

University of Nebraska - Lincoln

DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln

---

DBER Speaker Series

Discipline-Based Education Research Group

---

2-16-2017

# “Thank God I’m Mexican”: Cognitive Racial Reappraisal Strategies of Latino Engineering Students

Elvira Abrica

University of Nebraska-Lincoln, [elvira.abrica@unl.edu](mailto:elvira.abrica@unl.edu)

Follow this and additional works at: <http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/dberspeakers>

 Part of the [Bilingual, Multilingual, and Multicultural Education Commons](#), [Curriculum and Instruction Commons](#), [Educational Methods Commons](#), [Higher Education Commons](#), and the [Science and Mathematics Education Commons](#)

---

Abrica, Elvira, "“Thank God I’m Mexican”: Cognitive Racial Reappraisal Strategies of Latino Engineering Students" (2017). *DBER Speaker Series*. 107.

<http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/dberspeakers/107>

This Presentation is brought to you for free and open access by the Discipline-Based Education Research Group at DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln. It has been accepted for inclusion in DBER Speaker Series by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln.

## **Abstract for DBER Group Discussion on 2017-02-16**

### **Authors and Affiliations:**

Elvira Abrica  
Assistant Professor  
Educational Administration  
University of Nebraska-Lincoln

### **Title**

“Thank God I’m Mexican”: Cognitive Racial Reappraisal Strategies of Latino Engineering Students

### **Abstract**

Despite the fact that Latinos pursue science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) degrees as often as their peers, Latino degree completion rates lag behind those of other demographic groups. In an effort to better understand Latino persistence in STEM, this qualitative study explored the non-cognitive persistence strategies of Latino men pursuing engineering degrees at two highly selective, four-year institutions. Specifically, this study explored Latino engineering students’ understanding and responses to race and racism, with attention to ways in which understanding and responses differed by immigrant generation. A total of 37 semi-structured interviews were conducted and analyzed. Findings indicate that immigrant generation shaped levels of ethnic belonging and critique of racism in society. Responses to racism are referred to as *cognitive racial reappraisal strategies*.

# “Thank God I’m Mexican!”

## Racial Reappraisal Strategies of Latino Engineering Students

Elvira J. Abrica, Ph.D.

Department of Educational Administration  
College of Education and Human Sciences





# URMs in STEM

Emphasis: Failure vs. Success

Race as static variable



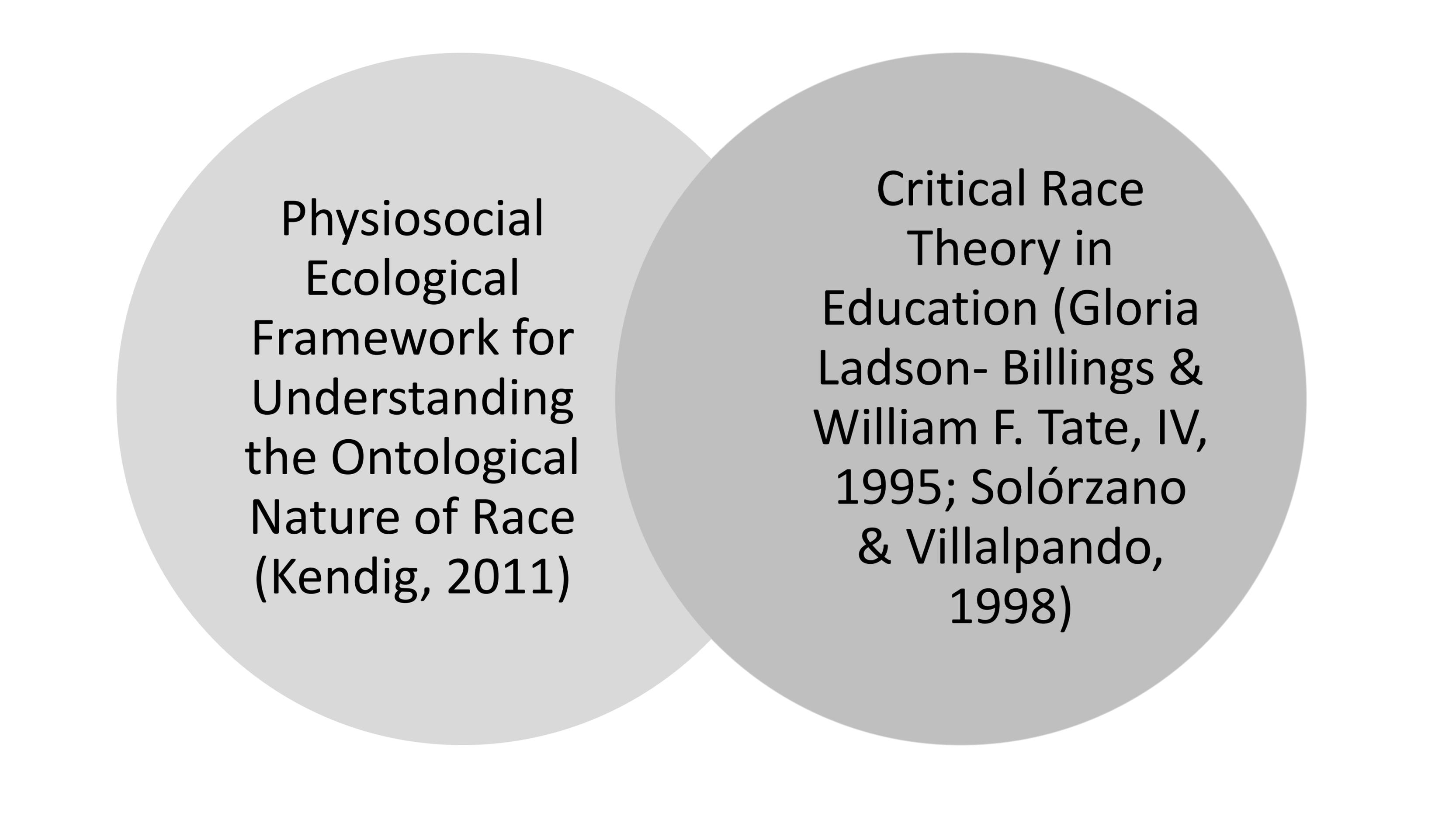
# Latinos in Engineering

Largest and fastest growing pop.

Engineering enrollment



**How do issues of racial and ethnic identity play out among Latino males in highly selective engineering programs?**



Physiosocial  
Ecological  
Framework for  
Understanding  
the Ontological  
Nature of Race  
(Kendig, 2011)

Critical Race  
Theory in  
Education (Gloria  
Ladson- Billings &  
William F. Tate, IV,  
1995; Solórzano  
& Villalpando,  
1998)

# Research Questions

1. How do Latino male engineering students understand race and racializing experiences?
2. How might understanding of race and racializing experiences differ by immigrant generation?
3. How might understanding and responses to race and racializing experiences shape persistence in engineering?



# Methodology

- Data Collection
  - 37 semi-structured interviews
  - 2 highly selective 4-year, research intensive, PWIs: Latinos <20% incoming 1st year students
- Participants
  - Mexican American descent
  - Enrolled full-time in any engineering subfield
- Data Analysis
  - Open and focused coding (Schensul, Schensul, & LeCompte, 1999)



# Understanding Race and Racism

## Theme #1: Stigma in Racial Minority Retention (MRP) Programs

I've always had a weird feeling toward segmented...because sometimes it does feel really exclusive because like for our MRP they have this thing called the learning center. It is like a study space with free printing and computers and white boards. It is a really good resource but...friends who are Indian or Pilipino and we would be like OH WE ARE GOING TO STUDY IN THE LIBRARY BECAUSE WE CAN'T GO STUDY IN THERE....It feels weird to be like oh there is this place where I can go get free printing and stuff but you guys cant go in there.



# Understanding Race and Racism

## Theme #2: Bridging and Buffering

One of the lessons that my dad told me when I was really young...he used circles as a metaphor and said only worry about the things that are in your circle- the things you, personally can change. And then things that are outside of the element, there is no point in worrying anyway. I cant change the people that have negative stereotype against me but I can use the resources that are given to me. It is like a life philosophy I try to live by. The only problem is that my circle is getting bigger so I am getting more stressed because now I can actually affect my life a lot more than I could when I was, say, 8 years old. That is the only thing.



# Understanding Race and Racism

## Theme #3: Reappraisal

They recruit you before you even enter the school, so I was just like, 'oh I am already classified as this thing.' But they provide so many helpful resources that now, I am like, '**Thank God I am Mexican** and that they put me into this little group.' In terms of my engineering success I would say I owe almost all of it to the MRP program. At first I was annoyed that was put into this but being in it I am grateful that I was grouped into this.

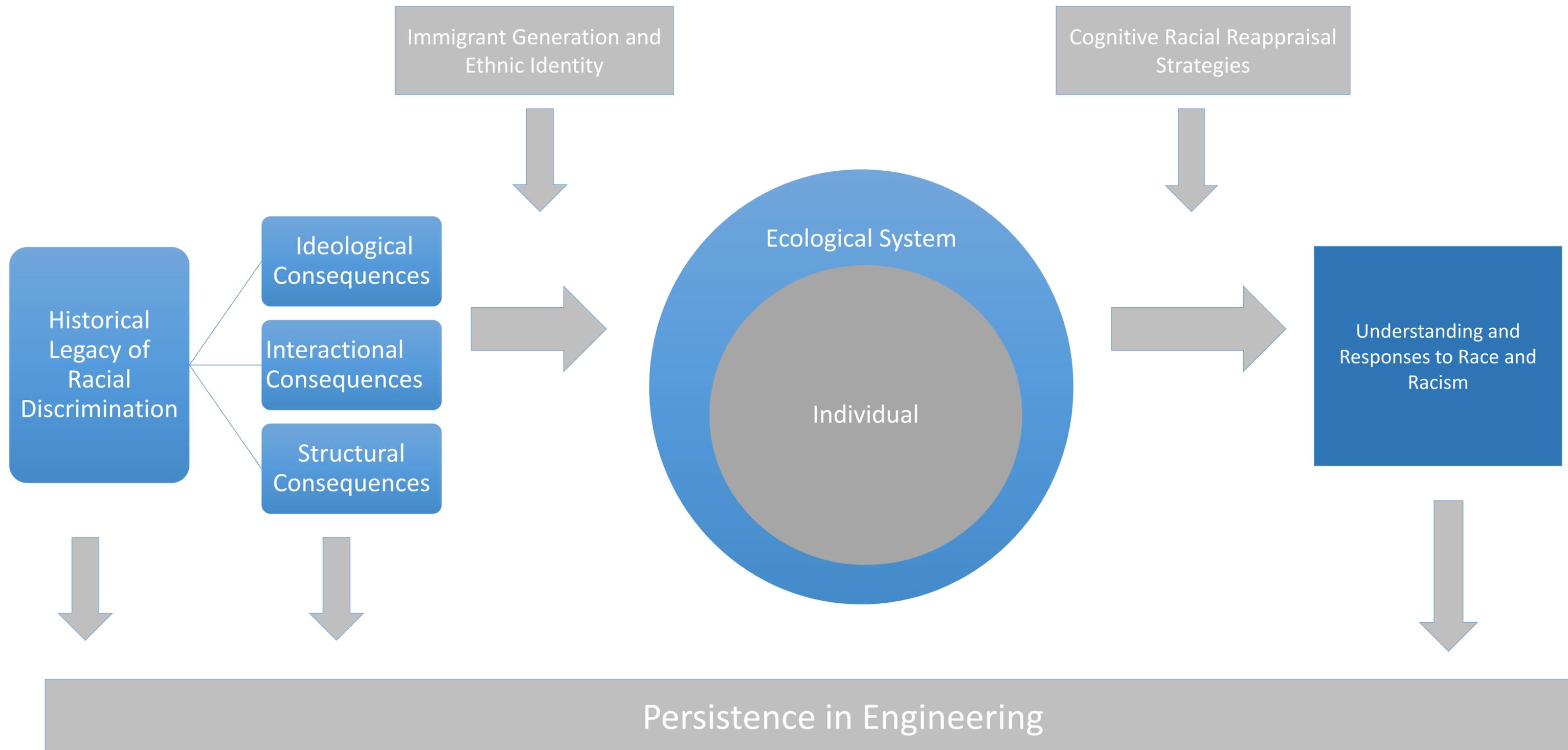


# Cognitive Racial Reappraisal Strategies

Strategies by which a student, in order to protect a core academic (engineering) identity, engages in cognitive reappraisal strategies to construct for others and/or themselves a revised (more positive) racialized identity, status, or positionality in order to persist despite of and/or because of a racially hostile institutional context.



# Conceptualizing Cognitive Racial Reappraisal Strategies and Persistence



# Resilience

Resilience demonstrated by ability to reappraise their racialized status and use experiences with racial discrimination as a motivation for social change

Important differences by immigrant generation in how participants understood and responded to race and racism

# Minority Retention Programs (MRPs)

Assessments of effectiveness of MRP should consider extent to which these programs stigmatize

Limited opportunities to engage with social identities

MRP strategies for positive cross-racial interaction and leadership capacity building

