relationships between the study's variables with Black and Latinx student populations who are beginning their college journey (i.e., first- or second-year students) to better understand how stress, resilience, and networking efficacy impact retention outcomes. In addition, although there were no outliers or statistically significant differences based on race, the sample consisted of mainly of Black college students; therefore, future studies can further explore the study's variables in Latinx students. From the study's measures, it is unclear how participants gained their resiliency. Future studies can explore the genetic and environment influences that build Black and Latinx college students' resilience. Finally, this study was correlational in nature; therefore, causal relationships cannot be determined, and generalizability is limited.

Conclusion

Career counselors can play an integral role in (a) building Black and Latinx students' social capital, (b) helping students develop resilience, and (c) assisting students in combating stress. By addressing these areas with students, career counselors can help reduce inequities in Black and Latinx students' career self-efficacy beliefs and attainments.

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