8-2018

Factors Contributing to African American and African Caribbean Students' Sense of Belonging and Retention in the First Year of College at a Predominately White Institution in the Northeast

Niki Fjeldal
St. john Fisher College, Nmf02395@sjfc.edu

Factors Contributing to African American and African Caribbean Students' Sense of Belonging and Retention in the First Year of College at a Predominately White Institution in the Northeast

Abstract

This study examined and compared the perceived experiences of African American and African Caribbean students during their first year of college at a predominately White institution (PWI) through the lens of Astin's theory of student involvement, Tinto's theory of student departure and Ogbu's theory of cultural ecology. This study explored the intersectionality of students' racial and ethnic identifies to further uncover their shared experiences, as well as the difference aspects of their college environment, to help them develop a sense of belonging as African American and African Caribbean students. The study explored precollege characteristics and environmental and institutional factors that contributed to the retention of these two populations. A qualitative research methodology captured the experiences of 12 participants, through face-to-face individual interviews, to gain insight into the lived experiences of these two groups and to understand how African American and African Caribbean students develop a sense of belonging at a PWI. The study examined implications for the retention and college completion of African American and African Caribbean students as well as future approaches to increase the retention rates among these populations. Results show that there are distinct differences for African American and African Caribbean students especially related to precollege factors, socioeconomic status, and social and academic integration. Recommendations were made for colleges and universities including understanding the differences between different Black students' experiences, accommodating students' needs based on precollege characteristics, and more recruitment of Black faculty and staff.

Document Type
Dissertation

Degree Name
Doctor of Education (EdD)

Department
Executive Leadership

First Supervisor
Jennifer Schulman

Second Supervisor
Janet Lyons

Subject Categories
Education

Factors Contributing to African American and African Caribbean Students' Sense of

Belonging and Retention in the First Year of College at a Predominately White

Institution in the Northeast

By

Niki Fjeldal

Submitted in partial fulfillment

of the requirements for the degree

Ed.D. in Executive Leadership

Supervised by

Dr. Jennifer Schulman

Committee Member

Dr. Janet Lyons

Ralph C. Wilson, Jr. School of Education

St. John Fisher College

August 2018

Dedication

I dedicate this dissertation to my students who inspired me and pushed me every step of the way to complete my journey. They inspire me as much as I inspire them; their passion helped me complete this process. Their ability to embrace me being a student, while also being a professional to them, was vital to this journey. To my Dad and Renee, who were understanding and supportive throughout this journey to help me finish. To my executive mentor, Lisa, who was a support throughout this process and advocated for me. To #DOD and the combined team from Cohort 8 of St. John Fisher College, who have been my support throughout this journey. Finally, I would like to recognize my dissertation team: Dr. Jennifer Schulman, my Dissertation Chairperson, whose challenge and guidance has been vital to the process; and Dr. Janet Lyons, my Committee Member, who always was a source of motivation and clarity. Thank you, everyone, for all you have done for me.

Biographical Sketch

Niki Fjeldal is currently the Associate Director for Orientation and Transitions, Student Development. Ms. Fjeldal attended the State University of Buffalo from 2002 to 2006 and graduated with a Bachelor of Arts in Public Communications, with a minor in Museum Studies, in 2006. She attended Canisius College from 2007 to 2009 and graduated with a Master of Science degree in College Student Personnel Administration in 2009. She came to St. John Fisher College in the summer of 2016 and began doctoral studies in the Ed.D. Program in Executive Leadership at St. John Fisher College. She pursued her research in the factors contributing to African American and African Caribbean students' sense of belonging and retention in the first year of college at a predominately White institution in the Northeast under the direction of Dr. Jennifer Schulman and Dr. Janet Lyons. She received her Ed.D. degree in 2018.

Abstract

This study examined and compared the perceived experiences of African American and African Caribbean students during their first year of college at a predominately White institution (PWI) through the lens of Astin's theory of student involvement, Tinto's theory of student departure and Ogbu's theory of cultural ecology. This study explored the intersectionality of students' racial and ethnic identifies to further uncover their shared experiences, as well as the difference aspects of their college environment, to help them develop a sense of belonging as African American and African Caribbean students. The study explored precollege characteristics and environmental and institutional factors that contributed to the retention of these two populations.

A qualitative research methodology captured the experiences of 12 participants, through face-to-face individual interviews, to gain insight into the lived experiences of these two groups and to understand how African American and African Caribbean students develop a sense of belonging at a PWI. The study examined implications for the retention and college completion of African American and African Caribbean students as well as future approaches to increase the retention rates among these populations. Results show that there are distinct differences for African American and African Caribbean students especially related to precollege factors, socioeconomic status, and social and academic integration. Recommendations were made for colleges and universities including understanding the differences between different Black students'

experiences, accommodating students' needs based on precollege characteristics, and more recruitment of Black faculty and staff.

Table of Contents

List of Tables

Chapter 1: Introduction

It is a fundamental responsibility of higher education institutions to provide graduates with the necessary skills to be prepared for a competitive job market (McFarland et al., 2017). An individual with a bachelor's degree is paid 64% higher than one who only has a high school degree (McFarland et al., 2017). In 2016, the employment rate was higher for individuals with college degrees than for those with a high school degree (Johnson-Ahorlu, 2013). Research shows how important it is for individuals to obtain a college degree; yet, higher education institutions are struggling to retain and graduate students from 4-year programs (Johnson-Ahorlu, 2013).

Black students have one of the lowest retention rates and college degree completion rates amongst all other races nationwide (Brooks, Jones, & Burt, 2013; Johnson-Ahorlu, 2013; National Student Clearinghouse Research Center [NSC Research Center], 2016). This makes it especially difficult for the Black population in America to compete in an increasingly competitive job market (Richards & Terkanian, 2013). There will be approximately a 14% increase in the number of new and replacement jobs requiring some college education by 2020 (Richards & Terkanian, 2013). In 2018, the demand for employees with bachelor's degrees will far exceed the current supply of graduates (Carnevale & Rose, 2012).

Research has been conducted on retention and the factors that influence it, but Allen, Robbins, Casillas, and Oh (2008) still noted in their research that retention rates are a problem affecting universities, despite understanding the factors for retention.

Specifically, in fall 2015, those students who attended colleges and universities in the United States, who were under 20 years of age, had a persistence rate of 78.2% (NSC Research Center, 2016). That means that 21.8% of students did not return to the same institution, about 7% did not continue their education, and 14.5% (about one in seven students) enrolled in a different institution in their second year (NSC Research Center, 2016).

Among students who entered 4-year public institutions in fall 2015, Asian students had the highest 1-year retention rate, with 82.3% returning to the same institution in fall 2016. Asian students also had the highest persistence rate with 91.3% returning to any institution in fall 2016. Hispanic and White students had similar 1-year retention rates (68.8% and 72.4%, respectively), but only 13% of Black students continued college at a different institution (McFarland et al., 2017).

The 6-year graduation rate for first-time, full-time undergraduate students who began college at a 4-year degree-granting institution in fall 2009 was 59% (NSC Research Center, 2016). By 2015 at the same institution where they started in 2009, which was within the 6-year period, 59% had completed a bachelor's degree. Of those students, 59% were enrolled at public institutions, 66% were enrolled at private nonprofit institutions, and 23% were enrolled at private for-profit institutions (NSC Research Center, 2016). The 6-year graduation rate was 56% for males and 62% for females; it was higher for females than for males at both public (61% vs. 55%, respectively) and private nonprofit (68% vs. 62%, respectively) institutions (McFarland et al., 2017).

The number of Black immigrants, mostly from the Caribbean and Africa, has more than doubled over the last two decades (Capps, McCabe, & Fix, 2012). African

Caribbean immigrants represent over half of the 3.8 million Black immigrants in the United States (Anderson, Lopez, & Rohal, 2015). Despite the increased presence of Black students on college campuses, the Black Caribbean population is often overlooked, because they have been characterized as African American students (Kim, 2014; Massey, Mooney, Torres, & Charles, 2006). African Caribbean students and African American students have different motives, cultural norms, supports, and rationales for obtaining a college degree, but these two populations are treated the same (Haynie, 2002; Ogbu, 1992, 2003; Thompson-Cudjoe, 2015; Waters, 1999, 2009).

For the purpose of this research, the two terms used to describe the two populations being studied will be *African Caribbean students*, meaning individuals whose ancestral roots began in the formally colonized British West Indies in the Caribbean (Deaux et al., 2007), and *African American student*, meaning individuals who are identified as persons residing in the United States and who are native-born Blacks, who are descendants of Africans brought to America as slaves (Pinder, 2008). The term *Black* will be used as a generic term that incorporates both African American and African Caribbean populations, because much research uses African American and Black interchangeably to talk about this population by race instead of culture (Agyemang, Bhopal, & Bruijnzeels, 2005; Blake, 2014).

African Caribbean families highly value education (Waters, 1999). Massey et al. (2006) explained that for African Caribbean families, making the decision to immigrate to the United States occurs after they have often exhausted all of their occupational opportunity at home, and they tend to be members of the skillful middle class before

coming to the Unites States. Massey et al. noted that these students' background accounts for a high level of motivation among these students.

Where West Indian immigrants chose to live, once they arrive in the United States, influences their educational achievement (Waters, 1999; 2009). Several of the participants in Waters's study explained that they would rather live in a neighborhood where the population was balanced racially, between Whites and minorities, because children of African Caribbean immigrants would feel more comfortable, and there would also be more prospects for them to explore educational opportunities (Waters, 1999, 2009). The Massey et al. research continued to explain that African Caribbean families also stress the importance of respecting authority and family support. This helps to foster a positive perception of the educational system and social mobility for the student and their families (Massey et al., 2006).

Ogbu and Simmons (1998) described, through their work that African Americans are less economically successful and do more poorly in school than their African Caribbean counterparts. Further, at least part of the reason for this is that, unlike the African Americans, African Caribbeans have assimilated with other immigrant communities and they have adapted to their actions. Many take on, as role models, individuals who have fully assimilated into the culture of the United States, including attaining higher education and achieving economic success. This also increases their intrinsic motivation to want to achieve a college degree (Ogbu & Simmons, 1998).

In fact, 35% of African Caribbean immigrants in the United States over the age of 25 years have a college degree (Anderson et al., 2015). This is 5% higher than the United States average (Anderson et al., 2015). Blacks (African American and African

4

Caribbean) born in the United States make up 19% of those enrolled in college, and immigrated Caribbean students represent 20% of that group (Anderson et al., 2015). There is a clear discrepancy in the retention rate of African Caribbean students compared to African American students (Anderson et al., 2015).

African Caribbean students suffer from bicultural socialization in the United States in which they have to navigate their Caribbean culture within the African American culture (Kim, 2014). African Caribbean students are often criticized by their African American peers for their academic achievements being framed as *acting White*, and they feel pressured to act and speak in the manner of African Americans (Kim, 2014). This means the self-identification of Caribbean students is often at odds with American society, which becomes a challenge for Caribbean students to persist in the higher education setting (Kim, 2014).

Nationally, the first-year retention rate of Black students who entered college in fall 2015 is lower, at 54.5%, compared to other race and ethnicities: Asian, 72.9%; Hispanic, 62%; and White, 64.4% (NSC Research Center, 2016). The retention rate at 4-year private institutions is the highest of any higher-education institution, but it is still low for Black students at 67% compared to Hispanic (75%), White (78.5%), and Asian (82.5%) students (NSC Research Center, 2016).

Students who are retained in the first year of college are more likely to persist through graduation and achieve a degree (DeAngelo, 2014; Tinto, 1993; Upcraft, Gardner, & Barefoot, 2004). First-year experience programs are meant to help with the student's transition to college, but these programs tend to target the practical and academic aspects of the college experience. They do not help with the social adjustment

that is often the highest need of students (Padgett, Keup, & Pascarella, 2013). Many colleges account for their first-year experience programs through first-year seminar courses, which are meant to be a catch-all for the first-year students, but the programs are not often effective on their own (Permzadian & Credé, 2016; Tinto, 1999). Kuh (2008) explained how involving first-year students in high-impact practice, such as learning communities, first-year seminar, and service learning, would help foster student success, engagement in the institution, and retention. These high-impact practices still do not address the social needs of students in their first year of college (Padgett et al, 2013).

The decision for students to be retained from their first year to their second year at the same institution, is based on two main factors: the students' personal development and understanding of themselves during their time at the institution, and their interactions with the informal and formal parts of the institution (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Padgett et al., 2013; Tinto, 1993). Therefore, the more integrated students become into the academic and social communities of the institution, the more likely they are to be retained and graduate from the institution (Kuh, 2007; O'Keeffe, 2013; Padgett et al., 2013; Tinto, 1993). A sense of belonging is part of this integration to college and a contributing factor to retention (O'Keeffe, 2013).

Strayhorn (2012) defined a sense of belonging as the degree to which an individual feels respected, valued, accepted, and needed by a defined group. Strayhorn further explained a sense of belonging as a basic human need and a fundamental motivator for student behavior. For marginalized populations, it takes more time to develop a sense of belonging among the majority population (Strayhorn). Feelings of mattering to a group, especially among marginalized groups, can lead to a sense of

belonging, which in turn promotes engagement and the retention of students (Strayhorn).

Schlossberg (1989) explained that mattering among the non-mainstream as living and

sharing intimately in the cultural life and traditions of two different groups. Kim (2014)

referred to this as *bicultural socialization*. Underrepresented students suffer from this

concept because the traditions of their culture are not quite accepted, and because of the

prejudice in the new community in which the individuals seek to find a place

(Schlossberg, 1989).

Strayhorn (2012) discussed how the self-concept, social capital, and previous

experience in education of individuals can affect how they create a sense of belonging

within a college community. Therefore, as this research notes, not all students experience

a sense of belonging in the same way. Researchers have argued that developing a sense

of belonging is especially difficult for underrepresented students at a PWIs (Hurtado &

Carter, 1997; Strayhorn, 2012). Several studies have found one of the most influential

factors on African American retention rates is related to race/racism (Grier-Reed, 2010;

Johnson-Ahorlu, 2013; Wells, 2008). For underrepresented students, specifically Black

students, racial microaggressions can affect their feelings of not belonging, and those

feelings can affect their retention rate throughout their first semester (Brezinski, 2016;

Grier-Reed, 2010; Lewis & McKissic, 2010). Members of historically excluded ethnic

groups, such as African American and African Caribbean students, need social belonging

in order to succeed academically in college (Stanton-Salazar, 2011). At PWIs, studies

have shown how Black students find their sense of belonging through having

organizations they can joint that are related to their race and ethnicity (Grier-Reed, 2010;

Guiffrida, 2003) and having specific spaces, including diversity offices or informal social

space, in which they are able to share experiences and anxieties to meet their individual

needs (Cunningham, 2015; Lewis & McKissic, 2010).

The development of a sense of belonging relates to social capital and is important

to the integration into college (Stanton-Salazar, 2011). Social capital is defined as the

relationships that provide support and assistance in each social situation (Bourdieu, 1989;

Holodick-Reed, 2013). Understanding social capital provides a context for the types of

social support that is helpful for ethnically diverse students in their first year of college

(Stanton-Salazar, 2011). These populations often feel *cut off* from the *inside* contacts and

the kinds of social capital available to traditional students (Steinhorn & Diggs-Brown,

1999).

Problem Statement

Students are increasingly arriving at college with lower levels of emotional health

and feeling overwhelmed (Pryor, Hurtado, DeAngelo, Blake, & Tran, 2010). First-year

college students tend to experience greater stress, anxiety, and psychological distress

relative to upper-class students (Bayram & Bilgel, 2008). The literature suggests that the

existing first-year experience programs only have limited impact on retention outcomes

(Padgett & Keup, 2011; Pascarella, & Terenzini, 2005; Robbins, Oh, Le, & Button,

2009). Furthermore, they do not address the psychosocial needs and the emotional and

mental well-being of incoming first-year students (Robbins et al., 2009). These

challenges are compounded for students coming from ethnically diverse backgrounds

(Johnson et al., 2007; Strayhorn, Lo, Travers, & Tillman-Kelly, 2015). Having minority

students present in a college environment promotes and improves the richness and the

vitality of their cultural identities, which adds to the learning and dynamics of the campus culture (Lewis & McKissic, 2010).

According to occupational employment projections for 2022, there will be approximately a 14% increase in the number of new and replacement jobs that will require some college education by 2020 (Richards & Terkanian, 2013). Carnevale and Rose (2012) opined that by 2018, the demand for employees with bachelor's degrees would far exceed the existing supply of graduates. With the current graduation rate of the Black population, which includes African Americans and African Caribbeans, it is especially difficult for this population to compete in such a growing competitive job market in America (Mason, 2014). The first-year retention rate of Black students who entered college in fall 2015 was lower than any other race and ethnicity (NSC Research Center, 2016). Black students are often identified as one population, but there are subpopulations with distinct differences (Cunningham, 2015). Pinder (2013) explained that African Caribbean students are being retained in college at a higher rate than African American students. Understanding the factors that impact the transition of African American compared to African Caribbean students is instrumental in increasing retention in college among these two populations (Johnson et al., 2007).

Theoretical Rationale

The purpose of this study was to examine the differences in sense of belonging and how they affect the retention of African American students compared to African Caribbean students in their first year of college at a PWI in the Northeast. There are two theories that helped develop the framework for studying this phenomenon: Tinto's (1987, 1993) theory of student departure and Ogbu's (1990, 2004) cultural ecological theory.

Tinto's (1987, 1993) theory of student departure focuses on the reasons why students are retained at an institution or decide to leave, while Ogbu's (1990, 2004) theory focuses on the interdependence of community and access to resources for underrepresented students in their pursuit for education and upward mobility.

Tinto's (1987) theory of student departure is one the most influential theories on students leaving institutions of higher education (Metz, 2004). Many researchers have used Tinto's theory to help guide their studies of student retention (Braxton, Shaw Sullivan, & Johnson, 1997; Cunningham, 2015; Elkins, Braxton, & James, 2000; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). There are numerous theories and models that have been created over the years on student retention, and at the core of all these theories is Tinto's (1987) theory of student departure (Bean & Eaton, 2000; Braxton et al., 1997; Elkins et al., 2000; Metz, 2004; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). This theory focuses on the interactions of the student with the institution (Tinto, 1993). Not only does this the theory of student departure examine precollege characteristics, but it also examines the interactions students have with a university (Tinto, 1993). Tinto's (1987) theory of student departure relates directly to the needs of underrepresented populations such as African American and African Caribbean (Strayhorn, 2015). There is a necessity for higher education institutions to understand the needs of African American and African Caribbean students based on their precollege characteristics, as well as the perceptions they develop through interactions with the university that are identified in Tinto's (1987) theory to create a sense of belonging and ultimately eliminate students' departures from institutions (Cunningham, 2015; Strayhorn, 2012; Tinto, 1993).

The theory of student departure explains that students go to college with specific characteristics that fall into three main categories: family, academics, and personal. These characteristics determine the level of commitment students have to their goal of achieving a degree and making a commitment to the institution (Tinto, 1987). Tinto suggested that higher-education institutions have both an academic system and a social system into which students must integrate. As students interact with formal and informal academic and social institutional systems, their commitments and goals change. Positive interactions with social and academic systems lead to greater commitment to their educational goals and the institution. Higher levels of institution and goal commitment increase the likelihood of persistence to the institution and attainment of a degree from the institution (Tinto, 1987).

Tinto's (1987) theory is described as an interactionalist theory, which maintains that student departure is a continuing possibility throughout the entire college experience, which is based on interactions in the social and academic environment Tinto (1993) explained that the decision for students to stay at an institution until graduation is based on two main factors: the student' personal development and understanding of themselves during their time at the institution, and their interactions with the informal and formal parts of the institution (Braxton, Hirschy, & McClendon, 2004; Tinto, 1993). Therefore, the more integrated students become into the academic and social communities of the institution, the more likely they are to be retained and graduate from the institution (Cunningham, 2015; Kuh, 2007; O'Keeffe, 2013; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Rendón, Jalomo, & Nora, 2000).

The social integration of this model is vital in explaining the sense of belonging needed in successful first-year students (Strayhorn, 2008, 2012, 2015; Strayhorn et al., 2015; Tinto, 1993). Students who find a sense of belonging on campus through strong relationships with faculty, staff, and students attach themselves to the institution (Strayhorn, 2015). Tinto (1987) explained that academic and social integration work together to influence ongoing goal and institutional commitment. Tinto (1987) clarified that a goal and institutional commitment leads to students' decisions to remain at or to leave an institution. Students enter college with certain commitments to both finish college and to stay at an institution.

Tinto (1987) adapted part of Astin's (1984) theory of input-process-output model in the creation of student departure theory. Astin's theory (1984) suggests that the educational environments with which students come into contact, along with their personal characteristics, determine their investment and success at the institution. For example, experiences that Black students specifically suffer from, such as racial stereotype threats (Johnson-Ahorlu, 2013) and negative racial incidences (Cunningham, 2015), create lower academic achievement and lack of degree completion (Fischer, 2010).

Astin (1984) stated in his theory that students' level of intensity of involvement in an institution affects their willingness to continue at that institution. Meaning, if students do not integrate themselves fully into the institution, they are less likely to be retained. Tinto (1993) expanded on the idea by stating that the extent to which students adopt the values and norms of the campus community, as well as the rules and requirements of the institution, are part of the social integration. In addition, there is a focus on the students'

perception of their interactions with peers, faculty, and staff at the institution, as well as their involvement in and out of classroom activities (Tinto, 1993). Therefore, if students do not have positive interactions outside of the classroom among the campus community, they are less likely to be engaged and, therefore, retained (Tinto, 1993).

Tinto (1987) adapted Astin's model (1984) to include five major theoretical bases for understanding the developing nature of student persistence research. These factors include the psychological or how individuals assess themselves in an educational context, societal factors, economic factors, the ability to understand and integrate into an organization, and interactions that one develops within a college environment.

Tinto's (1987) theory supported previous findings that environmental and psychological factors are important variables to include when developing a model of student attrition (Metzner & Bean, 1987). In addition to the immersion into the college environment that is outlined by Tinto's (1987) theory, he also explained the large influence family background characteristics, such as socioeconomic status, parental educational level, and parental expectations of the student, as they enter college, influence the student graduating with a degree (Tinto, 1987).

Ogbu's (1990) cultural ecological theory explains the way underrepresented individuals see the world and behave in it as a result. His theory focuses on the environment of underrepresented people in the United States and how that influences the way they interact within the culture that has been created (Ogbu, 1990). Ogbu's cultural ecological theory explains why different underrepresented groups adapt differently to the same social, economic, and political systems, and they learn differently and achieve at different rates (Ogbu, 1990). Specifically, he addressed the status into which these

populations arrive in the United States. African American populations are often described as involuntary minorities, meaning they did not choose to be in this country but, instead, were involuntary migrated to this country (Ogbu & Simmons, 1998). African Caribbean students differ in that they often identified as voluntary minorities and immigrants, meaning they made the decision to migrate to the United States, and they understand their role as a minority (Ogbu & Simmons, 1998).

Ogbu's (1990, 2004) theory expanded to include patterns of immigrants and parent-centered factors in immigrants' homes as possible influences on students' achievement (Ogbu, 1990, 2004). Massey (2004) supported Ogbu's (1987) theory that immigrants, including African Caribbean and their children, have an advantage in education achievement over African American youth who are involuntary minorities. Further, this theory states, despite their level in school and cultural differences, African Caribbean students do not share the negative attitudes of African Americans toward the educational system and historical discrimination. African Caribbean students do not experience the same pressures not to *act White*, as their African American counterparts do. Ogbu's (1990, 2004) theory provides educators with an understanding of the differences between voluntary and involuntary immigrant groups and the sociocultural dynamic affecting minority children's school performance, which in turn, affects their college academic success and retention. By integrating the understanding of Ogbu's theory (2004) with the precollege characteristics of Tinto's theory (1993), it provides a framework to best identify the needs of African American students, compared to African Caribbean students.

Statement of Purpose

The purpose of this study is to add to the limited but growing literature on African Caribbean students, compared to current literature on African American students, who are successfully retained at a PWI (Bourke, 2010; Strayhorn, 2014). Building on the already existing research examining the experiences of African Caribbeans by Feliciano (2009), Gustave (2016), Kim (2014), and Woodburn (2011) and of African American students by Bourke, (2010), Grier-Reed (2010), Hausmann, Schofield, and Woods (2007), Strayhorn (2014), and Strayhorn et al. (2015), this study compares the perceived experiences of these two populations during their first year at a PWI in the Northeast. As recommended by Cunningham (2015), this study explores the intersectionality of students' racial and ethnic identifies to further uncover the shared experiences, as well as the difference aspects, of the college environment to help develop a sense of belonging for African American African and Caribbean students.

This study explores precollege characteristics, as well as environmental and institutional factors, that contribute to the retention of these two populations. The setting of a PWI that, at the time of this study, was ethnically diverse was used to examine whether there are any difference in the experiences of these two population and their sense of belonging in the institution. The intent of this study is to gain insight into the lived experiences of these two groups and to understand how African American and African Caribbean students develop a sense of belonging at a PWI. The sense of belonging of Black students is often related to how they experience the different aspects of the campus racial climate (Hurtado, Milem, Clayton-Pedersen, & Allen, 1999;

Strayhorn, 2014). This study may offer consideration to future approaches to increase the retention of Black college students.

Research Questions

The research questions guiding this study are:

1. What factors contribute to a sense of belonging for African American and African Caribbean students and the desire to remain at the university?

2. How do the cultures of African American and African Caribbean students contribute to motivation for the completion of a bachelor's degree?

3. What barriers inhibit African American and African Caribbean students from completing their college experience?

Potential Significance of the Study

A sense of belonging affects a student's degree of academic achievement and retention (O'Keeffe, 2013; Strayhorn, 2012). Although much is known about the impact of a sense of belonging in students, there is a lack of understanding as to how belonging differs based on students' social identities, such as race or the conditions they encounter on campus (Strayhorn, 2012). Strayhorn (2012) recommended additional research to better understand what creates a sense of belonging among these marginalized populations. Cunningham (2015) recommended to specifically look at the intersectionality of race and ethnicity of Black students. The hope of this study is to gain more of an understanding of the similarities and differences in how African American and African Caribbean students' sense of belonging is attained during their first year in college. By exploring the claim of Hurtado and Carter (1997) and O'Keeffe (2013) that a sense of belonging supports the decision for a student to remain at an institution, it is

important to examine the distinct differences between these two populations. The presence of diverse populations in a college environment transforms the campus environment into a space where diverse voices can be heard and racism can be explored through many different perspectives (Lewis & McKissic, 2010).

Definitions of Terms

Retention – the number of students who remain at an institution from semester to semester, usually measured from fall to fall. This number is typically derived from first-time, full-time traditional day students, but it can be applied to any defined cohort (NSC Research Center, 2016).

Predominately White Institution (PWI) – college or university where the largest percentage of a single student or faculty population is White (Bourke, 2010).

Black Students – overarching term for African American and African Caribbean students (Cunningham, 2015; Pinder, 2008).

African American – persons residing in the United States who are native-born Blacks, descendants of Africans brought to America as slaves (involuntary immigrants) (Ogbu, 1992).

African Caribbean – persons born in the Caribs, which are the eastern and southern West Indies, or their American-born children (voluntary immigrants) (Ogbu, 1992).

Chapter Summary

The demand for employees with bachelor's degrees will far exceed the current supply of graduates (Carnevale & Rose, 2012). Nationally, the first-year retention rate of Black students who entered college in fall 2015 was lower compared to other races and

ethnicities (NSC Research Center, 2016). The theorists used in this study, such as Tinto (1993) and Astin (1984), have shed light on the factors that encompass retention, which include precollege characteristics, academic and social integration, and motivation. In addition, the theory of Ogbu (1992) has added to the understanding of the sociocultural aspects that affect the academic success of underrepresented students, such as African American and African Caribbean students.

The purpose of this study is to gain insight into the experiences of these African American (Booker, 2016; Lewis & McKissic, 2010; Strayhorn, 2014) and African Caribbean (Gustave, 2016; Woodburn, 2011) students and understand how they develop a sense of belonging at a PWI. Sense of belonging has proven to be integral in the success of retention at a higher-education institution (Strayhorn, 2012). By understanding the similarities and differences and intersectionality of these two populations, the researcher hopes to provide students and higher education administrators with the ability to understand how to make this population successful in achieving a 4-year degree. In Chapter 2, key literature on the topics of college retention (Astin, 1984; Bean, 1980; Milem & Berger, 1997; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1980; Tinto, 1993, 1999, 2006; Woosley, 2003), sense of belonging (Furrer & Skinner, 2003; Johnson et al., 2007; O'Keeffe, 2013; Strayhorn, 2012; Walton & Cohen, 2007), and the Black student experience (Cunningham, 2015; Griffin, Cunningham, & Mwangi, 2016; Gustave, 2016; Johnson-Ahorlu, 2013; Kim, 2014; Lewis & McKissic, 2010; Pinder, 2012; Ogbu, 1990, 1992, 2003, 2004) are discussed. Chapter 3 provides a description of the research design for this current study, which will determine the differences in how African American and African Caribbean students' sense of belonging is attained during their first year in

college. Chapter 4 provides the findings and a summary of the results, and Chapter 5 discusses the findings, along with any limitations and recommendations for future research.

Chapter 2: Review of the Literature

Introduction and Purpose

Existing first-year experience programs only have limited impact on retention

outcomes (Padgett & Keup, 2011; Pascarella, & Terenzini, 2005; Robbins et al., 2009).

Furthermore, they do not address the challenges, such as the psychosocial needs, and the

emotional and mental well-being, of incoming first-year students (Robbins et al., 2009).

These challenges are compounded for students coming from ethnically diverse

backgrounds (Johnson et al., 2007; Strayhorn et al., 2015). Having underrepresented

students present in the college environment promotes and improves the richness of the

vitality of their cultural identities, which adds to the learning and dynamics of the campus

culture (Lewis & McKissic, 2010).

According to the occupational employment projections for 2022, there will be

approximately a 14% increase in the number of new and replacement jobs requiring some

college education by 2020 (Richards & Terkanian, 2013). The demand for employees

with bachelor's degrees in 2018 far exceed the current supply of graduates (Carnevale &

Rose, 2012). With the current low graduation rate of Black students, including African

American and African Caribbean students, it is especially difficult for this population in

the United States to compete in a growing competitive job market (Mason, 2014). First-

year retention rates of Black students who entered college in fall 2015 was lower than

any other race and ethnicity (NSC Research Center, 2016). Black students are often

identified as one population, even though there are subpopulations with distinct

differences (Cunningham, 2015). Pinder (2013) explained how African Caribbean students are being retained in college at a higher rate than African American students. Understanding the factors that impact the transition of African Americans students compared to African Caribbean students is instrumental in increasing retention among these two populations (Johnson et al., 2007). Hausmann et al. (2007) note a sense of belonging is an important but often discounted variable in studies of student retention, and it is an integral variable for underrepresented students to be retained at a PWIs.

Research has examined Black, African American and African Caribbean students interchangeably, but little research has examined the experiences of African American African and Caribbean students at a PWI (Cunningham, 2015; Gustave, 2016; Johnson-Ahorlu, 2013; Kim, 2014). The purpose of this study is to add to the limited but growing literature on African Caribbean students compared to the existing literature on African American students who are successfully retained at a PWI (Bourke, 2010; Strayhorn, 2014). Building on already existing research examining the experiences of African Caribbeans by Feliciano (2009); Gustave (2016); Kim (2014); and Woodburn (2011) and of African American students by Bourke (2010); Grier-Reed (2010); Hausmann, Schofield, and Woods (2007); Strayhorn (2014); and Strayhorn et al. (2015), this study compares the perceived experiences and sense of belonging of these two populations, during their first year at a PWI in the Northeast.

Review of the Literature

Theoretical rationale and retention and the first year. A great deal of research has been done over the last 30 years identifying indicators for student retention and persistence to graduation (Astin, 1984; Bean, 1980; Milem & Berger, 1997; Pascarella &

Terenzini, 1980; Tinto, 1997, 1993). Astin (1975) studied student drop out in a longitudinal study of first-year students during fall of 1968 and then again in 1972 (Astin, 1975). Students were selected from over 350 2-year and 4-year institutions in the United States. During the first questionnaire, completed in 1968, students were asked questions about their individual characteristics, cocurricular activities in high school, and parent's income, level of education, and occupation. Questions were also asked regarding students' future goals, regular activities, and college choices. The second questionnaire, completed in 1972, asked questions about educational progress, status of enrollment, graduation, and financing of the students' education (Astin, 1975).

Through the 41,000 questionnaires completed by students, 110 characteristics were identified for further study. These characteristics were analyzed through a regression analysis to determine variables that indicated a student's potential to drop out. Identified as indicators, 53 variables where they fell into categories of personal characteristics, academic background and ability, family background, educational aspirations, study habits, and college expectations. Some keys findings included that the better a student did academically, including GPA, class ranking, and college admissions scores the less likely they were to drop out (Astin, 1975).

Astin (1977) conducted a similar longitudinal, quantitative study of over 200,000 students and 300 institutions over 10 years. The study measured outcomes including student satisfaction, attitudes, self-concepts, values, aspirations, behavior patterns, persistence, achievement, competency, and career development. The results of the study showed how outcomes are affected by different types of colleges and the level of investment students have in their college experience, which set the basis for his theory of

student involvement (Astin, 1977). This theory states that learning and development is directly influenced by the quality and quantity of students' involvement in the campus community. Astin (1984) stated that the more a student is engaged in the campus community the more likely he or she is to persist and graduate from an institution.

From Astin's theory (1977), Tinto (1987) developed a longitudinal model that proposed the reason students decide to leave an institution is directly related to the level of interaction they have with the campus on both a social and academic level. Tinto, along with other theorists, has identified that institutional commitment is developed through the social and academic integration of the student to the institution (Milem & Berger, 1997; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1980; Tinto, 1997, 1993).

Tinto's (1987) theory of student departure explains why students go to college with specific characteristics that fall into three main categories: family, academic, and personal. These characteristics determine the level of commitment the student has to their goal of achieving a degree and commitment to the institution (Tinto, 1987). Tinto suggests in his theory that higher education institutions have both an academic community and a social community in which the student must integrate.   As students interact with formal and informal academic and social institutional systems, their commitments and goals change. Positive interactions with social and academic systems lead to a greater commitment to their educational goals and the institution. Higher levels of institution and goal commitment increase the likelihood of persistence to the institution and attainment of a degree from the institution (Tinto, 1987).

Tinto's theory (1987) started with Tinto and Cullen (1973) synthesizing already existing theories on research regarding dropouts in higher education. Through analysis of

defining the term *dropouts* and considering the various meanings applied to that term,

suggests the researchers determined a need to modify the definition. They used recent

data (at that time) on dropouts to estimate both the individual characteristics, including

ability and social status that cause dropping out as well as trends in different institutions

(Tinto & Cullen, 1973). The researchers used theories, such as Durkheim's (1951) theory

of suicide, as they applied to students leaving the institution. This theory compares the

disengagement of students at an institution to the disengagement of an individual in

society who decides to commit suicide, in order to develop a modified definition that

sought to distinguish voluntary from non-voluntary dropout and a transfer of a student to

another college from a permanent dropout from higher education (Tinto & Cullen, 1973).

From this synthesis of existing research and theories, Tinto (1975) created the

first version of the theory of student departure. According to this theory, the decision to

drop out arises from an arrangement of students' characteristics and the extent of their

academic, environmental, and social integration at an institution. This theory maintains

that student departure is a continuing possibility throughout the entire college experience

(Tinto, 1975, 1987, 1993). This theory states that the decision for students to stay at an

institution until graduation is based on two main factors: the students' personal

development and understanding of themselves during their time at the institution, and

their interactions with the informal and formal parts of the institution (Braxton et al.,

2004; Tinto, 1993). First-year students who reported being more involved in the campus

community reported higher academic and social integration and more institutional

commitment (Hausmann et al., 2007; Milem & Berger, 1997). Researchers have applied

Tinto's theory (1987) and have tried to build on it, as in the case of Woosley (2003), who

wanted to learn how quickly students must be integrated into these social and academic communities to be successful and graduate with a college degree. Woosley (2003) conducted a study at a mid-sized, 4-year, public institution in the Midwest to investigate the effects of initial social and academic experiences on degree attainment. During the third week of the first semester at college, incoming first-year students completed a survey that addressed precollege characteristics, educational commitment, and social and academic adjustment. The researcher obtained information 5 years later from the university to determine how many of the students earned a bachelor's degree. A logistical regression model was used to test the effect that the initial social and academic experience had on degree attainment (Woosley, 2003).

The Woolsley (2003) study determined that students who attended social events and began to adjust socially within the first 3 weeks of arriving on campus were more likely to achieve a college degree at that same institution (Woosley, 2003). Earlier researchers (Milem & Berger, 1997; Tinto, 2006) had determined the more integrated students became into the academic and social communities of the institution, the more likely they were to be retained and graduated from the institution. Previous studies had identified the first semester as the most important (Milem & Berger, 1997). Woosley (2003) determined that most of the social integration for college completion happens in the first 3 weeks, which means that the sense of belonging early in the college transition is important.

Sense of belonging. Strayhorn (2012) defined a sense of belonging as the degree to which an individual feels respected, valued, accepted, and needed by a defined group. A student's decision to persist at an institution is directly impacted by that student's

ability to develop a sense of belonging and integrate into the institution socially and academically (Tinto, 1975; Strayhorn, 2012; Woosley, 2003). A sense of belonging is developed by students through the shared goals and values that are established, and this is often described as their psychological connection to an academic community (Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Strayhorn, 2012). Sense of belonging is an important, but often overlooked, variable in studies of student retention (Hausmann et al., 2007). Strayhorn (2012) discussed how the self-concept, social capital, and previous experience in education of an individual can affect how he or she creates sense of belonging within the college community. If students do not become integrated members of a college community, they are more likely to withdraw (Milem & Berger, 1997; Strayhorn, 2012; Tinto, 1993). Implicitly, in Tinto's (1993) theory, was the importance of sense of belonging, as determined by social and academic integration. He described this as a central feature of student persistence (Tinto, 1993).

Sense of belonging is such an important human need that Maslow (1954) addressed this concept in his hierarchy of needs. Maslow (1954) explained that the lowest level of needs must be met before progressing to higher levels in the hierarchy. The pyramid of Maslow's hierarchy explains that physical needs, such as air, food, water, and shelter, are needed before an individual can move to the safety needs to feel protected against danger and harm. The third tier of the pyramid includes social needs, which includes the psychological needs, such as a sense of belonging and being loved (Maslow, 1943). The creation of a caring, supportive, and welcoming environment within the university is critical in creating a sense of belonging (O'Keeffe, 2013). Students who

experience a sense of belonging in the educational environmental are more motivated, engaged, and dedicated to the school experience (Osterman, 2000; Strayhorn, 2012).

Some researchers believe that motivation is more important than sense of belonging, such as in a study by Morrow and Ackermann (2012). This quantitative study examined the sense of belonging of 156 students during the summer after their first year in college. Most of the students were female, ranging from ages 18-23 years. Most participants were White, but about 30% identified as African American or Black. The participants completed a survey that included a sense of belonging scale, academic attitudes scale, and a question about their intention to persist at the current institution into their sophomore year.

To assess if sense of belonging was related to the intention for a student to persist, Morrow and Ackerman (2012) performed a multiple regression analysis and it included a sense of belonging scale related to peer support, faculty support, classroom comfort, and perceived isolation as independent variables. Logistical regression was used to measure the relationship between motivational attitudes and second-year retention. The results showed that faculty support was significant, and the more students perceived peer support, the more likely they were to return in the fall of their sophomore year. A second multiple regression analysis was used to determine if motivational attitudes were related to the intention to persist. The researchers determined that motivation was a greater factor for success among first-year students than their sense of belonging. The more students agreed that personal development was a motivator in them attending college the more likely they were to return in the fall of their sophomore year (Morrow & Ackermann, 2012). This study provides some understanding of non-cognitive factors

involved in retention, but as Morrow and Ackerman pointed out, further studies are needed to examine the non-cognitive factors to help stakeholders understand the retention of students beyond their first year of college and to understand which of these non-cognitive factors are most important (Morrow & Ackermann, 2012).

From an early age, sense of belonging is important in the academic success of students (Furrer & Skinner, 2003). A longitudinal study by Furrer and Skinner (2003) examined a suburban-rural school comprising mostly middle- and working-class families. They conducted a quantitative, self-reported study that looked at the relationship between Grade 3 through 6 students' sense of relatedness and overall engagement. Students completed the self-reported questionnaires administered in three, 45-min sessions by trained interviewers. In their normal classrooms, without teachers present, the students marked their answers to the questionnaire items as they were read aloud by an interviewer. The students reported on their relatedness to peers, families, teachers, their perceived control in the classroom setting, and their engagement versus disaffection in the classroom. The teachers reported on each student's engagement compared to disaffection in the classroom.

Correlations were than analyzed between the main variables present. Regression analysis was used to determine the strength of the variables that were conducted on the students' relatedness to their peers, family, and teachers. The reports of the students of their own engagement were more highly correlated with reports of their relatedness and perceived control. The teacher reports of student engagement were more highly correlated with the students' academic performance than were the students' reports of their class. Of the 641 students who participated, it was determined that if they felt they

belonged in the learning environment, they reported high enjoyment, happiness, enthusiasm, interest, and more confidence in engaging in learning (Furrer & Skinner, 2003).

Flook, Repetti, and Ullman (2005) conducted a similar study of 248 fourth through sixth graders regarding sadness. For three consecutive years, fourth graders from one parochial and two public schools, in a large metropolitan area, were invited to participate in the study. The sample consisted primarily of students from high-income, highly educated White families. The students' peer acceptance in the fourth-grade classroom was assessed with a teacher-reported measure using a 5-point Likert-type scale. The teachers rated the children on six items that assessed (a) how well liked the child was, (b) the extent to which he or she was disliked, (c) number of good friends, (d) popularity among peers, (e) exclusion from play and activities organized by other children, and (f) the extent to which the child would or would not be chosen by peers to participate in different group activities (Flook et al. (2005). The fourth-grade teachers reported on peer acceptance in the classroom. The fifth-grade teachers described internalizing symptoms, and grades assigned by the sixth-grade teachers served as the outcome measure of the students' academic performance, showing if they were not accepted by their peers in the fourth and fifth grade and how it affected their academic performance in the sixth grade.

Flook et al. (2005) conducted a cross-sectional correlation among the variables, and it was determined that the less a child had peer acceptance in the classroom it was consistently associated with poorer academic performance. A multiple regression analysis was run to evaluate the strength of the variables of academic success, peer

success, and academic self-concept during the sixth grade, and the researchers found that a lack of peer acceptance in the fourth grade directly predicted poor academic performance in the sixth grade. This study found similar results to the Furrer and Skinner (2003) study that found students who felt isolated reported great anxiety, boredom, and frustration, and their academic achievement was explained by the lack of peer acceptance in the fourth grade (Flook et al., 2005).

Johnson et al. (2007) translated this same concept of grade school sense of relatedness to the college environment. Using the variables of student background characteristics, college selectivity, residence hall environments, perceptions of transition to college, and perception of racial climate, the study helped to predict the sense of belonging of students by ethnicity. This quantitative study of first-year students from 34 universities in 24 states surveyed the students based on 258 items of student background as variables. The national sample of 2,967 first-year students represented the existing racial diversity of college students in 2004 when the research was gathered (Johnson et al., 2007).

Johnson et al. (2007) analyzed the data through an ANOVA to measure the differences in sense of belonging between ethnic groups. A multiple regression analysis was conducted using ethnicity and the variables established in the framework to create a sense of belonging. To assess the statistical significance among the significant predictors, hierarchical multiple regression analysis with paired *t*-tests were performed on the nonstandardized regression coefficients for all racial groups. This helped to measure the differences in student background characteristics, perceptions of transition, campus climate, and college environment. The results indicated that Black students perceived a

less strong sense of belonging than their White peers. It was perceived during the second semester of their first year of college that White students expressed the greatest sense of belonging. Students' perception of the residence hall as a socially supportive environment was found to be the most significant factor in all of the underrepresented students' perception of sense of belonging. Perception of a smooth academic transition to college was a significant predictor for Asian, Hispanic, and White students. A smooth social transition to college significantly predicted sense of belonging, especially for African American students who were the least likely to report positive perceptions of the campus racial climate (Johnson et al., 2007).

Several studies have found one of the most influential factors on African American retention rates is related to race/racism (Johnson et al., 2007; Johnson-Ahorlu, 2013; Grier-Reed, 2010; Wells, 2008). Therefore, it is important to note the results of the Johnson et al. (2007) study revealed the importance of daily interaction for underrepresented students, as well as a network of institutional and student support. The importance of environmental factors was key for social integration and the success of African American students (Johnson et al., 2007).

Walton and Cohen (2007) found similar results in their study of belonging. They conducted two experiments to examine the role of belonging in Black students in the setting of a computer science department and in a private university in the Northeast. The study examined 36 Black students and 34 White students in a computer science program through measures of academic fit including questions of comfortability with others like themselves who were in the program, the ability to be skilled in computer science, and finally, being successful in the program (Walton & Cohen, 2007). The

participants were asked to create a list of eight, two, or no friends who would fit well into the computer science department. A control group of only Black students were not asked to provide a list of friends. After the conclusion of this activity, the participants completed several measures to assess a sense of academic fit. The amount of time it took students to complete this list was compared to their sense of academic fit, and then the time was analyzed through ANCOVAs. This allowed the researchers to examine the participants' race and whether they were in the treatment or control group against the variable of academic fit. The results showed Black students, who had to list eight friends, felt less like they fit in the computer science department and would deter fellow Black peers from joining the program. While both White and Black students had difficulty listing eight friends when asked, only the Black students responded with less sense of fit and belonging (Walton & Cohen, 2007).

A similar experiment was conducted by Walton and Cohen (2007) of 34 Black or Latino and 155 White first-year students in an Introduction to Psychology course at a PWI in the United States. The students were asked to complete a level-of-belonging survey on a 7-point Likert-type scale asking about their sense of belonging and facing challenges. The interpretation of the quantitative data showed underrepresented students are more uncertain about their belonging than White students, and underrepresented students' sense of belonging is weakened even more by difficulties that arise, such as a poor grade or negative interaction with a faculty member or student (Walton & Cohen, 2007).

In another experiment conducted in the Walton and Cohen (2007) study, 25 Black and 30 White first-year students, one month before the end of their first year at a PWI in

the United States, were asked to complete a survey about their attitude and experiences at the institution of study. The questionnaire included questions about academic expectations including level of importance it was to do well at the institution, study habits, and interactions with faculty. The survey also included the Race-Based Rejection Questionnaire (Mendoza-Denton, Downey, Purdie, & Davis, 2002), which asks students how readily they perceive and react to race-based rejection. This tool serves to predict disengagement of Black students from PWIs (Walton & Cohen, 2007).

In a related, but different, experiment, students were asked to complete a tool assessing their self-perceived academic fit including questions about enjoyment of academic work, perceived future success at the institution, and, finally, a measure of their desire to pursue an academic challenge by choosing a course based on evaluations from previous students. Upon completion, the students were asked to complete two questionnaires each day, for 1 week preceding the completion of the questionnaire; one in the afternoon and one in the evening. The afternoon questionnaire asked students to identify social fit, academic potential, and self-efficacy based on how they were feeling at the moment. The evening questionnaire asked them to assess the same items, it but also asked the participants to report their academic behavior for the day as well as any adversity they had faced throughout the day (Walton & Cohen, 2007).

Data were analyzed through ANCOVAs, which allowed for Walton and Cohen (2017) to examine the participant's race and whether they were in the treatment or control group against the independent variable of each stage of the study. The results showed almost 60% of changes in the Black students' sense of fit was related to the adversity they experienced during the day by not having a sense of belonging. The Black students

had a harder time coping with the day-to-day challenges of college and these challenges created an uncertainty about whether they belonged in the educational environment. Throughout the study, while the experiences of the White students were unaffected, the African American students were more affected by developing a lack of belonging, a lack of motivation, and they showed a drop in GPA. In the computer science experiment, Black students even deterred students from the same racial group from entering the program (Walton & Cohen, 2007).

Further results of the study revealed that the treatment of the Black students who were told first-year students experienced hardship, regardless of race, increased the belief in their potential for success in college by 20%. Therefore, the researchers concluded that social-psychological interventions can help resolve the concerns undermine the comfort and sense of belonging of Black students at a PWI. In addition, if students feel an uncertainty related to their sense of belonging or fit in their social relationships, it effects their academic and professional success (Walton & Cohen, 2007).

Researchers have argued that developing a sense of belonging is especially difficult for underrepresented students at a PWI (Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Strayhorn, 2012). Hausmann et al. (2007) examined whether a sense of belonging predicted an intention to persist through the first year of college by examining 220 White and 145 African American students. The experimental, quantitative study was conducted at a large, public, mid-Atlantic PWI using surveys completed that were three times throughout the academic year. The survey measured social and academic integration, financial difficulties, peer and parental support, sense of belonging, institutional commitment, and intention to persist at the beginning of their first semester and at the

beginning and end of their second semester. Students were then randomly placed in one

of three control groups so that each received a different treatment to help enhance his or

her sense of belonging. The first control group received communications from university

administrators stressing they were a valued member of the university community and

asking them to complete a survey. They also received a small university-branded gift.

The second control group received an email from a professor, without mentioning their

value, but they were asked to complete the survey, and they received a non-branded gift.

The final control group did not receive any additional communication or gift received by

the other two control groups (Hausmann et al., 2007).

The researchers measured social and academic integration through subscales on

peer group interaction, faculty interaction, perceived faculty concern, and academic and

intellectual development. Data were analyzed using the multilevel model for change to

allow for analysis of data on multiple levels and grouping data based on individuals

instead of variables. These models measured sense of belonging, institutional

commitment, and intention to persist based on precollege characteristics (Hausmann et

al., 2007).

The findings indicate there was not a significant change in the sense of belonging

based on treatment the three control groups received. The African American students

reported less peer support than the White students at the beginning of the academic year.

The White students reported more parental support than the African American students

during that period, as well. Greater sense of belonging at the start of the semester was

associated with interactions with faculty, peer-group interactions, peer support, and

parental support, but this was not true regarding academic integration. The White

students reported a small, statistically significant decline in sense of belonging over the course of the academic year. The African American students who reported more academic integration experienced an increase in sense of belonging over time, while those who had less academic integration experienced a decrease in sense of belonging. This may be explained by the heavy academic demands of college coursework. For both the White and African American students, factors were similar, but the African American students relied more on peer support, which even increased their sense of belonging throughout their academic career. Alternatively, White students saw a decrease in sense of belonging based on peer support over time (Hausmann et al., 2007).

While Hausmann et al. (2007) established some differences between African American and White students, Strayhorn (2008) looked at differences, specifically among male students and their sense of belonging. Strayhorn conducted a study looking at the relationship between African American males and their interaction with students who share different backgrounds from them at 4-year PWI across the United States. Specifically, the research examined the sense of belonging in the interaction on campus of 231 African American males and 300 White males by using the College Student Experiences Questionnaire (Friedlander, Pace, & Lehman, 1990). The questionnaire consists of 191 items designed to measure the quantity and quality of students' involvement in college activities and their use of college facilitates (Strayhorn, 2008). The researcher also conducted follow-up tests, which were conducted on a random sample of White men to understand if the experiences were unique to Black males or whether they were common among all college males (Strayhorn, 2008).

Strayhorn (2008) used descriptive analytics to establish existing patterns among the variables including sense of belonging, year in college, grades, residency status, age, and generational status. Independent sample *t*-tests were performed to establish differences between the Black and White males in the establishment of sense of belonging. The research established a hierarchical regeneration test that allowed for the independent variables to be entered into a regression analysis. This allowed for an establishment of variables that affect and predict a sense of belonging of Black males. The results showed that Black males who interacted with peers of a different race were more likely to a develop a sense of belonging with the institution. It also established that White males have a greater sense of belonging than Black males. The Strayhorn (2008) study agreed with other research that underrepresented students feel less welcome at PWIs, and there does not appear to be a difference in males compared to the general student populations (Strayhorn, 2008). It demonstrates social interaction is important to sense of belonging and social integration (Strayhorn, 2012; Tinto, 1993).

Another noncognitive factor that was examined in the research was social influences (Ogbu, 1990; Tinto, 1993). Individuals experience social influences through their regular interactions with family, school, peers, communities, and different social-class environments for 18 years before attending college (Ogbu, 1990; Tatum, 2017). The researchers stated that these experiences often have a strong influence on people's views and understanding of self. Often, they turn into social and cultural capital, or they have negative thoughts about institutional systems in society, such as education and their ability to do well (Ogbu, 1990). Early understandings can often reinforce incongruity in feelings of self that are not easily changed in students once they attend college (Lareau,

2003). As previously mentioned, and as the literature states, precollege characteristics must be acknowledged, and understanding the previous educational relationship of the student is important (Lareau, 2003; Tinto, 1993).

Tinto's (1993) theory and other studies have expressed the importance of family support relating to social capital, which addresses social capital from parents and it is a factor to promoting retention (Johnson et al., 2007; Stanton-Salzar, 2011). Parental support was the only predicator in the Hausmann et al. (2007) study that significantly related to intention, over time, to persist at the current institution. This researcher noted that while parental support appears to decline in one's sense of belonging, over time, it increased rather than decreased a student's intention to persist at an institution (Hausmann et al., 2007). Students who have a close connection to their parents could also be more tied to their home lives, in general, instead of to college, thus decreasing their sense of belonging within the institution (Hausmann et al., 2007).

Conversely, African American students who developed more peer support was associated with an increase in sense of belonging over time (Hausmann et al., 2007). The social experiences students have when they first enter college, and the social support they receive during that time, are likely to be better determinants of initial levels of social belonging, regardless of demographics or academic experiences (Hausmann et al., 2007). As a result, the first weeks of college are important to help determine degree completion (Woosley, 2003). How well students adjust to the academic environment of college is closely tied to their developing sense of belonging with that college (Hausmann et al., 2007; Strayhorn, 2012; Tinto, 1993).

For underrepresented students, specifically Black students, racial microaggressions, meaning every day verbal and nonverbal incidents of bias, can affect their feelings of not belonging and their retention throughout their first semester, making it hard for them to make a connection to the university (Brezinski, 2016). Members of historically excluded ethnic groups, such as African American and African Caribbean students, need social belonging to succeed intellectually in college (Stanton-Salazar, 2011). At a PWI, studies have shown that Black students find their sense of belonging through being engaged in organizations that are related to their race and ethnicity (Grier-Reed, 2010; Guiffrida, 2003) and specific spaces, including diversity offices or informal social space in which they are able to share experiences and anxieties, to meet their individual needs (Cunningham, 2015). These spaces help them to share their social capital, meaning their knowledge and expertise about the college environment, which is essential to their success (Stanton-Salazar, 2011).

The development of a sense of belonging relates to social capital, and it is important to the integration the students into college (Stanton-Salazar, 2011). Social capital is defined as the relationships that provide support and assistance in each social situation (Bourdieu, 1989; Holodick-Reed, 2013). Understanding social capital provides a context for the types of social supports that are helpful for ethnically diverse students in their first year of college (Stanton-Salazar, 2011). These populations often feel *cut off* from the *inside* contacts and the types of social capital available to traditional students. (Steinhorn & Diggs-Brown, 1999; Wells, 2008).

Wells (2008) addressed the role social and cultural capital plays in the first year to second-year retention rate in colleges, and the researcher examined how race and

ethnicity were associated with initial levels of social capital upon entering higher education. His quantitative study, conducted in the United States, analyzed a national sample of longitudinal data of students that began the eighth grade in 1988, and he followed up with them in 1990, 1992, 1994, and 2000. Wells (2008) analyzed the data specifically of students who graduated from high school in 1992 and were enrolled in a 4-year college in the fall semester of the same year. The researcher used descriptive analytics to examine the social and cultural capital that was brought to college and differed by ethnicity. The effects social capital had on the retention of the students from the first year to the second year was determined based on a regression analysis, which estimated the relationships among variables including personal characteristics, economic factors, and social and cultural factors.

Specifically, the Wells (2008) study used data from 1992 to understand the variables, such as gender ethnicity, financial aid, family income, parental education, and parental involvement, upon the students' entry into college and the data from 1994 that corresponded with the students' entry into their second year of college for traditional students who entered college immediately after high school. In his sample, of 1,310 students, a few factors relating to social and cultural capital stood out as significant. Wells noted that African American students had less parental education than both White and Asian students, and they also had less family resources than White students. When considering the social and capital variables, it was significant that at least one parent had a college degree. Students who had parents with a prior college degree, or friends with plans to attend college were more likely to persist to their second year, which is in line

with other studies that address sense of belonging and social capital (Stanton-Salazar, 2011; Strayhorn, 2012).

Motivation. Roksa and Whitley (2017) conducted a study in the United States, examining the relationship between academic motivation and academic success, specifically considering the difference in African American and White students during their first year in college. It was a multi-institutional study that examined first-year students entering college in fall 2006, 2007, and 2008. The researchers used data from the Wabash National Study, which includes a disproportionate number of liberal arts institutions, but otherwise, it has a diverse representation of institutions based on type, size, selectivity, and location. First-year, full-time students were invited to participate based on a random sample at a large institution, and a full sample was used at smaller institutions. The participants completed a survey at the start and end of their first year in college. The 5,993 participants were from 38 different 4-year institutions, representing 25 liberal arts institutions and 13 research and regional institutions Roksa and Whitley (2017).

Students' academic achievement was measured by students' GPAs at the end of the first year of college as reported by the institution. The dependent variable of the students' GPAs was measured against the independent variables of: academic motivation, race, and faculty interest in student learning and development. To measure motivation, a scale was used that was developed and used in previous studies. In the analysis of the data, the researchers created two regression models to examine the correlation between the variables, and each model was a least-square regression model. The Roksa and Whitley (2017) examined first-year GPAs and each variable, then they

identified correlations of the variables, together and separate between motivation, race and faculty interaction.

Roksa and Whitley's (2017) study had some limitations, because it presented two findings that were different from other studies. They noted that being academically motivated is not equally beneficial for everyone. According to this study, African American students were more academically motivated than their White peers. However, the African American students benefited less from being academically motivated if they did not have the investment of the faculty. Although, they may have entered college being academically motivated, if they did not feel faculty were invested in their academic success, their motivation did not stay constant and even decreased (Roksa & Whitley, 2017). This study also found the campus environment may also affect whether students can translate their academic motivation into academic achievement. Specifically, if traditionally underrepresented students have their cultural background validated by faculty members, it is more likely to have a positive impact on their relationship. Based on the results of Roksa and Whitley (2017), this investment from faculty has a direct impact on African American students' academic success. Roksa and Whitley posited that further research is needed to understand the complexity of the relationship between academic motivation, college environments, and race.

Walton and Cohen (2007) supported the case for racial and ethnic identity being a factor in a sense of belonging to a college. This support from like-minded individuals relates to other noncognitive factors that Tinto (1993) mentioned in his model, such as, feeling a sense of belonging will motivate a student to be retained by an institution (Tinto, 1993). Museus and Neville (2012) found that racially and ethnically

underrepresented students desire relationships—not only with institutional agents and faculty who share a common racial or education background—but also with those who provide holistic support and who are able to humanize the college experience and to proactively help students to succeed.

Museus and Neville's (2012) qualitative study focused on the impact faculty and staff have on the student success of underrepresented students, as well as the access underrepresented students have to social capital from faculty and staff at an institution. A purposeful sample was used at one small, two medium-sized institutions, and one large institution in the United States. Three of the participating institutions were in rural settings, and one was in an urban setting. From four PWIs, 60 students participated in the study including 20 Asian, 21 Black, and 19 Latino students. All the students participated in semi-structured interviews, which asked about specific people who helped them in their adjustment to college, including how those people helped in the process. Open and axial coding was used to generate themes in the interview transcripts.

The findings of the Museus and Neville (2017) study show that students gained social capital through mentorship, which allowed them to overcome various institutional and personal barriers. These experiences allowed for the humanizing of the college experience and in helping in the adoption of proactive attitudes and actions (Museus & Neville). This development of social capital translates into the sense of belonging discussed in earlier studies (Astin, 1984; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Stanton-Salzar, 2011; Strayhorn, 2008; Tinto, 1993).

The literature shows the influential role of social and emotional factors in academic performance and persistence to a higher education institution (Walton & Carr,

2012; Walton & Cohen, 2011). Undergraduate experiences are greatly influenced by one's ability to create and sustain social networks (Museus & Neville, 2012; Stanton-Salzar, 2011; Strayhorn, 2008). Those who perceive a high level of social support from their families and, more importantly, their peer group are more likely to adapt and cope with their new college environment, have feelings of belonging, and have a reduced likelihood of dropping out of college and going on to be successful in the long term (Taylor, Doane, & Eisenberg, 2013).

Black student experience. Smooth social transitioning to college significantly predicts a sense of belonging (Strayhorn 2012; Woosley, 2011). Perception of a smooth academic transition to college was a predictor of success for most underrepresented populations of African American students, and they were more likely to report negative perceptions of the campus racial climate and have a harder time transitioning (Johnson et al., 2007). Therefore, Wang and Castañed-Sound (2008) suggested strongly that studies incorporate gender and racial identity into understanding the psychosocial needs of students. Students coming from ethnically diverse backgrounds find the transition to a PWI especially difficult (Johnson et al., 2007; Strayhorn et al., 2015). The cultural ecological theory of underrepresented groups attempts to explain why different underrepresented groups adapt differently to school and to settings such as the college environment (Ogbu, 1990, 1992, 2003).

Ogbu and Simmons (1998) explained that there are three types of underrepresented groups: autonomous, voluntary, and involuntary. Autonomous groups share a different ethnicity, religion, linguistics, or identity from the dominant society, but they are not subordinate in the social, economic, or political system. Involuntary

minorities are those who were brought up in the present society without choice, such as through slavery for African Americans. Voluntary immigrants, on the other hand, are those who migrate to a host country because of a belief from themselves or their families that they would have a greater opportunity for them than in their country of origin, such as African Caribbean students (Ogbu, 2003).

As this research continues to point out that voluntary immigrants compare their present living environments to those of family members from their originating country or their own circumstances before moving to their new country. With this mindset, most see life as being better in the Unites States, presenting opportunities for more money and education, resulting in a positive frame of reference (Ogbu, 2003). Voluntary immigrants may be in menial jobs and encounter social, economic, or political difficulties, but they still see an optimistic future for themselves and their children (Ogbu, 2003). Conversely, involuntary immigrants compare themselves to the dominate culture in the United States of White individuals. Often, because of the racism and discrimination in the United States, they develop a negative frame of reference, and they may consider themselves worse off than the dominant culture (Ogbu, 2003). This is often what causes the rejection of the dominant culture or comments about others *acting White*, including when others obtain good grades (Ogbu, 2003).

Pinder (2012) did a review of literature to examine the major reasons for the differences in educational achievement levels of students of those with African heritage including African Americans, and African and Caribbean students. Pinder (2012) stated that there is a disparity gap in achievement between students of the same Black race, and Pinder gave an example that African American students are compelled to underperform

in school to be considered *cool* or a part of the *in group*. Furthermore, as other research

points out, which is line with Pinder's (2012) research, African American students do not

value education (Wiggan, 2007). Although the literature reveals African American

parents are involved, to some extent, in their children's education, the literature also

suggests that African American parents are not involved as much as they should be

(Pinder, 2012). If some Blacks are denied dominant cultural capital resources, they may

resort to the utilization of the nondominant cultural capital resources, and they may never

experience social mobility and academic success within the dominant society (Pinder,

2008). These findings can also be explained by cultural ecological theory, which

identifies students not wanting to appear as if they are acting White (Ogbu, 1990, 1992).

However, as other research points out, African American students are able to overcome

these challenges and enter college by being able to perceive an inclusive college

environment that allows them to be socially integrated (Astin, 1984; Milem & Berger,

1997; Pascarela & Terenzini, 2005; Tinto, 1987, 1993), and they have a sense of

belonging, which is a very important factor for college completion (Hurtado & Carter,

1997; O'Keeffe, 2013; Strayhorn, 2012).

In the Johnson et al. (2007) study, the findings indicate that African American,

Hispanic/Latino and Asian Pacific American students reported a reduced sense of

belonging than White students. In the Griffin et al. (2016) study of African American

and African Caribbean students, there was some discomfort in students being engaged in

PWIs and social spaces, which is consistent with other research that states that Black

students often have social isolation and limited opportunities at PWIs (Hurtado, Griffins,

Arellano, & Cuellar, 2008; Harper & Hurtado, 2007).

The Griffin et al. (2016) qualitative study addressed, through semi-structured interviews, how African American and African Caribbean students perceived diversity on campus, experienced the climate, and described their interactions with students from racial and ethnic backgrounds who were different from their own. Using a case study methodology, narratives were collected from 43 Black students enrolled at a PWI, based on their immigration status and how long their family had been in the United States (Griffin et al., 2016). Based on the results of the study, the longer the participants were in the United States, the more likely they were to experience racism and perceive it in a manner similar to African American students. African American students described a feeling of being treating as though they were inferior more often in social situations, whereas students from immigrant backgrounds spoke more of the stereotypes they faced in academic and classroom environments (Griffin et al, 2016).

As a result, studies, such as Cunningham (2015), have addressed the safe spaces for Black students at PWIs to help eliminate the social isolation they often feel. Cunningham's qualitative study examined the lived experience of 12 Black students at a PWI to understand how institutionally designated safe spaces, specifically, Black cultural centers, help to create a sense of belonging after the students experienced negative campus racial incidents. The study of traditionally aged, full-time students was conducted at a large land-grant university located in the mid-Atlantic region of the United States. Students were asked questions relating to the campus racial climate, sense of belonging, social network, and engagement with Black cultural centers, as well as being asked to identify their demographics and family background. These interviews were then

analyzed through the use of open coding then allowed for a codebook to be developed. These codes were then applied to inform the development of a grounded theory.

The six female and six male participants in the Cunningham (2015) study indicated they developed their sense of belonging with the institution in different ways. All acknowledged that a Black cultural center on campus, cocurricular experiences, and academic engagement combined to play a role in shaping how they developed their sense of belonging on campus. The participants, also, did not seek out institutionally designed safe spaces, such as the Black cultural centers, to aid them in coping with any racial incidents that occurred on campus, but rather, they used them as social spaces on a regular basis. The participants also explained that incidents of racism on campus did not decrease their sense of belonging. The individual needs, differences, and experiences were more important for the experience of Black students at a PWI than having a specific space on campus. The Black cultural center on campus was used by the students as a source of general support rather than for specific incidents of prejudice or discrimination (Cunningham, 2015). However, the study suggested that having a Black cultural center on campus did help minimize the effects of negative racial incidents on campus.

The Cunningham (2015) study did not distinguish between African American and African Caribbean students within their study of Black students. The researcher recommended studies be conducted to help understand intersectionality within racial and ethnic identities as it relates to a sense of belonging (Cunningham, 2015). Other studies, however, have supported the notion that African Caribbean students perceive the campus climate differently than African American students (Griffin et al., 2016; Lewis & McKissic, 2010).

Lewis and McKissic (2010) conducted a qualitative, narrative study examining the experiences of African Americans students at a small PWI in the Northeastern United States. The African American and Black students were defined interchangeably for this population and for this study, and it included 24 students who were of African and Caribbean descent, and students who were African American. The participants were selected on the basis of their presence and prominence at Black-identified events and in African American students' social networking sites or their positions in Black organizations and institutions at the college. Two cases were selected to offer a closer examination and analysis of the role of the Black community in the college persistence of African American students.

The researchers used interviews of 24 African American students, as well as observations of the African American students in student organization meetings and at formal and informal gatherings in residence halls, the cultural center, and dining halls. The interview questions were asked about the participants' backgrounds, perceptions of the racial climate at the college, perceptions of Black students at the college, perceptions of unity and Black male-female relations, their definitions of community and Black community, social network, involvement, and their thoughts of leaving or transferring from the college. The interviews showed there were feelings of marginality at the institution by the Black students, but by aligning themselves with other Black students, they were able to be renewed, rejuvenated, and restored. The participants also revealed that if it were not for the other Black students who were able to affirm what they were experiencing and offering practical advice, they would have left the institution (Lewis & McKissic, 2010). The diversity of different voices transforms the classroom environment

into a safe space (Lewis & McKissic, 2010). Lewis and McKissic (2010) opined that these safe spaces allows for Black students voices to be heard, and it is a place where the racist opinions of their White peers and professors are contested and proven flawed. By finding fellow underrepresented students, they preserve and promote the richness and validity of their cultural identities (Lewis & McKissic, 2010).

Literature has shown distinct differences in the motivation, family support, and ethnic identity of African American and African Caribbean students (Kim 2014; Ogbu, 1992, Waters, 1999). A seminal study conducted by Waters (1999) examined the experiences of Caribbean immigrants in the United States. In the study, Waters explained that Caribbean immigrants come to the Unites States with a particular worldview that reflects their identity, culture, and previous experience, which helps them to be successful, and this agrees with Ogbu's (1992, 2003) cultural ecological theory. Black immigrant and native students appreciated and sought opportunities to interact with those who shared their own background and identity and often lived in similar communities when coming to the United States (Griffin et al., 2016; Waters, 1999). These communities were often in more affluent communities in predominately White areas than the communities of most African Americans citizens (Waters, Kasinitz, & Asad, 2014; Waters, 1999). Little research exists on, specifically, on the experience of African Caribbean college students' in PWIs, but as the research by Waters (1999) pointed out, motivation and students living in more affluent communities may have had an influence on the success of African Caribbean students compared to African Americans when going to college.

Woodburn (2011) conducted a study of African Caribbean students to understand their experience at PWIs. The study focused on 10 undergraduate juniors and seniors who were first- or second-generation Caribbean-born, attending a PWI in New York. Through semi-structured interviews of students and four faculty/staff members, the researcher examined the experiences of African Caribbean students at a PWI. Students in the study associated family support, relationships with faculty in and out of the classroom, and involvement on campus as the reason for their success in college. In addition, some participants spoke of being the only Black student in their class or never being taught by a Black professor, and they all spoke about feeling welcome despite being underrepresented in the college community (Woodburn, 2011). They also expressed that they felt academically prepared for college, which may be related to their education before coming to the United States as well as receiving their education in a predominately White community (Waters, 1999). Woodburn (2011) did not address this in her study, but the researcher did recommend further studies be conducted expanding to other underrepresented populations at PWIs to assess the extent to which findings would be similar or different (Woodburn, 2011).

Thompson-Cudjoe (2015) conducted a quantitative correlation study on how motivation contributes to academic achievement of African Caribbean students. The researcher identified the City University of New York system as the site of the study. Thompson-Cudjoe used an electronic survey to assess students' academic motivation using a 7-point scale, along with demographic and GPA information. In the analysis of the data, a Cronbach's alpha was used to measure internal reliability of the tool. Descriptive statistics were then used for the independent variable, which included

intrinsic and extrinsic motivation with the dependent variable being the GPA. A Spearman's RHO correlation was used to establish the relationship between intrinsic motivation and GPA. The Thompson-Cudjoe (2015) study showed no correlation between these two variables, but it did illustrate the overall high motivation of African Caribbean students. Further, as pointed out, the study provided research to help answer the dilemma as to why African Caribbean students are found in institutions of higher education more often than African American students. Many African Caribbean students feel a motivation to attend college to better the life experience for themselves and their families, and therefore, they are highly motivated to obtain a college degree (Ogbu, 2003).

In another study, Kim (2014) examined the experiences of 12 Black immigrant students at a large, public, PWI located in the Midwest. The students were from Africa or the Caribbean with the intent to permanently stay in the United States, and they had a class standing of sophomore, junior, or senior. The study intended to identify the barriers Black immigrant students encounter, while they socialize into an academic and social college environment, as well as what sources of support helped them to cope with those barriers. Specifically, the Kim wanted to examine the bicultural socialization African Caribbean students have by combining the cultural attitudes and customs of two different nations. This was accomplished through asking interview questions and interview protocols that covered topics ranging from early childhood and immigration experiences to family and peer influences, perception of the college environment, challenges in adjusting to college, and factors that contributed to bicultural socialization experiences during the college years.

Kim (2014) found that this population expressed the tension that developed between themselves and peers on campus, primarily with the African American students. Families were a significant source of strength for the participants. Most students had at least one individual in their family who initiated them into campus norms and to develop the social capital that was similar to other studies (Hausmann et al., 2007; Stanton-Salzar, 2011; Strayhorn, 2012). Family and peer support profoundly impacted the ways in which they became adjusted to the university. They often felt compelled to concentrate their attention on academic achievement, which resulted in social isolation. Peer interactions and family relationships helped with this isolation by providing support outside of the college community (Kim, 2014). Black academic advisors and counselors were used as key cultural meditators and to serve as a bridge between the Black culture and mainstream college to help the participants learn the norms, values, and belief of the mainstream culture (Kim, 2014). Similarly, students look for someone whom is like them to create a sense that they belong in the environment (Cunningham, 2015).

Social support is an important factor in college completion (Taylor et al., 2013). Gustave (2016) conducted a quantitate study of 89 African Caribbean students, examining the effects of social support, self-concept, and ethical identity on their college adjustment. Most participants came from one public university in New York City (NYC), but there was also participation from three private universities in NYC as well. All the universities were PWIs. The researcher used a demographic questionnaire, the Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support, to identify support among family and friends; a self-description questionnaire, to assess different dimensions of self-

concept; and a multi-group ethnic identity measurement to assess the ethnic identity of the students, as well as a student-adaptation-to-college questionnaire.

Gustave (2016) used descriptive statistics and coefficient alphas of all subscales to examine a correlational matrix to explain the relationships between all the variables. A multiple regression analysis was used to examine the impact of social support, self-concept, and ethnic identity on their college adjustment. Results indicated that social support from friends demonstrated more of a significant correlation with the participants' self-concept and ease of college adjustment than social support from family. In fact, the findings from this study examining perceived social support have shown social support may not have as much of an effect on African Caribbean students' adjustment to college as their belief in themselves. This was an unexpected finding compared to the current research of social capital and social support, as little research exists on examining the social support of African Caribbean students specifically (Gustave, 2016; Stanton-Salazar, 2011). In addition, because the participants in the Gustave study ranged from 18 to 54 years, and they may have been in any year of college, that might influence their experience of having the perceived social support of traditionally aged college students as in previous studies (Gustave, 2016; Stanton-Salazar, 2011).

Findings from the Gustave (2016) study do suggest that self-perceptions regarding academics, peer relations, and emotional stability can strongly affect aspects of African Caribbean students' college adjustment. Positive identification with one's ethic group may help students cope with discrimination, or prejudices may result in lower self-esteem and interfere with school adjustment and performance (Wakefield & Hudley, 2007). This appears to be in line with the findings from Gustave (2016) that suggest institutional

attachment has a correlation with opposite-sex peer relationships and emotion and self-perception. Gustave's (2016) study provides new knowledge on African Caribbean students, as he recommended a qualitative study could also shed more light on the diversity that exists for personal experiences of African Caribbean college students, including what social supports these students find helpful, what their perceptions are of themselves, what their ethnicity means to them, and the role these factors play on the demands of college.

African American students often feel the subject of racism and discrimination, whereas first-generation African Caribbean students may feel they are less subjected to racism and discrimination (Griffin et al., 2016). First-generation African Caribbean students were more likely to identify with their ethnic identities than their racial identities, and they may feel less of a connection to what it means to be African American or Black in college (Griffin et al., 2016). Griffin et al. concluded that the findings of their study support the importance of disaggregating data—not only by race but by ethnicity. African American students described feeling ostracized more often in social situations, whereas African Caribbean students spoke more of the stereotypes they faced in academic contexts, such as negative interactions with faculty (Griffin et al., 2016).

Previous research examined that the *proving process* explains how many high-achieving Black students experience the academic environment (Griffin et al., 2016). This phenomenon is based on the stereotypes of Black students and suggests they are poor students or less academically capable (McGee & Martin, 2011). Students facing these stereotypes may work twice as hard and expend additional cognitive energy in an

effort to disprove their critics, and this, in turn, can potentially distract them from their work and diminish their motivation over time (Griffin et al., 2016). If students are in this situation, they often feel inferior or suffer from racism and stereotype threat (Johnson-Ahorlu, 2013).

Stereotype threat has been associated with lower academic achievement and degree completion (Fischer, 2010; Johnson-Ahorlu, 2013). The concept of stereotype threat is defined as a generalization applied to a group of people with some level of shared characteristics (Johnson-Ahorlu, 2013). A qualitative study conducted by Johnson-Ahorlu (2013) focused on how stereotype threat affects the academic success and graduation rate of African American students at 4-year public institutions. The researchers conducted 16 focus groups with a total of 94 participants at seven institutions, five 4-year colleges, and two 2-year institutions. Each focus group was made racially homogenous and institution specific. The participants were asked about barriers to their academic achievement, their perspective about diversity at their institution, and if their institution was accepting of diverse social identities including race, gender, sexual orientation, and disability. Quotes from respondents were organized by focus group and institution and then placed in a meta-matrix to be coded.

Findings showed the African American students from the 4-year institutions were the only group who highlighted issues of race as a barrier. Specifically, there was a stereotype of intellectual inferiority in African American students compared to other races (Johnson-Ahorlu, 2013). In the institutions studied, African Americans made up the least representative racial group on campus, comprising 5% of the student body, which was shown to have a large impact on the experience of African Americans and

stereotype threat. The researcher found that African American students felt stereotypes and the threat of fulfilling them was a major obstacle to their academic success. Stereotypes about their intellectual capacities had an impact on their in-class experience and interactions with peers outside of class. Students were less likely to share notes with them in class or even believe they should be in college (Johnson-Ahorlu, 2013). According to the participants, this treatment by faculty and peers made the stereotypes about them harder to fight and, in some cases, made the threat a reality (Johnson-Ahorlu, 2013).

Booker's (2016) study examined the in-classroom experience of six African American women at a PWI through focus groups and in-depth interviews. The purpose of the study was to explore the experiences of African American women in a classroom setting via faculty and peer interactions, and how that affected their sense of belonging to a public university on the Southern coast of the United States. Booker used a qualitative approach to examine how African American female undergraduates described their sense of belonging to others in the academic setting. The focus groups allowed the participants to discuss their classroom experiences as women of color at a PWI. During this time, the students explored issues of belongingness, faculty interaction, and peer support. Individual interview questions emphasized peer relationships, faculty availability, classroom dynamics, civility, and respect.

The Booker (2016) participants mentioned a level of loneliness while in their courses, because they did not want to always defend their race or correct misconnections with faculty and/or students. When students feel guarded, defensive, and on edge in the classroom, their learning is minimized (Dunlosky, Rawson, Marsh, Nathan, &

Willingham, 2013). The Booker (2016) study did determine that the faculty who were accessible, seemed approachable, and were authentic in their interactions became important reasons as to why the participants remained at the institution. Participants also expressed staying at their current institution in spite of the microaggressions and feelings of being *other*, meaning they were outsiders. One student even noted that friends were experiencing the same isolation and prejudices at other schools, and they determined it would not be different elsewhere. This study provided a stronger understanding about persistence for African American women and how classroom interactions can support or hinder their sense of belonging. It also reemphasized the work of Tinto (1993) and Astin (1984) about retention and the importance of social and academic integration into the college environment (Booker, 2016).

Chapter Summary

Sense of belonging and academic success does not begin in college. Studies of students in K-12 education showed that if a student felt like they belonged in a learning environment, they were interested and more confident in engaging in learning, and they were more successful in college (Furrer & Skinner, 2003). A similar study evaluating the academic success, peer success, academic self-concept during the sixth grade found lack of peer acceptance in the fourth grade directly predicted poor academic performance in the sixth grade (Flook et al., 2005). Previous educational experiences have an impact on success in college and the difference in the motivations, beliefs, and experiences of African Caribbean and African American students individually is vital to study (Griffin et al., 2016; Ogbu, 1992, 2003). African Caribbean, international African students, and African Americans are often lumped into a single group (Kim, 2014). The needs for

these two sub-populations are different (Cunningham, 2015; Ogbu, 1992, 2003). When examining sense of belonging and motivation, Morrow and Ackerman (2012) showed that motivation may have a larger impact on retention, as long as the student sees the college experience as helping them in their personal development. Studies examining the motivation in African American students showed that if traditionally underrepresented students are able to have their cultural background validated by faculty members, it is more likely to have a positive impact on their relationship and motivation (Roksa & Whitley, 2017). A smooth social transition to college is significantly predictive of a sense of belonging, especially for African American students who are the least likely to report positive perceptions of the campus racial climate (Johnson et al., 2007). Daily interactions by students of the same race are important for underrepresented students, as well as, developing a network of institutional and student support. This reason may be that underrepresented students are more uncertain about their belonging than White students, and their sense of belonging is more weakened by difficulties that arise (Walton and Cohen, 2007).

Retention and college completion is a challenge for African American students due to racist incidents, stereotype threat and their views of the educational system (Cunningham, 2015; Johnson-Ahorlu, 2013; Ogbu, 1992, 2003). African American students rely more on peer support, and it helps to increase their sense of belonging throughout their academic career (Hausmann et al., 2007). African Caribbean students often feel compelled to concentrate their attention on academic achievement, which results in social isolation. Peer interactions and family relationships help with this isolation by providing support outside of the college community (Kim, 2014). Studies

also showed that the longer a participant was in the United States, the more likely they were to experience racism and perceive it in a similar manner as African American students. African American students described marginalization more often in social situations, whereas students from immigrant backgrounds spoke more of the stereotypes they faced in academic and classroom environments (Griffin et al, 2016).

There is ample research on the general population of Black students (Griffin et al, 2016). The Griffin et al. (2016) study supports the importance of disaggregating data not only by race but by ethnicity. As this is often not done, there is a gap in the literature of examining the experiences of African American and African Caribbean students within the same institution to have a proper understanding of successful retention initiatives for these populations. Recommendations by researchers have included conducting qualitative studies that could also shed more light on the diversity that exists in the personal experiences of African Caribbean college students, including what social supports these students find helpful, what their perceptions are of themselves, and what their ethnicity means to them, and the role these factors play on the demands of Black students attending PWIs (Griffin et al, 2016; Woodburn, 2011). Studies support this notion that African Caribbean students perceive the campus climate differently than African American students (Griffin et al., 2016; Lewis & McKissic, 2010).

Tinto's (1987, 1993) theory of student departure identifies precollege characteristics and factors through the college experience, including the level of commitment and interactions with the social and academic component of a university that determine a student's decision to leave or stay at an institution. Ogbu's (1992, 2003) cultural ecological theory examined the differences between voluntary (immigrant) and

nonvoluntary (native) students. By examining Tinto's (1993) theory of student departure,

through the lens of Ogbu's (1992, 2003) cultural ecological theory, the precollege

characteristics of the participants in this study can be combined with the social and

academic integration into the institution to examine how best to serve the distinct

differences between the African American and African Caribbean populations. By

examining their first semester experiences, we can ensure they are having positive

interactions and developing a sense of belonging during their first semester to allow for

future enrollment and retention (Milem & Berger, 1997; Hausmann et al., 2007;

Strayhorn, 2012). This will not only help to increase Black students' complete

completion rates, but it will also allow for a more improved academic setting by

providing a racially diverse academic setting (Roksa & Whitley, 2017).

Chapter 3: Research Design Methodology

General Perspective

Students are increasingly arriving at college with lower levels of emotional health and feeling overwhelmed (Pryor et al., 2010). First-year college students tend to experience greater stress, anxiety, and psychological distress relative to upper-class students (Bayram & Bilgel, 2008). Literature suggests that the existing first-year experience programs only have a limited impact on academic performance and retention outcomes (Barefoot, 2000; Turner & Thompson, 2014). Further, first-year experience programs do not address the psychosocial needs and emotional and mental well-being of incoming first-year students (Robbins et al., 2009). These challenges are compounded for students from ethnically diverse backgrounds (Dowd, Sawatzky, & Korn, 2011; Johnson et al., 2007).

Nationally, the first-year retention rate of Black students who entered college in fall 2015 was lower than the retention rates of other races and ethnicities (NSC Research Center, 2016). Black students are often identified as one population, but there are sub-populations with distinct differences within this large population (Pinder, 2012). Pinder (2012) explained that African Caribbean students are being retained in college at a higher rate than African American students. Understanding the factors that impact the transition of African American students compared to African Caribbean students could be instrumental in increasing retention rates to achieve a college degree among these two populations (Johnson et al., 2007). Despite the increased presence of Black students on

college campuses, the African Caribbean population is often overlooked because they have been characterized as African American students (Massey et al., 2006). African Caribbean students and African American students have different motives, cultural norms, supports, and rationale for obtaining a college degree, but these two populations are often treated the same (Haynie, 2002; Thompson-Cudjoe, 2015). This study examined the experience and retention rates of these two population of students in their first year of college.

To understand the experiences of African Caribbean students compared to African American students, this study examined the sense of belonging of these two populations at a PWI in the Northeastern part of the United States. Since little is known about these two populations as separate entities, it is essential that there be further research to increase the students' retention and persistence towards graduation (Kim, 2014; Woodburn, 2011). Creswell and Poth (2017) stated when there is a need for an understanding of a complex and detailed issue, the study should use a qualitative research method to help understand the experiences.

Qualitative research relies on the detailed description of individual human experiences on a particular issue (Creswell & Poth, 2017). This study's design was used to explore and understand the individual experiences of African American African and Caribbean students during their first year of college (Creswell & Poth, 2017). This study took a phenomenological approach to describe the perceived commonalities and differences of these two populations at the same institution. By giving meaning to individuals of their lived experiences of being an African American or African Caribbean student at a PWI, this study helped to understand the what and how of the experiences of

these two populations in order to further advance retention rates during their first year in college and, ultimately, through graduation (Creswell & Poth, 2017).

This qualitative approach used in-depth interviews to elicit views, opinions, and experiences with the phenomenon being examined (Creswell & Poth, 2017). Interviewing provided meaning around the topic and empowered the researcher to register and interpret what was said and how it was said (Brinkman & Kvale, 2015). The open-ended questions provided the participants with the opportunity to share their lived experiences regarding social experiences, environmental factors, academic experiences, and retention in their first year of college (Rossman & Rallis, 2003).

The research questions guiding this study were:

1. What factors contribute to a sense of belonging for African American and African Caribbean students and the desire to remain at the university?

2. How do the cultures of African American and African Caribbean students contribute to motivation for the completion of a bachelor's degree?

3. What barriers inhibit African American and African Caribbean students from completing their college experience?

Research Context

The greater New York City metropolitan area is home to the largest number of Caribbean immigrants in the United States (Anderson, Lopez, & Rohal, 2015). According to the 2010-14 American Community Survey data, which is conducted as part of the census, the top four counties with Caribbean immigrants were in Bronx County, NY; Broward County, FL; Kings County, NY; and Miami-Dade County, FL. Together, these counties represented 41% of the Caribbean immigrant population in the United

States (Spielman, Folch, & Nagle, 2014). Immigrant Africans, Caribbeans, and African

Americans make up 25.1% of New York City's population. The New York City

metropolitan area represents the largest city and metropolitan area in America, with more

than 18 million residents (Spielman et al., 2014). Therefore, a private university in the

Northeast with a large population from the five boroughs of New York City was the

prime location for this study. The study was conducted at a predominantly White,

private, 4-year institution located in the Northeast with a tri-campus system.

This study focused on one of these three campuses, which is located in a town in a

suburban setting, and it is primarily a residential campus in the Northeast. It offers

certificate, associate, bachelor's, master's, and doctoral degrees based on majors in six

areas including law, arts and sciences, health professions, computer science and

information systems, business, and education. At the time of this study, the institution

had a gender breakdown of 60% female and 40% male; 60% of the population was

White, non-Hispanic, and 20% of the population was Black or multiracial students. The

remaining breakdown of the population was made up of Latino, Asian, and other

minority populations.

Research Participants

According to the literature, precollege characteristics, students' experiences, and

perceptions of an institution directly relate to students' academic and social experiences.

In addition, family and support networks are factors important to retention in the first

year of college (Kuh, 2007; Stanton-Salazar, 2011; Steinhorn & Diggs-Brown, 1999;

Tinto, 1993; Turner & Thompson, 2014). Therefore, to understand the factors that

impact the transition of African American students, compared to African Caribbean

students, this study examined the lived experiences of self-identified African American and African Caribbean students who attended a 4-year private, predominantly White institution (PWI).

The researcher solicited the chosen university for this study for a list of first-year students who identified as Black, multiracial, or other. The researcher also contacted the directors of Multicultural Affairs and Student Activities to solicit additional support in identifying individuals who would be eligible for the study. Eligibility was determined based on the criterion of being a first-year student at the university who self-identified as African American or African Caribbean. These prospective participants were contacted via email, the purpose of the study was described, and the students were invited to participate. Once the individuals were selected to participate in the study, they were asked to agree to an informed consent that they received via email. Once the informed consents forms were received, a 60-minute interview session was scheduled. During the interview sessions, the participants were reminded of the informed consent form, and they were asked to physically sign the hard copy form before the beginning of the interview. They were also given a reminder that the interview session was completely voluntary, and at any time, they were able to opt-out of the interview without risk of any penalty. The participants did not receive any compensation or reimbursement for participating in the study, but their names were entered into a drawing for one of two $50 gift cards.

A purposeful sampling technique was used by the researcher to select individuals who were knowledgeable about, or experienced with, the phenomenon being studied (Creswell & Poth, 2017). By using a purposeful sampling technique, the participants

were selected based on self-identification as African American or African Caribbean. These students were likely to generate useful data by having an in-depth understanding of their lived experience (Creswell & Poth, 2017). Within the selection of a purposeful sampling technique, a criterion sample was used. This form of sampling works best in qualitative research, when the individuals can represent others who have experienced the same phenomenon (Creswell & Poth, 2017). In order for a researcher to use a criterion-based selection process, the researcher must create a list of criteria for selection (Merriam, 1998). The criteria for the sample were students who self-identified as African American or African Caribbean and who were in their first year of college at the institution. International students or transfer students were not be included in the study, given that they did not meet at least one criteria of the study. Criterion sampling allowed for capturing the true experiences of the African American and African Caribbean students.

Polkinghorne (1989) recommended researchers interview from five to 25 individuals who have experienced a phenomenon. Based on the population in the setting of this study and the two distinct populations that were going to be interviewed, the researcher planned to interview at least five students who self-identified as African American and five students who self-identified as African Caribbean students, which would account for 13% of the Black student population on campus. After these initial interviews, the researcher reexamined to ensure the sample size had reached saturation. Saturation was reached when the data became repetitive and no new data could be obtained (Polkinghorne, 1989).

Instruments Used in Data Collection

Once the participants were identified, they were asked to complete a brief demographic questionnaire, which was constructed by the researcher before the start of the individual interviews (Appendix A). The questionnaire comprised eight questions designed to gather demographics and background information for the study. The information collected included (a) gender, (b) age, (c) current class standing, (d) ethnic identity, (e) highest level of education of parents, (f) country of birth, and (g) number of years in the United States. This short questionnaire confirmed that the candidates met the criteria of the study, and the information from the questionnaire was used in the description of the participants.

For the second phase of the study, after completion of the student demographic questionnaire, the face-to-face semi-structured interviews were conducted using a purposeful sampling procedure. Open-ended interview questions were used for the 60-minute in-depth interviews to serve as a guide to stay focused on the subject and possibly lead to new knowledge (Rossman & Rallis, 2003). Open-ended questions are the most revealing, in terms of individual meaning, regarding the lived experiences, which were interpreted by the participants (Rossman & Rallis, 2003). The open-ended questions provided an opportunity for the participants to respond in their own words and give meaningful and explanatory data based on the questions (Rossman & Rallis, 2003). The individual interviews were led by the researcher and audio recorded for accuracy and proper transcription. The purpose of the interviews was to elicit salient and beneficial information about the participants' experience based on their ethnicity in the first year of college at a PWI. The interview protocol (Appendix B) was developed by the researcher

and employed to gather an in-depth narrative on the factors that impacted the students'

sense of belonging during their first semester in college.

Reflectivity. In qualitative research, the researcher is the primary instrument for

gathering and analyzing data (Creswell & Poth, 2017). Therefore, how researchers

position themselves is important to know, as this informs the conduct of the study

(Creswell & Poth, 2017). In this specific study, it is important to note that the researcher

works at the institution in which the study occurred. The individuals in this study did not

have a previous relationship with the researcher nor did the researcher's position have

any influence or bearing on the outcome or the success of the participants or the study. A

complex reflectivity was created by the positionality of the researcher as a White, female,

Student Affairs professional, interviewing African American and African Caribbean

students at the institution in which this study was being conducted. Reflectivity refers to

a situation where the researcher is placed at the center of the data being analyzed and

draws from a variety of biographical aspects, such as values ethnicity, personal status,

and gender, as they apply to the researcher (Moustakas, 1994), but knowledge is

constructed through the interaction between the interviewer and interviewee (Creswell &

Poth, 2017).

The researcher provided a description of her experience with the phenomenon to

set aside personal experiences, assumptions, and prejudices, so the researchers' focus

could be directed on the participants of the study (Creswell & Poth, 2017). Moustakas

(1994) referred to this self-reflection as epoché, which is the suspension of judgement

regarding what is real. The researcher shared her experience with this phenomenon to

build rapport with the participants and to obtain valid and trustworthy information. When

a rapport is developed with an interviewee, the data collected through the interview is known to be trustworthy (Shenton, 2004).

Procedures for Data Analysis

As suggested in the qualitative research design by Creswell and Poth (2017), this study's data was analyzed into themes through the use of coding. The data was summarized through the use of narratives, tables, and figures. The process of data collection consisted of seven steps:

1. organizing the data,

2. researcher becoming familiar with the data,

3. generating categories and themes,

4. coding the data,

5. interpretation the data,

6. searching for alternative understandings, and

7. writing the findings.

In the collection of data, member checking was used to ensure the researcher was interpreting the information correctly (Creswell & Poth, 2017). Member checking requires the researcher to share her transcription and preliminary findings with the research participants or other neutral parties to ensure she accurately represented the participants' words, experiences, and the essence of their lived experience.

After the data collection phase, the recordings were sent to a transcription service to be transcribed. The real names of the participants were not disclosed and pseudonyms were assigned to each participant to maintain confidentiality and anonymity.

Transcriptions of the interviews were kept electronically on the candidate's computer and will be purged after 5 years.

As stated by Creswell and Poth (2017), the primary research instrument in this qualitative study was the researcher. Insight into the lived experiences of African American and African Caribbean students attending a PWI were through a series of open-ended questions. Open-ended questions are known to be the most revealing to understand the experience of the participants and their interpretation (Brinkman & Kvale, 2015). Open-ended questions provide an opportunity for participants to respond in their own words and give meaning and explanatory data based on the question (Creswell & Poth, 2017). The open-ended questions were developed based on the research literature and the theoretical framework that helped to construct this study (Creswell & Poth, 2017). According to Creswell and Poth (2017), qualitative researchers use a theoretical lens in order to guide the development of the questions, how the data is collected, and to provide an opportunity for change.

When designing a qualitative study, it is important for the researcher to be mindful of the interconnectedness of the parts and interactions of the design process (Creswell & Poth, 2017). In qualitative research, the standards of good, convincing research are trustworthy. To ensure validity and a proper understanding of the research instrument, a panel of experts were solicited to review the open-ended research questions. This panel was made up of students from African American and African Caribbean backgrounds, and the panel included a professional from the university's Multicultural Affairs Office and an African Caribbean staff member, in order to ensure the trustworthiness of the instrument.

In the collection and processing of the data, the writing of analytic memos was used to allow the researcher to record the process. These memos include observations about the participants, initial thoughts and interpretation of the phenomenon, and the process of collecting the data. During the interviews, each session was recorded and then transcribed. As a means to maintain the confidentiality of the participants and the information gathered for this study, several methods were used to ensure student identities remained confidential. First, all of the digital recordings and transcriptions are maintained on a password-protected secured drive to ensure only the primary researcher has access to the information. Secondly, as noted earlier in this chapter, pseudonyms were used when coding data to ensure anonymity throughout the study.

In the coding of the data, the researcher used open coding to establish first impressions related to the data. The system of open coding allowed the researcher to immerse herself in the data and make common meaning among the data by identifying significant statements that created an understanding of how the participants had experienced the phenomenon. Once this was established, the researcher followed up by using axial coding. This allowed the researcher to group the data into categories and analyze the data by focusing on the main themes that were developed to help understand the phenomenon. Throughout this process, the researcher used a constant comparison of all new coded text segments with previously coded segments to ensure consistency and to provide the opportunity to add, revise, and change codes and ensure intracoder reliability (Creswell & Poth, 2017). Thick description is a way of achieving a type of external validity. By describing a phenomenon in sufficient detail, one can begin to evaluate the

extent to which the conclusions drawn are transferable to other times, settings, situations, and people (Creswell & Poth, 2017).

Action plan and timeline. Upon approval of the proposal, the research process began with the identification of participants from the target groups identified above. After obtaining written consent from the participants, semi-structured interviews were completed. The recorded transcripts were professionally transcribed for a fee. The process of interviewing, transcription, and coding continued throughout the data-collection process through a system of open coding with a follow up of axial coding to develop emerging themes. The timeframe for study was flexible. The process began in February 2018 with recruitment for the participants, followed by data collection in the form of interviews February 2018-April 2018. Transcription and cleaning of the data occurred simultaneously during February-April 2018, the coding of data took place in March-April 2018, and the research concluded with the finalized coding, recording, and analysis of findings in May-July 2018.

Summary of the Methodology

This study focused on the perceived differences of African American students compared to African Caribbean students in developing a sense of belonging and in being retained in their first year in college at a PWI. This writing includes an overview of the methodology of this study, a description of research design, methodology, research context of the institution, as well as the information from the participants and a description of the data collection and analysis for this qualitative and phenomenological study. The design of a qualitative, phenomenological study through in-depth interviews allowed for the understanding of factors that impacted the transition of African American

and African Caribbean students by examining the lived experiences of the students

(Creswell & Poth, 2017). A series of practices were planned throughout the data

collection and analysis to confirm trustworthiness and ensure the findings of the study are

credible, transferable, confirmable, and dependable (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Chapter 4: Research Findings

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to gain insight into the lived experiences of African Caribbean and African American students to understand how they developed a sense of belonging at a PWI in the Northeast. This study explored precollege characteristics, as well as environmental and institutional factors that contributed to the retention of these two populations. There were three research questions relating to culture, motivation, and sense of belonging of the students' experiences during their first year of college.

This phenomenological, qualitative study included interviews of all the participants who were first-year students at the chosen PWI in the Northeast. They were also given a demographic questionnaire in order to determine the background information about each of the students in the study. Participants were selected based on the criteria of being a first-year student at the university and who self-identified as an African American or an African Caribbean. These prospective participants were contacted via an email that described the purpose of the study and stating that they were invited to participate. Once the individuals were selected to participate in the study, they were scheduled for a 60-minute interview session. Prior to the start of the interview, the participants completed a demographic questionnaire that included information about gender, age, class standing at the time of the interview, ethnic identity, highest level of education of parents, country of birth, and number of years in the United States.

To gain a better understanding of the participants, it was important to gather general background information during the in-depth interviews. Due to the nature of this study being focused on the differences between African American and African Caribbean students, it was important to gather information on how the participants identified their ethnicity and to understand how long they and their families had been in the United States. Other demographic information such as gender, hometown, major, and first-generation status were also used to help compare the groups. It is also important to note that the names of the participants shown on Table 4.1 are pseudonyms, and they were chosen by the students. Although not stated in the table, all participants were 18 years of age when they participated in the study.

The participants were a diverse sample of students who were representative of the incoming class to the private university in the areas of gender and hometown. There were 12 interviews conducted (Table 4.1). The interviews comprised six participants who self-identified as African American, and six participants who self-identified as African Caribbean. Eight participants identified as being first-generation college students, including all six of the African American participants. All participants identified as being born in the United States. All African Caribbean participants had at least one of their parents who migrated to the United States. Seven participants were females and five were males. The participants identified their majors in education, computer science, business, science, and liberal arts. Most of the participants had representation in the areas of liberal arts and sciences. Two participants, one African American and one African Caribbean, identified themselves as upper-middle class; six

participants identified as middle class, and four identified themselves as lower-middle class.

Research Questions

The research questions that guided this study were:

1. What factors contribute to a sense of belonging for African American and African Caribbean students and the desire to remain at the university?

2. How do the cultures of African American and African Caribbean students contribute to motivation for the completion of a bachelor's degree?

3. What barriers inhibit African American and African Caribbean students from completing their college experience?

Data Analysis and Findings

Research question 1. What factors contribute to a sense of belonging for African American and African Caribbean students and the desire to remain at the university? Through the in-depth interviews, four themes were identified. The identified themes were representative of the participants' perceptions of how the university created an environment in which they felt comfortable and welcome. Table 4.2 provides the themes and associated subthemes that emerged from the participants answers.

Table 4.1

Participant/Pseudonym Demographics

Pseudonym	Gender	City and State	Major	Participant Identified Ethnicity	Generation in the US	First-Gen
Aaliyah	Female	Hamden, CT	History	African Caribbean	Born in US/Parents Migrated	Yes
Abigail	Female	Hempstead, NY	Business	African Caribbean	Born in US/Parents Migrated	No
Asia	Female	Somerville, NJ	Criminal Justice	African American	Both Parents and I were born in US	Yes
Avery	Female	Mount Vernon, NY	Criminal Justice	African Caribbean	Born in US/Parents Migrated	No
Dash	Female	Peekskill, NY	Criminal Justice	African Caribbean	Born in US/Parents Migrated	Yes
David	Male	Park Slope, NY	Nursing	African Caribbean	Born in US/Parents Migrated	No
Jazz	Male	Silver Spring, MD	Biology	African Caribbean	Born in US/Parents Migrated	No
Kurt	Male	Ardmore, PA	Bio Psychology	African American (Bi-Racial)	Grandparents and beyond born in the US	Yes
Nani	Female	Patterson, NJ	Nursing	Black/African American	Grandparents and beyond	Yes
Raphael	Male	Newark, NJ	Information Technology	African American	Great-grandparents and beyond	Yes
Thomas	Male	Englewood, NJ	Sports Marketing	African American	One Parent and I were born in the United States	Yes
Victoria	Female	Lafayette, Louisiana	Global Studies	Black/African American	Great-grandparents and beyond	Yes

The four themes that emerged from the first research question, regarding a sense of belonging, was reported by the participants as academic integration, social integration, support from previous relationships (such as friends and family), and social capital and an understanding of the college environment, which meant they knew the appropriate resources to ask people at the university to assist them when needed. Both the African American and African Caribbean participants discussed support from their academic advisors and faculty to recommend the types of experiences they needed to help them integrate into the university.

African Caribbean participant, Dash, stated with excitement:

> Okay, so I was talking to my advisor for Criminal Justice, and she was just saying, "Oh, did you play any sports?" Because she knows my sister and my aunt, so I was like, "Oh, well, I played soccer in high school." Then she was like, "Really? Well, I'm friends with the coach. Let me talk to him." Then they called each other and then she was like, "Go over to his office. He wants to speak to you." We were talking about soccer, how many years I played. Then he was like, "Okay, kid, I'm gonna send you to this and send you all this stuff. If you're interested, still, when we come back from winter break, you can start working out with us." Then from there, [I] got onto the team.

Table 4.2

Sense of Belonging of Participants

Theme	Theme	Subtheme
1	Academic Integration	• Feel like they belong in the classroom. • Investment/support from faculty and staff. • Understand the academic work and/or use resources to help when needed.
2	Social Integration	• Have friends and a social network. • Involved on campus. • Have support from peers when they need help. • Found their "place" or feel like university is home.
3	Support from Previous Relationships	• Have support from family including financial and emotional support. • Support from friends in high school who are going through similar experiences and whom they can relate to, knowing they belonged in the college environment.
4	Social Capital	• Have upper-class peers they can ask questions. • Have family members or mentors who have previously attended college and can help them throughout the process.

The participants also discussed how faculty checked up on them to make sure they understood the work and were doing well in classes. African American participant, Raphael, explained with surprise,

> My professor, last semester, for my computer programming, she would reach out to me. She would make sure I was okay. I wasn't expecting that, coming to a PWI, I got to admit. I'm glad . . . . It's here, but at most schools, I don't really know, but they (other friends) tell me it's not, really there, like the professor don't really care. They don't know your name.

The participants discussed that they developed a sense of belonging with the college through finding their faculty and staff relatable, understanding their academic work, and knowing how to use resources to help when they found their course work challenging. African Caribbean participant, David, explained,

I feel like they make it clear that they kinda want you to succeed. I mean, you're coming here to get your education. It's their job to help you, and they want to help you. It's not like they're bad people. I go to see my math professor in the library. She's on the third floor next to the tutoring center. I sometimes email her just to go and make sure that I'm doing everything correctly, even though I feel like I'm pretty sure I know what I'm doing, I just wanna go say, "Hi. I feel like I know what I'm doing, but I just wanna make sure." Just to make sure that everything is going well. Even if they feel like everything is going well, they'll sometimes just wanna check in on you randomly. I've gotten emails from some of my professors saying "Hey, you've done really well on this assignment. If you have any questions or anything, feel free to call, meet with me. Here is my work number. You already have my email. Here are my office hours." Sometimes it's really just random and, of course, if you're doing poorly, then they'll also email you sometimes as well.

There were 10 of the 12 participants interviewed who discussed a sense of academic integration with the institution, which was discovered as one of the themes for this question. Also, it is important to note here that there was no difference in the answer to this question from the two groups in the study, the African American or the African Caribbean students. African Caribbean participant, Jazz, for example, stated:

I thought that doing homework was gonna be a challenge and it, to some extent, it

kinda is, but then I realized that we have a tutoring center, and so I can get help,

and so I find it as not a challenge, just something that has to be done.

Both African American and African Caribbean participants identified social

integration as important to their sense of belonging. The African Caribbean participants

identified cultural organizations on campus as part of their social integration, as well as

support from fellow Caribbean students. The African American participants Victoria,

Raphael, Nani, and Thomas identified a challenge in finding their social integration with

the university. They felt accepted but only in certain environments, mostly related to

athletics, when they saw more students of a similar race and ethnicity that were present in

this activity. . . The sense of belonging for Raphael and Nani can best be described

through their statements about feeling like they belong but not necessarily like they are

relatable to others. Nani said, "I feel comf-ort-able to go to class and to go to sports. I

just. . . Maybe I feel comfortable, but not relatable." She also explained that while

African Caribbeans are often classified as Black, she doesn't feel the same way:

A lot of the time, Caribbean and Jamaicans and even Afro Latinas, they all

classify as Black. Not that there's a distinction, but there almost is for me, just

because I feel like you have your own heritage, your own culture, your own

values. The only thing that we have in common is the color of our skin. So, I feel

like the reason why they're grouping everyone or they'd rather be grouped is

because that's the way society has grouped us.

Nani explained that being African American is a very different experience

growing up in the United States, and she cannot relate to African Caribbean students in

the same way as her fellow African American students. Other African American students

did not share her same view. For example, African American participant, Asia explained

the benefit of the Black student organization on campus for her:

> We just talked about recent things that happened. Like, "What do you think about
>
> school shooting?" We talked about Black Panther, we went to go see it, and talk
>
> about Donald Trump, and all the stuff like that. They give facts about Black
>
> history a long time ago, and we try to figure out, "do you feel like Black people
>
> are being more in society now, or are they still the same?" Talk about stuff like
>
> that.

Asia further identified that all Black students are seen as similar, so the

organizations are helpful in her finding like-minded people as herself. The participants

seemed to find it easier to identify their sense of belonging with a PWI if they went to a

predominately White high school, such as Asia, while Nani attended a predominately

Black high school. Out of the six African American students interviewed, five discussed

having a negative sense of belonging with the institution at points during their first year

at the college. Most of the statements related to African American students' negative

sense of belonging was related to the lack of diversity on campus. Victoria explained that

she wished the institution was more diverse, "I just feel like, I wish I had more people to

relate more about my experience, because only handful of us that I feel like I'm able to

talk to." A few other students shared the same thought, including Raphael, who was

looking forward to getting involved on campus but explained that the Black student

organization on campus did not provide what he was hoping for:

I went to the booth. They really just rubbed me the wrong way. I felt like they

were just looking to make it lit, or whatever, like lit, or have fun, and I really

wasn't looking for that. I was looking for other intellectuals I could learn from.

Not discrediting them, because they probably are intellectuals, but I'm looking for

something where I would be invested like that. Like we're always meeting up,

always talking. This and that . . . . They (Black student organization) rubbed me

the wrong way. I didn't feel like I was getting it from them.

Raphael explained that he felt lost after he knew this venue was not a network for him. It

took him longer to develop his sense of belonging and find his niche. Nani shared her

insight into why she felt a lack of belonging, which was related to her inability to act as

she wants to but more as to what is expected based on the people around her:

I think it's just the matter of fitting in. The fact of like . . . some people are not,

how do I say it? Maybe it's me. I take a mindfulness class right now. So, it's

making me very culturally aware. It's making me aware of my cultural biases. I

feel like some people should take that class, because a lot of people, they aren't

aware of some of the comments that they make. Even if it's unconscious, they

don't realize it. I don't know. I'm also, because of where I grew up, it's like

sometimes I have reactions to the way people say things or the things that people

say, and I have to stay in character. So, then that's how I try to be.

Most of the African American students went to predominately Black high schools

prior to attending college. Four African American students talked about attending

multiple high schools and that changing high schools changed their ability to be prepared

and actually go to college. Raphael explained changing high school helped him, even

though the high school was not much better than his previous school, people took an interest in him and he developed mentors:

> I had some male mentors in high school, Mr. Smith; he was one of my teachers. There was other guys, Mr. Porter. There was other teachers, Mr. Jesse. They talked about college, because they knew I was different from the rest, and they really wanted me to go to college so yeah . . . . You know you're Black, you know your percentages are lower. It was embedded in all of our conversations, so I guess, yeah, but I'm already well aware of that, and he was too. He went to PWI. He went to HBCU, so he knew the differences between both, he knew all the stats. He was really focused on helping us get to college.

The participants were able to identify support from faculty, staff, and peers as giving them a sense of belonging for African American and African Caribbean students and the desire to remain at the university. The participants felt like they belonged in a classroom, due to the investment and support from faculty and staff. While the interactions with people seemed the most important for these participants, understanding the academic work and/or to know how to use resources to help when needed were also very important. Socially, if the participants felt like they had friends and a social network, and they felt a sense of belonging to the university.

African Caribbean student, Aaliyah, explained that she had a sense of belonging with the university because she had friends, and she helped plan the events on campus, but she did not think she would graduate from the private university:

> I don't think it has anything to do with other people. I think it's just me. I feel like the campus is really pertaining to the area itself. There's not a lot that I can do. I

can take the train to (local city) and stuff like that, but it's like I would be more

satisfied if I could take the shuttle to like, a clothing store or something, not like a

boutique, because there's a boutique out there, but it's like a . . . . It's not a well-

known . . . . You know, those name-brand-type stores.

Based on Aaliyah's view, the amount of activities available on campus and things to do

in the general area, in some areas, hindered the intent to graduate, even if the participant

had a sense of belonging with the students. That being said, the students that were

involved and engaged on campus, including attendance at events and student

organizations, felt that there was ample opportunities to get involved and therefore had a

greater sense of belonging. Asia explained how her roommates complained about there

being not enough to do on campus, but how she disagreed and integrated quickly,

compared to the other students she lived with on campus:

When I go to meetings and stuff, and go do stuff, they (roommates) sometimes

don't even want to come, I have to go by myself, so when I go by myself, I end up

meeting people that I can talk to in the meeting or in the club or whatever I'm

doing.

She went on to further to explain:

Yeah. I feel like they have a lot of things for you to do and meet people. I also

feel like, since we're not mean, or anything, or discouraging anybody from being

themselves. I feel like we can literally do whatever we want and be whoever we

want.

In addition to the sense of belonging on campus, having support from family, high

school, or college peers to ask for advice when they needed help was also an important

asset. All African Caribbean participants and five African American participants identified that the support of peers at the institution helped them develop a sense of belonging. African Caribbean participant, Dash, explained the influence an upper-class student had in her getting involved on campus, "if she wasn't talking about getting involved, I would never got involved." African American participant, Asia, explained how an orientation leader she made a connection with helped her:

> She wasn't my orientation leader, but I talked to her one time, and she was like, "Hey, what are you doing?" She's like, "Oh, I have some friends that would love to hang out with you." She brought me over to these girls, and we went to the football game together and everything. We're not friends now, but when we see each other, we say hi and everything. I was just like, "aw, thanks," because I was awkward.

While the students may have expressed not having family motivate them to go to college, all the participants identified having support from family, including financial and emotional support, that reminded them they belonged at the university. African American participant, Nani, explained,

> Every day, my grandma will call me. She's like, "How's school going? How's your nursing classes?" My grandpa, he'll always be like, "Do you need anything? Do you have all your books or anything?" Even though he doesn't have a job right now, he still tries to make sure that I have everything that I need for school, because they want me to be great.

African Caribbean participant, Jazz, explained that moral support was the best thing his family could provide to him:

I feel like family moral support is the easiest thing they can do. Very effective, and you just have to recognize that family will do anything. My mom, literally, said "I am three and a half hours away. If you call me at 1:00 in the morning saying you're hurt, I will drive up three and a half hours to come get you." They're not gonna abandon you.

Research question 2. How do the cultures of African American and African Caribbean students contribute to the motivation for completion of a bachelor's degree? Through the interviews, three themes emerged that the students described as their motivation for attending college. Table 4.3 provides the themes and associated subthemes that emerged from the participants.

Table 4.3

Motivation for Attending College

Theme	Theme	Subtheme
1	Family Influence	Family as motivation to attend college
		Motivated by having to pay for college
2	Socioeconomic Status	Motivated to attend college to get out of the systematic cycle of racism or to prove it to those that said they couldn't do it or they weren't "college material."
		Motivation based on being successful/having a better life upon graduate, better than their parents.
3	Value of Education	Motivation driven by internal rewards.
		Value of education, learning expertise, and college experience motivation to attend.
		High school as a means for them to learn the value of a college education and help support them throughout the application and decision-making process.

The first major theme of *family influence* was expressed, particularly among all of the African Caribbean participants interviewed. They expressed that their family motivated them to attend college and want to earn their bachelor's degree. African Caribbean participant, Abigail, explained what motivated her to attend college:

Mainly my parents, though. My grandparents, my grandfather, especially, because my grandmother passed, but my grandfather kind of pushes my sister and I to keep going just the same way he pushed his two daughters, my aunt, and my mom. And so, it's kind of like a legacy, like, just keep it going for now.

While five out of six African American participants expressed support from their parents to keep them motivated, their parents may not have been the initial motivation to go to college, but instead to stay there. The motivation came from being the first in their family to graduate from college with a 4-year degree. African American participants,

such as, Nani said, "It's literally just that. I constantly say, "I have to make her (mom) happy. I have to make her (mom) proud." Raphael expressed the same feeling , "I just want to make everybody happy, keep everybody proud. That pretty much is it."

African Caribbean participants expressed being further motivated by having to pay for college. They said having to pay for college versus going to public school caused them to want to do better academically. African Caribbean participant David explained, "A lot of times I just feel bad they have to pay that much money so it makes me really try hard to do good at grades." One African American participant, Thomas, also shared a similar sentiment by stating, "It makes me feel like I need to . . . oh, this is a good thing though. It pushes me to make sure I'm doing good in all of my classes because there's money involved." The other five African American participants did not discuss paying for college being a motivation to do well.

Socioeconomic status was an important theme that the participants spoke about; specifically, the four African American participants, two of which were from a low socioeconomic background and who spoke about their motivation to attend college so they could get out of the systematic cycle of racism. Thomas explained:

> Not a lot of people from my town make it this far at all. There's a few. Like, I'm
> one of the few that go really for. It's either they don't go anywhere or they go
> really far. So, I'm happy I'm far.

Victoria explained that she needed to prove it to those who said she could not do it or she was not *college material*, "Absolutely, yeah that, and a lot of my family are not educated, so I just don't want to fall in that same continuous cycle of being stagnant for the rest of my life."

The other major theme that emerged in all participants discussion, except for one, was that the motivation to attend college was based on being successful or having a better life upon graduation, better than their parents. African Caribbean participant, Jazz, explained:

> College is something serious. It's something that people go to when they want to, or if they can, to further pursue their future and further follow their "dreams" if they find the desire to and try their best to make a living. 'Cause some people go out, they get their degree, they get an apartment, and then they get a job and that's . . . they're living their life and they're earning money.

African Caribbean participant, Aaliyah, explained what college could do for her:

> Being successful. I want to be so successful that I don't have to struggle to get what I want. I don't want to say I need to buy this and have to wait to buy it, and then make money, and then I can go get it. I want to, like, get it when I want to get it, not have to wait 2 weeks, wait for my paycheck to come in, pay the light bill, pay the gas bill, and then I get what I want. I want to, like, be able to get what I want when I want to get it.

The final theme that motivated the participants to want to achieve a college degree is the value of an education. The participants expressed that to get an education was being driven by internal rewards. All six of the African American participants discussed an intrinsic motivation that pushed them beyond any external motivators. Thomas explained, "I think I'm my first motivation. I want to be successful, so I want to push myself to do what nobody in my family has done."

Eight African American participants and three African Caribbean participants identified the value of an education and the opportunity for college being discussed with them as a motivation for them to attend college and want to achieve a bachelor's degree. African American student, Kurt, explained his motivation to learn what he is interested in being different from high school and motivating him to get a college degree:

> I personally enjoy learning new things, especially on subjects that I actually have an interest in. And I knew that in college I had a lot more control over what I learned, especially, like, you can decide your major and you get to pick your own classes. You have a lot more freedom in what you're actually learning.

The participants identified their high schools' involvement in college including discussing the value of a college education and helping support them throughout the application and decision process was significant to their socioeconomic status. How participants identified their socioeconomic status and racial breakdown of their high school had an influence on this particular theme. The participants coming from a lower socioeconomic life or were from predominately Black high schools expressed little conversation or help to navigate the process to apply and attend college. Three African American participants explained how they changed high schools in their junior or senior year to school that were more affluent, and they saw a distinct change in the focus on college attendance. Raphael explained how his principal had low goals for him and other students at his high school:

> Our principal, not so much. Our principal was focused on graduation rate. He didn't really care about . . . his big thing my year was, we have a 98% graduation rate. His thing wasn't how many people are going to college . . . . His motto was

"we prepare you, Ram Ready" being prepared for something; for college, life, and education. Something like that, but it really wasn't preparing us.

Victoria and Kurt both explained how changing high schools for their senior year allowed them to go to college. The new high schools they attended spoke about college. Victoria explained the difference in her two high school experiences:

> The focus on education has shifted, it's more so about test scores and trying so hard for the students to make the test scores and not about retaining knowledge. But this last high school, we'd go to school at like nine-ish and then stay until 8 o'clock night. That was enough for me because they were just so focused on my education and me catching up on everything that I had missed and just preparing me to go so far for college, being away from my parents, which was another big thing.

Victoria explained that her high school emphasized to her the importance of going to college in the Northeast and getting a good education while her family and other peers just wanted to graduate high school.

Kurt explained how, when we started going to a predominately White high school in an affluent area, it made a big difference:

> My last high school was so "college, college, college, college." Even the teachers went to Cornell, the University of Penn, or Brown. There were a lot of legacies or double legacies that graduated with me from Ivy League schools. So, it's not just the teachers, but also the students, as well as the parents, [who] were very college focused. Whenever you were in the school, especially as a senior or a junior, you only heard the word college—even if you didn't want to go to college. If you

wanted to go to trade school, or something like that, you were still hearing the word "college" because it was on all the announcements, in all the assemblies, it was . . . they had like TVs on all the morning announcements, "college." It was very in your face. You couldn't forget because they reminded you every 20 minutes.

Kurt further explained that he educated students at his old high school about applications and financial aid processes because they did not share any of that information with the students at his previous high school.

The cultures of the African American and African Caribbean students contribute to their motivation for the completion of a bachelor's degree differently. First, African Caribbean student participants identified their family as motivation to attend college more often than African American students. African Caribbean participant, Avery, explained:

My family always pushed me to do my best, so I always wanted to get good grades and stuff like that, even though . . . even a "B," I would not settle for a "B." I would like be like, "Oh, can I do it over so I can get an "A"? Stuff like that. I [was] always just trying harder.

The African Caribbean students also identified being motivated by having to pay for college, making them want to do better academically. They identified valuing the money their parents were spending on college and wanted to do well for their family because they were spending the money on them. More of the African American students identified their motivation to attend college was to get out of the systematic cycle of

racism or to prove to those who said they could not do it or they were not *college material* that they were, indeed, in college.

Both the African American and African Caribbean participants discussed that their motivation to attend college was based on being successful or having a better life upon graduation—lives better than their parents. All of the African American participants discussed that their motivation to get an education was being driven by internal rewards, but internal rewards were not a significant motivator for the African Caribbean participants. The African American participants further explained their view through the value they placed on education compared to their peers. Many of the African American students explained that their high schools did not discuss college much, especially among the self-identified low-income students. If they did discuss college in high school, it was mostly about 2-year community college programs and not 4-year institutions. The African Caribbean students identified higher occurrences of their high schools discussing the value of a college education and providing support throughout the application and decision process.

Research question 3. What barriers inhibit African American and African Caribbean students from completing their college experience? Through the interviews, four themes emerged that the students described as barriers for them to attend and complete a college degree. Table 4.4 provides the themes and associated subthemes that emerged from the participants answers.

The first theme that the participants explained as barriers to completing a college degree included students or their family members have not having any negative associations with dropping out of college. African American participant, Thomas,

explained that if it was not for his intrinsic motivation, he may have left college. He explained:

>There was one point when she [his Mom] was, like, "Do you want to drop out?" And when she said that I was, like, "No." And I snapped out of it. But she wouldn't have a problem with it, if I really needed to.

Other African American participants explained that they were not willing to drop out, but their families would not stop them if they had wanted to do so. The African Caribbean students, on the other hand, expressed the disappointment their families would have shared at the thought of them leaving college. African Caribbean participant, Abigail, explained:

>I know my parents would be upset just because, financially, college isn't cheap and they've done a lot for me and my sister . . . . So, it's like why not? I understand, like, the workload is tough and everything, but so are you, kind of thing. They did it so, like . . . and they would always tell me, "City College was rough, and you guys are in private schools now, so it's a lot easier, so enjoy it, but at the same time, realize what you have, but at the same time, don't lose motivation," kind of thing.

The African American participants discussed lack of support and understanding of the college process from their families, including statements such as "college is a scam." Five African American participants discussed the lack of support and understanding from their families of the college process. Asia explained, "I feel like he's [Dad] one of those people that are, like, 'College is just a scam, blah, blah, blah.' They weren't encouraging me to go, they were just saying all the bad stuff that can happen."

Table 4.4

Barriers to College

Theme Number	Theme	Subtheme
1	Precollege Knowledge and Mindset about College	Family members supported dropping out of college.
		Lack of support and understanding of the college process from their families including statements such as "college is a scam."
		Lack of an individual to understand the college process/experience and not having anyone to help them navigate it.
2	Racial Bias	Race of majority of the high school affecting their conversations about college.
		Barrier of the college experience is their race.
		Social integration or connection due to race.
		Need to change behavior, been told by their parents how they need to act differently, be treated differently or have to accommodate their behavior to not be treated like the "angry Black women" or "scary Black man" for the same actions as a White student.
3	Financial	Financing college regular concern or barrier to their success at college.
4	High School Preparedness for College	Lack of academic preparation or skills were a barrier for them to be successful in college.
		Lack of soft skills including problem solving, ability to ask for help, time management, self-confidence, and abilities to be independent.

Only one African Caribbean student expressed the same concern. Avery stated that her friends and families' dialogue of college: "That's what everyone says, to be honest. There's debate now, 'Is college a scam?' and stuff like that, but I don't think it's a scam. It just depends."

The participants identified one barrier of college being the lack of an individual who understands the college process/experience and not having anyone to help them navigate it. African Caribbean participant, Dash, explained that while she had support from a mentor that helped her get through the process, her Mom had been a barrier in her staying at the university, and she had made it difficult for her to navigate the processes like financial aid verification:

> Because she's, again, from Jamaica, she doesn't really understand either. When someone's talking to her, she gets frustrated because she doesn't understand how much she's supposed to about things like that. But we did it last semester for the fall, so hopefully it can be a little easier. It does upset her that she has to do this because she's, like, "Oh, you should have went to a public school or a SUNY school. This wouldn't have happened at a SUNY school."

African American participant, Victoria, discussed how hard it was to not be able to have the support of her parents about the college experience, "I can't really talk to my parents about it because they don't understand, and it bothers me." Victoria further explained that her parents were supportive of what she does, but they are always asking her if she wants to leave and go home.

The second theme that created barriers for the participants was related to the racial bias that occurred while they were at college or around the area right outside the college. As mentioned earlier, the African American participants expressed a lack of social integration, noting that not all Black students are the same, and the others felt that. Nani best expressed how race does not always connect students:

The few Black people that are here, it's like I try to connect with them, even though we're still different, because a lot of people are from New York, and I'm from Jersey. I'm from a very dangerous part of Jersey. So, I have a different mindset than a lot of people. I set my goals really high, so that's also a difference.

Nani had a challenge of finding like-minded individuals who shared the same ethnicity as her.

The participants discussed their high school experience and the ethnicity of the majority of the high school students affecting their conversations about college. The African American participants recalled being told that they "needed to overcome their Blackness." Asia explained her family telling her to be better than her White counterparts:

"You're Black, so you have to [do] better than the rest. You have to at least try to be like the rest." I felt, like, okay if I come here, I can get a bachelor's degree in criminal justice, and I can get [a] JD in law.

Victoria explained how she perceived that in order to succeed as a Black female, she had to work harder for faculty:

Just focusing that you're a Black student, so you have to put in more work, and that's just another . . . . They're not keeping on with me now, but you have to put in more work, not because you're dumber or whatever, but you have to prove yourself more.

Nani explained the barriers of being a Black student at a PWI:

If you're White here, you don't have to worry about being accepted. You don't have to worry about it, because that's [the] majority. So, you fit in with the

majority. It's always going to be the popular vote rather. So, it's like when you

come here and you're of African American or Jamaican or any kind of colored or

even Indian, if you come here; it's almost like people know that you're going to

be there, but it's just a matter of comfort. It's almost like sticking a blue sticky

note on a white wall, and then just expecting it to blend in or just expecting it to

camouflage. I don't know. I've always been the kind of person to stay true to my

roots without really, I don't want to use the word assimilating, but assimilating.

African Caribbean participant, Avery, explained how people look at her strangely

because she looks different than the White students on campus:

I really thought there was something on my face. Even if I catch them staring at

me, they will still stare at you. It's just kind of weird. Then, when I go back home,

like, "Oh, yeah. People don't do that here." I feel like it's just here. They just do

that or like somewhere else upstate.

Aaliyah shared a similar sentiment to Avery's, when asked if, due to feeling different, she

would prefer to go to college elsewhere she said:

I feel like no matter where I go, it would be the same thing. Not necessarily . . .

hmm . . . I feel like it doesn't matter where you go, you would always find people

that don't like you because of your skin color, and you will find people that like

you because of your skin color. You would always find a bunch of people you can

get comfortable with, and you would always find people that don't like you. It

doesn't matter where you go, it's just always going to be like that. So, no. No.

That just answered my question.

Raphael explained that despite the looks and being treated differently, he did not feel bad about himself:

> I don't feel bad about myself, because . . . if you're going to look at me like that, there's nothing I can do, unless you want me to get on my knees and beg for you to not look at me like that. Of course, I can be your friend, but then in that instance, I will only be your friend, so you don't look at me like a monster. I know people who have looked at me like that. Like a monster. It depends.

The participants discussed the need to change behavior, how they have been told by their parents how they need to act differently, be treated differently, or have to accommodate their behavior to not be treated like the "angry Black women" or "scary Black man" for the same actions as a White student. Nani explained,

> Sometimes ignorance is so overpowering that you just want to say something back, just so people won't say it against someone else. I know that I can't, because a lot of the professors here, especially if it happens in a class setting or even in a public setting where there are White people around, if you are doing that, especially to a White person, it almost looks like all they see is the angry Black person.

The African American participants identified financing college as a regular concern or barrier to their success at college. The African Caribbean participants did not identify this as a barrier for them. African American participant, Asia, explained her concern but she was aware that she had her family as a safety net:

> Yeah. I think about it a lot, like, this is literally so much money. That's why I wanted to go to community college. But my mom, I feel like she's the type of

person to be like, "Don't worry about it, it's fine. Just go, just go, do it.

Eventually, we'll pay it off." I'm just like, ugh, I literally overthink everything.

It's ridiculous. I think about it a lot.

Kurt, on the other hand, explained how the financial barrier of affording college may prevent him from finishing college,

Not 100%, no. You know, I do always have these doubts that like, you know,

what if my financial aid doesn't go through? What if I can't afford to pay off this

loan? If I told you that I don't think those, I'd be lying to you. Of course, I'm

stressed out that I might not be able to finish in 4 years, or I might have to take a

break in order to get the money to go back to school. But . . . . You know what?

It's like, whatever I have to do. I'm here to learn, I'm here to get a degree, so I'm

going to do that.

The African American participants identified lack of academic preparation or skills were a barrier for them to be successful in college. Specifically, Raphael discussed how underprepared he was in Math, "My math, I'm doing terrible in math. I was not prepared for math, I could tell you that. I never had to study in high school. I have to study now. Fall, I didn't. I failed math." Victoria explained how the education she received before she changed high schools during her senior year did not prepare her for the academics of college, "The focus on education has shifted, it's more so about test scores and trying so hard for the students to make the test scores and not about retaining knowledge."

The participants identified a barrier of the college experience to be their lack of soft skills including problem solving, ability to ask for help, time management, self-

confidence, and their ability to be independent. African Caribbean student, David explained that some of his biggest barriers in college were soft skills,

> Time management, I guess, is a big one. Hmm . . . Being in high school, the teachers always say study this for a test and give you notes. For nursing, for lectures, they just tell you the lectures and then, bam, there's a quiz. I'm so used to, "Here's a study sheet.," or stuff like that. Especially the first 3 months, it was like, yeah . . . crazy. Basically, I didn't know how to study on my own. I almost ended up failing my anatomy class because of it.

The barriers that the participants discussed that hindered them from completing their college degree seemed to be related more to socioeconomic status than their ethnicity, but there were some similarities between the African American and African Caribbean participants. They discussed lack of support and understanding of the college process from their families. They also explained how their parents encouraged them to leave college or to come home. The African American participants discussed their parents not expressing any negative consequences associated with them dropping out of college. More of the African American participants discussed not having an individual who understood the college experience, and they could not rely on family to help them navigate the process, but instead, they encouraged them to leave if they wanted to. The participants discussed having an easier transition to college and the racial differences because they attended a predominately White high school. Both the African American and African Caribbean participants discussed racial incidences that affected their feelings of acceptance and belonging, which made them second guess their experience and whether they belonged at the university. Although, based on discussing their experiences

with peers from other colleges, they felt that it was not different elsewhere, and in order to achieve the best education, it was worth staying at that institution. The African American participants, especially, discussed the need to change behavior to be treated the same as their White counterparts or not to be labeled based on their race.

The barriers that the participants identified tended to be related more to precollege characteristics, such as high school experience and socioeconomic status, and they included financing college. Some student decided it was worth it for the best job upon graduation, but others identified the cost of college as something that they thought about on a regular basis. These responses were not based directly on their ethnicity, but socioeconomic status appeared to be a factor and, more specifically, how they were funding their education. The participants identified lack of academic preparation or skills as a barrier for them to be successful in college, specifically, a barrier of the college experience was their lack of soft skills including problem solving, time management, self-confidence, and ability to be independent. African Caribbean participant, David, explained that time management was his biggest barrier to being successful in college. David described:

> Time management, I guess, is a big one. Hmm . . . Being in high school, the teachers always say, "study this for a test" and give you notes. For nursing, for lectures, they just tell you the lectures and then, bam, there's a quiz. I'm so used to, "Here's a study sheet.," or stuff like that. Especially the 3 three months, it was like, yeah, . . . crazy. Basically, I didn't know how to study on my own. I almost ended up failing my anatomy class because of it. The lowest you can get is a 77 and I think I got a 78 or something like that.

African Caribbean participant, Aaliyah, explained how lack self-confidence was a hindrance to her college experience:

> I prevent myself from doing certain things because I think people are going to say, "Why would she say that? She's not very smart." But that has nothing to do with race. That was how I was in high school and stuff like that. I would prevent myself from doing it just by overthinking.

> Several participants explained how having independence was a difficult barrier.

African Caribbean participant, Avery, explained how having independence made it hard for her to find a social network that shared the same values as her:

> I just never thought that I would have trouble finding the right people, because I always give people other advice, like, "Oh, that's not the type of person you should hang out with." But there's no one here looking out for me, telling me that's not the type that I should hang out with.

Jazz explained her shock of thinking she was independent and knew how to do everything to meet all of her basic needs, but taking for granted the things her family did for her:

> Being independent is a big, big thing here. Even me, who has been taught to be independent since I was young in my household, because my parents were smart. They raised me to be independent when I can, but to also ask for help when I need it. Even me, I felt like it was sometimes hard to remember everything that I'm given. I have to remember . . . it's easy to remember when's class, but sometimes it's hard to remember that you haven't eaten today. I try my best to eat at least two meals a day. Three meals a day was a thing in high school, but sometimes it's

hard. I try to eat at least two meals a day, and if I can't get a meal, get a protein

bar or something to make sure that I'm getting the energy I have to go through the

day 'cause it's not healthy if I don't eat.

Summary of Results

The results indicate that the African American and African Caribbean participants

experienced their first year of college differently, and some found it easier to develop a

sense of belonging than others. Overall, three major themes were established throughout

this study to explain the lived experiences among the African American and African

Caribbean students, as their reason for sense of belonging and retention through their first

year of college: (a) sense of belonging through academic and social integration, (b)

motivation for attending college, (c) barriers of precollege experiences and finances, and

(d) differences between the African American and African Caribbean participants.

Sense of belonging through academic and social integration. The African

American and African Caribbean participants described having developed a sense of

belonging based around their academic and social integration at the university.

Specifically, the students felt academically integrated if they were taken seriously by

professors, if professors cared about them, if they were able to find academic support,

and if they felt comfortable contributing to class discussions. If the participants became

socially integrated, they found like-minded friends or friends of similar backgrounds on

campus, they were included in informal activities, and they found their place on campus

through campus organizations, attendance at events, or some other social network. Both

the African American and African Caribbean students were more likely to develop a

sense of belonging if they developed a relationship with upper-class peers who were able

to answer questions for them and further integrate them into the university. The integration with upper-class students seemed to occur more with the African Caribbean participants than the African American participants. Having social capital from family members or mentors helped the participants through the process of getting to college and transitioning within the first few weeks, when those supportive individuals provided the participants with the necessary social capital so they immediately felt like they belonged. Those participants that did not have the additional support and social capital took longer to create a sense of belonging with the college. The African Caribbean students spoke of having more social capital prior to college than the African American students. While some of the African American students were able to identify social capital in high school, once they graduated, they seemed to lose those relationships.

The participants also spoke about having been supported by their families financially and through emotional support that helped to remind them when they were unsure, that they belonged at the university. Support from friends from high school, who were going through similar experiences, also helped the participants to understand that they belonged in the college environment. Data from this study show that the African Caribbean students appeared to have had more friends that they relied on were also attending college and therefore had similar experiences. The African American participants seemed to rely more on peers who were immediately available at the college in which they were currently enrolled to help them feel supported.

Motivation for attending college. Regardless of their ethnic identity, the African American and African Caribbean participants all expressed that their motivation for attending college was related to their wish for a better life than that of their families.

All six African American participants identified intrinsic motivation as the reason for attending college, while most African American participants discussed support from their families, once they were in college, some had to use their own motivation to overcome feelings of negativity from their support system about attending college. The influence of family motivated the African Caribbean students to attend college. The motivation for having to pay for college resulted in most of the participants intending to do better give that they were paying for the experience. This added motivation to ensure they did not their waste money. Socioeconomic status played a significate role in motivating the students to attend college to get out of the systematic cycle of racism or to prove to those who doubted them that they could make it to college. Finally, motivation for attending college came from those who saw a value in education. The African American students expressed the value they placed on education being different compared to their high school peers who did not make it to college and therefore continued to motivate the African American students to achieve a 4-year degree.

Barriers of precollege experiences and finances. While all the participants expressed wanting to achieve a 4-year degree, there were some barriers that were similar for most participants. The largest barrier for all the participants related to race. For most participants, relatability to the larger population was a barrier they needed to overcome. They needed to readjust to the idea of not seeing many people that were like them, and they had to find other ways to make connections with like-minded individuals. They also raised concerns of racial bias and the need to change their behavior in order to be accepted. While these were barriers for both the African American and African Caribbean participants, the African American participants seemed to have a larger barrier

around this idea. Although the African American participants discussed race being a larger barrier to their sense of belonging and retention at the institution than African Caribbean students, nine out of 12 of the African Caribbean participants also discussed it as a barrier. The African American participants further found they could not relate to their fellow African Caribbean students and therefore had an even smaller group to try to find and identify with. The African American participants discussed clear differences between the African American and African Caribbean students.

The participants discussed that finding students who shared a similar race or ethnicity to them was vital to them feeling supported at the institution. Some participants mentioned that they were unable to identify with faculty or staff who shared a similar ethnicity to them, so they relied on upper-class students or support from college friends of similar races. While not all families helped motivate the students to attend college, all the participants discussed how their families were integral to their support while at college.

The participants discussed other barriers, including lack of support and understanding from their families about the college process, which resulted in their families' support being dropped when things became difficult. This was especially true for the African American participants. There was a lack of academic preparation and soft skills that created barriers for the participants especially those from lower-income areas. Self-perceptions regarding academics, peer relations, and emotional stability strongly affected the aspects of college adjustment for both the African American and African Caribbean students. The participants discussed how the barriers of lack of soft skills and academics could be overcome through the investment of faculty and staff.

The differences between the African American and African Caribbean

participants. The African Caribbean students in this study appeared to have more motivation to attend college; have more support systems, including social capital; and they found it easier to develop a sense of belonging than the African American students. Although this appears to be the case, socioeconomic status in conjunction with their high school experience appears to play a significant role for both African American and African Caribbean students. The main difference in the findings was not directly related to the ethnic identity of students but more so their educational experience prior to attending college. If the students attended a predominately Black high school, they tended to have a more difficult time transitioning to a PWI—not just because of the social environment, but they seemed to be less prepared for academic work. Based on these findings, there are some clear similarities and differences between these two populations that need to be addressed to ensure their success in achieving a 4-year college degree. Chapter 5 details the implication of the findings, the limitations of the research, the recommendations, and the conclusions.

Chapter 5: Discussion

Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to discuss the findings from this research study in greater detail and to provide insight and give recommendations to faculty, staff, peers, and university officials of PWIs on how to change their professional policies and practices to provide welcoming environments to African American and African Caribbean students that create a sense of belonging for them. This chapter also includes the limitations of this study and recommendations for future research, which are based on creating further understanding of the experiences of students from various demographic populations who have successfully enrolled, retained, and persisted toward achieving a bachelor's degree.

The objective of this study was to gain insight and compare the lived experiences of African American and African Caribbean students at a PWI during their first year of college. The researcher gathered information from the experiences of the participants by asking about precollege characteristics, experiences during their first year of college, academic and social motivation to attend college, racial environment, and sense of belonging. The overall objective of this study was achieved and it is consistent with the literature presented in Chapter 2. This study provides colleges and universities with pertinent information regarding the difference in the experiences of African American and African Caribbean students. Their experiences provide an understanding for what

college and universities should do to positively impact experiences and retention rates of both the African American and African Caribbean students.

Implications of Findings

This section is the culmination of the three theoretical frameworks used to guide the study, the literature that supports the study, and the data analysis presented in Chapter 4. There were four implications: (a) examine the differences in the true lived experience of students with different interpretations and experiences that influence how they navigate the college experience, (b) examine the current demographics of faculty and staff members and the potential impact of the lack of Black faculty and staff on African American and African Caribbean student success, (c) maximize the investment in African American and African Caribbean success to enhance their academic and social integration into a sense of belonging, and (d) examine the high school experiences and other precollege characteristics that helped the students successfully transition to a PWI. These implications provide college and universities with insights on how to address the needs of African American and African Caribbean students and to ensure academic and social integration and keep intact their sense of belonging and retention at PWIs.

The differences in the lived experience of African American and African Caribbean students. As this study examined the similarities and differences of the lived experiences of African American and African Caribbean students, many of these experiences were consistent with Ogbu's (1990) cultural ecological theory. Ogbu's theory explained the way underrepresented individuals see the world and behave in it as a result. His theory focuses on the environment of underrepresented people in the United States and how that influences the way they interact within the culture that has been

created. Ogbu's cultural ecological theory explains why different underrepresented groups adapt differently to the same social, economic, and political systems; why they learn differently; and why they achieve at different rates (Ogbu, 1990). Specifically, he addressed the status into which these populations arrive in the United States. The African American populations are often described as involuntary minorities, meaning they did not choose to be in this country but, instead, were involuntarily migrated into this country (Ogbu & Simmons, 1998).

The African Caribbean students differ and are often identified as voluntary minorities and immigrants, meaning they or their families made the decision to migrate to the United States, and they understand their role as a minority (Ogbu & Simmons, 1998). African American students often feel like the subject of racism and discrimination, whereas first-generation African Caribbean students may feel they are less subjected to racism and discrimination (Griffin et al., 2016). This finding is true in the case of the African American students in this study who stated that they were not being able to relate to the experiences of the African Caribbean students because their live experiences were so different.

Recent studies have shown that Black students find their sense of belonging through having organizations related to their race and ethnicity (Grier-Reed, 2010; Guiffrida, 2003). While this was true in the case of this study, as well, it seems that the African Caribbean students identified more with the cultural organizations on campus than the African American participants. The African American participants seemed to be looking for more content and support for real-world issues in the student organizations, and when they could not find them, they went looking into other areas with which they

could identify, such as athletics. The African American participants explained that even if they were not on an athletic team, they saw and were able to interact with more people that looked like them while in those arenas, so it was there they felt a sense of belonging.

The African American students described how the African Caribbean students had a different mindset from them. The African American students discussed how they fought to get into college, while many African Caribbean students, on the other hand, spoke of their parents always telling them they were going to attend college. The African American students described how they set higher goals than their African Caribbean counterparts because they needed to make sure they succeeded and got a college degree.

Astin's (1984) theory of student involvement described the importance of student involvement in college. He suggested that involvement is the investment of energy into the college experience. The findings of this study show that this may be a barrier for the African American students. When the African American students attempted to get involved with organizations to help them navigate college and find like-minded individuals, they were unable to find them in the locations that they thought would be ideal but not only did those locations have a negative correlation with their sense of belonging, but they affected the other parts of their lives including academic performance. For example, one African American participant spoke of feeling secluded in classes stating, "in all of my classrooms, no one has talked to anybody. I don't know anybody's names in any of my classes." If students do not have the ability to connect in classes and they are unable to connect outside of classes, it makes them question their investment of time in the college experience. This is a barrier colleges and universities must address to ensure retention of African American students.

Recent studies have shown that Black students find their sense of belonging through joining organizations that are related to their race and ethnicity (Grier-Reed, 2010; Guiffrida, 2003). While this was true in the case of this study, as well, it seemed that the African Caribbean students identified more with the cultural organizations on campus than the African American participants. As previously mentioned, and reiterated here for clarity, the African American participants seemed to be looking for more content and support for real-world issues in the student organizations, and when they could not find them, they went looking for other areas with which they could identify, such as athletics.

Brezinski (2016) discussed how underrepresented students, specifically Black students, and racial microaggressions, meaning every day verbal and nonverbal incidents of bias, can affect their feelings of not belonging, making it hard for them to make a connection to the university and making retention difficult throughout the first semester. This was also true in this study. While some students expressed not having a sense of belonging with the overall university, they may have found a sense of belonging with social groups or academic programs within the university that made them feel as if they belonged there. As long as the students were finding a place and were able to invest and give time to an activity, they were still invested in the university, and therefore, they were involved.

Examine the current demographics of faculty and staff members and the potential impact of the lack of Black faculty and staff on African American and African Caribbean student success. Ogbu's (1992) theory explained the importance of having role models that have *made it* for voluntary and involuntary immigrants to

especially combat the *folk stories* that may exist about it being too hard for their people to make it. Several Black students mentioned that there was a lack of role models who shared a similar ethnicity with them among the faculty and staff at the private university. One student discussed that there was one African American male that he would have liked to relate to, but that individual was too busy to take time for him. It is important for colleges and universities to examine the demographics of the faculty and staff to ensure the university is making an effort to hire employees that are similar in make up to the student population they serve. This will allow underrepresented populations to feel confident in their ability to move forward past the first year, through this support, when they may not be able to get at home for support. As noted in Chapter 4, the African American participants discussed having a lack of support among their families and their community until they entered college. While the participants spoke of having support from their families, the African American participants spoke of not having support from those with the social capital to help them navigate college. They discussed support in high school that helped them get into college, so therefore having an African American faculty or staff member in the university would fill the void that this is created when students move on from their mentor from high school. The African American students realized that support from their peers was vital. Peers from other colleges were able to reinforce that the lack of Black faculty and staff was similar everywhere, and they needed to rely on each other to ensure they were successful. Some students expressed finding other faculty and staff who were not of the same culture, but who were empathetic to them, thus validating their experience and feelings. While this was helpful, the students

in the study said they would prefer to have someone that looked like them who had similar lived experience.

Maximize the investment in African American and African Caribbean student success to enhance their academic and social integration into a sense of belonging. Tinto's (1984) theory of student departure discussed the importance of a student's integration into both the formal and informal academic and social communities of the university. PWIs must focus on creating connections in academic and social environments to create a sense of belonging for these students. Specifically, if the students felt that they were being taken seriously by the professors, the professors cared about them, they were able to find academic support, and they felt comfortable contributing to class discussion, it would help them to integrate academically into the college community. When the participants in this study became socially integrated, they found like-minded friends or individuals with similar backgrounds on campus. When they were included in informal activities and found their place on campus through campus organizations by attending events or some other social network, they felt connected to the university. With Tinto's (1984) this theory in mind, colleges and universities should focus on the specific resources for African American and African Caribbean students to support their success.

The findings of this study differed from Cunningham's (2015) study, which showed that a Black cultural center on campus was used by students as a source of general support, rather than for specific incidents of prejudice or discrimination. Except for only one student, the participants in this study did not mention the use of the Black cultural center. They found other avenues for their integration and involvement. The

117

students tended to find other students who went through similar experiences or faculty and staff with which they could relate. Cunningham's (2015) study suggested that having a Black cultural center on campus helped minimize the effects of negative racial incidents on campus, while in this study, the students found other individuals throughout campus to help them. When a racial incident occurred among the participants, they relied on their peers at the college—more than faculty, staff, or cultural centers—to support them.

The participants in this study associated family support, relationships with faculty in and out of the classroom, and involvement on campus as reasons for their success in college. Similar to Woodburn's (2011) study, some participants spoke of being the only Black student in their class or never being taught by a Black professor, yet they all spoke about feeling welcomed, despite being underrepresented in the college community. Participants in other studies expressed a feeling of loneliness, but students in this study did not identify with the same level of loneliness. While they identified the need to find like-minded people, and they may have discussed the need to make and lose friends, in order to make that happen, they never described a feeling of loneliness because they always felt that they had individuals around with whom they could relate.

Booker (2016) explained that students felt a level of loneliness while in their courses, because they did not want to always defend their race or correct misconceptions with faculty and/or students. While some students mentioned being the only student of their race in their class, it did not seem to have an overall effect on their learning experience. Only two students mentioned feeling like their race had an impact on their class experience. At no point did the students feel like they had to defend their race.

They did identify microaggressions that occurred, meaning everyday verbal and nonverbal incidents of bias, but these were unrelated to in-class instruction by professors.

Several studies have found that one of the most influential factors on African American retention rates is related to race/racism (Johnson et al., 2007; Johnson-Ahorlu, 2013; Grier-Reed, 2010; Wells, 2008). The same was true in this case, most of the African Caribbean students identified with a sense of belonging, while three students identified that they were still developing their sense of belonging. Only one student said she did not plan to graduate from the college in which she was enrolled, but it was not related to their race but, instead, it was related to the lack of activity in the local area.

Examine the high school experience and other precollege characteristics to help students successfully transition to a PWI. Based on the findings of this study, it appears that, consistent with Tinto's (1987, 1993) theory of student departure, precollege characteristics have one of the largest factors on a student's retention at a college or university. By taking time to examine a student's previous college experience and create programs, not based on their ethnicity but, instead, based on the rigor of their high school education and support systems, this study shows that this would help students successfully transition to a PWI. Gustave's (2016) study suggested that self-perceptions regarding academics, peer relations, and emotional stability can strongly affect aspects of African Caribbean students' college adjustment. The findings of this study show that this was true for the African American and African Caribbean participants. The African American students discussed being academically underprepared for college, but not as many of the African Caribbean students discussed having that concern in their transition to college. This finding seems to be related to the environment in which they received

119

their education. As Waters (1999) explained, African Caribbean students expressed that they felt academically prepared for college, which may be related to receiving their education in a predominately White community (Waters, 1999). For example, many students coming from lower-income areas or low socioeconomic status spoke of the challenge to do well in the subject of math because it seemed to be taught completely differently in high school compared to college. While schools use math placement exams to place students into courses, this may not be enough to help the schools to understand where students stand academically. These precollege characteristics often include high school GPA or class rank, which may have little meaning once the students enter college, because these rankings may not be comparable to their college or university peers. This change in academic rigor and teaching, combined with the challenge of assimilating into a PWI creates greater challenges that need greater support through academic courses and support from faculty and staff to help these students navigate these challenges.

Along with these precollege characteristics arises the motivation to attend or not complete a 4-year degree. Based on the results of this study, which are similar to the results of Morrow and Ackerman (2012), if a participant identified their motivation for attending college as being related to their personal development and betterment of their situation, the more likely they were to have returned in the fall of their sophomore year. All of the participants in this study identified that their main reason for attending college was to better their lives. They all also expressed their intention of returning for the fall semester.

Limitations

The first limitation of this study is the research methodology. This study was concerned with understanding the lived experiences of African American and African Caribbean students at a PWI in the Northeast during their first year of college. Creswell & Poth (2017) stated that qualitative research designs provide detailed descriptions of the lived experiences of the participants rather than survey completion and analyzing statistical data found in quantitative research studies. However, a qualitative research design is often regarded as not being generalizable because it is based on the lived experiences of the participants in local conditions, which may not be replicable in other settings. Therefore, the findings of this research study should not be generalized to all Black students attending PWI. However, the findings do provide additional understanding into the nature of the phenomenon.

The second limitation of this research study is not having information on the students beyond their first year of college. While the intention of all students interviewed was to return in the fall, lack of information regarding their actual actions is unavailable based on the timeline of this study.

Recommendations

The findings of this study are important for institutional administrators, student affairs professionals, and faculty because it shows the ways that the institution can further support students in their social and academic integration to the university. The following recommendations are based on the implications of the study and informed professional practices.

Understand the differences between Black students. It is important that higher-education administrators consider African American and African Caribbean students as two different entities; more important is to look at the socioeconomic and support backgrounds of their students. This study has shown that although there is some similarities, overall, the motivation, sense of belonging, and retention is different for African American and African Caribbean students, and colleges should examine precollege characteristics of all students in order to better aid them in succeeding in their first year of college. This should occur especially in gateway courses, such as English, math, and the sciences to ensure students will be successful in achieving a 4-year degree.

An understanding of college and the level of support needed was the biggest difference for the African American and African Caribbean students. The African American students seemed to derive most of their social capital, meaning relationships that provide support and assistance in each social situation, from their high school supports, but it was more informal, meaning it was not a school-based program, but instead, a teacher took an interest in them, and as a result, they ended up graduation from high school. Those supports were sometime little to no longer existent when they went away to college. The African Caribbean students were able to gain much of their social capital from family and friends, so that the relationships continued after graduation from high school. Therefore, colleges and universities need to develop supports for African American students upon entering college to ensure they continue to have the social capital they need to succeed and graduate.

The racial climate also appeared different for African American and African Caribbean students. The African Caribbean students, while having some similar

challenges along with the African American students, seemed to adjust better to the PWI than the African American students. The African American students had a harder time identifying with the African Caribbean students, and they were are looking specifically for students who have very similar backgrounds to themselves. Therefore, it is vital that the resources available are different for African American and African Caribbean students. By providing the African American students with a clear time and space to come together and develop relationships with others who are similar to them, it will help create a sense of belonging earlier on in their first year of college.

Accommodate students' needs based on precollege characteristics. This study shows that the number of African American students who successfully transitioned from high school to college was smaller than for the African Caribbean students. This study shows that the academic experience in high school greatly impacted their transition and academic integration at the university. Precollege characteristics, such as academic rigor of high school, teaching styles, prevalence of students attending college, and discussion of college, greatly influenced the ability for the students to handle the changes and transitional issues of college. Student-facing faculty and staff need to ensure they understand the difference in the experiences of students from predominantly Black schools to be able to navigate within PWIs. Conversely, faculty and staff need to understand the Black inexperience of students from predominate White high schools, and they need to be able to navigate the two diverse communities. It is important to not only address differences but the abilities for students to live and work in an area with those who are different from themselves. This can be done through support groups and programs based on varying backgrounds. For example, having an urban support group

for students from low-income background and urban areas that include faculty and staff from similar background to help lead the way. This is something that students in this study spoke about as lacking at the campus.

As the findings of this study show, students tended to find resources among their peers. Therefore, programs like Black orientations in which students can meet like-minded individuals would help with their transition and sense of belonging. Having more faculty and staff from similar backgrounds as the students in this study would provide the students with role models who looked like them and who have the knowledge to understand how to help the students navigate the varied situations they experience. Colleges and universities need to know the stories of these African American and African Caribbean students. By understanding the experiences of African American and African Caribbean students, the institutions can ensure the students are served properly. Universities should devote a portion of staff development to educate on cultural differences and the ways in which the staff can support students without bias.

Diversity training. One of the large barriers for African American and African Caribbean students that was evident throughout this study was race and understanding of difference. It would be beneficial for high schools to create programs around diversity and implicit bias to help students understand the differences they are going to experience in college prior to attending college. By address this before the transition to college it would allow for first-year and transitional programs to build on an already existent foundation of understanding others and unpacking their implicit bias to allow for easier integration into college.   First-year experience and transitional programs should also address more of the social aspects of transition for first-year students. By focusing on

implicit bias and difference it will help students to better understand those around them and hopefully help to create a more open dialogue which would aid in the transition to college.

Recruitment of Black faculty and staff. The presence of Black faculty and staff members at PWIs is traditionally low, and such was the case at the institution of study. If the retention of Black students is important to an institution, the recruitment of Black faculty and staff is vital. Both African American and African Caribbean students need examples of successful people from similar cultural backgrounds. It is important for African American and African Caribbean college students to connect with leaders who look like them and can be an example of what they would like to become. Connecting with faculty and staff of the same race who understand the lived experience of these students is valuable for everyone. Colleges and universities need to examine the data on what the faculty and staff populations looks like in comparison to the population they serve. Creating more access and opportunities for Black faculty and staff members may impact the overall retention and graduation rates of Black students, and specifically African American and Afro Caribbean, the two groups studied in this research.

Conclusions

Black students have one of the lowest retention rates and college degree completion rates amongst all other races nationwide (Brooks et al., 2013; Johnson-Ahorlu, 2013; NSC Research Center, 2016). The first-year retention rate of Black students who entered college in fall 2015 is lower than any other race and ethnicity (NSC Research Center, 2016). Black students are often identified as one population, yet there are subpopulations with distinct differences (Cunningham, 2015). Pinder (2013)

explained that African Caribbean students are being retained in colleges at a higher rate than African American students. Understanding the factors that impact the transition of African American students compared to African Caribbean students is instrumental in increasing retention rates among these two populations (Johnson et al., 2007).

There are three theories that helped develop the framework for studying this phenomenon, Astin's (1984) theory of involvement, Tinto's (1987, 1993) theory of student departure, and Ogbu's (1990, 2004) cultural ecological theory. Astin's (year) theory of involvement focuses on how involvement leads to the overall investment in the college experience. Tinto's (1987, 1993) theory of student departure focuses on the reasons that students are retained at an institution or decide to leave, and Ogbu's (1990, 2004) theory focuses on the interdependence of community and access to resources for underrepresented students in their pursuit for education and upward mobility.

The research questions guiding this study were:

1. What factors contribute to a sense of belonging for African American and African Caribbean students and the desire to remain at the university?

2. How do the cultures of African American and African Caribbean students contribute to motivation for the completion of a bachelor's degree?

3. What barriers inhibit African American and African Caribbean students from completing their college experience?

Through qualitative research, perceptions were gathered through in-depth interviews from 12 Black students, 6 self-identified as African American and 6 self-identified as African Caribbean. The best way to understand the lived experiences of these African American and African Caribbean students was through phenomenological

research, an interpretive process in which the researcher listens to the lived experiences of the participants and then makes meaning of the lived experience (Creswell & Poth, 2017). Phenomenological research requires the researcher to understand the participant's worldview while prior beliefs of a phenomenon are temporarily set aside in order to appreciate the elements of the experiences (Merriam, 1998). This process supported the exploration of the underlying reasons why these Black males are succeeding in college. Open-ended questions assisted in drawing out the salient points of their experiences and resulted in the identification of common themes, patterns, or variables (Merriam, 1998).

The four themes that emerged from the data are (a) sense of belonging through academic and social integration (b) motivation for attending college (c) barriers of precollege experiences and finances (d) differences between African American and African Caribbean participants. The literature in Chapter 2 supports all five themes and creates an opportunity for further discussion on how to support African Caribbean and African American students in their first year of college.

The recommendations of this study were developed from the implications of this research study and they include hiring of more African American faculty and student-facing staff, different supports for African Caribbean and African American students, training for student-facing staff on differences between African American and African Caribbean students and programs specific to the additional needs of African American students, such as urban support groups or black orientation programs. Colleges and universities need to understand the differences between African American and African Caribbean students and the enrichment they provide to the educational environment. While both populations created their sense of belonging in similar ways, the motivation

and additional supports they needed were very different. First, academically, if students felt they were being taken seriously by professors, professors cared about them, they were able to find academic support and felt comfortable contributing to class discussion, then they integrated academically with the college community. Secondly, socially, if they found like-minded friends or similar backgrounds on campus, found their place on campus through campus organizations or informal gatherings, attend events or some other social network they felt a sense of belonging socially. African American students seem to experience more racial incidents in these settings which made their sense of belonging more difficult to achieve. They also found less students from a similar background as them. They needed more support from their peers, faculty and staff.

While understanding the difference between these two ethnic groups are important, this study also learned that varying precollege characteristics seemed to be even more important to the transition and retention of students in their first year of college. It is necessary to value accommodating students' needs based on precollege characteristics including high school experience and rigor, social capital and support for college degree and socioeconomic status.

Finally, ensuring recruitment of Black faculty and staff that are representative of the population being served is important. Students expressed the value of seeing others in successful positions helping to motivate them and help them navigate the college experience.

Recommendations for future research were based on the need to further understand the differences in motivations and experiences of how African American and African Caribbean students to successfully enrolled, developed a sense of belonging and

were retained at a PWI throughout all four years. Expanding this study to other PWI, HBCU (historically black colleges and universities) or HSI (Hispanic serving institutions) to gain a better understanding of their experiences as one of the largest minority populations entering colleges and universities. A longitudinal study would allow for a better understanding of the barriers that occur over the four years and go beyond the intention of students to graduate with a 4-year degree.

There is literature that expresses to the reasons why African American and African Caribbean students do and do not succeed in college. This literature does not examine the comparable experiences of African American and African Caribbean students. It is imperative to understand the differences in these experiences in order to address the barriers for those who are not successful. It will take the investment and priority of colleges or universities across the country to invest and prioritize the academic and social achievement of African American and African Caribbean students in order for the retention, and graduation rates increase. This is a challenge for all to consider and act on so we can finally move the graduation rates in a positive direction for our African American and African Caribbean students and stop treating them like one population with the same needs when their needs are very distinct.

Anthony D'Angelo (1995) said, "Without a sense of caring, there can be no sense of community" (p. 93). If students do not feel like someone is invested in their success and willing to help and guide them students do not feel a sense of belonging and will not excel in college. It is the responsibility of colleges and universities to make all students feel like they belong and can achieve a college degree.

References

Agyemang, C., Bhopal, R., & Bruijnzeels, M. (2005). Negro, Black, Black African, African Caribbean, African American or what? Labelling African origin populations in the health arena in the 21st century. *Journal of Epidemiology & Community Health*, *59*(12), 1014-1018.

Allen, J., Robbins, S. B., Casillas, A., & Oh, I. S. (2008). Third-year college retention and transfer: Effects of academic performance, motivation, and social connectedness. *Research in Higher Education*, *49*(7), 647-664.

Anderson, M., Lopez, M. H., & Rohal, M. (2015, April 9). *A rising share of the US Black population is foreign born; 9 percent are immigrants; and while most are from the Caribbean, Africans drive recent growth.* Washington, DC: Pew Research Center. Retrieved from http://www.pewsocialtrends.org/2015/04/09/a-rising-share-of-the-u-s-black-population-is-foreign-born/

Astin, A. W. (1975). *Preventing students from dropping out*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Astin, A. W. (1977). *Four critical years. Effects of college on beliefs, attitudes, and knowledge.* San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Astin, A. W. (1984). Student involvement: A developmental theory for higher education. *Journal of College Student Personnel*, *25*(4), 297-308.

Barefoot, B. O. (2000). The first-year experience – Are we making it any better? *About Campus*, *4*(6), 12-18.

Bayram, N., & Bilgel, N. (2008). The prevalence and socio-demographic correlations of depression, anxiety and stress among a group of university students. *Social Psychiatry and Psychiatric Epidemiology*, *43*(8), 667-672.

Bean, J. P. (1980). Dropouts and turnover: The synthesis and test of a causal model of student attrition. *Research in Higher Education*, *12*(2), 155-187.

Bean, J. P., & Eaton, S. B. (2000). A psychological model of college student retention. *Journal of College Student Retention, 3*(1), 73-89. Retrieved from http://www.se.edu/dept/native-american-center/files/2012/04/The-Psychology-Underlying-Successful-Retention-Practices.pdf

Blake, R. (2014). African American and Black as demographic codes. *Language and Linguistics Compass*, *8*(11), 548-563.

Booker, K. (2016). Connection and commitment: How sense of belonging and classroom community influence degree persistence for African American undergraduate women. *International Journal of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education*, *28*(2), 218-229.

Bourdieu, P. (1989). Social space and symbolic power. *Sociological Theory*, *7*(1), 14-25.

Bourke, B. (2010). Experiences of black students in multiple cultural spaces at a predominantly white institution. *Journal of Diversity in Higher Education, 3*(2), 126-135.

Braxton, J., Hirschy, A., & McClendon, S. (2004). Modifying Tinto's theory of college student departure using constructs derived from inductive theory revision. *Retention and Student Success in Higher Education*, 89-102.

Braxton, J. M., Shaw Sullivan, A. V., & Johnson, R. M. (1997). Appraising Tinto's theory of college student departure. In J. C. Smart (Ed.), *Higher education: Handbook of theory and research* (vol. XII, pp. 107-165*).* New York, NY: Agathon Press.

Brezinski, K. J. (2016). *You PC bro? How experiences of racial microaggressions affect undergraduate African American student retention.* (Electronic doctoral dissertation). Document No. toledo1463129299. Retrieved from https://etd.ohiolink.edu/

Brinkman, S., & Kvale, S. (2015). *Interviews: Learning the craft of qualitative research interviewing* (3rd ed.)*.* Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE.

Brooks, M., Jones, C., & Burt, I. (2013). Are African-American male undergraduate retention programs successful? An evaluation of an undergraduate African-American male retention program. *Journal of African American Studies*, *17*(2), 206-221.

Capps, R., McCabe, K., & Fix, M. (2012). *Diverse streams: African migration to the United States.* Washington, DC: Migration Policy Institute.

Carnevale, A. P., & Rose, S. J. (2012). *The undereducated American.* Washington, DC: Georgetown University, Center on Education and the Workforce.

Creswell, J. W., & Poth, C. N. (2017). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches* 4th ed.. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE.

Cunningham, E. L. (2015). *Institutionally designated safe spaces: Understanding how black students utilize and experience these spaces to develop a sense of belonging.* (Doctoral dissertation,). Pennsylvania State University, State College, PA. Retrieved from https://etda.libraries.psu.edu/catalog/24849

D'Angelo, A. J. (1995). *The college blue book: A few thoughts, reflections & reminders on how to get the most out of college & life*. (5th ed.). Easton, PA: The Collegiate EmPowerment Company, Inc.

DeAngelo, L. (2014). Programs and practices that retain students from the first to second year: Results from a national study. *New Directions for Institutional Research*, *2013*(160), 53-75.

Deaux, K., Bikmen, N., Gilkes, A., Ventuneac, A., Joseph, Y., Payne, Y. A., & Steele, C. M. (2007). Becoming American: Stereotype threat effects in Afro-Caribbean immigrant groups. *Social Psychology Quarterly*, *70*(4), 384-404.

Dowd, A. C., Sawatzky, M., & Korn, R. (2011). Theoretical foundations and a research agenda to validate measures of intercultural effort. *The Review of Higher Education*, *35*(1), 17-44.

Dunlosky, J., Rawson, K. A., Marsh, E. J., Nathan, M. J., & Willingham, D. T. (2013). Improving students' learning with effective learning techniques: Promising directions from cognitive and educational psychology. *Psychological Science in the Public Interest*, *14*(1), 4-58.

Durkheim, E. (1951). *Suicide: A study in sociology* (J. A. Spaulding & G. Simpson, Trans.). Glencoe, IL: Free Press. (Original work published in 1897).

Elkins, S. A., Braxton, J. M., & James, G. W. (2000). Tinto's separation stage and its influence on first-semester college student persistence. *Research in Higher Education*, *41*(2), 251-268.

Feliciano, C. (2009). Education and ethnic identity formation among children of Latin American and Caribbean immigrants. *Sociological Perspectives*, *52*(2), 135-158.

Fischer, M. J. (2010). A longitudinal examination of the role of stereotype threat and racial climate on college outcomes for minorities at elite institutions. *Social Psychology of Education*, *13*(1), 19-40.

Flook, L., Repetti, R. L., & Ullman, J. B. (2005). Classroom social experiences as predictors of academic performance. *Developmental Psychology*, *41*(2), 319.

Friedlander, J., Pace, C. R., & Lehman, P. W. (1990). *The community college student experiences questionnaire.* Los Angeles, CA: Center for the Study of Evaluation, University of California, Los Angeles.

Furrer, C., & Skinner, E. (2003). Sense of relatedness as a factor in children's academic engagement and performance. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, *95*(1), 148.

Grier-Reed, T. L. (2010). The African American student network: Creating sanctuaries and counterspaces for coping with racial microaggressions in higher education settings. *The Journal of Humanistic Counseling*, *49*(2), 181-188.

Griffin, K. A., Cunningham, E. L., & George Mwangi, C. A. (2016). Defining diversity: Ethnic differences in Black students' perceptions of racial climate. *Journal of Diversity in Higher Education*, *9*(1), 34-49.

Guiffrida, D. A. (2003). African American student organizations as agents of social integration. *Journal of College Student Development*, *44*(3), 304-319.

Gustave, S. J. (2016). Social support, self-concept ethnic identity, and college adjustment among African Caribbean college students. (Doctoral dissertation.). ETD Collection for Fordham University. (AAI10112663)

Harper, S. R., & Hurtado, S. (2007). Nine themes in campus racial climates and implications for institutional transformation. *New Directions for Student Services*, *2007*(120), 7-24. Special Issue: Responding to the Realities of Race on Campus.

Haynie, A. C. (2002). Not 'just black' policy considerations: The influence of ethnicity on pathways to academic success amongst black undergraduates at Harvard University. *Journal of Public and International Affairs, 13*(Spring), 40-62. Retrieved from https://jpia.princeton.edu/sites/jpia/files/2002-3.pdf

Hausmann, L. R., Schofield, J. W., & Woods, R. L. (2007). Sense of belonging as a predictor of intentions to persist among African American and White first-year college students. *Research in Higher Education*, *48*(7), 803-839.

Holodick-Reed, J. A. (2013). *First-generation college students' persistence at a four-year college: A phenomenological case study*. Retrieved from ProQuest. (ERIC: ED568490)

Hurtado, S., & Carter, D. F. (1997). Effects of college transition and perceptions of the campus racial climate on Latino college students' sense of belonging. *Sociology of education*, 324-345.

Hurtado, S., Griffin, K. A., Arellano, L., & Cuellar, M. (2008). Assessing the value of climate assessments: Progress and future directions. *Journal of Diversity in Higher Education*, *1*(4), 204.

Hurtado, S., Milem, J., Clayton-Pedersen, A., & Allen, W. (1999). Enacting diverse learning environments: Improving the climate for racial/ethnic diversity in higher education. In *ASHE-ERIC Higher Education Report* (Vol. 26, No. 8). Washington, DC: The George Washington University.

Johnson, D. R., Soldner, M., Leonard, J. B., Alvarez, P., Inkelas, K. K., Rowan-Kenyon, H. T., & Longerbeam, S. D. (2007). Examining sense of belonging among first-year undergraduates from different racial/ethnic groups. *Journal of College Student Development*, *48*(5), 525-542.

Johnson-Ahorlu, R. N. (2013). "Our biggest challenge is stereotypes": Understanding stereotype threat and the academic experiences of African American undergraduates. *The Journal of Negro Education*, *82*(4), 382-392.

Kim, E. (2014). Bicultural socialization experiences of black immigrant students at a predominantly white institution. *The Journal of Negro Education*, *83*(4), 580-594.

Kuh, G. D. (2007). How to help students achieve. *Chronicle of Higher Education*, *53*(41), B12-B13.

Kuh, G. D. (2008). *High-impact educational practices: What they are, who has access to them, and why they matter.* Washington, DC: Association of American Colleges and Universities.

Lareau, A. (2003). *Unequal childhoods: Race, class and family life.* Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

Lewis, K. S., & McKissic, S. C. (2010). Drawing sustenance at the source: African American students' participation in the Black campus community as an act of resistance. *Journal of Black Studies*, *41*(2), 264-280.

Lincoln, Y. S., & Guba, E. G. (1985). *Naturalistic inquiry*. Newbury Park, CA: SAGE.

Maslow, A. H. (1943). A theory of human motivation. *Psychological Review*, *50*(4), 370-396.

Maslow, A. H. (1954). The instinctoid nature of basic needs. *Journal of Personality*, *22*(3), 326-347.

Massey, D. S. (2004). Segregation and stratification: A biosocial perspective. *Du Bois Review: Social Science Research on Race*, *1*(1), 7-25.

Massey, D. S., Mooney, M., Torres, K. C., & Charles, C. Z. (2006). Black immigrants and black natives attending selective colleges and universities in the United States. *American Journal of Education*, *113*(2), 243-271.

Mason, P. L. (2014). Immigration and African American wages and employment: Critically appraising the empirical evidence. *The Review of Black Political Economy*, *41*(3), 271-297.

McFarland, J., Hussar, B., de Brey, C., Snyder, T., Wang, X., Wilkinson-Flicker, S., & Bullock-Mann, F. (2017). *The condition of education 2017*. NCES 2017-144. Washington, DC: National Center for Education Statistics.

McGee, E. O., & Martin, D. B. (2011). "You would not believe what I have to go through to prove my intellectual value!" Stereotype management among academically successful Black mathematics and engineering students. *American Educational Research Journal*, *48*(6), 1347-1389.

Mendoza-Denton, R., Downey, G., Purdie, V. J., Davis, A., & Pietrzak, J. (2002). Sensitivity to status-based rejection: implications for African American students' college experience. *Journal of personality and social psychology*, *83*(4), 896.

Merriam, S. B. (1988). *Case study research in education: A qualitative approach*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Metz, G. W. (2004). Challenge and changes to Tinto's persistence theory: A historical review. *Journal of College Student Retention: Research, Theory & Practice, 6*(2), 191-207.

Metzner, B. S., & Bean, J. P. (1987). The estimation of a conceptual model of nontraditional undergraduate student attrition. *Research in Higher Education*, *27*(1), 15-38.

Milem, J. F., & Berger, J. B. (1997). A modified model of college student persistence: Exploring the relationship between Astin's theory of involvement and Tinto's theory of student departure. *Journal of College Student Development*, *38*(4), 387.

Morrow, J., & Ackermann, M. (2012). Intention to persist and retention of first-year students: The importance of motivation and sense of belonging. *College Student Journal*, *46*(3), 483-491.

Moustakas, C. (1994). *Phenomenological research methods*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE.

Museus, S. D., & Neville, K. M. (2012). Delineating the ways that key institutional agents provide racial minority students with access to social capital in college. *Journal of College Student Development*, *53*(3), 436-452.

National Student Clearinghouse Research Center. (2016, May 3). *Snapshot report – persistence and retention.* (Fall 2015). Retrieved from https://nscresearchcenter.org/snapshotreport-persistenceretention22/

Ogbu, J. U. (1990). Minority education in comparative perspective. *The Journal of Negro Education*, *59*(1), 45-57.

Ogbu, J. U. (1992). Understanding cultural diversity and learning. *Educational Researcher*, *21*(8), 5-14.

Ogbu, J. U. (2003). *Black American students in an affluent suburb: A study of academic disengagement*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc.

Ogbu, J. U. (2004). Collective identity and the burden of "acting White" in Black history, community, and education. *The Urban Review*, *36*(1), 1-35.

Ogbu, J. U., & Simons, H. D. (1998). Voluntary and involuntary minorities: A cultural-ecological theory of school performance with some implications for education. *Anthropology & Education Quarterly*, *29*(2), 155-188.

O'Keeffe, P. (2013). A sense of belonging: Improving student retention. *College Student Journal*, *47*(4), 605-613.

Osterman, K. F. (2000). Students' need for belonging in the school community. *Review of Educational Research*, *70*(3), 323-367.

Padgett, R. D., & Keup, J. R. (2011). 2009 National survey of first-year seminars: Ongoing efforts to support students in transition. In *Research reports on college transitions* (Vol. 2). Columbia, SC: National Resource Center for The First-Year Experience and Students in Transition.

Padgett, R. D., Keup, J. R., & Pascarella, E. T. (2013). The impact of first-year seminars on college students' life-long learning orientations. *Journal of Student Affairs Research and Practice*, *50*(2), 133-151.

Pascarella, E. T., & Terenzini, P. T. (1980). Predicting freshman persistence and voluntary dropout decisions from a theoretical model. *The Journal of Higher Education*, *51*(1), 60-75.

Pascarella, E. T., & Terenzini, P. (2005). *How college affects students: Findings and insights from twenty years of research.* San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Permzadian, V., & Credé, M. (2016). Do first-year seminars improve college grades and retention? A quantitative review of their overall effectiveness and an examination of moderators of effectiveness. *Review of Educational Research*, *86*(1), 277-316.

Pinder, P. J. (2008). *Cultural ethnic differences and educational achievement of African heritage students: Towards employing a culturally sensitive curriculum in K-12 classrooms: A literature review.* Retrieved from ERIC database. (ED499783)

Pinder, P. J. (2012). African Caribbean and African American students, family factors, and the influence on science performance in the United States: The untold story. *Education*, *132*(4), 725-739.

Pinder, P. J. (2013). Cultural ethnic differences, parental involvement differences, and educational achievement of African Heritage students: Towards employing a culturally sensitive curriculum in K-12 classrooms: A literature review. *Journal of African American Studies*, *17*(2), 116-128.

Polkinghorne, D. E. (1989). Phenomenological research methods. In *Existential-phenomenological perspectives in psychology: Exploring the breadth of human experience* (pp. 41-60). New York, NY: Plenum. doi:10.1007/978-1-4615-6989-3_3

Pryor, J. H., Hurtado, S., DeAngelo, L. E., Blake, L. P., & Tran, S. (2010, January). *The American freshman: National norms fall 2009*. (Research Brief). Los Angeles, CA: Higher Education Research Institute at UCLA. Retrieved from https://www.heri.ucla.edu/PDFs/pubs/briefs/brief-pr012110-09FreshmanNorms.pdf

Rendón, L. I., Jalomo, R. E., & Nora, A. (2000). Theoretical considerations in the study of minority student retention in higher education. In J. M. Braxton (Ed.), *Reworking the student departure puzzle* (pp. 127-156). Nashville, TN: Vanderbilt University.

Robbins, S. B., Oh, I. S., Le, H., & Button, C. (2009). Intervention effects on college performance and retention as mediated by motivational, emotional, and social control factors: Integrated meta-analytic path analyses. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, *94*(5), 1163.

Roksa, J., & Whitley, S. E. (2017). Fostering academic success of first-year students: Exploring the rules of motivation, race, and faculty. *Journal of College Student Development*, *58*(3), 333-348.

Rossman, G. B., & Rallis, S. F. (2003). *Learning in the field: An introduction to qualitative research*. Thousand Oaks, SAGE.

Richards, E., & Terkanian, D. (2013, December). Occupational employment projections to 2022. *Monthly Labor Review*, *136*, 1.

Schlossberg, N. K. (1989). Marginality and mattering: Key issues in building community. *New Directions for Student Services*, *1989*(48), 5-15.

Shenton, A. K. (2004). Strategies for ensuring trustworthiness in qualitative research projects. *Education for Information*, *22*(2), 63-75.

Spielman, S. E., Folch, D., & Nagle, N. (2014). Patterns and causes of uncertainty in the American Community Survey. *Applied Geography*, *46*(January), 147-157.

Stanton-Salazar, R. D. (2011). A social capital framework for the study of institutional agents and their role in the empowerment of low-status students and youth. *Youth & Society*, *43*(3), 1066-1109.

Steinhorn, L., & Diggs-Brown, B. (1999). *By the color of our skin.* New York, NY: Dutton.

Strayhorn, T. L. (2008). The role of supportive relationships in facilitating African American males' success in college. *NASPA Journal*, *45*(1), 26-48.

Strayhorn, T. L. (2012). *College students' sense of belonging: A key to educational success for all students*. New York, NY: Routledge.

Strayhorn, T. L. (2014). What role does grit play in the academic success of black male collegians at predominantly white institutions? *Journal of African American Studies*, *18*(1), 1-10.

Strayhorn, T. L. (2015). Reframing academic advising for student success: From advisor to cultural navigator. *NACADA Journal*, *35*(1), 56-63.

Strayhorn, T. L., Lo, M. T., Travers, C. S., & Tillman-Kelly, D. L. (2015). Assessing the relationship between well-being, sense of belonging, and confidence in the transition to college for Black male collegians. *Spectrum: A Journal on Black Men*, *4*(1), 127-138.

Tatum, B. D. (2017). *Why are all the Black kids sitting together in the cafeteria?: And other conversations about race*. New York, NY: Basic Books.

Taylor, Z. E., Doane, L. D., & Eisenberg, N. (2014). Transitioning from high school to college: Relations of social support, ego-resiliency, and maladjustment during emerging adulthood. *Emerging Adulthood*, *2*(2), 105-115.

Thompson-Cudjoe, V. D. (2015). *Educational motivation and academic achievement differences among generations of black Caribbean college students* (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). University of Phoenix, Tempe, AZ.

Tinto, V. (1975). Dropout from higher education: A theoretical synthesis of recent research. *Review of Educational Research*, *45*(1), 89-125.

Tinto, V. (1987). *Leaving college: Rethinking the causes and cures of student attrition*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

Tinto, V. (1993). Building community. *Liberal Education*, *79*(4), 16-21.

Tinto, V. (1997). Classrooms as communities: Exploring the educational character of student persistence. *The Journal of Higher Education*, *68*(6), 599-623.

Tinto, V. (1999). Taking retention seriously: Rethinking the first year of college. *NACADA Journal*, *19*(2), 5-9.

Tinto, V. (2006). Research and practice of student retention: What next? *Journal of College Student Retention: Research, Theory & Practice*, *8*(1), 1-19.

Tinto, V., & Cullen, J. (1973). *Dropout in higher education: A review and theoretical synthesis of recent research*. Washington, DC: Office of Planning, Budgeting, and Evaluation, Department of Health, Education, and Welfare.

Turner, P., & Thompson, E. (2014). College retention initiatives meeting the needs of millennial freshman students. *College Student Journal*, *48*(1), 94-104.

Upcraft, M. L., Gardner, J. N., & Barefoot, B. O. (2004). *Challenging and supporting the first-year student: A handbook for improving the first year of college*. Jossey-Bass.

Wakefield, W. D., & Hudley, C. (2007). Ethnic and racial identity and adolescent well-being. *Theory Into Practice*, *46*(2), 147-154.

Walton, G. M., & Carr, P. B. (2012). Social belonging and the motivation and intellectual achievement of negatively stereotyped students.

Walton, G. M., & Cohen, G. L. (2007). A question of belonging: race, social fit, and achievement. *Journal of personality and social psychology*, *92*(1), 82.

Walton, G. M., & Cohen, G. L. (2011). A brief social-belonging intervention improves academic and health outcomes of minority students. *Science*, *331*(6023), 1447-1451.

Wang, C. C. D., & Castañeda-Sound, C. (2008). The role of generational status, self-esteem, academic self-efficacy, and perceived social support in college students' psychological well-being. *Journal of College Counseling*, *11*(2), 101-118.

Waters, M. C. (1999). Immigrant dreams and American realities: The causes and consequences of the ethnic labor market in American cities. *Work and Occupations*, *26*(3), 352-364.

Waters, M. C. (2009). *Black identities: West Indian immigrant dreams and American realities*. Harvard University Press.

Waters, M. C., Kasinitz, P., & Asad, A. L. (2014). Immigrants and African Americans. *Annual Review of Sociology*, *40*, 369-390.

Wells, R. (2008). Social and cultural capital, race and ethnicity, and college student retention. *Journal of College Student Retention: Research, Theory & Practice*, *10*(2), 103-128.

Wiggan, G. (2007). Race, school achievement, and educational inequality: toward a student-based inquiry perspective. *Review of Educational Research, 77*(3), 310–333.

Woodburn, A. (2011). *Persisting at predominantly white institutions: African Caribbean college students narrate their U.S. academic experiences and administrators' perspectives* (Doctoral dissertation). Retrieved from DigitalResearch @ Fordham. (AAI3461908).

Woosley, S. A. (2003). How important are the first few weeks of college? The long-term effects of initial college experiences. *College Student Journal*, *37*(2), 201-208.

Appendix A

Participant Demographic Form

1. Gender (please circle one): Male_____Female _____ Other _____

2. City and State of Residency: _____

3. Major: _____

4. Current Class Standing(please circle one): Freshmen ____Sophomore ____

5. Ethnic/Racial Background (e.g., Haitian, Jamaican, African Caribbean, African Trinidadian, West Indian, Native Black etc.)
   _____

6. Generations in the United States (please check one):
   _____ I was born outside the United States and moved to the United States
   _____ I was born in the United States but both my parents immigrated to the U.S.
   _____ One Parent and I were born in the United States (other parent immigrated)
   _____ Both parents and I were born in the United States
   _____ Grandparents, parents, and I were born in the United States
   _____ Great-grandparents and beyond were born in the Unites States

7. If you were born outside the United States and moved to the United States, how old were you when you moved to the United States? (If you were born in the United States, please skip this question.): _____

8. Highest Level of Mother's Education Completed:
   _____ High School Graduate
   _____ Some College
   _____ College Graduate
   _____ Advanced Degree (master's or beyond)

9. Highest Level of Father's Education Completed:
   _____ High School Graduate
   _____ Some College
   _____ College Graduate
   _____ Advanced Degree (master's or beyond)

Appendix B

Interview Protocol

Interview Question	Related Research Question
Introductory Question - • Tell me a little bit about your background, family and area in which you grew up. *Probing Questions*: • Have other members of your family attended college? • Why did you decide to attend college? • What were your expectations of college? • What was your high school experience like? Were you a minority? Majority? • What motivates you to obtain a college degree?	• How do the cultures of African American and African Caribbean students contribute to the motivation for completion of a bachelor's degree?

1. Tell me about your experience since you have been here?
 Probing Questions:
 - Why did you decide to attend this college?
 - What other schools did you consider attending? Did you look for schools like this one that are predominately white institutions (PWI)?
 - What have you been involved in during your first semester here?
 - Do you intend to graduate from the University?
 - If you live on campus, how often do you go home?
 - What are your feelings of the racial environment here at the university/college?
     o Does that differ in the classroom?
     o Does that differ socially?
     o Does that differ culturally?
	• How do the cultures of African American and African Caribbean students contribute to the motivation for completion of a bachelor's degree?
	
	 • What factors contribute to a sense of belonging for African American and African Caribbean students and the desire to remain at the university?

2. Do you feel a sense of belonging with the University? *Probing Questions*: - How were you able to integrate into the institution? - Would you say your friends share a similar race or ethnicity to you? - What has helped you develop that sense of belonging? - What has hindered you feeling a sense of belonging? - Do you feel accepted here? Do you feel your race or ethnicity plays a role in that? - Do you feel comfortable here? Do you see a difference in your comfort level compared to others from a different race or ethnicity? - Do you feel that faculty are invested in your academic success? - Who do you talk to about how you are doing at the institution? - Do you have a mentor here at college? - When you graduate from the University to you foresee yourself coming back to visit? - How are you financing your education? - How does the financial commitment of paying for college impact your college experience?	What factors contribute to a sense of belonging for African American and African Caribbean students and the desire to remain at the university?
3. What challenges have you discovered in your transition to college? *Probing Questions:* - Were you able to overcome that barrier? If so, how?	What barriers inhibit African American and African Caribbean students from completing their college experience?
4. How has your culture and family impacted your college experience? *Probing Questions*: - What is your family's expectations of you in college? - How have your family shown support for your college experience? - How about your friends, how have they supported your college experience? High School and College - How if at all, have you changed or acting differently in high school v. college?	How do the cultures of African American and African Caribbean students contribute to the motivation for completion of a bachelor's degree?

5. Have you ever thought about leaving college?
   - If so, why?
   - If you don't finish college, what would that look like?
	What barriers inhibit African American and African Caribbean students from completing their college experience?

Appendix C

E-Mail Solicitation to Participants

Greetings!

I'm a Doctoral Candidate in St. John Fisher College's Executive Leadership Program. I'm currently conducting a study on the **sense of belonging of Afro-Caribbean and African American students** at a Predominately White Institution in the Northeast. I'm specifically reaching out to you because you have been identified as a student that may eligible for this study. You are eligible if:

1. You are currently in your first-year at Pace University (started in fall 2017)
2. Identify as being Afro-Caribbean or African American
3. You are a First-Year Time College Student

This letter serves as an official invitation to participate in my study. The study has been approved by St. John Fisher College and Pace University's Institutional Review Board. Participation in this study consists of **completing a demographic questionnaire and sharing your experiences during a 60 minute interview that will be scheduled at a convenient time for you between now and March 23, 2018**. You will also be presented with the opportunity to participation in a follow-up meeting that will allow you to review transcripts from our interview as well as my initial analyses late in the spring semester.

There is minimal risk associated with participating in this study and you have the option to withdraw from this study at any point. You are not required to answer any questions(s) that cause you to feel uncomfortable and your identity will be kept confidential in any data that is reported from this study.

If you **would like to participate** or require further information about this study, please do not hesitate to contact me by **replying to this email.**

Thank you in advance for your time and consideration. I look forward to hearing from you soon.

Sincerely,

Niki Fjeldal, M.S.

Dissertation Chair: Dr. Jennifer Schulman, St. John Fisher College

St. John Fisher College
INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Title of study: A Study of Factors Contributing to African American and Afro-Caribbean Students' Sense of Belonging and Retention in the First-Year of College at a Predominately White Institution in the Northeast

Name of researcher: Niki Fjeldal, nmf02395@sjfc.edu, (914) 703-7923

Faculty Supervisor: Dr. Jennifer Schulman **Phone for further information**: (914) 330-4840

Purpose of Study: The purpose of this study will be to compare the perceived experience of Afro-Caribbean and African American students, during their first year at a Predominately White Institution (PWI) in the Northeast. This study will explore the experience of these two populations in the college environment and help identify how a sense of belonging is or is not developed and the influences that has on a student's decision to remain at the institution.

Length of participation: If you agree to participate in the study, you will be asked to complete a brief demographic questionnaire and participate in a 60-minute interview.

Method of data collection: Data will be collected through a demographic questionnaire and 60-minute interview with open-ended questions about your experiences at the college in which you are enrolled.

Risks: There are no foreseeable risks for participants in this study. If you experience emotional or physical discomfort due to participation in this study, please contact your personal health care provider or an appropriate crisis service provider (914- 925-5959). **Benefits**: There are no direct benefits of participant in this study but all participants in this study will be entered into a drawing for 2-$50 gift cards. Your participation in the study will provide a better understanding of the experiences of African American and Afro-Caribbean students at a Predominately White Institution, a topic that is in need of more research.

Method for protecting confidentiality/privacy of subjects: Your identity will be kept confidential through the use of a pseudonym instead of your name in all written documentation. All digital audio recordings and transcriptions of interviews will be maintained using a private, locked, and password-protected file and password-protected computer stored securely in the private home of the principal researcher. Electronic files

will include assigned identity codes and pseudonyms; they will not include actual names or any information that could personally identify or connect participants to this study. Other materials, including notes or paper files related to data collection and analysis, will be stored securely in unmarked boxes, locked inside a cabinet in the private home of the principal researcher. Only the researcher will have access to electronic or paper records. The digitally recorded audio data will be kept by this researcher for a period of five years following publication of the dissertation. Signed informed consent documents will be kept for five years after publication. All paper records will be cross-cut shredded and professionally delivered for incineration. Electronic records will be cleared, purged, and destroyed from the hard drive and all devices such that restoring data is not possible. Your information may be shared with appropriate governmental authorities ONLY if you or someone else is in danger, or if we are required to do so by law.

Your rights: As a research participant, you have the right to:

1. Have the purpose of the study, and the expected risks and benefits fully explained to you before you choose to participate.
2. Withdraw from participation at any time without penalty.
3. Refuse to answer a particular question without penalty.
4. Be informed of the results of the study.

If you have any further questions regarding this study, please contact the researcher(s) listed above. The Institutional Review Board of St. John Fisher College has reviewed this project. For any concerns regarding this study/or if you feel that your rights as a participant (or the rights of another participant) have been violated or caused you undue distress (physical or emotional), please contact Jill Rathbun by phone during normal business hours at (585) 385-8012 or irb@sjfc.edu. She will contact a supervisory IRB official to assist you.

I have read the above, received a copy of this form, and I agree to participate in the above-named study.

_____   _____
Print name (Participant)   Signature   Date

_____   _____
Print name (Investigator)   Signature   Date