HOW AFRICAN AMERICAN MEN AT A PREDOMINANTLY WHITE INSTITUTION NEGOTIATE THEIR IDENTITY WHEN INTERACTING WITH WHITE PEERS

A Dissertation in
Workforce Education and Development

by
Wayne M. Gersie

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The dissertation of Wayne Gersie was reviewed and approved* by the following:

Judith A. Kolb  
Associate Professor of Education  
Dissertation Advisor  
Co-Chair of Committee

Ronald L. Jackson II  
Professor of Communication  
University of Cincinnati  
Special Committee Member  
Co-Chair of Committee

James B Stewart  
Professor Emeritus  
Labor Studies and Employment Relations and African & African American Studies

Craig D. Weidemann  
Vice President of Outreach  
Affiliate Professor of Education, Workforce Education

David McBride  
Professor of African American Studies and African American History

Roy Clariana  
Director of Graduate Studies  
Professor of Education  
Department of Learning and Performing Systems

*Signatures are on file in the Graduate School
ABSTRACT

Student success is directly tied to the kind of support they receive while in school. This goes beyond academic support services to include peer-to-peer social experiences that encapsulate the student experience. In order to address the issue of student persistence and student success, this study’s overarching investigative concern was how African American males at Predominantly White Institutions (PWIs) characterize their identity negotiation when interacting with non-African American peers. The three research questions were developed to reveal the essence of the identities and student experiences of Black males and their White peers in communicative interactions. Semi-structured interviews and focus groups were utilized to gain insight into this phenomenon as it takes place at a PWI. Using a critical interpretive approach along with an audit trail, the results yielded 607 nodes that were reduced to seven emergent themes and three broader categories which were reflective of the three research questions. The results showed that African American male students tended to resist and/or struggle with identity negotiation with White peers, and that this has impacted their attitudes toward persistence and degree of comfort with peers, but their family upbringing and values as well as personal motivation have facilitated their overall student success.
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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated Elfrede Addelina Patricia Denny and Harriette Paulina Sofia Schalkwijk.

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Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

Problem Statement: A Historical Perspective

In 1799, John Chavis, a Presbyterian minister, became the first Black person of record to attend an American college or university when he was admitted to take courses at what is now known as Washington and Lee University in Lexington, Virginia (Berlin, 1974). Oberlin College, which was founded in 1833, immediately opened its doors to Blacks and women (Baumann, 2010). The U.S. Congress passed the first Morrill Act in 1862, which provided for the establishment of a land-grant institution in each state with the goals of giving access to higher education to all citizens and educating in the fields of agriculture, home economics, the mechanical arts, and other useful professions. Particularly in the South, due to the oppressive Jim Crow laws, Blacks were not initially permitted to attend the institutions established under the Morrill Act of 1862. To circumvent these Jim Crow laws, lawmakers of that time included provisions for separate but equal facilities. Despite these provisions, only Mississippi and Kentucky set up any such institution to accommodate Blacks. In response to the lack of access afforded to Blacks by the first Morrill Act, a second act was passed in 1890. The Morrill Act of 1890 was aimed at the former Confederate states’ Jim Crow laws. The intention of this law was to create separate but equal institutions for Blacks, who in large part had been excluded from access to higher education. This law gave Blacks the opportunity to pursue higher education degrees at Black Colleges and Universities that had previously been widely denied to them.

It was not until nearly a hundred years after the first Morrill act was passed that the 1954 Supreme Court ruled on Brown v. Board of Education that racial segregation in education was deemed unconstitutional. In higher education this ruling was not tested until 1962, when James Meredith became the first African American student to enroll at the University of Mississippi.
Finally, the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 confirmed that all forms of segregation in U.S. higher education legally ended, and thus began the ability of Blacks to exercise their inalienable right to pursue higher education. The passage of the Civil Rights Act on July 2, 1964, followed by the passing of the Higher Education Act on November 8, 1965, represented the beginning of a change in the landscape of U.S. higher education systems.

Since the mid-1960s, the enrollment of minorities at colleges and universities has continued to increase. According to the National Center for Education Statistics (2011), in 1976, only 15.7% of college enrollees were minorities. In 2000, this number increased to 29.2%. As of 2011, this number increased to 38.8%. Even though there have been significant gains in the enrollment of minorities within higher education, a closer examination shows significant disparities along racial lines and gender lines.

In the case of African Americans, even though research indicates that the rate of enrollment of undergraduate African American students at U.S. colleges and universities has increased, it appears that this increase has been taking place at a much slower rate compared to Asians and Latinos (National Center of Education Statistics, 2011, Table 263). The continuing questions and concerns about lagging enrollment rates have led to an extensive body of research on this issue (Chronicle of Higher Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 2011, Table 263, 2014; Knapp et al., 2010; Ryu, 2012). This research has not only focused on all institutions, but also on specific enrollment trends among African American students at PWIs (Allen, 1992; Holmes, 2000; Nelson et al., 2007). In particular, there has been a continuing national conversation regarding the issue of the attrition and/or retention of African American students in post-secondary education (D’Augelli & Hershberger, 1993, Delgado, 1998, Freeman, 1999, Willie & McCord, 1972). As a result of this significant body of work conducted since the
early 1970s, researchers have identified a variety of factors contributing to the underrepresentation of African Americans in higher education (Pascarella & Terrenzini, 2005; Tinto, 1993). Factors such as access, affordability, attrition, climate and retention have been examined through the utilization of various college impact models.

When the enrollment of African Americans at U.S. colleges and universities is examined along gender lines, alarming disparities become apparent. Compared to other historically underrepresented groups (excluding Native Americans), when it comes to overall college enrollment rates, African American men’s rates have only increased from 4.3% in 1976 to 5.1% in 2010, which is the smallest increase for any historically underrepresented group. In that same period, Latino men increased from 1.9% to 5.4% and Asian men increased from 0.9% to 2.8%. (National Center of Education Statistics, 2011, Table 1.1).

Recently, research has been conducted that has provided some insights along gender lines, with specific focus on African American males (Cuyjet, 1997; Harper, 2006, 2012; Strayhorn, 2008a, 2013). This research indicates that Black females outnumber Black males by more than 2 to 1 on American college campuses (Cuyjet, 2006). Additional research suggests that two-thirds of Black males who enroll in college leave without completing their degree. When compared to Black women, Black men devote less time to their academics, are less involved in co-curricular activities (including leadership roles), and report lower grades (Cuyjet, 1997; Harper et al., 2004). The drop-out rate for Black males in college is the highest of any ethnic group and highest for both sexes (Harper 2006; Strayhorn, 2010). Finally, Black male undergraduates at PWIs report hostile campus environments, where they encounter victimization and micro aggressions that are the result of racial bias. This isolates them and negatively affects their academic achievement (Bonner II, 2010; Harper, 2009).
Researcher Bias

When I arrived at my undergraduate institution's flagship campus as a first-year student, I realized quickly that I was the only Black male on a dormitory floor of forty students. This was very shocking to me on two fronts. First, it was a very different picture from the one depicted on the brochures and other informational materials that I had viewed during my selection process. In hindsight it seemed that the materials I viewed presented a diverse university with strategically placed multicultural students, which gave the appearance of a critical mass of multicultural students. Second, the environment of a flagship campus at a major research university in Central Pennsylvania was pretty much the reverse of the environment I was leaving—Brooklyn, New York. The visual difference was not the only significant change I noticed when I arrived at the main campus of Alma Matter, a PWI. I noticed students self-segregated in most public places such as the student union, cafeterias, intramural activities, and social events. By the end of my first month, I endured several racial epithets hurled at me in addition to less confrontational interactions/micro-aggressions where I felt dehumanized because of my race.

As time went on, I remember becoming very withdrawn from my dormitory mates and left my residence hall to “hang out” with people who sounded and looked like me. The same was true in my classes. I had trouble relating to my professors who were in every instance White males who spoke in a vernacular that was very different. I felt disconnected and struggled in the classroom. The only sense of belonging and affirmation I felt of my race was on the gym floor, where I was often picked first for my perceived ability. I experienced the opposite in the classroom. The phenotypical appearance that led me to be picked first in athletics caused me to be picked last or not at all in the classroom. In some instances where there were two or three
minorities in our class, we were able to form groups. Occasionally, a White female who had been in the same predicament as us joined our group. Feeling unworthy, I began to devote less and less time to my academics and replaced academics with athletics, the only thing that allowed me to feel acceptance, normalization, and non-hostility from White people. By the end of my first year, I hated being in college and could not wait to go back to New York.

Many things have changed since my first year at Penn State, but some things remain the same. Currently, I work as an administrator at my alma mater in an office offering support to students of color. Unfortunately, the same familiar hostilities and micro-aggressions I experienced as an undergraduate seem to be experienced by this current generation of Black male students (who come from a homogenous environment in which they are the majority—mostly in urban areas) with whom I have had the opportunity to interact.

The status of African American students and in particular of African American male students in our higher education systems is cause for concern. Based on the previously mentioned challenges and trends, it is critical for administrators and researchers to attempt to identify the sources of these troubling outcomes. As we become more diverse as a nation, we must have a workforce that is not only racially diverse, but also diverse by gender within races. Student preparedness for the multicultural workforce is most often associated with college student success; hence, the current study sought to explore student preparedness and persistence further by focusing on African American males’ perspectives around not only peer-to-peer relationships but also the way in which they feel the campus climate affirms them as competent, capable students.

Since there has been overwhelming evidence that student success is largely determined by the student’s academic and social experiences, it is very important we not only take a close
look at the role of retention rates among this already marginalized group, but also on ways these students can be supported (Tinto, 1993; Upcraft, Gardner, & Barefoot, 2005). Within this study, I maintain student support must begin with identity experiences. There is no better place to examine student success than by the way students live and interact with their peers on a daily basis. Although it may seem painfully obvious, it is important to note when students, like every other social group member, feel unsupported, their potential for success begins to decline. If college and university administrators want to ensure student success, one important indicator is in the way students define themselves, their social support networks, and ultimately the way they work through the negotiation of their self-definitions during what has been commonly documented as one of the most volatile and significant times in their lives.
Table 1.1.

*Total Fall enrollment percentages by ethnicities*

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>83.4%</td>
<td>82.7%</td>
<td>79.0%</td>
<td>69.8%</td>
<td>67.1%</td>
<td>66.5%</td>
<td>65.8%</td>
<td>64.6%</td>
<td>63.5%</td>
<td>61.6%</td>
<td>60.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>10.2%</td>
<td>9.9%</td>
<td>9.8%</td>
<td>12.0%</td>
<td>13.3%</td>
<td>13.5%</td>
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<td>15.0%</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>3.8%</td>
<td>4.2%</td>
<td>6.2%</td>
<td>10.5%</td>
<td>11.8%</td>
<td>12.2%</td>
<td>12.5%</td>
<td>13.1%</td>
<td>13.7%</td>
<td>14.4%</td>
<td>15.2%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Asian/Pacific Islander</td>
<td>1.8%</td>
<td>2.4%</td>
<td>4.3%</td>
<td>6.6%</td>
<td>6.6%</td>
<td>6.7%</td>
<td>6.8%</td>
<td>7.0%</td>
<td>6.6%</td>
<td>6.2%</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>American Indian/Alaska Native</td>
<td>0.8%</td>
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Early student development theory and retention research often focused on traditional-aged White students and failed to take into account the experience of other ethnic groups (Guiffrida, 2005; Hurtado, 1997; Kuh & Love, 2000; Rendon, Jalomo, & Nora, 2000). As subsequent research mitigated this gap, another area of concern became the gender disparities along racial lines. Since the start of the millennium, this too has been examined extensively (Cuyjet, 2008; Harper, 2006, 2012; Strayhorn, 2008b, 2013). It is abundantly clear that research on student development has made tremendous strides in identifying engagement and identity development as factors that influence student success. However, there have been no studies of how Black males negotiate their identity when interacting with their White peers at a PWI and how that impinges on their student success. The present study sought to address this void by exploring how African American males at a PWI negotiate their identity when communicating, engaging and interacting with their peers. This study also explored the types of relationships African American males at PWI enter into when interacting with their peers, as suggested by Jackson (2002). Additionally, this present investigation attempted to describe the essence of these interactions by describing the nature and as well as the quality of the aforementioned interactions.

Significance of the Study

As previously suggested, the purpose of this study was to explore how African American males at a PWI negotiate their identities when interacting with peers. This study accentuated a body of research focusing on the retention of African American men in higher education. Findings from this research may influence how PWIs address the unique cross-cultural needs of African American males. These findings may lead universities to explore strategies to engage African American males both academically and socially at the formal and informal levels while
keeping in mind how the cultural uniqueness of their communication styles influences decisions to continue matriculation.

The research gathered as part of this dissertation is critical since little to no research has been devoted to exploring African American male identities as negotiated in interactions with peers at a PWI. Even though the research of participation rates of African American students has expanded, more research needs to be devoted to the specific factors impacting participation rates. Identity negotiated through interactions with peers might be a factor.

**Research Questions**

This study sought to explore this issue by addressing the overarching investigative concern, which was how African American males at PWIs characterize their identity negotiation when interacting with non-African American peers. In order to drill down more succinctly, three sub-questions were explored. The three questions were as follows:

RQ#1: How do African American male participants describe identity negotiations where they are most apt to assimilate (agree to ready-to-sign cultural contracts)?

RQ#2: How do African American male participants describe the way quasi-completed contracts emerge and get negotiated among the participants and their non-African American peers?

RQ#3: According to the participants, under what conditions are co-created cultural contracts made possible?

**Scope**

The population of this study includes currently enrolled undergraduate African American males aged 17 to 24 enrolled in non-science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) majors at a large northeastern research university. This study explored African American males’ self-
reported identity negotiation experiences as it occurs in both formal and informal interactions with peers in academic and social settings.

**Limitations**

The sample size for this particular study was limited to 29 students. The scope of the study was limited to include only major research universities within a non-urban setting. Finally, the researcher’s own experiences in negotiating his identity as a Black male at a PWI was divulged here to bracket the researcher’s bias as much as possible.

**Definition of Terms**

In order to capture the essence of jargon used in the extant literature, the following terms were used and had these specific meanings:

**Academic interaction** - Exchanges that take place within the structure of an academic course or activity that the student completes for credit.

**Co-created contract** - Refers to two or more parties who agree to mutually value one another. The metaphor of the contract suggests an agreement to relationally coordinate as previously stated. These particular “contracts” are fully negotiable with limits only for individual preferences and expectations.

**Critical Mass** - an amount necessary or sufficient to have a significant effect or to achieve a result.

**Cultural contract** - The idea that cultural values and worldviews are exchanged and negotiated between groups.

**Cultural identity** - The emotional significance that we attach to our understanding of affiliation to with a large culture.

**Formal interaction** - Any structured or planned exchange.
Identity - a self-definition that is communicatively affirmed or validated by others

Informal interaction - Any interaction that occurs spontaneously or that was not structured.

Intercultural Interaction - One-on-one communication or exchange between members of different cultural groups.

Negotiating identity - A careful selection of identity among a group of several to utilize within a particular communication context

Nigrescence - The identity model that explains the stage-by-stage process of valuing and recognizing the significance one’s Black identity. The term means “to become Black.”

Micro-aggression - a slight, putdown, indignity, or invalidation unintentionally directed toward a marginalized group, but experienced by marginalized groups on an almost daily basis.

Predominantly White institution – An institution where 51% or more of the students enrolled are White.

Pre-negotiated contract - Refers to ready-to-sign cultural contracts with no further negotiation allowed.

Quasi-negotiated contract - Refers to a social agreement between two or more individuals to mutually accommodate one another despite differences. The metaphor of quasi-completed cultural contracts is used here to describe a social agreement to develop a relationship that is partly pre-negotiated (assimilating in nature) and partly open for negotiation (partly valuing or affirming of the other).

Ready to Sign Contract - This concepts refers to a social arrangement in which two or more parties develop a relationship where one party expects the other to consciously or subconsciously agree to assimilate to their perspective or worldview. The metaphor of the ready
to sign cultural contract is used to suggest that there are those who are prepared to do nothing to advance an intercultural relationship unless you behave, communicate, or live like they do.

Research Institution - A university where the primary focus of the faculty is on the development of continuing research. The Carnegie Classification is now identified as research-intensive, which reflects the significance of the research mission along with the amount of total research expenditures each year.

Social interaction - Interactions taking place as part of a co-curricular activity the student takes part in and does not receive credit for.

Student engagement - This concept refers to the degree of attention, curiosity, interest, optimism, and passion that students show when they are learning or being taught, which extends to the level of motivation they have to learn and progress in their education.

Theoretical Framework

In order to appropriately explore the chief investigative concern regarding how African American males at PWIs characterize their identity negotiation when interacting with non-African American peers, one theoretical framework guided this study—Jackson’s (1999) Cultural Contracts theory. Based on the research questions, this study explored the role of intercultural communication dialogue and identity development as it pertains to the level of engagement of African American male students.

Cultural Contracts Theory (CCT) suggests identities are negotiated via cultural contracts at every stage of relationship development, irrespective of context, from initial interaction to relational termination (Jackson, 1999). In other words, every human being is socialized into a culture that both defines that person’s relationship to the world and offers a set of values, norms, and beliefs that shape the contours of interaction with others. Those worldviews and identities
are critical apparatus necessary for human social survival. When applying this perspective to a college campus it is clear that cultural contracts are central to daily interactions among all college students. Specifically, a cultural contract is defined as an implicit agreement between two or more interactants who have different interpretations of culture and decide to coordinate or resist coordination of a relationship with one another depending on whether the relationship is deemed valuable to both (Jackson, 1999).

This study explored how different interpretations of culture by African American males influence resistance to coordinating relationships with cultural others depending on whether the relationship is deemed valuable by the African American male and ultimately whether the perceived importance of such a relationship influences the student’s level of engagement. The pre-collegiate characteristics the student brings to their interactions were explored in the context of the coordination of the relationship.

**Overview of Chapters**

This dissertation has several chapters. Chapter two provides a review of the extant literature beginning with a discussion of trends related to student enrollment, student persistence, and graduation rates, and engagement, and compares these data across cultural groups. Subsequently the chapter examines studies of student departure and success before exploring Black male identity.

Chapter three explains the qualitative methodological orientation of the study as well as the methods used to collect data. The critical interpretive approach employed here facilitates an in-depth examination of racial dynamics while privileges the voice of the participants. Humanistic studies are necessary for researchers interested in uncovering thick-descriptive data, with the biggest advantage being a resultant analysis that is intensive rather than extensive. The
constant comparison technique used for thematic analysis is explained in addition to stepwise replication, which is employed to facilitate the conformability of the data.

Chapter four presents the findings of the study. Out of the eight individual interviews and three focus groups emerged 607 nodes or independent thoughts, which revealed seven emergent themes and three categories. Each of these are discussed and analyzed while answering the three research questions.

Chapter five offers the conclusions for the study. It provides an overview of the literature, theoretic framework, method, findings, strengths and limitations, implications, and future research.
Chapter 2

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Minorities in Higher Education

The Re-segregation of America’s K–12

The landscape of U.S. public elementary and secondary schools is rapidly changing. Prior to the late 1960s when court-mandated desegregation policies were instituted, White students comprised 80% of public school enrollment. Post-mandated desegregation, the percentage of Black students in majority White schools reached its peak until the early 1980s. In the midst of this changing landscape, an increase in the racial segregation of Black and Latino students emerged. The outcome of this significant pattern of re-segregation has been a return of the percentage of Black students at majority schools to the levels of the 1960s. Furthermore, in less than forty years dating back to the early days of desegregation the enrollment of Latino student has quadrupled (Orfield & Lee, 2007). Between fall 2000 and fall 2010, the number of White students enrolled in pre-kindergarten through grades twelve in public schools in the United States decreased from 28.9 million to 25.9 million. In sheer percentages, this is a decrease from 61 to 52%. At the end of that same period, enrollments of Black students reached 17% and that of Hispanic students reached 23% (National Center for Education Statistics, 2013).

Even more significant, researchers predict that by the middle of this century White students will make up only 40% of school aged youth (Campbell, 1996).

An examination of this pipeline compared to college reveals this trend might continue. Since 1999, at least five states (including the two largest states—California and Texas) reported a majority of elementary and secondary public school students are ethnic and racial minorities. In addition, our country’s largest city school systems only serve a small portion of White
students (Orfield & Yun, 1999). When researchers examined the largest big-city school districts in 1996-97, it was discovered most of the largest districts served 85% or more ethnic minority families and practically served no middle-class White families. In addition to this severe segregation, students in these school systems often experience poverty (Orfield & Yun, 1999). The public schools systems in the U.S. reflect a significant shift in our future demographics and the future of the higher education system. In order to serve our future college population better than was the case with previous generations, appropriate steps need to taken to ensure successful outcomes for this next diverse student population that will be attending college.

**National Higher Education Enrollment Trends and Graduation Rates across Race and Gender**

According to the National Center for Educational Statistics (2011), between 1976 and 2011, total undergraduate enrollment increased for all racial/ethnic groups. Data indicated that in 1976, 1,535,000 undergraduate minority students were enrolled in U.S. colleges and universities. This accounted for 17% of all enrolled undergraduates at that time. When broken down by race, Asian Americans represented 1.8% of undergraduate students at the time, followed by Hispanic students at 3.6% and Black students at 9.6%. As of 2011, the percentage of minority students in the U.S. undergraduate student population grew to 38.8%. When broken down by race the Asian American undergraduate student percentage grew to 6.3%, Hispanic Americans grew to 14.3% and Black students to 15.1%. During these 45 years, the annual percentage growth rate of Hispanic and Asian students outpaced that of Black students by at least three to one. Future enrollment projections indicate the number of students in American higher education will continue to increase. It is clear that these projections not only suggest an increase
in the sheer number of students but also an increase in the diversity of future student bodies at colleges and universities.

Even though there has been an extensive increase in the enrollment of ethnic minorities at colleges and universities (Allen, 1992; Holmes, 2000; Nelson et al., 2007), the crux of the matter remains getting a clear understanding of the performance of these sub-populations. Gaining insights into their levels of matriculation will accurately indicate whether the academy served its purpose in preparing our nation’s next diverse workforce.

The Gender Gap

Since 1976, research indicates both male and female enrollment at U.S. colleges and universities increased. Since 1980, the percentage of undergraduate females enrolled has surpassed the percentage of undergraduate males enrolled. Broken down along ethnic groups, this is also the case. Since 1976, all ethnic groups have increased in percentages of male to female enrollments of undergraduates at U.S. colleges and universities. For example, since 1976, Indian/Alaska Native female enrollment overtook male enrollment in almost equal numbers between males and females, to a 61% to 39% ratio in 2011. Furthermore, Hispanic and White females increased their percentages of undergraduate enrollment between 1976 and 2011. Specifically, the Hispanic female-to-male ratio at colleges and universities changed from 46% in 1976 to 59% in 2011. For White females, the change was from 48% to 56% during the same time period. Finally, between 1976 and 1990, Asian/Pacific Islander females represented less than 50% of Asian/Pacific Islander enrollment at U.S. colleges and universities. Since the year 2000, however, Asian/Pacific Islander females overtook males and represented 54% of total Asian/Pacific Islander enrollment. When examining the trends for Black males and females, the numbers appear to be a little more drastic. Significant differences exist between Black males and
females. In 1976, 54% of the total numbers of Black undergraduates enrolled were female. Subsequently, the gap between Black females and Black males has consistently been the widest of all ethnic groups, reaching its peak in 2007 when females accounted for 64.3% to 35.7% for Black males (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2012, Table 263).

Despite the fact that ethnic and racial minorities made marked increases in overall enrollment, when comparing and contrasting graduation rates, except for Asian Americans, these rates continue to be below the national average. The overall retention rate for the 2005 cohort of undergraduate students was 58.7%. Except for Asian American students, for that same cohort the retention rate for African Americans, Latino Americans and Native Americans were 39.9%, 51.0%, and 39.8%, respectively, all well below national average. When separated by gender, African American males reported the lowest retention rate of any group in the 2005 cohort at 35.1%. When compared to previous cohorts dating back to the 1996 cohort, in all instances Black males posted the lowest retention rates of any group (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2014, Table 326.10).

**Graduation Rates**

Extensive research has been focused on understanding the experiences of ethnic minorities in higher education (Dearing, 1997; Gurin et al., 2002; Hurtado, 1999). This research added richness to the data-driven composites attempting to describe the status of ethnic minorities in higher education. It is critical that administrators evaluate these findings to determine the best possible strategies for serving minority students, including the devastating trends for African American males.

**Asian Americans in Higher Education**

Asian Americans represented 4.8% of the U.S. population, according to 2010 U.S. Census data (U.S. Census Bureau, 2012). The college enrollment percentage of Asian/Pacific
Islander students in higher education was roughly 7% in 2008 at its highest point and 6.2% in 2011, according the National Center for Education Statistics (2011). From 1976 until 2011, the percentage enrollment of Asian/Pacific Islander students increased by 4.8%. When comparing Asian Americans, the ratio of Asian American men to women is 47.4% men versus 52.6% women. In addition, the national graduation rate for the 2005 cohort of Asian/Pacific Islander students was 69.2% (National Center of Education Statistics, 2012, Table 263).

Researchers have argued that the data on Asian American students’ success in higher education have been misleading. Since there are fifty-seven distinctly identifiable ethnic subgroups within the Asian American population, it has been argued that a closer look is needed at these specific sub-groups within the Asian American student population. A closer examination of some of these specific sub-groups indicates a low college attendance rate and low persistence rates (Chan & Hune, 1995).
### Table 2.1

**College enrollment ratios by gender for all ethnic and racial groups**

<table>
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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Undergraduate (male)</td>
<td>52.0%</td>
<td>47.7%</td>
<td>45.0%</td>
<td>43.9%</td>
<td>42.8%</td>
<td>42.9%</td>
<td>43.1%</td>
<td>43.2%</td>
<td>43.2%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>43.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Undergraduate (female)</td>
<td>48.0%</td>
<td>52.3%</td>
<td>55.0%</td>
<td>56.1%</td>
<td>57.2%</td>
<td>57.1%</td>
<td>56.9%</td>
<td>56.8%</td>
<td>56.8%</td>
<td>56.7%</td>
<td>56.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White (male)</td>
<td>52.4%</td>
<td>47.8%</td>
<td>45.1%</td>
<td>44.6%</td>
<td>44.1%</td>
<td>44.2%</td>
<td>44.4%</td>
<td>44.5%</td>
<td>44.5%</td>
<td>44.6%</td>
<td>44.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White (female)</td>
<td>47.6%</td>
<td>52.2%</td>
<td>54.9%</td>
<td>55.4%</td>
<td>55.9%</td>
<td>55.8%</td>
<td>55.6%</td>
<td>55.5%</td>
<td>55.5%</td>
<td>55.4%</td>
<td>55.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black (male)</td>
<td>45.7%</td>
<td>42.0%</td>
<td>39.0%</td>
<td>37.3%</td>
<td>35.7%</td>
<td>35.7%</td>
<td>36.0%</td>
<td>36.2%</td>
<td>36.4%</td>
<td>36.7%</td>
<td>36.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black (female)</td>
<td>54.3%</td>
<td>58.0%</td>
<td>61.0%</td>
<td>62.7%</td>
<td>64.3%</td>
<td>64.3%</td>
<td>64.0%</td>
<td>63.8%</td>
<td>63.6%</td>
<td>63.3%</td>
<td>63.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic (male)</td>
<td>54.3%</td>
<td>48.8%</td>
<td>45.1%</td>
<td>43.1%</td>
<td>41.4%</td>
<td>41.5%</td>
<td>41.9%</td>
<td>42.0%</td>
<td>42.2%</td>
<td>42.3%</td>
<td>42.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic (female)</td>
<td>45.7%</td>
<td>51.2%</td>
<td>54.9%</td>
<td>56.9%</td>
<td>58.6%</td>
<td>58.5%</td>
<td>58.1%</td>
<td>58.0%</td>
<td>57.8%</td>
<td>57.5%</td>
<td>57.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian/Pacific Islander (male)</td>
<td>53.8%</td>
<td>51.7%</td>
<td>50.8%</td>
<td>47.5%</td>
<td>46.1%</td>
<td>46.2%</td>
<td>46.4%</td>
<td>46.0%</td>
<td>46.8%</td>
<td>47.2%</td>
<td>47.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian/Pacific Islander (female)</td>
<td>46.2%</td>
<td>48.3%</td>
<td>49.2%</td>
<td>52.5%</td>
<td>53.9%</td>
<td>53.8%</td>
<td>53.6%</td>
<td>54.0%</td>
<td>53.2%</td>
<td>52.8%</td>
<td>52.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American Indian/Alaska Native (male)</td>
<td>49.9%</td>
<td>44.6%</td>
<td>41.8%</td>
<td>40.7%</td>
<td>38.9%</td>
<td>39.6%</td>
<td>39.6%</td>
<td>40.1%</td>
<td>40.4%</td>
<td>40.4%</td>
<td>39.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American Indian/Alaska Native (female)</td>
<td>50.1%</td>
<td>55.4%</td>
<td>58.2%</td>
<td>59.3%</td>
<td>61.1%</td>
<td>60.4%</td>
<td>60.4%</td>
<td>59.9%</td>
<td>59.6%</td>
<td>59.6%</td>
<td>60.1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2.2

Six year graduation rates of first-time, full-time bachelor's degree-seeking students at 4-year postsecondary institutions, by race/ethnicity, 1996 through 2006

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cohort entry year</th>
<th>Overall</th>
<th>White</th>
<th>Black</th>
<th>Hispanic</th>
<th>Asian/Pacific Islander</th>
<th>American Indian/ Alaska Native</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1996</td>
<td>55.4</td>
<td>58.1</td>
<td>38.9</td>
<td>45.7</td>
<td>63.4</td>
<td>38.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>57.5</td>
<td>60.2</td>
<td>42.1</td>
<td>49.1</td>
<td>66.7</td>
<td>40.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2002</td>
<td>57.2</td>
<td>60.2</td>
<td>40.1</td>
<td>48.9</td>
<td>67.1</td>
<td>38.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003</td>
<td>57.4</td>
<td>60.8</td>
<td>39.1</td>
<td>48.7</td>
<td>68.0</td>
<td>38.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>58.3</td>
<td>61.5</td>
<td>39.5</td>
<td>50.1</td>
<td>68.7</td>
<td>39.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005</td>
<td>58.7</td>
<td>62.1</td>
<td>39.9</td>
<td>51.0</td>
<td>69.2</td>
<td>39.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>39.0</td>
<td>42.6</td>
<td>20.5</td>
<td>29.2</td>
<td>45.8</td>
<td>21.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Researchers suggest that to present a more accurate picture of the academic success of Asian American students, the data pertaining to Asian American students should be dissected and scrutinized by criteria such as ethnicity, English proficiency, and generations in the United States (Kim & Yeh, 2002).

**Native Americans in Higher Education**

According to the 2010 U.S. Census, Native Americans make up 0.9% of the U.S. population (U.S. Census Bureau, 2011). In 2011, Native Americans represented 1% of the college population (U.S. Department of Education, 2012). Comparing Native American men’s and women’s enrollments in higher education, the ratio is 39.9% men to 60.1% women (Table 2.1).

Data clearly indicate that the underrepresentation of American Indian students at colleges and universities continues to be an ongoing issue. Even though these data indicate that the enrollment of Native American students has more than doubled over the last 25 years (U.S. Department of Education, 2012), Native American students continue to post the lowest enrollment numbers at colleges and universities. Only 18% of American Indians aged 18 to 24 attend college. This number is substantially lower than that for other ethnic groups (Freeman & Fox, 2005).

Once enrolled in college, the news about Native American students does not get any better. The underrepresentation of American Indian students is strongly influenced by low retention rates. Jackson, Smith, and Hill (2003) suggested that Native American students are admitted to colleges and universities at a much higher rate in comparison with other ethnic groups, yet they graduate at far lower rates. As a result, less than 1% of all undergraduate degrees are awarded to Native American students (Silas, 2006). Researchers studying Native American students in college attribute performance and persistence to factors such as type of high school attended, high school grade point average, parental education level, parental involvement and encouragement, and financial aid. The
latter appeared to be the stronger predictor for college performance and completion of Native American students (McNamarra, 1982).

In addition, researchers reaffirmed findings by Astin (1982) and Tinto (1993) that Native American students who are socially engaged with peers and faculty are more likely to persist (Brown & Robinson-Kurpius, 1997). A study conducted by Jackson, Smith, and Hill (2003) found that the presence of structured social support systems fostered success among American Indian students. This same study concluded that American Indian students self-identified their association with American Indian clubs, multicultural offices, and other groups organized to provide social support as a critical factor in their success.

**Latinos in Higher Education**

Latinos represented 16.3% of the U.S. population in 2010, according to the U.S. Census Bureau (2011). According to the U.S. Department of Education, Latinos represented 15.2% of students enrolled in higher education in 2011. The ratio of Latino men to women in higher education in 2011 was 42.3% men to 57.7% women (Table 2.1).

According to recent data, a greater number of Latino students attend college than do non-Hispanic and Whites. In particular, roughly 10% of all Latino high school graduates are enrolled in some form of college compared to 7% of the total population of high school graduates. Even though this might sound very promising, most of these students are pursuing paths not leading to the completion of their bachelors’ degree. Most students who enroll in community colleges attend school part-time or do not pursue higher education until their later years. The findings clearly show large numbers of Latinos finish their secondary schooling and try to extend their education but fail to earn degrees (Fry, 2002).
When examining what would be considered traditional-aged college candidates, just 35% of Latino high school graduates aged 18 to 24 years enroll in college compared to 46% of Whites. Research indicates that Latinos are far more likely to be enrolled in two-year colleges than any other group. Further, 40% of college-aged Latino students attend two-year institutions compared to about 25% of White and Black students in that age group. In addition, Latinos are more likely to attend college as part-time students. In comparison, nearly 85% of the 18- to 24-year-old White college students are enrolled full-time compared to 75% of Latinos (Fry, 2002).

In a close intra-group examination of Latinos, it was found that native-born Latino high school graduates enroll in college at a higher rate than non-U.S.-born Latinos. When examined by national origin, 46% of college-aged Mexican students attend two-year institutions in comparison to 31% of Puerto Rican and Cuban students. Research indicates that 45% of college-aged Cuban students attain the highest rate of college attendance of any Latino national origin group followed by Mexican students at 33% and Puerto Rican students at 30% (Fry, 2002).

A look at degree completion shows a substantial gap in the numbers of Latino and White college students who graduate with a bachelor’s degree. Researchers attribute Latinos’ low completion rate of bachelors’ degrees to the fact that many Latinos are minimally prepared academically to succeed in a four-year college. In particular, among college-ready students, Latino students are at disadvantage when it comes to degree completion due to different factors. One factor relates to as many 60% of Latino students enroll in non-selective colleges and universities, in comparison to 52% of White students. Furthermore, nearly 66% of Latinos initially enroll in “open-door” institutions. In contrast, less than 45% of White students with comparable academic backgrounds enroll at similar open-door institutions (Fry, 2004). This is critical since selectivity is a strong indication of degree completion (Pascarella & Terrenzini, 2005).
African Americans in Higher Education

According to the U.S. Census, African Americans represent 12.6% of the U.S. population in 2010 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2011). In comparison, they represented 15.3% of the population enrolled in higher education. For that same year African American men represent 36.9% of their ethnicity in college in comparison to 63.1% of African American women. The 6-year graduation rate for the 2005 African American freshmen cohort students was 39.9% (Table 2.2), representing an 18.8% lower average overall retention rate for all students from that cohort and only higher than the Native American cohort of that year by 0.1% (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2012).

As clearly indicated by the previous data, a substantial number of African American students do not matriculate successfully to graduation. Besides the low retention rates of African American students in general, there is a disparity in the ratio of African American men to African American women.

African American Men vs. Women

The enrollment rates of African American male students lag in comparison to White and Asian students and even African American women by almost two to one. When comparing retention rates with White students and Asian students, this is clearly the case again. Finally, when comparing participation rates along gender lines, the status of African Americans in comparison with any group enrolled in college is simply devastating (National Center for Education Statistics, 2012).

African American Men

Much research focuses on the state of Black men in American society in general. However, very little research has examined the state of these men in higher education. In those few studies, the focus was on faculty and staff, rather than undergraduate students. Researchers have suggested that the disproportionate representation of both African American men and women on college campuses
holds significant implications for the social experiences and attitudes of these groups (Cuyet, 2005). This impact is often demonstrated in the disproportionate retention rate of African Americans compared to their White counterparts at colleges and universities. Beyond the previously mentioned troubling enrollment trends, literature suggests that African American males are more likely to experience racism, discrimination and marginalization at predominantly White colleges and universities. In addition to these aforementioned issues, Black males continue to feel alienated, isolated and unsatisfied at institutions of higher education (Cuyet, 1997, 2005).

Extensive research has explored disparities in academic performance among African American men and other groups at institutions of higher education (Flowers, 2004; McNairy, 1996; Swail et al., 2004; Tierney, 1999). Even though this body of research focused on cultural factors, little to no research focused on identity negotiations taking place during the interactions between Black males and their non-Black peers.

In general, retaining students at universities remains an important goal for all colleges and universities. To support these efforts, large bodies of research are devoted to the study of the retention of students in general (Astin, 1991; Pascarella & Terrenzini, 2005; Tinto, 1993). As demographics shift to a more heterogeneous college campus environment at the academy, a better understanding of differences along racial lines provides helpful insights into the retention rates of various ethnic groups.

Over the last several decades, much research has been dedicated to the study of retention in higher education. In this research, several conceptual frameworks and models were introduced. These were widely accepted for their applicability to the collegiate environment, and are referred to as college impact models as well as student persistence models (Pascarella & Terrenzini, 2005).
Traditional Models of Student Persistence

A Historical Review of Retention Research

Since the early stages of research on student development, an emphasis has been placed on retention and persistence. Research on retention goes back to the beginning of the twentieth century. From that time on, a body of research began to examine retention and attrition and its effects on students and colleges. Research on retention in higher education increased post-World War II with the large influx of students as a result of federal programs including the GI Bill and the subsequent Civil Rights Act and the Higher Education Act. From the post-World War II era emerged early models of student development that attempted to explain the causes of retention and attrition. Most of these early models were based on psychological and sociological theoretical frameworks.

The first broad look at student development did not occur until the early 1970s when Spady (1971) developed a practical student development model. This model described how students’ personal attributes interacted with environmental influences at colleges and universities. Spady (1971) argued that the interaction between personal attributes and environmental factors produced opportunities that gave students opportunities for successful assimilation into the social and academic systems of colleges. This early stage of research produced insights into why students chose to remain or depart the university. Subsequent research reaffirmed some of Spady’s (1971) findings related to a student’s decision to either remain at or leave the university due to influences relating to the rewards found within these systems (Bean, 1985; Terenzini & Pascarella, 1979). The population targeted for early student departure theory was primarily the first-year student (Gardner & Upcraft, 1989; Tinto, 1987). This was the first time an emphasis was placed on a specific subgroup of the general student population. Subsequently, research on retention began to slowly
focus on other sub-populations as early retention research was scrutinized for focusing too much on research on traditionally aged White college students (Tierney, 1999).

**Organizing Student Development Theory**

Today, an extensive body of research has been devoted to students and how they experience college (Astin, 1985, 1993; Pascarella & Terenzini 1991, 2005; Tinto, 1987, 1993).

In their extensive review of the previous literature on the influence of college on students over time, Pascarella and Terenzini (1991, 2005) were able to group student development theories and models into two distinct categories. The categories include developmental theories of student change and college impact models of student change.

Developmental theories and models addressed the nature, structure, and process of individual human growth, whereas college impact models of student change emphasized change associated with the characteristics of the institution students attended or with the student experiences while enrolled at these colleges. In exploring cross-cultural dialogue and the influence of engagement of first-year African American males at a PWI with White peers and White faculty, it appears this phenomenon could be explained in a college impact model of student change.

**College Impact Models of Student Change**

College impact models focus less on intra-individual development than on the environmental and inter-individual origins of student change. They focus specifically on changes within the individual related to the nature, structure, and processes of the individual’s growth. According to researchers, existing models tend to be eclectic in identifying and evaluating a number of variables supposedly influencing one or more aspect of change. The sets of variables might be related to student, structural and organizational or environmental factors (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005).
Student-related factors include gender, academic achievement, socio-economic status, race and ethnicity. Structural and organizational factors may include institution type, type of control, selectivity and curricular mission. Environmental factors include academic, cultural, social and political climate created by faculty and students on campus (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). Two of the most frequently cited college impact models include Astin (1985, 1993) and Tinto (1987, 1993). Both focus on variables assumed to affect student behavior and change. These sets include variables related to the students’ social identity and demographic backgrounds as well as institutional factors, factors related to the student’s experiences, and the climate of the campus (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). Theoretical approaches by Alexander Astin and Vincent Tinto provide a good starting-point for investigating study abroad as part of the college experience.

Astin’s Theory of Student Involvement

Astin’s theory of student involvement includes the amount of physical and psychological vigor the student devotes to their educational experience (Reason, 2003). This theory characterizes a highly involved student as one who devotes a great deal of energy to academics and to their social experience. In particular, this student participates actively in student organizations and interacts frequently with their peers, faculty and staff. In summary, Astin’s theory contends that a correlation exists between the student’s learning experience and the personal development associated with any educational program in relation to the quality and quantity of student involvement in a program. As a result of this relationship, Astin concluded that the significance of the student’s involvement in the college experience correlates with the level of engagement. As a result, the more engaged a student is, the more motivated they will be.

As previously mentioned, Astin suggested that outcomes from the college experience result from the student’s investment of time and energy in the college experience. Astin further suggested
the student’s pre-collegiate characteristics may influence the extent to which they immerse
themselves into the collegiate experience. Factors drawing the student’s effort away from the
college experience result in a negative impact on the student’s matriculation. When the student
invests in quality endeavors during their collegiate experience, the student tends to be more engaged.
Astin considered meaningful interactions with peers and faculty. These factors contribute to the
positive outcomes of their college experience.

Astin (1984) suggested that five basic postulates for a theoretical framework of involvement
include:

(a) Involvement is described as the investment of physical and psychological energy in a
variety of objects. These objects can be general in nature or very specific—as general as
institutional experiences and as specific as interaction with a particular instructor that range
in the degree of their specificity.

(b) Involvement occurs along a continuum with different students investing different
amounts of energy in a variety of objects at various times.

(c) Involvement includes quantitative and qualitative components.

(d) The amount of student learning and personal development is directly proportional to the
quality and quantity of involvement.

(e) The effectiveness of educational practices and policies directly relates to the capacity of
policy or practice to increase involvement.

Astin’s first three postulates attempt to measure the concept of involvement. They ascribe
and relate involvement to the students’ educational and institutional experience. Postulates four and
five appear to measure the involvement that might be helpful in conducting research or even in practical application (Astin, 1984).

One of the criticisms of Astin’s models suggests a failure to take into account the experiences of minority students. Critics of Astin’s model argue the endeavors students take part in may be linked to social class and student race/ethnicity. As a result, minority students face unique challenges to their involvement in the college experience. Rendón, Jaloma, and Nora (2000) argued that Astin’s models underestimated the cost of involvement for minority students. In addition, critics contend this model addressed the cost of involvement with a focus on the individual’s responsibility to ensure their success, rather than on the institution’s responsibility to provide a more multicultural affirming environment to ensure student success (Tierney, 1992). Astin’s (1993) model assumes that involvement depends primarily on student effort.

Rendón (1994) adapted a critical position from Astin’s model. She argued that nontraditional students are more likely to become involved when others from the institution invite their involvement. Utilizing her validations theory, she suggested the charge of engaging students in the college experience is in large part the duty of university faculty and staff. Rendon’s model affirms the role of dual socialization and bi-culturation in encouraging students to enjoy simultaneous membership in multiple cultures. As a result of socialization and bi-culturation, the cost of involvement for students from non-dominant cultures in higher education is not as stressful.

**Tinto’s Model of Student Departure**

Tinto’s model of student departure (Figure, 2.1) represents the most cited theory related to student persistence (Braxton, Milem, & Sullivan, 2000). Although Tinto’s model reflects Astin’s involvement theory, the main difference in Tinto’s model provides an extensive overview that gives researchers and practitioners clues about student change. As a result, researchers developed new
models building on existing models about influences on student persistence. In his research, Tinto attempted to understand the longitudinal process of student persistence; the primary goal of his research was to investigate how the prevalence or lack of certain behaviors impact student persistence and retention.

Tinto’s original model of student departure emerges from a collaborative effort with Cullen (1973). Prior to this collaboration, Cullen’s research focused on the examination and review of longitudinal studies of student attrition. Cullen and Tinto produced a theoretical model of attrition and persistence.

Tinto’s original research with Cullen produced the basis of his 1975 model. In that model, Tinto incorporated perspectives from Van Gennep’s (1960) rites of passage theory. Van Gennep’s theory, which was anthropologically based, provided Tinto with a foundation through which to apply his student departure theory in a higher education setting.

Tinto’s theoretical perspective influenced Spady (1971), who was influenced by a theory of student departure he derived from Durkheim’s suicide theory (1953). Spady’s theoretical model explored the student dropout process. After Spady, Tinto began to use Durkheim’s suicide theory (1953) and concept of egotistical departure. This became his foundation for explaining student departure.

With a focus on the four-year traditionally aged college students, Tinto incorporated six components from his previous research with Cullen into his research on the influences on student persistence. From this initial model Tinto suggested students arrive at college with certain expectations and aspirations. He continued to build on this concept finally leading to his 1993 model of student departure which became one of the most widely cited as well as most scrutinized models of student development.
Tinto’s (1993) model of student departure examines various academic, psychological and social factors leading to student departure from the university where they are enrolled. The model suggests student departure is a consequence of the interaction between the individual student and the college or university as an organization.

More specifically, this model suggests students come to a particular institution with a range of background traits. These traits include secondary school experiences, academic aptitude, and family backgrounds. Based on these traits, a student’s initial commitments, both to the institution and to the goal of graduation from college, are developed (Tinto, 1993). Together with background traits, these commitments influence not only how well students will perform in college but also how they will interact with, and subsequently become engaged in, the institution’s social and academic systems (Tinto, 1993).

Ultimately, the greater the individual’s level of social and academic engagement, the greater their subsequent commitment to the institution and commitment to the goal of college graduation, respectively. In Tinto’s model, these students’ initial and subsequent commitments, along with levels of integration, produce direct, positive influence on retention. This study focuses on this aspect of this framework as it relates to academic and social experiences and the role of cross-cultural dialogue in those experiences.

Even though Tinto’s model continues to be one of the most cited models of student persistence, it probably has been one of the most criticized. Critics in general have argued that Tinto’s model fails to take the experience of minority students into account (Guiffrida, 2005; Hurtado, 1997; Kuh & Love, 2000; Rendon, Jalomo, & Nora, 2000; Moore & Upcraft, 1990; Tierney, 1999). Another criticism levied against Tinto’s model is that it places too much
responsibility for social and academic engagement on the student and not enough on the institution (Rendon, 1994; Tierney, 1992).

It is clear that extensive research was devoted to the role of the retention of students in general. This research led to the development of widely accepted theoretical frameworks addressing retention issues. These models are consistently criticized for not being culturally relevant. Based on existing data, it is clear that retention of African American students has reached a critical point. A closer examination of this phenomenon is truly warranted if this issue is to be corrected.

Both Astin (1984) and Tinto (1993) attempted to address formal and informal interactions between students and their peers’ interactions with faculty. Even though these interactions provide some insight, they lack rich perspectives, giving us insights into what these interactions truly look like. The essence was this: What do the interactions between students as well as the interactions between students and faculty look like? Furthermore, if one or more of the interactions is from a different cultural background, how do these interactions play out? What is at stake? What role does culture play in these interactions? How is identity negotiated during these interactions? What is the essence of the experience of these interactions at a PWI?

If most widely accepted models of student retention and departure fail to address this crisis with African American students and even more specifically African American males, new approaches need to be considered separately or in combination with these currently existing models. Student academic and social engagement is a well-recognized factor contributing to student departure. Research on what these specific interactions look like does not address the role of cross-cultural dialogue in these interactions. A better understanding of cross-cultural dialogue in a general context is applicable to the collegiate context and enhances insights into the social and academic
engagement that leads to departure. Engagement and departure are both inherently addressed within the context of the discussion of culture of communication.

**Culture and Communication**

Current trends in U.S. higher education point to the fact that colleges and universities will become more and more ethnically diverse. These same trends indicate that students who represent this ethnic diversity are more likely to face challenges than their White counterparts. A substantial part of a student’s collegiate experience revolves on face-to-face communication with their peers and faculty. Since face-to-face communication is a large part of the overall student experience it would be fair to suggest these constant interactions shape how a student experiences college. Little to no research has been devoted to the essence of face-to-face communication experience and their impact on students’ experiences at colleges and universities. Even more so, little to no research has been devoted to how students from diverse backgrounds in higher education settings negotiate their identity with their White peers at a PWI.
Figure 2.1

Tinto’s Model of Student Departure

(Adapted from: Tinto, 1993, p. 114)
Within the field of communication, a large body of research has focused on how messages exchanged between individuals impact identities or relationships. From this body of research has emerged a significant theoretical perspective that provides insight into how communication takes place as people negotiate their identity in these interactions. How and to what extent one’s identity is negotiated is where various identity paradigms diverge (Cupach & Imahori, 1993; Gudykunst & Ting-Toomey; 1988, Jackson, 1999, 2002; Ting-Toomey, 1999). Beginning with Cross’s nigrescence model, related studies will be explored.

**Black Identity Development**

**Racial Identity**

As the U.S. population has become more ethnically diverse and as interest in how individuals from various ethnic groups negotiate their identity has become more prominent, models and theoretical perspectives on identity development have significantly increased over the last several decades (Bernal and Knight, 1993, Helms, 1990, Rowe, Bennett, & Atkinson, 1994). Helms (1990) defined racial identity as “a sense of group or collective identity based on one’s perception that he or she shares a common racial heritage with a particular racial group” (p. 3). Helms further stated that “racial identity development theory concerns the psychological implications of racial-group membership, that is, belief systems that evolve in reaction to perceived differential racial-group membership” (p. 3). Most early versions of racial identity research focused on African American racial identity.

In an attempt to examine the psychological experiences of African Americans, a large body of research has been devoted to the study of Black racial identity. Over the years, researchers have developed several models that have attempted to explain Black identity development (Cross, 1991; Cross & Fhagen-Smith, 2001; Cross & Vandiver, 2001; Sellers et al., 1998). These models were
mainly created in an attempt to understand the experiences of Blacks in the United States. Most of these models offered progression along different stages. The individual developed from a low level of salience of his/her Blackness to a thorough journey of self-discovery. Emerging with a strong Black identity, he or she developed the ability to interact across other cultural dimensions (Cross, 1971, 1978, 1991). Even though several models of Black identity have emerged, one that has stood out and is most often cited has been Cross’s (1971, 1978) theory of psychological nigrescence or the Black Identity Development Model that eventually was revised into the Cross and Fhagen-Smith life span model of Black identity development.

**Cross’s Model of Black Identity**

In Cross’s Nigrescence Model of Identity Conversion (1971), he suggested five stages of identity development. These stages are five progressive linear stages that included pre-encounter, encounter, immersion/emersion, internalization and internalization-commitment. One of the criticisms of Cross' original model was that it did not make a clear distinction between group and personal identity. In its original version, Cross’s (1971) model centered more on individual factors rather environmental factors in the development of Black identity. Specifically, if one had a healthy Black identity, he or she moved from a mainstream/euro stream (non-Afrocentric) to Afrocentric, to a multicultural identity. In this transformational experience, the individual moves from complete unawareness of race to embracing Black culture only and finally to commitment to many cultures, empathizing with their experience of oppressed cultures while advocating for their concerns (Chavez & Guido-DiBrito, 1999). Furthermore, the theory posited that race, as part of a Black person’s identity, was preferred and race influenced this person’s ability to function mentally (Vandiver et al., 2002). Acceptance of Blackness by Blacks was associated with a healthy sense of self. In opposition, those who did not embrace their Black Identity struggled with poor sense of self.
Pre-encounter

Pre-encounter is the first stage in Black identity development. During this stage, a person has absorbed many of the beliefs and values of the dominant White culture, including the notion that “Whiteness” is superior to “Blackness.” During this stage, the individual can possibly internalize negative Black stereotypes subconsciously; he or she may seek to assimilate and be affirmed by Whites while distancing himself from “Blackness”.

Encounter

Encounter is the second stage of identity development. During this phase, the individual typically experiences an event or series of events that forces the individual to acknowledge the impact of racism in one’s life. This can be in the form of social rejection by White friends or co-workers. In turn, the individual may conclude that Whites will not view him or her as an equal. After this experience, the individual concludes that he or she cannot truly embrace “Whiteness.” The individual is then resigned to focus on his or her Black Identity and how that identity makes him/her a target for social oppressions.

Immersion/emersion

During the third stage of Black identity development, the individual develops the desire to surround themselves with visible symbols of their racial identity and an active avoidance of symbols of Whiteness. The individual is in opposition to “Whiteness”, often viewing “Whiteness” as the enemy. In the Immersion stage, there is a conscious effort to seek out and explore aspects of their own history and culture with the support of peers from their own racial background. Eventually during this stage, anger towards Whiteness fades and the focus shifts to emersion and Black exploration. This exploration of Blackness leads to self-affirmation and a newfound sense of Black consciousness.
Internalization

During this stage, the individual is still fully immersed in his/her identity and maintains connections to his or her Black peers. There is a change in the perception of “Whiteness.” “Whiteness” is no longer viewed as the enemy and the individual develops a willingness to enter into relationships with Whites who affirm and humanize their Blackness.

Internalization-commitment

This stage is considered the final stage in Black identity development. In this stage, Cross describes those who have entered this stage as having developed a “personal sense of Blackness into a plan of action or a general sense of commitment” about the concerns of Blacks as a group, which is sustained over time (Cross, 1991, p. 220). During this stage the individual’s ongoing actions show a concern for Black issues. The individual becomes an emissary and is prepared to cross and transcend groups and boundaries regularly.

Cross’s Nigrescence Model of Identity Conversion

Over the years, Cross’s model has been well vetted in research and scholarly publications. As a result of scrutiny, Cross’s model has undergone several revisions (Cross, 1978, 1985, 1991, 1995), as well as expansions (Cross & Fhagen-Smith, 2001; Cross & Vandiver, 2001; Vandiver & Worrell, 2001). Researchers also argued that the original model did not stress the influence group and personal identity had on self-esteem (Vandiver et al., 2002). In addition, researchers have argued that even though this model was presented in a linear form, it was actually more spiral. Specifically, the argument was made that a person may progress from one stage to then next only to revert to a previous stage due to result of new experience (Parham, 1989; Tatum, 1992).

Cross’s Model of Black Identity revised

In his revised model, Cross (1991) suggested that a person’s concept of self was made up of two components: personal identity and reference group orientation. In this model, personal identity
and group identity, as well as reference group orientation, are clearly outlined and the relationship
between these aforementioned factors and self-esteem is demonstrated. Personal identity refers to
the individual’s traits and characteristics that define his personality. The term reference group
orientation refers to the individual’s personal values and worldview is determined through their lived experiences. In addition, Cross (1991) condensed the stages of identity development to four.

In the 1991 revised Nigrescence model, the stages of identity development did not represent identities but rather the overarching themes of each particular stage. This model is characterized by seven Black racial identities across four stages. In this new model, the stages of identity development were Pre-Encounter, which contains two identities; Encounter, which has none; Immersion-Emersion, which has two; and finally Internalization, which has three identities (Vandiver et al., 2002).

**Pre-Encounter**

The first stage of the revised model remained pre-encounter. This stage was characterized by two identities: assimilation and anti-Black (Cross, 1991). Individuals who have Anti-Black identity appear to be miseducated and are consumed by self-hatred. Individuals who demonstrate assimilation identity have a pro-American reference group orientation and the construct of race is not salient to them. Furthermore, in anti-Black identity, self-hatred is the result of a person’s negative view about being Black.

**Encounter**

As with the first model, the encounter stage follows the pre-encounter stage. What is critical in this stage is that it portrays a series of events that trigger the subject to reevaluate his/her reference group orientation. Unlike the other stages in this revised model, in this encounter stage, no identity cluster is depicted. Instead, the encounter stage describes a process in which the individual’s
reference group orientation is depicted. What is critical in this stage is that if enough cognitive and emotional discomfort is generated during the reexamination of the individual’s reference group orientation, he/she will graduate to the Immersion-Emersion stage (Vandiver et al., 2002).

**Immersion-Emersion**

During the Immersion-Emersion stage, two identities are prevalent: Intense Black Involvement and Anti-White. In the Intense Black Involvement identity, the person over-indulges in the Blackness or Black Identity. In the Anti-White identity, the individual rejects everything White without any positive regard for anything White (Vandiver et al., 2002).

**Internalization**

The Internalization stage combines the original Internalization stage and the Commitment stage. During this stage three identities emerge that demonstrate the graduation to Black acceptance: Black Nationalist, Biculturalist and Multiculturalist. In short, unlike the Black Nationalist, the Biculturalist and the Multiculturalist want to build coalitions beyond their own Black communities. A person who demonstrates a Black Nationalist identity is someone who is described as a person who invests his/her wisdom in uplifting his/her Black community. A Biculturalist identity has two prominent characteristics: Black self-acceptance and a focus on one other social identity such as sexuality or gender. The last identity in the Internalization stage is the Multiculturalist. The difference between the Biculturalist and the Multiculturalist is that in addition to Black acceptance, two or more salient social identities are focused upon.

**Current Trends in Research**

Current research on underrepresented minorities in higher education continues to focus on the disparities and inequities experienced in these groups (Burke, 2013; Cuyet et al., 2013; Quaye & Harper, 2014). In addition, emergent research is drilling down deeper on issues that impact new
areas of study. New research has shed light on various external environmental challenges such as socioeconomic and demographic factors (Advisory Committee on Student Financial Assistance [ACSFA], 2010; Baum et al., 2010) that impact enrollment of URM students. Furthermore, future workforce demands have initiated federal mandates that require the examination of URM participation in specific disciplines such as Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math (STEM). Finally, the approaches in the research have shifted from focusing less on the negative factors that influence the state of underrepresented minorities in higher education to positive factors that stimulate URMs’ enrollment in higher education. New conceptual frameworks are being introduced to support current research that aims to address existing research gaps that will be helpful to both scholars and practitioners in reversing or enhancing the academic, social and career outcomes of underrepresented minority students in the college pipeline (Harper, 2012; Perna, 2006). This current research will ensure that we create work that is diverse and equipped to serve the future majority minority population what will inevitably require their expertise and service.

The most recent research on Black Identity development has attempted to enhance Cross’s (1991) Model of Black Identity. The development of and findings from the Cross Racial Identity Scale (CRIS; Vandiver et al., 2000) resulted in revisions to the 1991 Model of Black Identity. Subsequent changes and expansions to the model included addition of the Pre-Encounter stage, which presented three identity models as opposed to two. Beyond the changes offered by an expanded model, Cross and Fhagen-Smith (2001) introduced another addition called the “life span model of Black identity development” that offered four characteristics of the 1991 model across a lifespan. Researchers believed that three delineated patterns across a lifespan presented Black identity development across six sectors, encompassing all of these three Nigrescence patterns. It is clear that current research continues to identify research gaps that, when addressed, will offer
findings essential to enriching the experiences of African American males in higher education. It is hoped that this emerging research will compel practitioners and scholars to set the tone for policies and practices needed to enhance the academic experiences of marginalized groups such as African American males at U.S. colleges and universities.

**Conceptual Model of Student College Enrollment**

Current research on college enrollment trends continues to highlight the impressive gains made in higher education but with the proverbial asterisk (NCES, 2012). It has been suggested that while these gains are impressive, they continue to mask college enrollment challenges. Specifically, the persisting argument is that enrollment rates continue to vary based on race and ethnicity, socioeconomic status as well as other targeted social identities (Baum, Ma, & Payea, 2010). Beyond disproportionate enrollment trends, selectivity by institutions of higher education is also inequitable along racial lines. White students attend highly selective institutions at much higher rates than Blacks and Hispanics who mostly attend less selective and more affordable institutions such as community colleges and for-profit institutions (Perna & Jones, 2013). With this awareness, scholars continue to drill down deeper on issues that impact specific ethnic groups.

One area of current research on college enrollment has been predicated on previous research based on the “Conceptual Model of Student College Enrollment” (Perna & Kurban, 2013). In an effort to demystify the college enrollment process and the multiple layers that influence college access and selection by diverse students, Perna (2006) offered the “Conceptual Model of Student College Enrollment.” This models characteristic includes the multi dimensions of the college enrollment and choice processes and the multiple issues that influence the behaviors associated with it. Furthermore, this model posits that a close examination of the circumstantial factors that
influence college enrollment and choice offer a strong basis for deciphering how the primary predictors of college enrollment and choice influence outcomes” (Perna, 2006).

Researchers argue that even as access to enrollment in higher education grows, the “Conceptual Model of Student College Enrollment” can be utilized to mitigate continued inequalities and stratification. Researchers posit that the circumstances that determine the social, cultural, economic, and policy contexts in which students are anchored define college access and choice. In particular, factors such as financial resources, academic preparation and achievement, support from significant others, and information about college and financial aid are the primary predictors of college access and choice (Perna & Kurban, 2013).

**Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math: The New Frontier**

Due to the increasing need for a future STEM workforce that includes URM, policy makers have begun to realize that initiatives are needed that ensure removal of barriers to entry and ensure progress by URM students in STEM fields. With an understanding of this STEM dilemma, the President’s Council of Advisors on Science and Technology (2012) called for an initiative that would result in a 33% increase in the number of science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) bachelor’s degrees completed annually as well as an initiative to train 100,000 additional K–12 STEM teachers. The need for this initiative is affirmed and supported by current research that focuses on URMs in STEM (Hurtado et al., 2010; National Science Foundation & National Center for Science and Engineering Statistics, 2013; President's Council of Advisors on Science and Technology, 2012).

Historically, URMs have lower participation than their White counterparts in STEM-related undergraduate majors (National Science Foundation & National Center for Science and Engineering Statistics, 2013). Researchers have attributed these participation rates to barriers such as lower
degree attainment rates, more frequent changes to non-STEM majors, and encounters with unique social challenges to their success in engineering and related STEM fields (Strayhorn, 2012b; Whittaker & Montgomery, 2012). Current research has focused on institutional factors and their impact on URMs in STEM as well as factors that can stimulate the pool of URMs in STEM disciplines. A study conducted by Strayhorn (2011) examined academic and social experiences of URMs in STEM. The results revealed that students in STEM shared feelings of isolation and invisibility, lacked same-race peers and faculty members, had difficulty applying theory to practice and came from K–12 systems that failed to prepare them adequately to succeed in STEM fields (Strayhorn, 2011). Beyond institutional factors that impact URM in STEM, researchers have pointed out that research enrichment for undergraduates and strong faculty mentoring have positive effects on URMs in STEM (Griffin et al., 2010; Hurtado et al., 2009; Strayhorn, 2010, 2012a).

The Anti-Deficit Achievement Framework

Researchers have argued that when examining challenges and issues related to URM student enrollment and participation, studies tend to highlight failures and deficits (Harper, 2012). As a result of this approach, little to no emphasis is placed on the achievement of URM students who are able to successfully matriculate through higher education. In an effort to develop an effective research perspective for examining the achievement of URM students Harper (2012) introduced the “The Anti-Deficit Achievement Framework”, which he has applied in studying URM students in STEM. This framework has been informed by psychological, sociological, and educational theories. Its purpose is not to be a rigid blueprint for future research topics but offer an example of anti-deficit questions that would illuminate three segments in the college pipeline: pre-college socialization and readiness, college achievement and post-college persistence in STEM. In addition to the three segments in the college pipeline, this framework informs us on nine reachable
dimensions of achievement: familial factors, K–12 school forces, out–of–class engagement, experiential and external opportunities, industry careers, graduate school enrollment, and research careers. Students who participated in these studies were able to identify key factors that enhanced their college predisposition, their college retention, and key undergraduate experiences that enhanced their career viability in STEM (Harper, 2012c).

**Cross’s Model of Black Identity Expanded**

In an attempt to enhance the Model of Black Identity, Cross and colleagues developed the Cross Racial Identity Scale CRIS; Vandiver et al., 2000). CRIS was developed to measure the 1991 Model of Black Identity. The findings of CRIS lead to the expansion of the 1991 Model of Black Identity. Similar to the 1991-revised model, the same four stages of identity development appeared in the expanded model of 2001. On the other hand, in the new expanded model the Pre-Encounter stage presented three identity models as opposed to two. The three identities included: Assimilation, Miseducation and Self-Hatred as opposed to Assimilation and Anti-Black in the revised model (Cross & Vandiver, 2001).

Assimilation was one identity in the expanded model that was still articulated in the same manner as it was in the revised Black Identity Model of 1991. In contrast, as a result of the early findings of the CRIS, it was determined that the Miseducation and self-hatred components of Pre-Encounter of Anti-Black represent separate identities (Cross & Vandiver, 2001). In defining these new identities in the Pre-Encounter Miseducation, identity was described negative perception a Black person has about the Black community, in general which is cultivated by perceived stereotypes. Pre-Encounter Self Hatred identity is described as Black individuals who have a negative sense of self because of their race (Cross & Vandiver, 2001). In the expanded model,
miseducation and self-hatred were separated from original Anti-Black identity ultimately replacing the Ant-Black identity. (Cross & Vandiver, 2001)

One of the key differences in the expanded model (2001) and the revised model (1991) is that only a negative relationship exists in suggested relationship between Pre-Encounter Self-hatred and self-esteem. More specifically, it was determined that Black individuals who completed CRIS and rated themselves high on self-hatred also rated themselves low on self esteem. It is furthermore suggested that misinformation or stereotypes about Blacks is not considered to result in low self-esteem (Vandiver et al., 2001). Vandiver et al. (2001) posit that self-hatred due to being Black shifts identity issues from a reference group orientation to personal identity.

In the expanded model, the Immersion-Emersion stage and the Internalization stage remained unchanged. Specifically, the Immersion-Emersion stage includes two identities which were Intense Black Involvement and Anti-White. Finally, just like the revised model, Black Nationalist, Biculturalist and Multiculturalist identities remained unchanged.

**Cross and Fhagen-Smith’s Life Span Model of Black Identity Development**

In 2001, Cross and Fhagen-Smith introduced their life span model (Figure 2.2) approach to racial and ethnic identity. In their attempt to construct this model, they presented a perspective with four characteristics. First, this model continues to recognize the differences in Black identity. This is distinct since previous models sought to deliver a single Black identity. Second, this lifespan model demonstrates that Black identity can take on both linear and nonlinear growth patterns during a lifespan. Third, Cross and Fhagen-Smith (2001) presented low race salience identity patterns as non-pathological. Finally, internalized racism is multidimensional.

Furthermore, Cross and Fhagen-Smith (2001) explained Black identity development as “psychological nigrescence” or “the process of becoming Black”. They argued, just as in the revised
1991 model, that three central concepts help define Black identity. These concepts are personal identity, reference group orientation, and race salience. Different from previous models, this model contained three delineated patterns across a lifespan. These patterns include Nigrescence Pattern A, Nigrescence Pattern B and Nigrescence Pattern C. Furthermore, this model presented Black identity development across six sectors encompassing all three Nigrescence patterns. Five of the sectors are identifiable developmental stages and one is a recycling sector. These developmental stages included infancy, pre-adolescence, adolescence, early adulthood and adulthood.

Nigrescence Pattern A

The emphasis of Nigrescence Pattern A is on the socialization of African American children and adolescents. Specifically, in Nigrescence Pattern A the socialization process determines how African American children and adolescents view meaning race in their lives. The understanding of race or how individuals develop their Black identity is a result of “formative socialization experiences” that is influenced by parents, family members and their community. Cross and Fhagen-Smith (2001) suggested that if a positive racial socialization experience is facilitated by parents, family and community, the developed identity of many African American adolescents will be positive. If the experience is negative and as a result, the individuals do not commit to their racial identity during their adolescence or during Nigrescence Pattern A, they will probably be at risk for a second pattern of identity development that can take place at any point during their life span (Cross & Fhagen-Smith, 2001).

Nigrescence Pattern B

Nigrescence Pattern B develops when an individual has not been able to form a healthy Black identity (mentioned in Pattern A) and now must undergo conversion, usually during adulthood. This pattern is usually facilitated by an event or a series of events where the individual is
forced to reexamine their racial identity. This pattern occurs usually in Blacks who have not formed a healthy Black identity during their formative socialization process and eventually experience a conversion during adulthood.

**Nigrescence Pattern C**

The final nigrescence pattern is Nigrescence Pattern C. When an individual is in this pattern, they tend to re-examine their identity. This is driven by experiences that demonstrate inconsistencies that are not in line with their identity values and beliefs. As a result, these individuals return to a delicate state of identity exploration before ultimately settling on a new racial identity.

Cross and Fhagen-Smith (2001)’s model also presented a lifespan approach that may be divided into six sectors: infancy and childhood, pre-adolescence, adolescence, early adulthood, adult nigrescence and nigrescence recycling.

**Sector One: Infancy and Childhood in Early Black Identity Development**

The infancy and childhood sector represents the identity stage into which the African American child is born. During this sector, the importance of race in life or race centrality and saliency of race to African American children is reinforced. Race centrality means the degree to which being Black is a normative feature of an individual’s self-concept or identity. Race salience is the degree to which being Black holds significance in a particular circumstance or situation (Seller et al., 1998). Race salience and race centrality are influenced by different environmental factors such family, culture, social class, neighborhood, community and so forth. All these factors play a significant role in the early socialization of Black children. Specifically, those who are responsible for rearing the child, such as parents and immediate family members, showcase a way of life and
norms that project a Black culture and as a result, the child is consistently immersed and socialized into Black culture through modeling.

**Sector Two: Preadolescence**

In the second sector, Preadolescence, African American youth begin to identify with a particular identity that will characterize their developing sense of self. Cross and Phagen-Smith (2001) posited that during this sector a variety of social identities begin to emerge. Explicitly these identities include low race salience, high race salience, and internalized racism. It has been argued that those with low racial salience, race and Black culture are immaterial influences on adolescents’ identity. The factors that do have a significant influence on their emerging identity are religious orientation, social status, or unique talents and abilities. Cross and Phagen-Smith (2001) argued that race emerges as a central attribute of self-concepts among African American preadolescents who have a high racial salience. In addition, they suggested that some African American preadolescents may begin to internalize the negative stereotypes, messages, and images of Black people and Black culture. As a result, these adolescents may present emerging identities that are confused, that are withdrawn, negative and lack clarity. Hence, their emerging identities may be riddled with confusion, alienation, negativity, and are inconsistent.

**Sector Three: Adolescence**

In the adolescence sector, adolescent Blacks begin to develop a Black self-concept in which they authenticate their own beliefs which then become critical to their achieved identity. Black adolescents enter this sector with what is described as emergent identities. These emergent identities grant differentiating salience to race and Black culture. During this stage, individuals may confirm or redefine their salience in this sector. Individuals in this stage go through a process of identity exploration. This process of identity exploration entails exploring ideas and issues regarding race and Black culture. Finally, the self-concepts that emerge from the identity exploration process might
be more focused or only focused on areas that have very little racial or cultural content (Cross & Fhagen-Smith, 2001)

**Sector Four: Early Adulthood**

The fourth sector of the life span model is Early Adulthood. Researchers suggest that cultural context determines the distinction between adolescence and adulthood (Worrell, 2008). It has been argued that three types of identities that might have developed in early adolescence and that were possibly explored during adolescence, are present in the early adulthood. The first identity relates to African Americans with a high-race salience. Individuals with this identity have developed a salient reference group orientation that affirms their race and culture. The second identity that is prevalent in this sector reflects individuals who have low race salience. These individuals see race as not significant and therefore have developed a diverse identity. As a result of these individuals seeing race as not significant, they are very vulnerable to adult-nigrescence if they encounter an event that compels them to examine their race. The last identity that may be prevalent in this sector are individuals with low race salience or internalized racism. These individuals may never experience adult nigrescence. For these individuals, race may never be a factor and therefore they may experience feelings of self-hatred throughout their adult life.

**Sector Five: Adult Nigrescence**

The adult nigrescence sector is similar to Cross’s (1991) original model. Just like the original model, adult nigrescence has four stages. These stages are: pre-encounter, encounter, immersion-emersion, and internalization/internalization commitment. During the pre-encounter stage, individuals with low race salience assimilate into mainstream culture with an appreciation for Black culture. Counter to that, individuals with internalized racism become anti-Black. During the encounter stage, a specific event may cause the individual to question his or her Black identity. The
immersion-emersion stage signals that an individual immersed into Black culture is becoming a Black nationalist or pro-Black. This individual becomes entrenched in the culture and issues of Blacks. Finally, the last stage internalization/internalization commitment has three specific resolutions to dissonance: Black nationalist, bicultural, and multicultural. These were previously described (Cross & Fhagen-Smith, 2001).

**Sector Six: Nigrescence Recycling**

Nigrescence recycling is the last sector in Cross’s life span model. This sector depicts the individuals’ Black identity across their adult lifespan. Specifically this sector refines and expands the individual’s Black identity across their adult life span. The refining and expanding of Black identity during this sector can be facilitated by both positive and negative cultural experiences (Cross & Fhagen-Smith, 2001; Parham, 1989). As a result of these experiences, an individual may question some aspects of their already developed Black identity. It has been argued that the individual might re-enter the Immersion-Emersion stage to reconcile these new experiences and expand their knowledge of their racial identity. Finally, those individuals who have truly achieved a healthy self-concept will also have a strong sense of Black identity.
Figure 2.2. Descriptive Model of the Relationship between Ego Identity and Nigrescence: A Life Span Perspective
Researchers have suggested that in order to understand the content of identity one needs to look at the value dimensions influencing people’s behaviors (Gudykunst & Ting-Toomey, 1988). For the purpose of this thesis, cultural identity was defined as the emotional significance attached to understanding of affiliation to a large culture. This emotional significance is developed when an individual is socialized within a larger cultural membership group (Ting-Toomey, 1999). Ting-Toomey (1999) stated that “Our cultural identities can be so impregnated that unless we encounter major cultural differences we may not even notice the importance of our cultural membership badges” (p. 30).

Cultural group membership is acquired by individuals via parental guidance and responses during the adolescent years. In addition, phenotypes (physical appearance, racial traits, and skin color), language usage, education, mass media, peer groups, institutional culture factor in on how one develops and structures their identity. It is with this invisible suitcase that individuals enter into an interaction with one another.

Cultural identity defines aspects of how two or more people interact with each other. Even more so, when two people with different cultural identities interact with each other cultural identity there is a definite impact. When multiple, changing and confounding identities interact, these differences bring about conflict as individuals attempt to negotiate their identity during these interactions (Jackson, 2002). Jackson (2002) stated that: “It would be nice to think that as we speak we are simply exchanging information, but even in casual contact with others, we are constantly exchanging codes of personhood, worldview, indeed our identities” (p. 359 ).
This appears to be the case when a student with multiple identities interacts with their peers at a PWI.

**Negotiating Identity**

Communication research defines communication as the genuine “identity-negotiation process between self and relevant others”. Specifically, identity negotiation is described as a careful selection of identity among a group of several to utilize within a particular communication context (Ting-Toomey, 1999). Humans communicate constantly, but it is much more difficult to accurately determine how one’s identities or portions of identity are exchanged during communication. In order for individuals to negotiate their different identities effectively, they need to be willing to find some sort of common ground (Cui, Van den Berg, & Jiang 1998).

Two widely accepted theories address identity negotiation, but more specifically intercultural identity negotiation. These models include the Identity Management Theory (IMT) and the Identity Negotiation Theory (INT). Both theories suggest that the preservation of face-to-face interactions is natural and unavoidable. Furthermore, the ability to negotiate equally established images makes up the necessary building block of communication proficiency (Cupach & Imahori, 1993; Ting-Toomey, 1999).

**Identity Management Theory**

The IMT focuses on face-to-face interaction. The basis of IMT focuses on how aspects of person’s identity are revealed. The maintenance of a face is a natural and inevitable condition of human interaction. In addition, Cupach and Imahori (1993) argued that the ability to negotiate mutually accepted images makes up the essential element of communication competence. IMT emphasizes face maintenance and intercultural relationship. Furthermore, the creators of this theory argue that individuals
do not know much about each other’s cultures, so they manage face intercultural encounters by using preconceived notions or stereotypes.

To develop competence in intercultural relationships; IMT posits three stages: trial-and-error stage, enmeshment of identity stage, and the renegotiation of identity phase. During the trial-and-error stage, the interactants in a specific communication attempt to find identities where they share similarities. During the second stage a convergent relational identity is acceptable to both interactants despite their differences. Finally, during the last stage identities are renegotiated as the interactants use narrowly defined relational identities from the second phase.

**Identity Negotiation Theory**

INT as suggested by Ting-Toomey (1999) highlights a broad scope of identity negotiation principles. Effective identity negotiation produces an ever-changing balance among five separate but related forces:

1) identity security/identity vulnerability
2) identity inclusion/identity differentiation
3) identity predictability/identity unpredictability,
4) identity connection/identity autonomy
5) identity consistency/identity change

In INT, the general idea of identity negotiation competence is grounded in a creative communication episode. Intercultural knowledge and negotiating skills are significant.

An effective identity negotiation process depends on various aspects influencing one another and determining the degree to which an individual is able to manage intercultural communication. Every human being has so-called multiple self-identity
images. These self-images include cultural, social or personal identity images. Identity images wield influence both on a person’s motivation to communicate and on the level of comfort with their own identity. Level of comfort in this instance manifests itself as low or rather high personal self-esteem (Ting-Toomey, 1999).

In addition to motivation to communicate and saliency of one’s own identity, cognitive, affective and behavioral resourcefulness affect the negotiation process. Specifically, a question such as how mindful a person is, and how well a person is able to manage reactive emotions or their self-esteem, are critical to how one negotiates their identity in INT. Ting-Toomey (1999) argued that all of these aforementioned factors impact on the process of identity negotiation.

IMT and INT focus on the similarities of individual face-to-face interactions. They focus less on the discourse occurring when two people from different identities interact with each other. They fail to describe the conflict occurring when multiple, changing and confounding identities interact as individuals attempt to negotiate their identity during interactions, as suggested by Jackson (2002).

Within the field of communication, researchers attempted to dissect the issue of cross-cultural communication dialogue and its impact on the interaction of two individuals from different cultures (Cupach & Imahori, 1993; Gudykunst & Ting-Toomey, 1988; Jackson, 1999, 2002; Ting-Toomey, 1999). One specific model that examines interaction by looking at what takes place when persons from multiple identities interact is Jackson’s (1999) Cultural Contracts Theory (CCT). CCT is considered a category of identity negotiation research (Ting-Toomey, 1999). INT offers a general structure for the CCT.
**Cultural Contracts Theory**

Within the field of communication, researchers have attempted to dissect the issue of cross-cultural communication dialogue and its impact on the interaction of two individuals from different cultures (Jackson, 1999). One specific model of interaction is Jackson’s (1999) Cultural Contracts Theory (CCT). Cultural Contracts Theory (CCT) suggests that identities are negotiated via cultural contracts at every stage of relationship development, irrespective of context, from initial interaction to relational termination (Jackson, 1999). When applying this perspective to a college campus, it becomes clear that cultural contracts are central to the daily interaction of all college students. Specifically, a cultural contract is defined as an implicit agreement between two or more interactants who have different interpretations of culture and who decided to coordinate or resist coordination of a relationship with one another depending on whether the relationship is deemed valuable to both (Jackson, 1999).

Jackson defined Cultural Contracts Theory as a rhetorical paradigm about locating and understanding values related to parts of identities. He argued that identities are negotiated via cultural contracts at every stage of relationship development, irrespective of context, from initial interaction to the point where relationships are terminated. Three grounds for identity negotiation emerge before any in-depth conversation about the process and/or outcome of this daily engagement occurs. These three grounds are: identities require affirmation; identities are constantly being exchanged; and identities are contractual.
Identities Require Affirmation

Identity refers to a self-definition affirmed through communication or validated by others (Jackson, 1999). Even though there are multiple ways to think of identity, it is defined by the individual and subsequently affirmed and validated by communication with others, known as the “I-Other” dialectic. Jackson (2002) supported Fanon’s (1967) notion that belief in human interaction is a mutually dependent function. In the “I-Other dialect,” the “I” acts as subject and has a direct relationship to the “Other,” thereby creating a relationship between the two. As a result, one cannot understand the meaning of “I,” without understanding the meaning of “Other.” The example Jackson (2002) used is to know right by acknowledging wrong.

Identities Are Constantly Being Exchanged

It is widely accepted that communication is unavoidable and happens all of the time (Jackson, 1999). Communication is continuous even on a subconscious level. Throughout this ongoing process, identity negotiation as both a personally and socially developmental activity is constant. Jackson (1999) suggested that humans communicate constantly. The difficulty lies in determining how accurately people’s identities or portions of their identities are exchanged during interactions. In order for people to avoid conflict and be able to negotiate their identity differences effectively, they need to be willing to empathize with each other and find common ground (Cui, Van den Berg, & Jiang 1998).

Identities Are Contractual

Every cultural contract enacted via language and speech contains social, political and cultural features. Since these features are present, consequences arise when an interactant violates the contract by imposing values that work against the expectations of
other interactants (Jackson, 1999). In turn, a commitment to the contractual arrangement needs to be acknowledged. Jackson (1999) argued that social rules and laws govern behavior and become guideposts for acceptable and normal interactions. Restrictions to cross-cultural dialogue are socially agreed-upon and the agreeability of one’s behavior within the context of communication confirms one’s signature on the contract (Jackson, 1999).

Overall, researchers who study cultural competence assume racial harmonization should occur unilaterally from the most powerful to the least powerful. If this occurs, the interactant or interactants with the least powerful cultural identity will be forced to adapt. Even though widely accepted in the cultural competence literature, this has been challenged. Ting-Toomey (1999) disagreed with the assertion that racial harmonization should occur unilaterally from the most powerful to the least powerful. She argued against believing that a stranger should always adapt to a host, regardless of context. Jackson (1999) concurred that a clear dominant identity does not arise unless one assumes that White identity is the host in every situation.

Jackson (2002) argued that individuals never simply exchange conversations, but actually within every interaction, rhetorically exchange codes of personhood. He believed this is primarily responsible for the vulnerability mentioned by Ting-Toomey. In cross-cultural dialogue, the frequency with which human beings interact increases the likelihood that identities will either firm up or become highly unstable and unaware over time (Jackson, 1999). Based on communicative interactions as a cultural contract, Jackson suggested three types of cultural contracts: ready-to-sign contracts, quasi-completed contracts and co-created contracts.
Ready-to-Sign

Jackson (2002) defined ready-to-sign cultural contracts as pre-negotiated with no further negotiation allowed. He articulated that for interactants in ready-to-sign cultural contracts, "signing" or the development of the contract may or may not be the goal. A random roommate assignment in the college dormitory is one example.

Quasi-completed

Quasi-completed cultural contracts are described as partly pre-negotiated and partly open for negotiation. Individuals involved in this type of cultural contract are not ready to fully co-create and do not necessarily rule out maintaining their own worldview. Jackson (2002) described these individuals as "straddle the fence" in terms of their commitment. These individuals maintain some sense of control. Jackson (2002) suggested this is due to a perceived sense of vulnerability. He believed quasi-completed contracts are usually the least long-lasting contracts. Examples of this type of contract in a higher education setting would include a student initially attending an ongoing co-circular activity based on his perceived vulnerability and deciding not to return for the next meeting.

Co-created

The last type of contract is a co-created cultural contract. These types of contracts are fully negotiable with limits only on individual preferences and expectations. The characteristics of co-created contracts are often perceived by the individual entering into them as the most favorable way to engage in relational coordination across cultures. This is due to the opportunity to be fully negotiable and open to differences. When a cultural contract is co-created, acknowledgment and valuation of cultural differences readily
exists. Jackson (2002) stated that in co-created cultural contracts, cultural differences are not ignored; nevertheless, these differences are not the single reason the interactants partner together. Ultimately, the emphasis in co-created contracts is truly on mutual fulfillment rather than individual resignation to them.

Cultural Contracts Theory provides significant insights into how people negotiate communication. This phenomenon is also very prevalent and will continue to be prevalent at institutions of higher education. As campuses become more diverse, the level of cross-cultural dialogue will intensify. When examining the retention rates of minority students who often come from a different cultural background than their White peers, it is imperative to consider factors contributing to whether they will be engaged or not.

Research strongly indicates that the most at-risk group on college campuses today are African American males (Cuyet, 2005). Even though several student developmental models has attempted to explain student engagement and/or departure, they have been criticized for their lack of cultural sensitivity (Rendon, 1994; Tierney, 1992). Exploring cross-cultural dialogue within the context of factors such as social and academic experiences might provide some additional insight into the experience of minority students. This study sought to explore these issues. This study attempted to accentuate a body of research focusing on the retention of African American men in higher education. The research presented here may influence how PWIs address the unique cross-cultural needs of African American males. Findings from this study may be a catalyst for universities seeking to explore strategies for engaging African American males both academically and socially at the formal and informal levels while keeping in mind how
the cultural uniqueness of their communication styles influences decisions to continue to matriculation.

The research gathered for this study is critical since little to no research has been devoted to exploring African American male identities as negotiated in interactions with peers at a PWI. Even though research on the participation rates of African American students has expanded, more research needs to be devoted to the specific factors impacting participation rates. Identity negotiated through interactions with peers might be a factor.
Chapter 3

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study was to explore how African American males at PWIs characterize their identity negotiation when interacting with non-African American peers. For the purposes of this study, intercultural dialogue was defined as an interaction/communication between two or more people from different cultural backgrounds. This phenomenon was explored utilizing Jackson’s (2002) Cultural Contracts Theory (CCT) as it occurs in a higher education setting.

Rationale for Critical Interpretive Approach

This study was a qualitative study employing in-depth, semi-structured individual interviews and focus group interviews. This study was conducted from a critical interpretive orientation focusing on the lived experiences of the participants (Moustakas, 1994). A critical interpretive approach was used since the researcher was interested in exploring the essence and interaction of African American men and their non-African American peers and how these interactions explain the ways in which identity is negotiated.

Research Question

The overarching investigative concern was African American males’ identity negotiation. Three research questions guided this study:

RQ#1: How do African American male participants describe identity negotiations where they are most apt to assimilate (agree to ready-to-sign cultural contracts)?
RQ#2: How do African American male participants describe the way quasi-completed contracts emerge and get negotiated among the participants and their non-African American peers?

RQ#3: According to the participants, under what conditions are co-created cultural contracts made possible?

**Unit of Analysis**

The phenomenon investigated in this specific study was identity negotiation. The primary unit of analysis depended on the recalled memories of actual interactions between African American male participants and their non-African American peers. These interactions produce, elicit, manifest and express the phenomenon of identity negotiation, especially in cases where there are uneven power differences between two interactants. In this case, the interaction between African Americans and their non-African American peers was considered a social interaction competent to produce a phenomenon (Babbie, 2007).

**Access**

The researcher gained access to the participants through his administrative duties. He is employed as a retention counselor in an academic support unit providing counseling and referral services to all self-identified students of color at this particular PWI’s most selective campus. In addition, the researcher’s unit of employment provides academic support to first-generation, first-year African American males. Due to this relationship, the researcher utilized an electronic database to identify 32 males who met the characteristics of the subjects needed for the study. The original pool had a total of over 100 eligible subjects.
The researcher contacted potential subjects via e-mail, personal interaction, and phone calls. In some instances, the researcher was able to interact with some of the potential subjects at first-year orientation activities sponsored by his employer as well as other structured activities.

**Survey Administration**

All participants in this study were over the age of eighteen; therefore, no parental consent was required. After obtaining approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB), the researcher recruited roughly 40 participants which ultimately yielded 29 actual participants for this study. As part of the recruiting effort, African American males in the College of the Liberal Arts, the College of Communication, and the Division of Undergraduate Studies were notified via electronic mail, phone calls, and personal interactions regarding the focus group and individual interviews. The researcher met with prospective subjects for preliminary, pre-screening questions (Appendix E). If certain criteria were met, the subjects were selected for the study. All participants were asked to read and sign an informed consent form that guaranteed confidentiality. All subjects were informed that pseudonyms would be used to protect their identity. Furthermore, during analysis, subjects were only identified by using numerical codes to protect their identity and all documents used for analysis were kept in a securely locked cabinet, available only to the researcher. In addition, all documentation would be destroyed after completion of the study, per federal regulations.

A total of 29 subjects were selected for study and participated in an individual interview or a focus group interview. Participants were notified of the date, time, and place where the interviews were to be conducted. After recruiting participants, individual
interviews were conducted with eight participants. Of the subjects who participated in the individual interviews, four were first-year students and four were upperclassmen. In addition to the individual interviews, three focus groups were conducted that had no more than eight participants and no fewer than seven. The three focus groups consisted of an upperclassmen focus group, a first-year focus a group, and a combination first-year and upperclassmen focus group. All focus groups and interviews lasted roughly one hour and were recorded. All data were transcribed and computer files made for ease of analysis using Nvivo software.

**Researcher Identity**

In qualitative research it is widely accepted that the researcher is the instrument in the research process (Wolcott, 1999). It is suggested that good researchers be transparent and reflective in their conduct, theoretical perspective, and values (Seale, Gobo, Gurbrium & Silverman, 2004). Since this study was highly interpretive, disclosing the background and identity of the researcher was necessary to maintaining a level of transparency.

The researcher is a first-generation college student who attended the same institution of higher education where the study was conducted. His background, prior to arriving at this PWI, was the attendance of a high school that was predominantly Black, similar to the subjects investigated for this study. In addition, the researcher works in an administrative role in which he interacts extensively with African American males who are the first member of their family to attend college, and who often express concerns about forging relationships with non-Black peers. The researcher empathizes with this
experience since he had a similar experience when he was a first-year student at this particular PWI.

The researcher acknowledges that because of his empathy for the subjects under investigation, he was the instrument/played a critical role at every stage of this particular research process.

**Data Analysis**

Researchers advise taking a systematic approach to qualitative analysis of data, which must include strategies bearing out those sources of data best able to produce the most relevant information (Baptise, 2001). Prior to deciding on a specific analytic approach, the researcher wrestled with decisions about how to carry out the study as well as his research paradigm and theoretical stance. Ultimately, a set of strategies that included tactics to address his particular epistemic interests, led him to choose a specific analytic approach which was explicitly, critically-interpretive. This process included a review of several approaches before finding an appropriate strategy for the epistemic interest of the researcher. The data were analyzed using Lincoln and Guba’s (1985) constant comparison technique. This technique involves a process of transcribing data and methodically deconstructing by thematizing, unitizing, and ultimately interpreting inter-subjectively coded data. The goal was to uncover emergent themes in order to make sense of prior conceptual categories and research questions. This approach is most useful when several safeguards are utilized to account for dependability and conformability of the interpretive process and data.

**Consideration of Other Approaches**

Several approaches were considered for this study; however, since the researcher
was not specifically interested in how the interviewed participants told their story from a content perspective, a narrative analysis was not employed. Specifically, the researcher was not interested in producing a substantive theme from the derived story (Reissman, 2008). The focus was not on fully formed stories. Therefore, narrative elements suggested by Robichaux and Clark (2006), which include the abstract, orientation, complicated action, evaluation, resolution and coda, were not the focus of this thematic analytic process.

The researcher was not interested in using coding as the building block for developing a theoretical construct. Therefore, grounded theory analysis was not used as an analytic method in this study. The researcher did not organize data into short phrases to give a condensed account of each piece of data. Coding was not used as a building block from which analysis would be constructed and subsequently lead to the development of theory (Charmaz, 2006; Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Glaser & Straus, 1967).

The analytic process used for this study was thematic analysis. In choosing this analytical process, the researcher attempted to apply theory rigorously and practiced a systematic method in which the assumptions were succinct and met the manner in which the subject matter was being conceptualized (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The researcher sought to analyze a phenomenon in order to identify the themes and experimental structures in the experience or phenomenon of identity negotiations (Van Manen, 1990). A checklist (Appendix A) as suggested by Braun and Clarke (2006) was utilized.

There are several reasons why thematic analysis supported this particular study. Thematic analysis focuses on identifying themes and patterns of the lived experience in line with the goal of the researcher (Aronson, 1994). In addition, the researcher sought to
provide the reader with a rich thematic description of the interaction between African American males and their non-African American peers so the reader had a sense of the predominant and important themes in the data set. This allows for an overall rich description of the data.

Another reason for utilizing thematic analysis for this study was that the phenomenon investigated was under-researched for this particular setting that being the interaction between Black males and their peers at a Predominately White institution (PWI). In addition, the researcher did not know the participants’ views on the topic under investigation. The final reason was that as an analytic approach, it could be both reflective of reality and unpack the surface of the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

The process for conducting thematic analysis began by determining a theme, followed by deciding upon an approach to be used in identifying particular themes and patterns. The next step included identifying themes and patterns in the data (inductive versus deductive), deciding at what level themes would be identified (semantic versus latent), followed by which research paradigm would be appropriate for thematic analysis (essentialist/realist versus constructionist thematic analysis). The last steps in the thematic analysis process included completing the stages of thematic analysis, including familiarization with the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes and finally producing the report.

**Determining a Theme**

The first step in using thematic analysis focuses on identifying a theme. Braun and Clarke (2006) described a theme as something important about the data relating to the research question and represents a level of “a patterned response or meaning” within
the data set. Next, the researcher determined a theme and the size of the theme. Since
the judgment of the researcher is a key factor in determining a theme, the researcher used
flexibility in determining the theme. The researcher needed to be continually reflective
and cautious, and to use good judgment in assigning themes. The researcher had to be
aware that a key theme would not necessarily be guided by the frequency of its
occurrence. The key factor in driving the determination of the theme, related to whether
or not it captured something important in relationship to the overall research question
(Braun & Clarke, 2006).

**Horizontalization**

The first step employed in analyzing the data from a transcribed interview for this
study was similar to the concept of horizontalization as described by Moustakas (1994).
Horizontalization is comparable to grounded theory analysis. Specifically,
horizontalization is similar to open coding, where data are broken up into distinct parts,
closely examined, and compared for similarities and differences (Strauss & Corbin,
1997). There is a difference between open coding and horizontalization. During
horizontalization, the researcher lists every statement with equal value as opposed to
open coding where similar themes and ideas are grouped together (Strauss & Corbin).
Horizontalization provides statements showing an understanding of the nature and
meaning of a phenomenon. In contrast, open coding reveals those concepts and
categories being used in building a theory of the subject being studied.

One of the benefits of thematic analysis relates to flexibility. In the case of
establishing themes, this was helpful. Horizontalization was beneficial in establishing
themes and grouping them together. It assisted the researcher in recognizing flexibility is not a carte blanche approach.

Identifying themes and patterns in the data was the next step in the thematic analysis. Inductive reasoning was used in this part of the analytical process. Since the researcher collected data via in-depth, open-ended interviews and focus groups, the study was data-driven. As such, the researcher found that the themes he identified bore little or no relationship to the specific questions asked of the participants. There was no attempt to fit the data into a pre-determined coding frame; however, the researcher did not ignore or dismiss his epistemic and theoretical interests.

The level at which the themes were identified is a crucial part of the analytical process (Braun & Clarke, 2006). In this study, the researcher was interested in identifying features of the collected data that gave it a particular meaning. The researcher was interested in learning: “What is it like when African American students interact with their non-White peers?” The researcher was also interested in the interpretive meaning of specific underlying ideas, assumptions and concepts. Based on the aforementioned descriptions, a latent level of identification seemed appropriate.

The thematic analysis for this study was conducted within a constructionist paradigm. The researcher sought to theorize the socio-cultural contexts and structural conditions that gave way to the accounts described by the participant interviews. The researcher was interested in the experiences and meaning of the experiences being socially produced and reproduced, such as the interactions of African American male students and their non-White peers.
Following the recommendations made by Braun and Clarke’s (2006), the researcher incorporated six stages of thematic analysis to complete the study. The stages included familiarization with data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes and finally producing a report. Even though this process appeared to be chronological, the researcher acknowledged that this process might be dynamic and include ongoing back-and-forth revisions among the initial five stages of the thematic analytical process.

Data Collection

Population and Sampling

The population for this study was degree-seeking African American males in the College of the Liberal Arts, College of Communication, and the Division of Undergraduate Studies at a large research-based university. This population did not include non-degree-seeking and provisional African American males. The minimum age was eighteen years old and the maximum age was twenty-four. A purposeful sample was drawn to obtain the essence of the research question being investigated. The criteria for those selected included the following: African American male at this particular PWI who came from a K–12 school system where they were the majority. In the focus group interview method, people who had something in common were brought together and asked for their opinions and ideas about a specific topic (Gupta, 2007).

Interviews

Researchers suggested conducting interviews as a necessary data collection method when utilizing a critical interpretive research method (Creswell, 1998). The interviewing format for this particular research project was grounded in critical
interpretive inquiry. The purpose of an interpretive interview format is to explore and gather data, which provides a richer and deeper understanding of the essence of the participant’s experience. Furthermore, this format allowed the interviewer to develop a conversational relationship with the subject being interviewed as related to the meaning of the experience.

The researcher used semi-structured interviews because, unlike standardized interviews, this strategy allowed the interviewer to follow up on topics and subjects that the interviewed subject brought up that may have significance. Patton (2002) suggested the benefit of semi-structured interviews allows the data to be collected in a systematic and orderly method. The purpose of the semi-structured interviews was to enter into the interviewee’s perspective and capture the essence of their experience.

The researcher used an interview protocol to facilitate the interview process. Patton (2002) suggested that there are both benefits and detriments to using an interview guide. The benefit of using an interview guide ensures that the interviewer will tend to use his time more efficiently. An interview guide helps outline issues being explored in the interview process. In addition, an interview guide helps maintain the structure of the interview. On the other hand, use of an interview guide results in several weaknesses, including that an interviewer may not follow the structure of the interview guide, leading to the omission of some critical information. All interviews were conducted by the researcher and followed a semi-structured interview protocol. The individual interviews were conducted over a two-week period. The focus groups were conducted within the same two-week span over the course of three consecutive days. The researcher’s background as a trained facilitator was significant in getting the subjects to provide
extensive and rich data in their answer to the interview questions. Furthermore, this training also assisted the researcher in assuring participation by all subjects in the group process without concern about one or two subjects dominating the entire discussion during the focus group portion of this investigation. The researcher was familiar with the subjects interviewed, which made facilitating follow-up discussions on topics and subjects raised by the interviewed subjects a seamless process. Finally, the researcher was integrally involved with the transcription of the interviews.

Focus Groups

Focus group interviews were the second method used to collect data in this study. A focus group is a small group of participants with a common goal of discovering information based on their personal values, beliefs systems, cultural traditions, and their world view (Calderon, Baker, & Wolf, 2000). In comparison to other data collection methods, focus group participant interaction is an essential feature of the focus group experience (Babbie, 2001; Calderon et al., 2000; Morgan, 1998). Patton (2002) described the end result of a focus group as a transcription of the information flow among participants. Focus groups can provide insight into attitudes, behaviors, and contexts from different perspectives (Patton, 2002). The researcher believes focus groups provide additional insights from a collective group not apparent in individual interviews.

Triangulation

Triangulation is a process by which a researcher can eliminate some doubt regarding the trustworthiness of a study (Patton, 2002). Triangulation incorporates multiple data collection approaches to boost the dependability of a study (Creswell, 1998; Guba & Lincoln, 1985; Stake, 1995). Specifically, triangulation guards against the
allegation that the study findings are biased if they are generated from a single data source. In this particular study, the researcher followed multiple perspectives in order to discover whether his interpretation was plausible based on the data presented. The researcher had hoped triangulation would provide for a deeper knowledge of the phenomenon being examined: How do first-year African American males at PWIs characterize their identity negotiation when interacting with non-African American peers.

**Reliability or Trustworthiness**

In order to have increased confidence in the credibility of their results, the data were triangulated (Green et al., 1989) by using multiple data collection methods in order to yield consistent findings. These methods included transcribing the notes in order to capture main points, observation of the participants during the focus groups and interviews, and tape-recording the participants, which ensured that missed points were captured.

Cross-cultural dialogue in academic contexts and the engagement of Black male students indicates, as defined by Lincoln and Guba (1985), no single reality exists where inquiry may converge. Cross-cultural dialogue involves a set of multiple realities socially constructed realities that cannot be studied in pieces. Cross-cultural dialogue as defined by Lincoln and Guba (1986) is a time- and context-bound human behavior. Since cross-cultural dialogue can only be explored within the context of multiple interacting factors, events and processes that give shape to it and that are part of it, must be examined. Based on the criteria established by Lincoln and Guba (1986), this study was rigorous, trustworthy and authentic in its emphasis on naturalistic evaluation.

**Ethical Considerations**
Researchers suggest that there are no particular guidelines for qualitative research or how qualitative researchers should uphold certain ethical standards. These ethical standards include confidentiality, interacting with the participants in a humane way, not misleading the participants, not abusing privilege, acting in good faith and remaining truthful in reporting results, and so forth. The researcher required participants to sign an informed consent document that included a confidentiality agreement. This agreement promised that the researcher would remove personal identification information from all collected and transcribed data. The participants were assigned a fictitious name to maintain confidentiality. Finally, all collected data were located in a secure place where no persons, other than the researcher, had access.

**Participants**

**Participant Backgrounds**

As part of this study, 29 undergraduate African American men who attended the main campus of a PWI State University were selected. In particular, 11 first year students were interviewed in addition to 16 upperclassmen. The participants were all traditional-age college students between the ages of 18 and 24. The participants ranged from freshmen to senior students. The participants’ scholarly pursuits ranged among major interests or declarations across ten academic colleges at PWI State University. Some of the participants were still undecided in their pursuit of academic majors. The participants for this study were all degree-seeking students who were enrolled as full-time students during the semester in which they were interviewed. They were all enrolled at the main campus of PWI State University. They were all in good academic standing since they all had a cumulative grade point average above 2.00 on a 4.00 scale.
The participants came from single- and two-parent homes. None of the participants were orphans or wards of the state. One of the participants was considered an independent student since he was twenty-four years of age and met the federal definition of an independent student by being at least twenty-four years old. The remaining students were all dependents since they were under the age of twenty-four, were not married, had not served in the military and had no children or dependents.

The participants’ socio-economic status varied from low to middle to high socio-economic status. The majority fit the first two socio-economic status categories. Most students disclosed that they were first-generation college students. In addition, several shared that they were foreign-born children of first-generation immigrants or were bilingual.

**Participant Biographies**

Note that all names used here are pseudonyms for the participants in order to protect their identities and ensure their confidentiality.

Jason was a first-year student who graduated from Urban Preparatory Academy, an all-boy, predominately Black, public charter high school in Chicago, Illinois. He intended to major in business/sports management. His co-curricular activities included participating in the club basketball team, the National Association of Black Accountants (NABA), and the Black Caucus. In addition, Jason was part of the Student Minority Advisory and Recruitment Team (SMART), a student organization that assists the undergraduate admissions office with the recruitment of multicultural students. At some point Jason hoped to pledge a historically Black fraternity. Upon graduation from college, Jason hoped to become a sports agent.
Jamal was a first-year student from Philadelphia, PA. He graduated from Motivation Academy, a predominantly Black public high school. He intended to major in health policy and administration. He was involved in the Blue and White Society, a large student organization that helps students get engaged in co-curricular activities and promotes school spirit. James was also involved with SMART, Black Caucus, and hoped to become part of a historically Black fraternity at some point. During the semester, he had a work-study job with the Multicultural Resource Center. He interned with Philadelphia Youth within City Hall. This organization’s overall purpose is to give a voice to Philadelphia’s young people by advising city leadership in regard to policies, programs, and actions that affect the city’s youth. His experiences within the group included working on community events and activities promoting nonviolence, developing newsletters, and attending workshops and meetings.

Michael was a senior from Newark, New Jersey. He graduated from Seton Hall Preparatory Academy in Newark. He was majoring in communications with a concentration in advertising. He also had a strong interest in art. Michael hoped to combine his passion for art with his knowledge of the advertising field, and work in New York City at an advertising company. He was a member of Iota Phi Beta Fraternity, a historically Black fraternity. Prior to graduation, he interned at Saatchi & Saatchi Advertising Agency, located in New York City.

Claude was a senior from Brooklyn, New York majoring in health policy and administration. He graduated from Jamaica High School, a public high school in Queens, New York. Kevin transferred to the University’s main campus from a smaller branch campus in northwestern Pennsylvania. His parents immigrated to the United States from
the island of Haiti. Claude is bilingual—he speaks English and Creole, a dialect spoken in Haiti. His co-curricular activities included club Kreyol, a student organization devoted to developing and promoting understanding of the country of Haiti and its culture. In addition, he wrote for various journalism blogs and worked for the University’s student-run newspaper.

Justin was a first-year student from Spring Valley, New Jersey majoring in economics. He graduated from Spring Valley High in New Jersey. Justin’s parents immigrated to the U.S. from the island nation of Haiti. He participated in various extracurricular activities, including serving on the executive board of Club Kreyol, participating in THON, a student-run philanthropic organization dedicated to raising money for cancer research, the Economics Association, and the Black Male Leader Symposium. After applying for summer internships, he was offered an opportunity through the Verizon Corporation to work in the marketing and sales department.

Adam was a junior from Long Island, New York who was enrolled in the College of the Liberal Arts and majored in economics. He attended Roosevelt High School, which is a public high school in Long Island. He was the first male in his family to attend college. He worked at the Black Cultural Center as a receptionist. He interned with the United States Federal Reserve Bank in Washington, D.C. Adam was a member of S.M.A.R.T. and also hoped to join a historically Black fraternity in the future.

Shawn was a senior from the Bronx, New York. He graduated from Mount St. Michaels, a private Catholic school. He was majoring in computer engineering with a minor in geography information systems. He was a member of the National Society of Black Engineers. He was interning with an electrical engineering company and
previously worked for the New York Board of Elections. He was also self-employed as a web designer. He used his knowledge of computer graphics and publishing languages such as HTML, Adobe Flash Player, and ASPX to create websites for locals within his community. He hoped to attend graduate school upon graduation.

Jerrod was a senior from Brooklyn, New York majoring in economics. He graduated from Bishop Ford High School, a private Catholic school. He was an active member of the student chapter of the NAACP. He had multiple business-related jobs and his employment plan was to work for the Federal Reserve and then eventually go into the real estate business. He was working in the College of Business Finance Department. He worked closely with PWI State University professors on analytical projects and on developing spreadsheets. Upon graduation he hopes to attend graduate school and earn a master’s degree in finance.

Paul was a first-year student born and raised in Uniondale, New York. He attended Edward T. Uniondale High School. He was majoring in journalism and agricultural sciences. He also was a member of MANRRS, a club for minorities involved in the agricultural sciences. His aspirations included coaching college football. Recently, Paul spent the summer enrolled in the summer session at PWI State University.

Jackson was a PWI State University freshman in the Eberly College of Science. He was majoring in Neuroscience. Originally from Norristown, Pennsylvania he moved to Downingtown where he completed elementary school. He then resided in Pottstown where he completed junior high and high school. He attended Pottstown High, a predominantly Black high school where he was a part of the football team. He played as a defensive back receiver for four years. As a first-year student, Jackson’s primary focus
was his academics. During the summer of 2011, Jackson enrolled in summer courses at University Park where he completed courses such as Physics 211 and Math 230.

Marcus was a junior from Brooklyn, New York majoring in communications. He attended Bedford Academy High School, a public high school, before transferring to Hudson Catholic High where he joined the football team. He had completed two internships—one at CNBC and one with FOX News. His ultimate aspiration was to become a film producer. Marcus was a member of the Kappa Alpha Psi Fraternity; however, he wanted to join other clubs including the Student Minority Advisory and Recruitment Team (S.M.A.R.T), the S-Plan mentoring program, and THON. Marcus also had a part time job as a University Police Auxiliary Officer.

Ibrahim was a freshman from Philadelphia, Pennsylvania majoring in actuarial science. He graduated from Central High, a predominantly Black public high school in the city. During the summer after his first year, he interned at the Band Digital Marketing Firm in Philadelphia Pennsylvania. During his internship, he conducted various presentations and organized data using Excel. He recently applied to the Inroads Organization, which is an agency that aids minority students in getting full paid internships in their respective majors. He was a member of the local university chapter of the NABA. Ibrahim’s parents immigrated to the United States from the country of Nigeria.

Wesley was a senior from Brooklyn, New York majoring in political science. He graduated from Elmont Senior High School. Paul was a member of the Kappa Alpha Psi fraternity incorporated, the Caribbean Student Association, and NAACP. He had completed internships with the Queens County District Attorney’s office and also
interned with several grassroots organizations to raise money for disadvantaged communities.

Edwin was a foreign service and international politics major from Brooklyn, New York. He attended St. Agnes High School, an all-boy Catholic high school. He intended to enroll in law school upon completion of his undergraduate degree. He completed an internship with the Kings County Supreme Court in Brooklyn. He was the recruitment chair for Phi Alpha Delta, a pre-law fraternity. He participated in a summer pre-law program at a college in Pennsylvania. The program is for undergraduate students from disadvantaged backgrounds who want to attend law school in the future.

Dennis was an English and crime law and justice double major from Brooklyn, New York. He graduated from Transit Tech High School, a public school located in east New York. Before arriving on campus, Dennis faced some personal challenges, as he was shot and robbed on his way home from work. He interned with the New York State Assembly in Queens, NY as well as with a criminal defense attorney who had his own practice in New York City. He was a member of the debate team and the current the vice president of the Billiards Team.

Ian was a first-year student enrolled in the Division of Undergraduate Studies. He was raised in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Ian attended Martin Luther King High School. He was the first of his siblings to attend college. Ian’s parents immigrated to the United States from the island of Jamaica, in the Caribbean. He enrolled in the university through the State’s equal opportunity program and also received services from the Student Support Services Program, a federally funded grant program that supports first-
generation, low-income students. He was a member of the Caribbean Student Association, with plans to become a civil engineer.

Xavier was a senior from Fairfax, Virginia who was majoring in economics. He graduated from Bishop Ireton High School, a Catholic high school in Fairfax. Xavier was a member of the French Club and the Blue and White Society. He volunteered on the political campaigns of various Democratic candidates. He was a teaching assistant for a Sociology course, in which Xavier facilitated a discussion group on racial issues. Xavier had received an offer to intern at a law firm in Washington, DC. He planned to enroll in law school after graduation.

Ronald was a first-year student from Westville, New Jersey, where he attended Gateway Regional High School, a public high school in the area. Ronald was a marketing major. He was the youngest of four children, all of whom had attended the same university. He was a member of the National Association of Black Accountants, University Marketing Association, and a former National Congressional Youth Leader. He was interested in getting more involved in student government and becoming student body president one day. However, due to current financial hardships, Ronald was not sure whether he would be able to return to this institution in the next semester. He worked hard to secure an internship for the summer following the interview.

Jacque was a junior from Long Island, New York majoring in economics. Jacque was born in the capital city of Port-au-Prince, on the Island of Haiti. He spent his first two semesters at a branch campus before transferring to the main campus. He was involved in the Black Male Leadership Symposium and Club Kreyol. Jacque was
pledging at a historically Black fraternity. He was interviewing with several companies and government agencies in an attempt to secure a summer internship.

Omar was a senior from Philadelphia, Pennsylvania majoring in crime, law and justice. His co-curricular activities included membership in the Student Minority Advisory and Recruitment Team (SMART), the Black Male Leadership Symposium, and Kappa Alpha Psi fraternity. Omar had an off-campus job at a local retail store. He resided in the Kappa Alpha Psi fraternity house. Upon graduation, Omar hoped to attend law school in the city of Philadelphia.

Adrian was a senior from Highspire, Pennsylvania, where he graduated from Steelton-Highspire High School, a predominantly Black high school. He was majoring in crime, law and justice. In addition to his studies, he had a love for the spoken word. Adrian was a work-study student at the Black Cultural Center where he helped to create and organize events and programs for students. He recently decided that upon graduation he would go to graduate school for higher education administration.

Marlon was a senior from Brooklyn, New York, majoring in psychology with a business option. Marlon attended Murray Bergtraum High School, a predominantly Black public high school in Manhattan, New York. He then attended a branch campus in the northeastern part of the state, prior to arriving at the main campus. At his branch campus, he was a Resident Assistant and a campus tour guide. This past summer, he interned for the sales and marketing department of a national hotel chain. Ultimately, he wanted a career in corporate management or corporate resources. He was the President of Phi Beta Sigma fraternity. In addition, he was involved in various clubs, including the Caribbean Student Association, where he served as the public relations chair.
Yves was a first-year student from Reading, Pennsylvania. His intended major was broadcast journalism, with a minor in international studies. Yves was the first person from his immediate family to attend college. As part of his co-curricular activities he had been involved in various groups, including PSN-TV, CommRadio, and Radio Television Digital News Association (R.T.D.N.A.). He hoped to become a commentator for sports news or a sports analyst. Yves was also an active member of Club Kreyol, Nittany Nation, and Project Haiti.

Walter (Walt) was a senior from Brooklyn, New York. He graduated from Elmont Senior High School. Walt was a member of the Kappa Kappa Psi-National Honorary Band fraternity, the Caribbean Student Association and NAACP. His major was political science. He completed internships with the Queens County District Attorney’s office and with several grassroots organizations to raise money for disadvantaged communities. Walt worked as a sales representative and tele fundraiser while working towards completing his last semester at the University.

Bernard (Bernie) was a first-year student from Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Bernie graduated from Carver High School for Engineering and Science. He planned to major in secondary education counseling or English. He was involved in Club Boxing and played intramural basketball. He was part of the Comprehensive Studies Program, a program that provides academic and financial support to talented students from disadvantaged backgrounds. He was ub the process of securing an internship for the summer through the Inroads Program.

Shaquille was a first-year student from Lansdowne, Pennsylvania. He attended Pennwood High School, a predominantly Black public high school. He intended to major
in computer science. Outside the classroom, Shaquille was active in clubs, including the University Club Basketball, Great Show Squad (football marketing program), and S.M.A.R.T. Shaquille had a work-study position in the Office of Multicultural Student Affairs. He was selected for a summer research enrichment program where he did research under the supervision of a faculty member. The program is designed to increase interest in graduate school and research among students from underrepresented groups.

Travoye was a freshman from Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. He planned to study business management. Morris graduated from Perry Traditional Academy in 2010. He had a work-study position with the information technology office. Travoye was involved in the Student Support Services Program, a federally funded grant program that provides learning and financial assistance to first-generation and/or low-income students with disabilities.

Brian was a senior from Miami, Florida majoring in supply chain management. He attended St. Andrews Catholic High School, a predominantly Black and Latino Catholic school in the city of Miami. He was raised by a single mom who immigrated to the United States from the island of Jamaica. Brian was part of the Student Support Services Program. This past summer he interned with Booz Allen, a consulting firm in Chicago, Illinois. He had accepted an offer for an entry-level position with the Pratt and Whitney Company. Brian was a member of the Black Male Leadership Symposium.

Jibri was a senior from Pompona Beach, Florida. He attended high school in both Pompona Beach and Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. He was a returning adult student who arrived at the university after previously attending a community college. He was majoring in hotel, restaurant and institutional management. Jibri relied heavily on the
Support Services Program for academic support. His financial circumstances required him to work part-time at a local hotel. He was part of the Peer Mentoring team in the Student Support Services Program.

Nasir was a junior originally from Philadelphia, Pennsylvania studying crime, law and justice. He recently returned to the university after a four-year break caused by financial issues. He worked full time at a national electronics chain store as a department manager. He was part of the Upward Bound Math and Science Program, a federally funded pre-collegiate program that helps first-generation and low-income students from disadvantaged backgrounds with college readiness. Since his re-enrollment, he received services from the Student Support Services Program which is a collegiate based federally funded grant program that assists first generation, low-income underrepresented students.
Chapter 4

ANALYSIS OF DATA

This chapter presents findings from this study. The findings are direct reflections of individual interviews and focus groups conducted at PWI State University. Transcripts from the audio-recorded interview and focus group data are included in Appendix E. This chapter presents quotes and excerpts from these interviews that privilege the voice of the participants. These findings address the overall research question: how do first-year African American males at PWIs characterize their identity negotiation when interacting with non-African American peers? Here are the three specific research questions asked in this study:

RQ 1: How do first-year African American male participants describe identity negotiations where they are most apt to assimilate (agree to ready-to-sign cultural contracts)?

RQ 2: How do first-year African American male participants describe the way quasi-completed contracts emerge and get negotiated among the participants and their non-African American peers?

RQ 3: According to the participants, under what conditions are co-created cultural contracts made possible?

The next sections are organized according to three categories, arranged according to these three research questions, and driven by participant responses. The categories are: (1) unwilling to change, (2) getting along, and (3) appreciating difference. Across all categories, a total of seven thematic subheadings emerged. More specifically, each category included two to three thematic subheadings as shown in Table 4.1.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>RQ #</th>
<th>Research Questions</th>
<th>Categories</th>
<th>Themes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>How do African American male participants describe identity negotiations where they are most apt to assimilate (agree to ready-to-sign cultural contracts)?</td>
<td>Unwilling to Change</td>
<td>• They think they’re entitled</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Finding community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>How do African American male participants describe the way quasi-completed contracts emerge and get negotiated among the participants and their non-African American peers?</td>
<td>Getting Along</td>
<td>• Can’t let color get in the way</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Being Black makes me a target</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• On making adjustments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>According to the participants, under what conditions are co-created cultural contracts made possible?</td>
<td>Appreciating Differences</td>
<td>• Upbringing and values</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• “You can’t just sit there; you’ve gotta take it”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Category One: Unwilling to Change

As indicated in Table 4.1, category one, which corresponds to RQ#1, is “Unwilling to change.” Comments pertaining to this category related to the concepts of ready-to-sign contracts as described by Jackson (2002). Ready-to-sign cultural contracts are sociocultural encounters in which personal interactions are most successful when one interactant assimilates to the cultural perspectives of the more culturally dominant interactant. The metaphor of a contract is used to explain that, frequently, very real everyday intercultural interactions are metaphorically akin to social arrangements in which the dominant interactant appears to already have a contract or presumed way of how he/she uncompromisingly expects the other person to communicate.

In this study, it is suggested that for interactants in ready-to-sign cultural contracts, "signing" or developing mutually satisfying intercultural relationships, may or may not be the goal (Jackson, 2002). To metaphorically sign a ready-to-sign cultural
contract one party must be willing to cede a part of who they are in order to be successful in that encounter. The other person or party does nothing more than remain as they are. Some people are not even aware they are rendering a ready-to-sign cultural contract because their entitlement does not allow them to see that their privilege overwhelms the encounter.

Two themes emerged from the interview and focus group data related to the category “Unwilling to change”: “They think they are entitled” and “Finding community.” The “They think they are entitled” theme gives voice to the participants who believe that their White counterparts project a sense of sole propriety over their surroundings (i.e., in this case, the campus). The theme “Finding Community” reveals participants’ feelings of constriction in ready-to-sign contracts that lead them to take agency over defining their cultural self using various strategies. This is similar to what is described by Jackson and Simpson (2003) in their exploration of cultural contracts.
### Table 4.2

**Participants’ Demographics**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Interview type</th>
<th>Hometown</th>
<th>Class Standing</th>
<th>Major</th>
<th>Foreign affiliation</th>
<th>First Generation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Adam</td>
<td>Focus Group</td>
<td>Long Island, NY</td>
<td>Junior</td>
<td>Economics</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adrian</td>
<td>Focus Group</td>
<td>Highspire, PA</td>
<td>Senior</td>
<td>Crime Law and Justice</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bernard</td>
<td>Focus Group</td>
<td>Philadelphia, PA</td>
<td>Freshman</td>
<td>Secondary, PA</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jibri</td>
<td>Individual</td>
<td>Pompona Beach, FL</td>
<td>Senior</td>
<td>Hotel and Restaurant Management</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Claude</td>
<td>Focus Group</td>
<td>Brooklyn, NY</td>
<td>Senior</td>
<td>Health Administration</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dennis</td>
<td>Focus Group</td>
<td>Brooklyn, NY</td>
<td>Freshman</td>
<td>Crime Law and Justice</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Edwin</td>
<td>Focus Group</td>
<td>Brooklyn, NY</td>
<td>Junior</td>
<td>International Politics</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ian</td>
<td>Focus Group</td>
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<td>Freshman</td>
<td>Undecided</td>
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<td>Ibrahim</td>
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<td>Actuarial Science</td>
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<td>Yes</td>
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<td>Jacque</td>
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<td>Junior</td>
<td>Economics</td>
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<td>Yes</td>
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<tr>
<td>Jamal</td>
<td>Focus Group</td>
<td>Philadelphia, PA</td>
<td>Freshman</td>
<td>Health Administration</td>
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<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jason</td>
<td>Focus Group</td>
<td>Chicago, IL</td>
<td>Freshman</td>
<td>Business</td>
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<td>Yes</td>
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<td>Jerrod</td>
<td>Focus Group</td>
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<td>Senior</td>
<td>Economics</td>
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<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brian</td>
<td>Individual</td>
<td>Miami, FL</td>
<td>Senior</td>
<td>Supply Chain Management</td>
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<td>Justin</td>
<td>Individual</td>
<td>Spring Valley, NJ</td>
<td>Freshman</td>
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<td>Yes</td>
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<tr>
<td>Jackson</td>
<td>Focus Group</td>
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<td>Freshman</td>
<td>Neuroscience</td>
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<tr>
<td>Marcus</td>
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<td>Junior</td>
<td>Communications</td>
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<td>Marlon</td>
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<td>Psychology</td>
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<td>Michael</td>
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<td>Senior</td>
<td>Communication</td>
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<tr>
<td>Omar</td>
<td>Focus Group</td>
<td>Philadelphia, PA</td>
<td>Senior</td>
<td>Crime, Law and Justice</td>
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<td>Yes</td>
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<tr>
<td>Paul</td>
<td>Individual</td>
<td>Uniondale, NY</td>
<td>Freshman</td>
<td>Journalism</td>
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<td>Ronald</td>
<td>Focus Group</td>
<td>Westville, NJ</td>
<td>Freshman</td>
<td>Marketing</td>
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<td>Shaquille</td>
<td>Focus Group</td>
<td>Landsdowne, PA</td>
<td>Freshman</td>
<td>Computer Science</td>
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<td>Shawn</td>
<td>Focus Group</td>
<td>Bronx, NY</td>
<td>Senior</td>
<td>Computer Engineering</td>
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<td>Travoye</td>
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<td>Pittsburgh, PA</td>
<td>Freshman</td>
<td>Business Management</td>
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<td>Political Science</td>
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<tr>
<td>Wesley</td>
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<td>Senior</td>
<td>Political Science</td>
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<td>Xavier</td>
<td>Individual</td>
<td>Fairfax, VA</td>
<td>Senior</td>
<td>Economics</td>
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<td>Yes</td>
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<tr>
<td>Yves</td>
<td>Focus Group</td>
<td>Reading, PA</td>
<td>Freshman</td>
<td>Broadcast Journalism</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
They Think They Are Entitled

This theme reflects White privilege, but specifically the degree to which respondents not only feel like outsiders but also endure a feeling that they are being treated by Whites like they are social oddities who are not equally entitled to the same space. Strangely, the entitlement to the very public space Whites share with non-Whites often interrupts the potential for effective intercultural interactions. For example, Omar remarked:

I see a lot of people that feel like they are entitled because they’re non-minorities and because they’re majorities. When I really think about the way they treat me, I’m not a big fan of Whites. I’ve been called a nigger by people while I’m walking to class and they just drop the N word on me, so I mean I see myself as I don’t really fit in with the majority.

Michael concurred and elaborated upon his related perceptions as follows:

Um, they’re mostly white people cause at the end of the day I feel like they’re not gonna go out of their way to get to know me, and I also feel like I’m not goin’ go out of my way to get to know you. And at times I do go out of my way but I end up disappointed, so, I feel like if someone is not goin’ to meet me half way then why do it?

Despite the sense of isolation from their White peers described by study participants, they offered a resolution to their conundrum. In addition, they were able to identify circumstances under which privilege briefly subsides and there is a brief shared identity or a cultural exchange where the exchange of identity is deemed valuable to both interactants. The participants referred to university football games as one such instance in which this sense of social parity seems to occur. Outside that setting, the interactions with White counterparts are principally described as being consistent with a ready-to-sign contract.
Dennis described these exchanges as follows:

. . . it’s kinda dumb to me because we should not make boundaries of ourselves. It should be where you reach out to other people and become more interracial and more of a family. It seems like at this university people are only a family at functions like football games, but in classrooms, black people sit over here, white people sit over here, and nobody interacts. But it shouldn’t be like that.

Within this study, the participants offered a rich description of micro-aggressions and encounters they experience with White peers that affirm and reinforce the entitlement of their White counterparts. The sentiment is that Whites’ overwhelming privilege actually disengages and contravenes any attempt to genuinely facilitate intercultural interactions with non-Whites. Furthermore, these illustrations give voice to how one party must be willing to jettison a part of who they are in order to be successful in that encounter, and that party is usually the least powerful. Since Whites maintain collective power in the United States, there is little trepidation about the belief that Whiteness will be accepted and valued everywhere. This reality offers little reality to those who mindlessly enjoy White privilege and entitlement without hesitation or reflection. Despite these dynamics, these encounters do not seem to discourage the African American participants from remaining engaged and affirmed in their own identity. In ceding part of who they are, they hope for reconciliation and acceptance. The question then is: Is this cession in vain and or is the price of the cultural capital spent too steep? Tinto (1993) argued that in order for students to persist, they need to be social and academically engaged both formally and informally. What these participants are illustrating is that these engagements are not as valuable as hoped. In fact, often they find themselves being treated as though they do not belong. Jibri captured this well as he offered a glimpse into his own experience:
You goin’ look at me when I go to sleep? You goin’ watch how I wash my hands or what? But like what I wanted to do, I wanted to understand why they felt that way. Why they felt they had to watch me all the time. And then that’s when they didn’t want to say anything because they didn’t really know that they were watching me all the time, so I was like, why you watching me all the time? They were like well, we don’t know? How is it you don’t know? You always watching me, like you always looking at me to see if I’m going to do something or say something and I don’t do nothing and I don’t say nothing.

Extant research suggests that intercultural relationships may or may not be coordinated. The dynamics that influence the negotiations include: power, boundaries, cultural loyalty, group identification and maturity amongst others (Hecht et al., 2003). The interactions described in the above theme clearly indicated that participants in this study resisted ready-to-sign contracts, but frequently felt they had no other alternative but to sign.

On the other hand, they suggested that Whites have not fully realized that due to their power, boundaries, racial loyalty, group identification, maturity and additional factors that they mindlessly offer others the opportunity to sign a contract that are designed to promote assimilation and maintain the status quo as described by (Hecht et al. 2003). This study’s African American participants’ descriptions of these interactions clearly show their White counterparts as entering these negotiations from a position of power. Their White counterparts have an ingrained identity and from the participants’ perspectives are unwilling to lean into discomfort and see value in the lived experiences of the participants in this study.

By recognizing that “they are not going to go out of their way to get to know me” (Michael) or describing them as “entitled”, they described pre-negotiated contracts. This
description particularly affirms the three steps suggested by researchers as needed for Whites to “carry” ready-to-sign contracts. The three steps include: actively resisting understanding and appreciation of other’s realities; not seeing race as real or not considering race at all (Jackson & Simpson, 2003).

**Finding Community**

The second theme, “Finding Community”, suggests that the participants in this study sought relationships and spaces on campus where they would find camaraderie and community. This contradicts the characterization of ready-to-sign to contracts where the intent is to promote assimilation and maintain the status quo (Jackson, 2002). Rather than entering into ready-to-sign contracts, study participants were forced to deal with the severe consequences of breaching a ready-to-sign contract, especially when the new contracts were not with Whites. As researchers have posited (Jackson & Simpson, 2003), the only way participants describe taking agency in defining their cultural self is by reneging on pre-negotiated contracts where they have consented to assimilate to others’ cultural worldviews. In this study, participants escaped the exhausting work of assimilation by finding community.

Adrian said: In the black community because they’re so few black people, especially in East, everybody knows everybody or heard of this person. So if I go up to these black guys and say, you know, ah, John, they automatically know I’m talking about a black person. I wouldn’t go up to them and say John the white guy. It’s like we only want to interact with black people. And like Jerrod says, everybody knows somebody even before you meet them face to face. So it’s so small, and then the campus becomes so small because we just, it’s like we narrow it down to all the black people, we rarely, like, interact with all the other white people outside.
What Adrian was describing was that his interactions with Black peers were unlike the ready-to-sign contracts with White peers. Their interactions with White peers are described as interactions where the White peer are negotiating from a position of conscious or subconscious power, where they are entrenched in their own world view and do not have to concede their privilege. Adrian was taking agency in defining his cultural self by resisting ready-to-sign contracts with White peers. In this case, the opportunity for ready-to-sign contracts was interrupted and little to no assimilation took place, so the status quo remained intact. In this case, of course, the status quo reflects a word where Black marginality and White entitlement are practically asymmetrical. The adjustment that comes with assimilating to Whites due to their race is cogently described by Travoye as follows:

I see white people, like, everywhere, and it’s definitely a shock, like, places that I come from they’re all black, and then, some places I never really saw white people and stuff like around the hospital or downtown and around court. And now I see them all over the place, and every time I see someone who is white, which is all the time, I never really, like, know how to have an interaction ‘cause I never really know what they think of me. I don’t know if they like black people or associate with black people, I don’t know if they don’t, so, it’s just like, I rather just keep quiet and keep going about my business. I don’t really go out of my way.

Travoye described the un-readiness of ready-to-sign contracts. He acknowledged that he was unsure whether or not he would need to concede his identity/cultural capital. This is a clear example of not negotiating from a position of power, but deciding to take custody over his options. Since he realized his disadvantage in the contract negotiation he maintained that he
would rather avoid ready-to-sign situations with White peers. Although this was risky, it was perhaps even more risky to suffer from dejection as Michael explained.

But with these girls and stuff, they’re also black. I didn’t really have to do much. Say my name, tell them a little about me, and ever since we just been real cool. It’s just the chemistry was just there with these two people cause, like, they be inviting me to go to the NAACP luncheons and a whole bunch of stuff and I said okay. But these white people like, I made it known like, I’m here but I wasn’t feeling the love.

In contrast to Travoye’s interaction with White peers, Michael described how a ready-to-sign situation with a Black peer quickly progressed to a quasi-negotiated or co-created contract. He described a clear sense of a cultural exchange that he deemed valuable enough for the contract to continue. Jibri described a similar conclusion. Each of their comments fit clearly into the theme of finding community. Participants described cultural contracts that gave them a feeling of acceptance and affirmation rather than a feeling of being a social oddity. Jibri put it succinctly, “I don’t know, it’s like if they’re not white, I get along better with them.”

Researchers have indicated that Cultural Contracts Theory is predicated on three principles. The first is that identities require validation. Second, identities are constantly being exchanged. Finally, identities are contractual (Hecht et al., 2003). In privileging the voices of the participants in this study, it appeared that with the category “Unwilling to change”, the two themes; “They think they’re entitled” and “Finding community”, clearly demonstrated comments related to the concepts of ready-to-sign contracts as described by Jackson (2002). In the “They think they’re entitled” theme participants gave voice to the concept that their White counterparts projected a sense of ownership of their surroundings, demonstrating intercultural exchanges from a position of power without conceding awareness of their White privilege. In the “Finding
community” theme, participants described how they mitigated ready-to-sign situations by reneging on these kinds of contracts in order to take agency of their own Black identity. Even still, the participants did not give voice to the cost of breaching ready-to-sign contracts.

**Category Two: Getting Along**

The second category, which corresponds with the second research question for this study, was “Getting Along” (see Table 4.1). The comments in this category pertain to what Jackson (2002) described as quasi-completed contracts. Quasi-completed cultural contracts are considered partly pre-negotiated and partly open for negotiation. Individuals involved in this type of cultural contract are not ready to fully co-create and do not necessarily rule out maintaining their own worldview. Jackson (2002) described these individuals as “straddling the fence” in terms of their commitment to successfully coordinate mutually satisfying and progressive intercultural relationships. These individuals maintain some sense of control. Jackson (2002) suggested that this is due to a perceived sense of vulnerability. He believed that quasi-completed contracts are usually the least effective and among the most common, yet often the longest lasting contracts, given that very little commitment is required. In other words, these relationships are similar to an old classmate one never sees or an acquaintance who waves but never has an in-depth conversation. This can also be a very comfortable place to maintain a professional connection, such as a mentoring relationship.

In the “Getting Along” category, three themes were identified. The three identified themes were: “Can’t let color get in the way”; “Being Black makes me a target” and “On making adjustments.” In the “Can’t let color get in the way” theme the participants revealed that despite racial discrimination and micro-aggressions they needed to stay focused on the ultimate goal of attaining their degrees in order to be successful. The “Being Black makes me a target” theme
pointed to participants’ feeling that they were being surveyed and mistreated due to their color. Finally, the “On making adjustments” theme illustrated how participants instinctively may want to remain who they are, yet they recognized the need to adapt or alter their normal social behaviors to be successful in White America. In other words, they felt the need to code-switch and negotiate their identities. As a result, participants were unsure about their commitments and felt unsafe and vulnerable in this overwhelmingly White space.

**Can’t Let Color Get in the Way**

Perhaps the biggest sociocultural challenge a person of color faces in the United States is being treated as a normal, average human being who deserves respect and fair treatment. Instead, their difference cues others that they must do something with that difference. They have to negotiate, code-switch, resist, assimilate, detach from one’s own culture, or work arduously to hold onto one’s cultural or racial identity. So it is an active, conscious choice not to let color get in the way. Michael maintained, “Honestly, to tell you the truth, I’m goin’ be viewed as a person. That culture thing causes a lot of separations and I just see myself as a person with values.”

Michael clearly gave voice to the concept of “straddling the fence.” He asserted his own identity by demanding recognition of his humanity. He proceeded to acknowledge how cultural discourse creates separation, thus acknowledging the status quo. He then concluded by asserting his identity within existing structures (Jackson, 2002Bb). In taking this approach, Michael showed some inclination to negotiate a contract. However, his inclination was restrained by his aspiration to maintain his own worldview and subsequently maintain some sense of control (Jackson & Crawley, 2003). When asked who he hung out with the most, Xavier stated:

It’s probably a mix. Without Asians it’s probably a mix of White people and
Hispanic people and Black people. Most of my friends are a mix of White, Hispanic and Black. And the ones I hang out with the least are Asian. I have maybe, maybe one Asian friend. And I really don’t judge my friends on the color of their skin and, um, whether or not I make my friends of the color of their skin, I don’t. It’s just really about your personality and about your character and that’s how you judge your friend.

Xavier demonstrated that negotiations were still open for him. By not making friends based on the color of their skin, he maintained some measure of control. It could be posited that he was in the early stages of Black Identity development. He might be in the pre-encounter stage where he remains race neutral. He might remain on the fence until an encounter leads him to continue or terminate his relationship based on “Nigrescence.” The three subsequent respondents echoed similar sentiments.

For example, Shawn revealed:

To be honest, I don’t have one black friend that I can say right off the bat. Like all the people I associate with are white people. I live with white people and I don’t choose like, oh because he’s black I got to be his friend. Cause he’s black let me sit next to him in class. Cause he’s white let me talk to him, it just happens to be like, white people are who I’m friends with.

Shawn described a ready-to-sign living situation. Even though he argued that he did not chose friends based on color, he showed his risky position. He acknowledged the status quo of how interactions along racial lines normally take place and proceeded to share that he was not inclined to follow the status quo by not choosing friendships based on skin color. He demonstrated that because of his understanding of the status quo he was willing to buck the trend.
Xavier discussed how he did not let color get in the way:

Um, I don’t have a minority professor, but the few that I see around, it really would not change my perception of how well they could teach the class. It’s just all about how you teach. The color of your skin is the color of your skin. I don’t think whether you’re black, Asian, Hispanic, white doesn’t really matter. It’s just a matter of how you teach. The fact that you’re black and you’re a minority professor, like more power to you. But it’s really not going to make a difference. If you’re a minority professor and you suck, then you suck. It’s not going to make a difference.

Xavier continued to argue a race-neutral/post-racial approach to identity negotiations. By taking this approach, he maintained some level of control in these identity negotiations.

Like Xavier and Shawn, Dennis chose not to let social imparities paralyze his interactions with Whites. He said:

I see myself as a human being. That black and white culture stuff don’t really matter to me… it’s just like color it doesn’t matter that person still has a heart, he still breathes, he still takes pisses just like us. He still does the same thing like we do. There’s nothing different.

Dennis continued the trend of participant responses within this theme by offering clear acknowledgement of the status quo but with a willingness to remain open for negotiations. The privileged voices of the respondents suggested that they opted for the safety of staying non-committal in identity negotiations to protect their vulnerability. In doing so they could avoid leaning into the discomfort of difficult identity negotiations where they were forced to cede part of who they were.
Being Black Makes Me a Target

Within this theme, study subjects acknowledged that their race made them vulnerable to acts of intolerance. They offered a very descriptive account of these interactions and the hostile climate they encountered. What was noticeably evident from these lived experiences was their reactions to them. Clearly these subjects were “straddling the fence” in their contract negotiations with their peers. In light of these hostilities that left them vulnerable, they were uneasy about relinquishing control over their ability to define their identities. Jibri uncovered his concerns about how his blackness made him a target:

But here, it’s like just because I’m walking around here, ah, it’s like people have a problem with that with just me being here. Like sometimes, I really don’t feel safe here, even though they say this is one of the safest places in the country, it ain’t really safe for me. It’s like I don’t know how to make them feel like they’re not offended by me.

Jibri acknowledged the hostility he encountered, contrary to his university’s safety regulation assurances. This hostility toward him was so severe that he felt unsafe. What he was describing was uneasiness/un-readiness. He clearly was “straddling the fence” in terms of his willingness to branch outside his comfort zone and connect with cultural others versus staying in comfortable spaces where his identity could be affirmed. This un-readiness was due to the vulnerability he felt. Jackson (2002) argued that this kind of vulnerability often leads marginalized group members to maintain their own worldviews. Jibri also offered a rich description of the discomfort he felt about being in a “White space.” He eloquently demonstrated his doubt about interacting with his White peers, which left him at a loss with respect to approaching and interacting with them.

Jibri further articulated his perspective:
It’s like you learn it when you learn how to walk or something like that. So you grew up with this kind of communication. But they (Whites) don’t have it. Then it’s like they look at you like you’re less than a human being because they don’t understand you…But when they realized that I was not, I don’t know stupid or whatever, they just like decided that they don’t like me because I’m not whatever it is that they thought. So that was a big problem last year like I had never lived with all White people until last year. That was like one of the craziest experiences for me like I didn’t know what to do every day. I was like what’s it going to be today? Like you goin’ watch me when I watch TV? You gonna look at me when I’m eating?

This comment reflected the ongoing hostilities and dehumanization the participant felt at the hands of his White peers. He described indoctrination into how to approach an encounter with Whiteness. He then explained how Whites’ privilege left them unprepared for encounters with non-Whites. He then indicated that despite all attempts to master these interactions, he still felt victimized by their xenophobia and sense of White supremacy—this was causing him to be viewed by Whites as sub-human. This excerpt also clearly revealed how some interactants in quasi-negotiated contracts come to the vulnerability that results in reluctance to further interact with Whites and to work hard to hold onto their respective worldview.

**On Making Adjustments**

In the final theme (“On making adjustments”) of the Getting Along category, participants instinctively attempted to hold on to their worldview. Nonetheless, they were keenly aware of the necessity to adapt or modify their inclined social behaviors to be successful in White America. Specifically, participants clearly articulated their understanding of the concepts of code-switching and resistance to identity negotiation.
Marlon explained the importance of code-switching: “So when I’m around Caucasian people, I adapt to them. I become, not Caucasian, but I acclimate myself to them.” As far as he was concerned, code switching was inevitable.

Marcus agreed and contended that, “We have to make sure that we look good in front of these people so that they won’t have a negative image of us regardless of who we actually we are.”

It is interesting that Marcus offered the recognition that in order to maintain some control of these contractual negotiations, he needed to be on his best behavior. He seemed to have a strong sense of his own identity, but argued that in order to maintain his worldview he needed to code-switch and create an appearance that soothed the dominant group, which simultaneously served to protect his own vulnerability.

Xavier realized that he was entering his encounters from a position of weakness. He posited that in quasi-negotiated contracts the dominant group viewed him as less-than. Despite having concluded his position in these negotiations, he indicated that he would not enter into negotiations. He suggested that:

Even though I’m friends with white people, you always get that concern that, um, that you’re not equal to them even though you’re friends. You have that issue inside of yourself. At least I have that issue inside of myself where I’m like, damn, I just don’t fit in, like I’m not white, I’m not Hispanic, I’m a minority.

Told from a different perspective, Bernard explained that:

I wasn’t really that much in touch with the fact that I am, not that I’ve got a problem being black, I’m proud of being black, but you don’t realize that you’re different being black when you go to a predominantly black high school. But as soon as you go to a
predominantly white college you say all right, I’m black. So I mean, it does change the way you look at yourself and the way you look at other people.

In this case this participant presented a strong Black identity, referencing having grown up in a homogenous Black environment as the root of that interpretation. He expressed a confident worldview; however, the change to a predominantly White environment gave him pause. He reflected that the change in environment might force him to relinquish his worldview.

Ibrahim was deeply concerned about assimilating, and posited that:

I would never try to change, like what he said, never try to change who I am to fit another person’s, you know, expectations of me. My parents taught me you’re going to be who you’re going to be and people you interact with, either they’re going to accept you for it or not. If you try to switch up who you are, then you’re being something you’re not supposed to be.

Ibrahim offered the other side of quasi-negotiated contracts. He was unwilling to relinquish his worldview and was entrenched in his position. Clearly, he was unwilling to leave himself vulnerable. Jamal also implied his reluctance and unwillingness to change. He indicated that he intended to hold on to his worldview. What seemed telling was that he did not appear to be overly convinced that he had the ability to control his surroundings. He remarked that:

Basically what he’s saying, like in school you just gotta be yourself. I’m not going to force myself to like go forward to assimilate with like white values and such like that… I don’t want to change just because they never seen a black person, or whatever, or they think he’s ghetto, things like that.

Bernard implied that his contractual negotiations were emotionally taxing. He seemed to be suggesting that taxations were the necessary cost of admissions into these negotiations.
Most of the participants agreed. Omar further noted that:

I’m still concerned about the way they look at me, but I’m not going to change who I am in front of these people because that’s me. If you got a problem with it, that’s fine. I really don’t need to speak to you. I’m black first of all, most of you all never seen a black person, so I already got that working against me, and then with the music I listen to and the way I’m coming to class, I’m not going to change that just because you’re used to a song. No, I’ve really not had to change who I was for non-blacks on this campus.

He presented his vulnerability and stated that despite it, he was not rescinding his worldview. He always entered negotiations with Whites with an understanding that he was negotiating from a position of weakness. Despite this understanding, he would not change his tactics and maintained his worldview—hence, once again protecting his vulnerability.

Ibrahim believed that when he gave up his identity/worldview and assumed the identity deemed appropriate by his White peers, his negotiations seemed less advantageous and even led to his perceived acceptance. He stated that, “…But if I dress suited up, tie, close shaven or whatever, you know, they would view me as an equal or almost equal, so.”

Not only was the process of identity negotiation taxing, but it also led to vacillations between feelings of frustration that their worldview was at stake in the first place and strategies for addressing even a partial forfeiture of that worldview. Jamal showed how he has been struggling with this process:

As far as white people, they’re fine. Like at first, it was hard for me to adjust and open myself up to white people. But then I told myself like coming to college and keep an open mind. So I mean, it wasn’t all that bad.
He was clearly still straddling the fence in his identity negotiations. Yet he presented a more hopeful tone in his identity negotiations than many participants. Several of his peers gave voice to their vulnerability and uneasiness with having to change their worldview.

The privileged voices in this section are great examples of quasi-negotiated cultural contracts. As Jackson (2002) posited, those involved in quasi-completed contracts tend to straddle the fence regarding fully committing to these negotiations. Furthermore, there is a clear expression of a sense of vulnerability in contemplating entrance into these contracts. These excerpts also gave voice to uncompromising worldviews in protection of vulnerability. As suggested by Jackson (2002), the quasi-completed contract demonstrates a lack of commitment to full valuing of the other. Finally, it is unclear what the longevity or brevity of these contracts are for participants represented in the presented excerpts.

**Category Three: Appreciating Differences**

The last category in this study, which corresponds with RQ#3, was labeled “Appreciating Differences.” The “Appreciating Differences” category in this study had to do with what Jackson (2002) termed as co-created contracts. Co-created contracts are fully negotiable with limits only defined by individual preferences and expectations. Individuals entering into co-created contracts view these arrangements as the most favorable way to engage in relational coordination with individuals who belong to other cultures. The value here is gained by the opportunity to be fully open to differences. When a cultural contract is co-created, acknowledgment and valuation of cultural differences readily exists. Jackson (2002) also suggested that in co-created cultural contracts, cultural differences are not ignored; nonetheless, these differences are not the single reason the interactants partner together. Finally, the emphasis in co-created contracts is actually on shared contentment rather than the individuals being
resigned to them or begrudgingly compromising with others as they try to coordinate a relationship. This is not a perfect contract, but rather one that is principally focused on valuing others’ cultural values, beliefs, social behaviors, background, worldviews, etc.

Within the “Appreciating Differences” category the emergent themes were “Upbringing and Values” and “You can’t just sit there; you’ve gotta take it.”

The “Upbringing and Values” highlighted participants’ experiences at home along with the family influences that equipped participants to enter into identity negotiation at a PWI. The “You can’t just sit there; you’ve gotta take it” implies that participants have learned that in order to succeed they must seize opportunities rather than being passive or entangled in the identity politics that paralyze opportunities to meet new people and get work done successfully. In this case, this is much more about being self-efficacious and seizing the day than on being distracted by racial and cultural differences.

**Upbringing and Values**

In this study, it was very apparent that the participants’ identities were strongly influenced by both their environmental surroundings growing up and their parents’ childrearing approach. The participants offered a rich description of how these influences were key to their development. In this theme, the residual effects of their upbringing and values were a central point in how students entered into negotiations. Furthermore, it was paramount that those who entered into co-created contracts were not only aware of their own values, but also prepared to accept others’ standpoints and values as well. So, many of the following excerpts speak directly to the foundational values that are the catalysts for effective mutually beneficial intercultural relationships or what cultural contracts theory calls “co-created cultural contracts.” Shawn explained:
Um, my parents came from hard working people so they said as black people you had to work twice as hard as white person and, um, all day they drive for me to work as hard as I can. But education, sports, anything that I’m doing I work hard at it.

Shawn presented the idea that placing value on a different set of expectations for a work ethic across race is critical to positioning yourself for entering into co-created contracts. This understanding, appreciation, and empathy towards industriousness creates a fertile environment for a successful co-created contract. In expressing the importance of industriousness, a shared meaning might be found with a companion in a co-created contract. Dennis revealed that:

Growing up wasn’t that easy, so like it was always shared that nothing is ever given to you. You’ve got to earn everything that you get. Everything I got I earned it. My car I have I earned it. I bought it myself. Money wasn’t so easy. I’ve seen my grandmother struggle. I didn’t grow up living with my parents, so like growing up it was always a hustle and bustle kind of thing, always trying to get what you need but enough to satisfy you.

Dennis and Shawn expressed a similar emphasis on hard work. He argued that environmental and parental values emphasized achievement through hard work in order to nurture oneself.

Yves: just to take off what they said, my mother always told me that people can take almost anything away from you, but the one they cannot take away from you is your education, so that’s the most important thing.

Ibrahim: I learned that from my parents the most important thing is education, and that you’ve gotta be successful at school and successful at life if you want to go somewhere.
Yves and Ibrahim both stated that their value system had endorsed the importance of education as a tool in overcoming challenges and a primary catalyst for effective co-created contracts. An added dimension to success is respect. Paul noted that:

That’s like my whole family since they are from this country, it’s like a close knit family. It’s more like respect your elders; grandma reigns supreme, stuff like that.

Paul described a value system that created a blueprint for how respect was awarded in his familial setting. His worldview included how he views respect, a phenomenon deeply intertwined with privilege, and how contracts are negotiated.

Ibrahim: but you know, going to a predominantly black high school is more about having respect because if nobody respect you, then you got nothing growing up, especially on the streets in New York.

This insight on earned respect in a peer setting proved invaluable to several participants. The importance of respect from peers clearly influences one’s identity development. Claude recounted how parental influences affected his decision-making:

My mom always told me that if I wanted to be like people outside I could go live with them outside, so my mom is the type of parent that would drive fear into you so you really don’t want to do anything that she said you not supposed to do, so that’s basically how I grew up cause she was always like threatening me about being out there and not having a place to live and stuff like that

He described the threat of removal from a familial sanctuary as a means of getting him to embrace values that his mother in particular viewed as proper. Marlon received a different kind of threat or prodding. He said:
Sometimes I would go out and play basketball or football, but to do so would kind of be a struggle to ask my dad to do it because it was always, why don’t you study? Then once I started to do my work in school, when I got home it was well, why don’t you read a book? So there was never really the opportunity to go out and play. He was always staying inside doing some kind of work or chores or such.

Marlon described a combination of work ethic and education as a childrearing strategy employed by his father, in particular, to teach family values. Family is critical to the sense of self-efficacy needed by these participants to survive in a social world not tailored to their race or culture. Ian recognized this and recalled that:

Actually, my aunts, they were heavily into our household, as well. Ah, my one aunt lived down the block; my other aunt lived like across town, but they visited frequently.

He was describing the “It takes a village” approach to his indoctrination. Clearly, his extended family, and in particular his aunts, were central to his upbringing and the development of his worldview. This shifted a bit across study participants in part due to the immigrant background of their respective parents. For example, Jacque suggested that as a first-generation immigrant the value system he brought with him from Haiti remained intact from outside threats that could possibly diminish or destroy it.

Jacque: My house was uncultured. I come from Haiti and we just kept the same morals, same ethics that you have inside your house, you know? We lived the same exact way as you live in your country. The only difference is it’s a different place. That’s pretty much it. Keep out of trouble, come back home and do your work.
Despite his change of locations, the catalyst for a successful future was co-created contracts. Participants’ upbringing had a tremendous bearing on their social and personal outlooks. Success was not simply due to one’s start in life. The quality and breadth of relationships developed over time also contributed to their success. In this study, the principal concern was about relationships within and across cultures that fostered one’s sense of the possibilities for success.

**You Can’t Just Sit There; You’ve Gotta Take It**

One of the dangers or pitfalls of ineffective intercultural interaction is the development of non-genuine communication behaviors or inauthentic relationships. The respondents revealed via the following excerpts their interest in moving beyond their comfort zones to embrace people who do not look like them and do not always show that they care about them. They did this mostly out of necessity or at least out of learned survival behaviors. Even still, the link among these comments was that the values of hard work overlap the students’ interest in being successful. Success, for them, requires that all counterproductive or exclusive behaviors be put aside while aims are pursued. This is fascinating in that research has consistently demonstrated that people’s natural instinct tends to be to seek asylum among those with whom one is most comfortable; however, the stark reality is that this is not an option for members of marginalized groups.

Bernard: Respect is gained. You have to gain your respect. Sometimes you have to take it. Don’t let people push you in places you’re not supposed to be in

Ibrahim: You gotta work for what you get. That’s what I realize. You gotta work for everything you get. Ain’t nothing gonna be given to you… But in terms of using
different resources and mentors and everything, I think the best person to have in your
life is someone that’s going to tell you what you need to hear, not want you want to hear.

Bernard was not resigned to embracing his expected fate in a predominantly White space. He was willing to experience discomfort to achieve high aspirations. He was dedicated to an unrelenting pursuit of excellence despite the hidden cost that might come with it. Ibrahim affirmed Bernard’s articulation that that the price of excellence could be an uncomfortable topic. He affirmed that his starting point while negotiating these cultural contracts had not emerged from a position of strength. The price of doing business was high, but his preparation for these encounters was based on resources and value systems that equipped him for these encounters.

Marlon: I guess that we have to work for everything that we want to accomplish that they really don’t feel the need to do anything

Marlon pointed out that even though he was aware of the inequity between “us and “them”, he was resigned to a work ethic that demanded more of him in order to achieve the same opportunities as White peers. He seemed to chalk this up to the price of doing business.

Yves: I try to get whoever I think’s the smartest person in the class so I can get the best grade. I know they will bring something good to the table, whether it’s a black person or a Asian person or a white person doesn’t matter to me. Whoever I think will get the best grade working with, I will go towards them.

Jibri: Yeah, I get a lot of dudes’ phone numbers there. Yeah, like one dude named Danny, he could help me with um ECON2. So I call him sometimes. But I didn’t know he was an ECON major until I started talking to him in-between games.

Jamal: Since coming here, I feel like as far as my success, will be to like network and use every possible opportunity, whether it be like knowing this person, know that person,
or go on to this type of discussion, that type of discussion. Just be able to find an
opportunity and utilize it.

Unlike Marlon, Jibri, Yves, and Jamal focused on ingenuity as opposed to a work ethic. One coping strategy is to identify talented resources that will ensure successful outcomes. These subjects were willing to put aside counterproductive or exclusive behaviors in pursuit of excellence. Additionally, Jibri offered that he leveraged resources in environments where identity exchange was both valuable to him and his counterpart. He used interactions during athletic activities to achieve his goals. Being directed is key, according to Michael:

I mean this University for me so far, you know, I’m doing what I have to do. For me it’s an issue, but I’m not letting the issue get to me cause I came here to, you know, get something, so I plan on leaving here with something, even though I have to, you know, run into a bit of obstacles, but like my focus is getting what I want and that’s my degree. So at the end of the day, these problems, they’re there but, I’m not gonna pay attention to these problems cause at the end of the day I have to do what I have to do, so, that’s it

Michael emphasized the importance of staying focused despite the acknowledgement of a social climate often filled with hostility. This hostility is duly acknowledged but does not get in the way of his resilience and commitment to the ultimate goal. Michael demonstrated how his tenets of hard work overlapped with his desire to be successful.

Marlon: They’ve started to occur more often because I’m trying to, I guess network more. So I try to put myself out there, I try people that I know and usually don’t talk to, I try to go up to them and ask how they’re doing, I try to set a place where we can meet.

Marcus: And it’s after I started to get involved I started to realize I had something, something to offer people.
Marlon and Marcus indicated their reluctance and discomfort in leaving their comfort zone. Marlon’s primary motivation was necessity and/or out of learned survival behaviors. Marcus’s motivation seemed more intrinsic based on his negotiations with cultural capital deemed valuable that could allow him to negotiate from a position of power. Regardless, both subjects recognized that they needed to move out of their comfort zones to embrace people who do not look like them. Ian presented successful interactions that are usually the product of referrals. These interactions are successful because they have been vetted by others deemed to be valuable to them.

Interactions with people that I actually pursue, um, they’re fairly good when I’m being sent to the right people. But when I individually pursue, sometimes you don’t find the right help. Just some people just yeah, they some people are not understanding whatever the case may be, but it’s just some people it’s just like whatever, yeah, people go through issues and problems all throughout their life, who cares, you know, tough it out, do better. As a result, the positive cultural exchange might be transferred to others also in search of similar success and faced with similar challenges. Ian maintained that he pursued interaction on his own without a reference point; he also experienced vulnerability so that he might have valuable cultural exchanges. In this case, he offered perseverance as a survival technique in working toward discovering and achieving the elusive co-created contract in a predominantly White environment. These adaptive and protective behaviors are indicative of survival techniques taught at an early age and employed to ensure success.

In this category, the participants offered a clear sense that their identities had been strongly influenced by both their environmental surroundings growing up and their parents’ childrearing approach. They offered a rich description of how these influences were key to their
development. In this theme the residual effect of their upbringing and values are a central point in how students enter negotiations. Furthermore, the participants in this category indicated that if they were to enter co-created contracts, they could imagine only being aware of their own values, but also prepared to accept others’ standpoints and values as well. The fact is that the participants were unable to recount any intercultural peer relationships where they experienced co-created cultural contracts. That is, they never really felt accepted or affirmed by their White peers, except in momentary instances such as when they were allowed to join a class group or invited to play basketball. Interestingly, they did report that they often felt an immediate connection with Latinos but not with Asians.

In conclusion, participants in this category showed that their foundational values were the catalysts for effective mutually beneficial intercultural relationships or what cultural contracts theory coins co-created contracts. They explained that they felt prepared for healthy productive relationships where they felt mutually affirmed, yet those experiences never emerged in any real sustainable way across cultures. This interesting finding speaks to the social isolation so commonplace in academe and broader U.S. social life. Arguably, it might be asserted that their lack of enriching and affirming intercultural peer experiences was their fault. They needed to try harder. Of course, this point is turned on its head when one considers that their White peers don’t feel this same pressure, because they experience affirmation in the broader society without even trying.
Chapter 5

CONCLUSION

The purpose of this study was to explore how African American males at a PWI negotiated their identities when interacting with peers. This study was conducted with the intent of contributing to the body of research focusing on the experiences of African American males at a PWI as well as their retention or persistence in this setting. Research has shown that by 2040 the U.S. population will be 50% people of color (SEE http://rftgf.org/PP/pdft-thipp/THI_US_Demographic_Outlook.pdf). This implies that every sector of our society should reflect multiculturalism. In order to ready the workforce leadership, as well as the broader business and residential communities for this shift, it is paramount that we continue to uncover new strategies of addressing the gap in recruitment, retention, and graduation rates for all members of marginalized groups. The overall focus of this study was Black male student success, and the strategic focus was on the ontological factors that affect their persistence. In other words, the principal concern addressed here was how Black males negotiate their identities when they come into contact with cultural others. By revealing their identity negotiations, the aim was to gain insights into how Black male students might be better supported as they matriculate through their collegiate education and move on to their respective professional careers.

More specifically, this research was designed to provide insight to PWIs about the experiences of Black males at their respective institutions and assist them in the development of policies and practices that will support a welcoming environment for African American males with consideration of the unique cross-cultural needs of the students.
Within this chapter, an overview of the entre study is presented, beginning with the purpose and significance, followed by a recap of the primary literature, conceptual framework, method, results, and practical implications and recommendations for future research.

**Review of the Significance of the Study**

This study’s findings serve as a resource for universities interested in exploring new strategies for engaging African American males both academically and socially at the formal and informal levels while keeping in mind how the cultural uniqueness of their communication styles influences decisions to continue matriculation or depart. The research gathered as part of this dissertation will be critical since little to no research has been devoted to exploring African American male identities as negotiated in interactions with peers at PWIs. Even though the research on participation rates of African American students has expanded, this research offered information on specific factors that impact participation rates.

In order to contribute to the body of literature on strategies for ensuring strategic support for minority student persistence and graduation, the literature had to be explored. This literature offered great possibilities as well as a few voids and inconsistencies that must be addressed to alleviate gaps while improving outcomes.

**Review of the Literature**

Research has indicated that since the mid-1960s, the enrollment of minorities at colleges and universities has continued to increase. Specific data indicate that the enrollment rate for minority students at colleges and universities grew from only 15.7% in 1976 to 29.2% in 2000 (National Center for Education Statistics, 2011). As of 2011, this number had increased to 38.8%. Despite significant gains in the enrollment of minorities, a closer examination showed alarming disparities along racial lines and gender lines within those minority groups.
National longitudinal data have indicated that when it comes to African American college enrollees, even though the enrollment of undergraduate African American students at U.S. colleges and universities has increased, this increase has occurred at a much slower rate compared to those for Asians and Latinos (National Center of Education Statistics, 2011). These troubling data on lagging enrollment rates have steered researchers toward examining this issue (Chronicle of Higher Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 2011, 2014, Knapp et al., 2010; Ryu, 2012).

Extensive research has been conducted on troubling enrollment trends among African American students at colleges and universities. This research has included an emphasis on these trends at PWIs (Allen, 1992; Holmes, 2000; Nelson et al., 2007). Findings have fostered a national conversation on the issue of attrition and/or retention of African American students in post-secondary education (D’Augelli & Hershberger, 1993; Delgado, 1998; Freeman, 1999; Willie & McCord, 1972). Since the early 1970s, researchers have dedicated a significant time to identifying a variety of factors contributing to the underrepresentation of African Americans in higher education (Pascarella & Terrenzini, 2005; Tinto, 1993). Emergent research from this interest has led to examinations of factors such as access, affordability, attrition, climate and retention in order to shed light on these troubling enrollment data.

The examination of African American enrollment trends at colleges and universities has shed light on additional troubling trends in this group. Specifically, enrollment of African Americans at U.S. colleges and universities examined along gender lines reveals alarming disparities. Compared to other historically underrepresented groups (excluding Native Americans), when it comes to overall college enrollment rates, African American men have only experienced an increase from 4.3% in 1976 to 5.1% in 2010, which is the smallest increase for
any historically underrepresented group. For that same period, Latino men increased from 1.9% to 5.4% and Asian men increased from 0.9% to 2.8%. (National Center of Education Statistics, 2011, Table 263).

Researchers have attempted to provide some insight into these gender perspectives by specifically focusing their research on African American males (Cuyjet, 1997; Harper, 2006; 2012; Strayhorn, 2008, 2013). It has been shown that Black females outnumber Black males by more than 2 to 1 on American college campuses (Cuyjet, 2006). Additional research suggests that two-thirds of Black males who enroll in college leave without completing their degree. When compared to Black women, Black men devote less time to their college academics, are less involved in co-curricular activities, including leadership roles, and report lower grades (Cuyjet, 1997; Harper et al., 2004). The drop-out rate for Black males in college is the highest for any ethnic group and highest for both sexes (Harper 2006; Strayhorn, 2010). Finally, Black male undergraduates at PWIs report hostile campus environments, where they encounter victimization and micro aggressions that are the result of racial bias. This isolates them and negatively affects their academic achievement (Bonner II, 2010; Harper, 2009).

An important goal for all colleges and universities has been the development of initiatives that support the retention of all students. To support these efforts, large bodies of research have been devoted to the study of the retention of students in general (Astin, 1991; Pascarella & Terrenzini, 2005; Tinto, 1993). Specific to African American students, this research has been dedicated to exploring disparities in academic performance among African American men and other groups at institutions of higher education (Flowers, 2004; McNairy, 1996; Swail et al., 2004; Tierney, 1999).
The extensive research on college retention has produced several conceptual frameworks and models that have served as a benchmark for further studies. These frameworks and models have been widely accepted for their applicability to the collegiate environment, and are referred to as college impact models as well as student persistence models (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). The main goal of this research was to determine how students experience college (Astin 1985, 1993; Pascarella & Terenzini 1991, 2005; and Tinto 1987, 1993). This research led to the creation of two distinct groups of student development theories and models (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991, 2005).

The two groups of student development theories and models that have emerged from research on student retention include developmental theories of student change and college impact models of student change. Developmental theories and models addressed the nature, structure, and process of individual human growth, whereas college impact models of student change emphasized change associated with the characteristics of the institution students attended or with the student experiences while enrolled at these colleges. In exploring cross-cultural dialogue and the influence of engagement of first-year African American males at a PWI with White peers and White faculty, it appears that this phenomenon would be explained in a college impact model of student change.

Two of the most frequently cited college impact models include Astin (1985, 1993) and Tinto (1987, 1993). Both impact models focus on variables assumed to affect student behavior and change. These sets include variables related to the students’ social identity and demographic backgrounds as well as institutional factors, factors related to the student’s experiences, and the climate of the campus (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005).
Astin’s theory of student involvement comprises the extent of physical and psychological vigor devoted by the student to their educational experience (Reason, 2003). Furthermore, Astin’s theory indicates a correlation between a student’s learning experience and his or her personal development due to an educational program and the quality and quantity of involvement in that program. This relationship led Astin to conclude that the significance of the student’s involvement in the college experience correlates with the level of engagement. In other words, the more engaged a student is, the more motivated they will be. Astin offered five postulates described in the literature review to explain the relationship between student experience and involvement.

Tinto’s model of student departure represents the most cited theory related to student persistence (Braxton, Milem, & Sullivan, 2000). With his model Tinto (1993) attempted to understand the longitudinal process of student persistence; the primary goal of his research was to investigate how the prevalence or lack of certain behaviors impact student persistence and retention. This model of student departure examines various academic, psychological and social factors leading to student departure from the university where they are enrolled. It is suggested that student departure is a consequence of the interaction between the individual student and the college or university as an organization.

More specifically, this model asserts that students come to a particular institution with a range of background traits. These traits include secondary school experiences, academic aptitude, and family backgrounds. Based on these traits, a student’s initial commitments, both to the institution and to the goal of graduation from college, are developed (Tinto, 1993). Together with background traits, these commitments influence not only how well students will perform in college but also how they will interact with, and subsequently become engaged in, the
institution’s social and academic systems (Tinto, 1993). Tinto (1993) suggested that the greater the individual’s level of social and academic engagement, the greater their subsequent commitment to the institution and commitment to the goal of college graduation, respectively. Furthermore, the students’ initial and subsequent commitments, along with levels of integration, produce direct, positive influence on retention.

As one of the most cited models of student persistence, Tinto’s model of student departure also has been subjected to significant criticism. Critics argue that it fails to take the experience of minority students into account (Guiffrida, 2005; Hurtado, 1997; Kuh & Love, 2000; Moore & Upcraft, 1990; Rendon, Jalomo, & Nora, 2000; Tierney, 1999). An additional criticism is that it places too much responsibility for social and academic engagement on the student and not enough on the institution (Rendon, 1994; Tierney, 1992).

In addition to the above-mentioned criticism, this study contended that even though Tinto and other researchers have identified the importance of engagement, no time has been spent conceptualizing what this engagement looks like from an intercultural communication perspective. Further, no studies have examined how Black males negotiate their identity when interacting with their White peers at a PWI and how those interactions impinge on their student success. The present study aimed to address this void by exploring how African American males at a PWI negotiate their identity when communicating, engaging and interacting with their peers.

All published national data indicate that college campuses are ethnically diverse (National Center of Education Statistics, 2011). With this emergent trend, it important to gain perspective on the experiences of emerging groups of students. Students who represent this ethnic diversity are more likely to face challenges than their White counterparts. Specific studies
have acknowledged the hostilities Black students face at PWIs campuses (Davis et al., 2004; Jones, 2004; Solorzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000; Swim et al., 2003).

Since hostilities are part of face-to-face communications and since face-to-face experiences are a large part of the overall student experience, it would be fair to suggest that these constant interactions shape how a student experiences college. The imperative to conduct research on intercultural communications becomes more apparent when it is recognized and acknowledged that Blacks at PWIs campuses experience hostilities and that the occurrence of these hostilities is far too prevalent (Davis et al., 2004; Solorzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000; Swim et al., 2003).

The fact that there has been little to no research on students’ face-to-face communication experiences at colleges and universities drove the design of this study. More specifically, little to no research has been devoted to the constant interactions among students from different cultural backgrounds and very little to no research has looked at how students from diverse backgrounds in higher education settings negotiate their identity with their White peers at a PWI.

To frame the research question an exhaustive literature review was conducted within the field of communications. A large body of research was located that focuses on how communicative interactions take place between individuals. From this body of research, a significant theoretical perspective emerged offering insight into how communication takes place and how persons negotiate their identity in these interactions. Most of this research suggested that during communicative interactions the interactants negotiate their identity. How and to what extent this identity has been negotiated was the point of divergence among these different theoretical perspectives (Cupach & Imahori, 1993; Gudykunst & Ting-Toomey, 1988; Jackson, 1999, 2002; Ting-Toomey, 1999). In addition to communications research, it was critical for this
study to be designed in such a way that findings would offer some understanding of the psychological experiences of African Americans and to Black racial identity.

Over the years, even though several models of Black identity have emerged, one that has stood out and is most often cited is Cross’s (1971, 1978) theory of psychological nigrescence or the Black Identity Development Model that eventually was revised to become the Cross and Fhagen-Smith life span model of Black identity development. Cross and Fhagen-Smith (2001) defined Black identity development as “psychological nigrescence” or “the process of becoming Black”. They argued that three central concepts help define Black identity: personal identity, reference group orientation and race salience. This model contains three delineated patterns across a lifespan: Nigrescence Pattern A, Nigrescence Pattern B and Nigrescence Pattern C. Furthermore, this model presented Black identity development across six sectors encompassing all three Nigrescence patterns. Five of the sectors are identifiable developmental stages and one is a recycling sector. These developmental stages included: infancy, pre-adolescence, adolescence, early adulthood and adulthood. Although this model is helpful it merely provides insight into the stages through which one matriculates as one comes to learn about and define his or her identity. While that is compelling, the focus of this study was much more on what one does with their identity as they engage with others rather than what stage one has reached across one’s lifespan. In other words, the focus here was on the interactive process used to adjust identity vis-à-vis others.

After an extensive review of the literature one model was identified as most equipped to support this study’s overarching research question: “How do African American males at PWIs characterize their identity negotiation when interacting with non-African American peers?”
Cultural Contracts Theory (Jackson, 1999) was the communication-based theory deployed for this study.

Cultural Contracts Theory (CCT) suggests that we all negotiate our identities throughout our lives. The theory seeks to explain what is actually being negotiated. Jackson et al. (1999) maintained that the cultural worldview is at stake during identity negotiation. We all grow up socialized into a particular set of cultural values, norms, beliefs, and orientations that constitute our cultural worldviews. When we leave the comfort of our familiar and shared cultural environs, we find that we are introduced to others who do not necessarily share our worldviews. That is where the conflict ensues. It is instinctive to want to be socially affirmed, and in fact when our identities are affirmed other crucial dimensions of our identities are triggered such as self-efficacy, self-esteem, and self-worth, all of which are necessary for productivity and success.

So, to ensure positive outcomes for student persistence, researchers must uncover those factors that lay dormant in the identity negotiation process. When those are discovered, other social dimensions that spill over into overall student success are accessible and can be adjusted accordingly. To say that one negotiates identity via cultural contracts is to say that one is engaged in the process of relationship development within and across cultures, irrespective of context, from initial interaction to relational termination (Jackson, 1999). When applying this perspective to a college campus it is clear that cultural contracts are central to daily interactions among all college students. Specifically, a cultural contract is defined as an implicit agreement between two or more interactants who have different interpretations of culture and decide to coordinate or resist coordination of a relationship with one another depending on whether the relationship is deemed valuable to both (Jackson, 1999). This theoretical framework was
essential in exploring the lived experiences of African American males at a PWI through their characterization of interactions with White peers.

**Review of Method & Methodology**

The purpose of this study was to explore how African American male college students at PWIs characterize their identity negotiation when interacting with non-African American peers. This phenomenon was explored utilizing Jackson’s (2002) Cultural Contracts Theory (CCT) as a conceptual frame. To best answer the overarching question, a critical interpretive approach was used since the researcher was interested in exploring the essence and interaction of African American men and their non-African American peers and how these interactions reveal how identity is negotiated.

Since this study was conducted focusing on the lived experiences of the participants (Moustakas, 1994), in-depth, semi-structured interviews and focus group interviews were employed to answer the research question. A critical interpretive approach was necessary since the researcher was interested in exploring the essence and interaction of African American men and their non-African American peers and how these interactions identify stimulate identity negotiation. The researcher critically examined participants’ discussion of interracial interactions by identifying themes and patterns, and recollected interactions of African American men with their non-African American peers. Finally, the researcher aimed to explore how these interactions produced, elicited and manifested identity negotiations, giving voice to these participants’ experiences.

There was one overarching investigative question in this study: How do first-year African American males at PWIs characterize their identity negotiation when interacting with non-
African American peers? Three research questions were subsumed under this overarching concern:

RQ#1: How do African American male participants describe identity negotiations where they are most apt to assimilate (agree to ready-to-sign cultural contracts)?

RQ#2: How do African American male participants describe the way quasi-completed contracts emerge and get negotiated among the participants and their non-African American peers?

RQ#3: According to the participants, under what conditions are co-created cultural contracts made possible?

This study had a total of 29 students (see Table 4.1) who participated in either individual interviews or focus groups. Eight individuals participated in individual interviews. Of the subjects who participated in the individual interviews, four were first-year students and four were upperclassmen. In addition to the individual interviews, three focus groups were conducted in which there were no more than eight participants and no fewer than seven. The three focus groups consisted of an upperclassmen focus group, a first-year focus group, and a combined first-year and upperclassmen focus group. All focus groups and interviews were recorded and lasted about one hour. All data were transcribed and computer files created for ease of analysis using Nvivo software.

During the analytical phase of this study, the data were analyzed using Lincoln and Guba’s (1985) constant comparison technique. This technique involves a process in which data are transcribed methodically, deconstructing by thematizing, unitizing, and ultimately interpreting inter-subjectively coded data. The goal was to uncover emergent themes and make sense of prior conceptual categories and research questions.
This approach is most useful when several safeguards are utilized to account for dependability and confirmability of the interpretive process and data. Dependability is about the trustworthiness and transferability of the technique used in the study such that the study can be repeated to the greatest degree possible. This is a tough standard but was accomplished in this study by clearly explaining the constant comparison technique deployed. The confirmability standard is also about the trustworthiness of the study with a focus on the consistency of the data interpretation. This was accomplished here via stepwise replication in which another researcher performed an audit trail and offered independent interpretations of the same data set.

During this interpretive process, 121 pages of transcribed notes were analyzed. Within these pages, 607 nodes or independent thoughts were identified and grouped in 37 node groups. These nodes were organized in seven emergent themes placed in three forced research categories aligned with the research questions for this study. Roughly 7% of the nodes were discarded, an acceptable range by qualitative research standards (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

This section provides a summary of the results. As described in Table 4.1 a total of seven themes were distributed among the three categories that respectively captured each of the three research questions. Results are discussed as they relate to each research question.

The participants’ comments in the “Unwilling to change” category clearly demonstrated comments related to the concepts of ready to sign contracts as described by Jackson (2002). In the “They think they’re entitled” theme participants give voice to the concept that their White counterparts project a sense of ownership of their surroundings demonstrating that intercultural exchanges from a position of power without conceding awareness of their white privilege. In the “Finding community” theme participants describe how they mitigate ready to sign situations by
reneging on these kinds of contracts in order to take agency of their own Black identity. Even still the participants do not give voice to what the cost of breaching ready to sign contracts is.

The “Getting Along” theme explores participant responses that offer great examples of quasi-negotiated cultural contracts. They give voice to Jackson’s (2002) assertion that those who are involved in quasi-completed contracts tend to straddle the fence with respect to fully committing to this particular contract negotiation. Furthermore, participants in this category disclose a clear sense of vulnerability in contemplating entrance into these contracts. These excerpts tell a tale of uncompromising worldviews while securing themselves from vulnerability. Within these participant responses there is affirmation of the position argued by Jackson (2002), that the interactants of quasi-completed contracts demonstrate an intermittent lack of commitment to fully valuing the other. Finally, the participants in this category did not give to voice to whether or not they experienced long-term or ephemeral relationships when entering into these contracts.

The last category is “Appreciating Differences,” which corresponds with the third research question regarding the conditions needed to facilitate co-created contracts. Co-created contracts are ones where interactants feel mutually valued. Although there is no perfect contract this one requires the least identity negotiation, because each party is accepted for who they are.

As you might imagine this is rarely if ever reported or experienced by the participants, except among African American and Latino peers. The participants report that they have momentary flashes or glimpses of acceptance by their White and Asian peers, but these are not sustained. They attribute the White peers’ exclusionary behaviors to entitlement and privilege, but they offer no explanation to the Asian students’ behavior. This would be a fascinating area
for future research, since there is little to no research that explores Black-Asian students’ peer relationships.

**Strengths and Limitations of the Study**

This study has two very apparent strengths and a couple of limitations. Its strengths are its emphasis on interaction and method. The limitations principally relate to the scope of the study.

The focus on peer-to-peer interaction as it relates to both identity and student success is unique. The use of cultural contracts theory is instrumental to this study because of how the metaphor of the contract reflects students’ worldviews and identities, and their interest in retaining them. The examination of peer-to-peer interaction in this regard is key. It rebuts the presumption that the power and privilege associated with whiteness only surfaces when there is an apparent asymmetry between interactants such as in a supervisor-subordinate interaction. The fact that White peers still maintain a detectable sense of entitlement and privilege has direct bearing on how Black male students engage. This power dynamic clearly emerges throughout the interview data.

The qualitative research method employed in this study is critical-interpretive. This particular approach permits attention to the power dynamics that intercede race-related experiences of the participants. It would be negligent to ignore these social dynamics associated with race. The other complicating factor is that several of the participants were not only Black, but also come from recently immigrated families. This reveals the hidden contours and complexity of Blackness that are rarely discussed in the literature. It signifies that not all Blacks see race and identity the same way growing up; however when they are confronted with racism
and/or social exclusion they find themselves using similar strategies to protect their identities so that they can remain self-efficacious and retain a sense of self-worth.

Several aspects are related to the scope that limited the current study. First, the qualitative method, although useful for revealing in-depth, thick-descriptive responses, limited the number of participants. The study might have been enhanced if it were triangulated and included survey instrumentation coupled with ethnographic observations. That would have expanded the scope and potentially the outcomes. Another area related to scope was the recruited participant population. The study did not parse out Black students with immigrant parents versus second-generation Black students and beyond. Certainly, the students from immigrant families improved the depth of the responses and uncovered a need for a study that exclusively focuses on immigrant experiences, perhaps with some discussion of being first-generation U.S. college students. In other words, it is possible that immigrant families have gone to college for years, but there is something unique about a first-generation U.S. citizen and his or her experiences at a U.S. university, even if the student has grown up in and only knows U.S. culture. Finally, arguably an expansion of the conceptual scope might have offered a different interpretation of the results. If, for example, the study had deployed two conceptual frameworks, including cultural contacts theory and Cross and Fhagen-Smith’s lifespan model of nigrescence, it might have offered additional information on how students’ struggle around identity might have started internally and then manifested outwardly.

Note that mixed methods were not used.

The strength of this study was accented by the focus on interaction and method. The limitations were reflected via scope as it pertained to the number of participants, methodological variety, and conceptual frame. Of course, no study can say or do it all. That would be
counterproductive. Instead, researchers must aim at a specific population, using a particular methodological and theoretic approach, while working to extend extant lines of inquiry on the respective topic. The current study did that and the results suggested compelling insights into Black male student persistence.

**Practical and Conceptual Implications**

Although many high-achieving, academically successful African American college students graduate within 4–6 years (Harper, 2012), the rate of persistence among African American males as a group are lower than the national average. This study’s findings offered some explanation. Tinto (2008) contended that, “Access without support is not opportunity” (p. 50). It is imperative that universities understand how to offer that support to extend the greatest opportunity possible to Black male students. This study presented some insights that may facilitate the development of new strategies that take into account Black male identities and identity negotiations. The practical implications can be manifested in three areas: curriculum, policy, and leadership.

The curriculum is rife with possibilities for greater multicultural inclusion. As students from all backgrounds engage with materials, they will learn best via curricular materials that provide affirmation about who they are. For example, participants ruminated about not seeing themselves reflected in the classroom. The choice of curricular materials may facilitate greater participation, identification with the material, and a sense of propriety over a learning process that affirms their identities. Second, practical improvements may be seen at the policy level. Policies for college admission, student support, and educational improvement outcomes could be ameliorated. For example, mounting evidence has proven again and again that there is little to no correlation between standardized test scores such as ACT and SAT and college or career
success. Yet, universities across the country use this biased indicator as a yardstick for access, scholarships, and eventual success. This policy needs to be reviewed and changed to allow greater opportunity for college entry by high-performing high school students who are not treated as being academically capable. Third, the university leadership must take ownership of the student they have readily admitted into the university. A concerted effort at all levels of these institutions must be made to ensure student success. At the highest levels of these institutions, leaders must recognize that diversity is a moral imperative that offers, among other things, economic opportunity. As our nation becomes more diverse, institutions of higher education are being charged with preparing the workforce. University leaders must be willing to drive these difficult conversations, take ownership of their own privilege, and endure the discomfort that may arise in these discussions. Leaders must recognize that this imperative is not a reactive training issue but a robust organizational approach with tangible and visible outcomes.

The competitive nature of university leaders to outdo their counterparts in terms of resource commitments (e.g., research expenditures) should hold true for diversity as well. University leaders must commit to tackling these challenges in the same way they tackle challenges in revenue-generating sports. Commitment to financial support, advocacy and superior physical plant should be the same for diversity as for revenue-generating athletics. Convenient fear of litigation or the resigned view that these issues are “not unique to the institution” and so cannot be addressed must not drive policies and practices that are needed to reverse deplorable trends. Striving for these high aspirations can go a long way toward reversing some of the hostilities and challenges to which many subjects in this study gave voice.

In addition to the practical implications, there are also conceptual implications. For example, the current study exposed conceptual voids and inconsistencies in the literature. Tinto
provided pioneering work on college student access and persistence, yet one of the glaring omissions was the discussion of multicultural persistence. Tinto eloquently described the ways in which students need to be engaged both formally and informally at academic and social levels in order to persist; however, what his student departure model failed to articulate was the essence of that engagement. The void filled by the cultural contracts theory was the realization that identities need to be affirmed, identities are contractual, and counterproductive interactions are a detriment to student persistence.

Beyond Tinto and other college impact models, researchers in student development need to concede that any interaction in a collegiate setting at the most basic level revolves around communication. When we combine the compelling research of communication scholars with the plethora of challenges encountered by multicultural students, staff and faculty due to being in non-privileged positions, clearly a lot of work must be done to enrich extant work on student enrollment, persistence, support, and graduation.

**Future Research**

The heuristic value of this study is its steady focus on identity negotiation in the context of peer-to-peer intercultural interaction as a means of understanding Black male student success. The extant literature offers interesting insights into Black male identities and student achievement, yet this study affirmed that communication is an essential part of engagement in university experiences both in and out of the classroom for faculty, staff and students. The participants in this study gave voice to the notion that at the most basic level of interaction identity conflicts often reside beneath the intercultural exchange.

Future research should explore this gap in communication and at least three offshoots of the current study: (1) How are Black female student engagement and persistence affected by
peer-to-peer intercultural communication and identity; (2) How might university administrators devise strategies for multicultural student success; (3) How can student support mechanisms on campus such as faculty-student interaction and student groups shift resources to better meet Black male student needs; and (4) What is the extent to which multicultural peer relationships affirm identities and foster student success?

Since the national imperative for STEM impacts Black students, a future study might include Black STEM students or be exclusively about Black STEM students' persistence and identity negotiations. Furthermore, future research should examine differences between Blacks from other countries and U.S. Blacks, both matriculating in U.S. universities that are PWIs.

Black female student engagement is also critical to ensuring a student body and ultimately a workforce that is reflective of the general population. The research on Black female students is negligible. This emphasis on interaction might help to uncover facets of Black female student experiences and Black female identity that will promote even greater rates of persistence and graduation.

Beyond peer-to-peer interaction there are also structural concerns that must be addressed to ensure a climate that is conducive for Black student success. Although students can offer valuable input related to this, university administrators must offer student support that is applicable and progressive. The university leaders need to duplicate practical nationally recognized models that work, such as the Meyerhof Program at the University of Maryland Baltimore County and theoretical models such as Harper’s (2010) Anti-Deficit Achievement Framework to ensure a future climate that is welcoming to the diverse workforce they are charged with educating.
The investment in student support across U.S. university campuses is overwhelmingly impressive as a whole; yet data indicate little progress regarding low first-year retention rates and tremendously lower six-year graduation rates among Black students, and specifically Black males. This means that university administrators must find ways to interrupt the patterns and practices that have proven again and again to be severely limited in achieving important results.

The fourth area ripe for future research is the extent to which multicultural peer relationships affirm identities and foster student success. As indicated in chapter four, an interesting finding in this study is that Black male student participants felt affirmed by Latinos but not so much by Whites and Asians. This is fascinating and speaks to very different social dynamics that seem directly aligned with the way in which social privilege emerges in the U.S. A subsequent study on this would be useful in understanding how multicultural peer relationships might contribute to or avert student success.

Within these four previously mentioned areas for future scholarly inquiry, there is work to be done. This work includes research on the interaction between multicultural faculty and students, male and female student peers, student peers at different levels of academic standing, and students across disciplines. In addition to examining these selected groups this phenomenon can be explored in different academic settings from predominately White institutions to historically Black colleges and universities.

The greatest assets at any university are the students. Everyone and everything else are there to support the students. With the projected increases in diversity within the U.S. population there is a need to push the envelope in facilitating the success of students on campus and in preparation for the workforce. Many studies have focused on student failure, success, recruitment, enrollment, retention, persistence, and graduation. These were all impacted by
students’ backgrounds and identities and also by the messages students received on their first day on campus. It is necessary to meet students where they are and cultivate their talents and abilities, and help them to become the future leaders and productive citizens that higher education institutions work hard to ensure.
References


Strayhorn, T. L. (2012a). Increasing the participation of underrepresented minorities (URMs) in Black graduate education at Historically Black Colleges and Universities: Trends, Experiences, and Outcomes.


Appendix A

A 15-point checklist for good thematic analysis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Process</th>
<th>#</th>
<th>Criteria</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Transcription</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>The data have been transcribed to an appropriate level of detail, and the transcript have been checked against the tapes for ‘accuracy’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Each data item has been given equal attention in the coding process</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Themes have not been generated from a few vivid examples (an anecdotal approach), but instead the coding process has been thorough, inclusive and comprehensive.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
<td>All relevant extracts for all each theme have been collated.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Themes have been checked against each other and back to the original data set.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Themes are internally coherent, consistent, and distinctive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Analysis</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Data has been analyzed – interpreted, made sense of-rather than just paraphrased or described</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Analysis and data match each other – the extracts Illustrate the analytic claims</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>9</td>
<td>Analysis tells a convincing and well-organized story about the data and topic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>A good balance between analytic narrative and illustrative extracts is provided</td>
<td></td>
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<td>---</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Overall</strong></td>
<td>Enough time has been allocated to complete all phases of the analysis adequately without rushing a phase or giving it once-over-lightly</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Written report</strong></td>
<td>The assumptions about, and specific approach to, thematic analysis are clearly explicated</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>There is a good fit between what you claim you do, and what you show you have done – ie, described method and reported analysis are consistent</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The language and concepts used in the report are consistent with the epistemological position of the analysis</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The researcher is positioned as active in the research process, themes do not just ‘emerge’</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix B

Date:         September 17, 2010

From:        Sara J. Hartman, Compliance Coordinator

To:          Wayne Gersie

Subject:     Results of Review of Proposal - Expedited (IRB #34304)

Approval Expiration Date: September 16, 2011

“How African American Men at a Predominantly White Institution Negotiate Their Identity When Interacting with White Peers”

The Institutional Review Board (IRB) has reviewed and approved your proposal for use of human participants in your research. By accepting this decision, you agree to obtain prior approval from the IRB for any changes to your study. Unanticipated participant events that are encountered during the conduct of this research must be reported in a timely fashion.
Attached is/are the dated, IRB-approved informed consent(s) to be used when recruiting **participants for this research**. Participants must receive a **copy** of the approved informed consent form to keep for their records.

If signed consent is obtained, the principal investigator is expected to maintain the original signed consent forms along with the IRB research records for this research **at least three (3) years** after termination of IRB approval. For projects that involve protected health information (PHI) and are regulated by HIPAA, records are to be maintained for **six (6) years**. The principal investigator must determine and adhere to additional requirements established by the FDA and any outside sponsors.

If this study will extend beyond the above noted approval expiration date, the principal investigator must submit a completed Continuing Progress Report to the Office for Research Protections (ORP) to request renewed approval for this research.

On behalf of the IRB and the University, thank you for your efforts to conduct your research in compliance with the federal regulations that have been established for the protection of human participants.

**Please Note:** The ORP encourages you to subscribe to the ORP listserv for protocol and research-related information. Send a blank email to: **L-ORP-Research-L-subscribe-request@lists.psu.edu**

SJH/sjh
Attachment

cc: Edgar I. Farmer

Appendix C

INFORMED CONSENT FORM FOR SOCIAL SCIENCE RESEARCH
The Pennsylvania State University

Title of Project: HOW AFRICAN AMERICAN MEN AT A PREDOMINANTLY WHITE INSTITUTION NEGOTIATE THEIR IDENTITIY WHEN INTERACTING WITH WHITE PEERS.

Principal Investigator: Wayne M Gersie
220 Grange Building
1. **Purpose of the Study:** The purpose of this study is to explore how African American males at a Predominantly White Institutions (PWIs) negotiate their identities when interacting with peers. This study will accentuate a body of research focusing on the retention of African American men in higher education. This research may influence how PWIs address the unique cross-cultural needs of African American males. This study might lead universities to explore strategies to engage African American males both academically and socially at the formal and informal levels while keeping in mind how the cultural uniqueness of their communication styles influences decisions to continue matriculation. The research gathered as part of this dissertation will be critical since little to no research has been devoted to exploring African
American male identities as negotiated in interactions with peers at a PWIs. Even though the research of participation rates of African American students has expanded, more research needs to be devoted to the specific factors impacting participation rates. Identity negotiated through interactions with peers might be a factor.

2. **Procedures to be followed**: A select group of participants involved in this research study will be expected to participate in a focus group interview. The focus group interviewing format for this particular research project is grounded in critical interpretive inquiry. The purpose of a critical interpretive interview format is to explore and gather data giving a richer and deeper understanding of the essence of the participant’s experience. Furthermore, this format allows the interviewer to develop a conversational relationship with the subjects being interviewed as related to the meaning of the experience.

3. **Discomforts and Risks**: The likelihood of risk and discomfort is minimal. The PI will continually remind subjects that they can stop their participation in the study at anytime they experience discomfort/embarrassment or feel there is an invasion of privacy. Additionally, the PI will be sensitive to the interview environment and if the subject exhibits any signs of discomfort/embarrassment, the subject will be asked if they would like to move on to different question. With the demographic questions, if the subject feels that any question is too invasive they do not have to answer it.

4. **Benefits**: The purpose of this study is to explore how African American males at a PWI negotiate their identities when interacting with peers. This study will accentuate a body of
research focusing on the retention of African American men in higher education. This research may influence how PWIs address the unique cross-cultural needs of African American males. This study might lead universities to explore strategies to engage African American males both academically and socially at the formal and informal levels while keeping in mind how the cultural uniqueness of their communication styles influences decisions to continue matriculation. The research gathered as part of this dissertation will be critical since little to no research has been devoted to exploring African American male identities as negotiated in interactions with peers at a PWI. Even though the research of participation rates of African American students has expanded, more research needs to be devoted to the specific factors impacting participation rates. Identity negotiated through interactions with peers might be a factor.

5. **Duration/Time:** Participants will be involved in this research study to commence immediately following approval from the Office for Research Protection (September) until the later part of January, 2011. Participants will be interviewed once. All interviews will last approximately 90 minutes to a two-hour session. All interviews will be conducted at a setting selected and approved by the university.

6. **Statement of Confidentiality:** The Office for Research Protections and the Social Science Institutional Review Board may review records related to this project. There will be no identifying information on any data. All participants will be assigned numbers and pseudonyms. Interview numbers will be the only identifier of the data obtained. All data recordings will kept in a securely locked cabinet within a locked office t in the PI’s office. If
you speak about the contents of the focus group outside the group, it is expected that you will not tell others what individual participants said.

The PI will listen to the tapes and simultaneously type the data being heard into a word processing program at the PI’s office. The information will be coded by the PI on the tapes and in the PI’s word processing program according to numbers (order of interview: interview 1, interview 2, so on). Participants will be identified by their assigned pseudonym. Tapes will be destroyed by the summer of 2011. For the duration of this study, only the principal investigator (Wayne M Gersie) and research advisor (Dr. Edgar I Farmer) will have access to participants’ identity and access to any and all data.

7. **Right to Ask Questions:** You can ask questions about this research. Contant Wayne M Gersie at (office) 814-863-1649, (home) 814-238-9296, or by E-mail at wmg109@psu.edu or Dr. Edgar I. Farmer at 814-863-3858 or by E-mail at eif1@psu.edu with questions. If you have questions about your rights as a research participant, contact The Pennsylvania State University’s Office for Research Protections at (814) 865-1775.

8. **Voluntary Participation:** Your decision to be in this research is voluntary. You can stop at any time. You do not have to answer any questions you do not want to answer.

You must be 18 years of age or older to consent to take part in this research study. If you agree to take part in this research study and the information outlined above, please sign your name and indicate the date below.
You will be given a copy of this signed and dated consent form for your records.

____________________________________________  ______________________
Participant Signature  Date

____________________________________________  ______________________
Person Obtaining Consent  Date
Appendix D

INFORMED CONSENT FORM FOR SOCIAL SCIENCE RESEARCH

The Pennsylvania State University

Title of Project: HOW AFRICAN AMERICAN MEN AT A PREDOMINANTLY WHITE INSTITUTION NEGOTIATE THEIR IDENTITY WHEN INTERACTING WITH WHITE PEERS.

Principal Investigator: Wayne M Gersie
220 Grange Building
The Pennsylvania State University
University Park, Pa 16802
9. **Purpose of the Study:** The purpose of this study is to explore how African American males at a Predominantly White Universities (PWIs) negotiate their identities when interacting with peers. This study will accentuate a body of research focusing on the retention of African American men in higher education. This research may influence how PWIs address the unique cross-cultural needs of African American males. This study might lead universities to explore strategies to engage African American males both academically and socially at the formal and informal levels while keeping in mind how the cultural uniqueness of their communication styles influences decisions to continue matriculation. The research gathered as part of this dissertation will be critical since little to no research has been devoted to exploring African American male identities as negotiated in interactions with peers at a PWI. Even though the research of participation rates of African American students has expanded, more research
needs to be devoted to the specific factors impacting participation rates. Identity negotiated through interactions with peers might be a factor.

10. **Procedures to be followed:** A selected group of participants involved in this research study will be expected to participate in an in-depth semi-structured interview. The in-depth semi-structured interviewing format for this particular research project is grounded in the critical interpretive approach. The purpose of a critical interpretive interview format is to explore and gather data giving a richer and deeper understanding of the essence of the participant’s experience. Furthermore, this format allows the interviewer to develop a conversational relationship with the subjects being interviewed as related to the meaning of the experience.

11. **Discomforts and Risks:** The likelihood of risk and discomfort is minimal. The PI will continually remind subjects that they can stop their participation in the study at anytime they experience discomfort/embarrassment or feel there is an invasion of privacy. Additionally, the PI will be sensitive to the interview environment and if the subject exhibits any signs of discomfort/embarrassment, the subject will be asked if they would like to move on to different question. With the demographic questions, if the subject feels that any question is too invasive they do not have to answer it.

12. **Benefits:** The purpose of this study is to explore how African American males at a PWI negotiate their identities when interacting with peers. This study will accentuate a body of research focusing on the retention of African American men in higher education. This research may influence how PWIs address the unique cross-cultural needs of African American males.
This study might lead universities to explore strategies to engage African American males both academically and socially at the formal and informal levels while keeping in mind how the cultural uniqueness of their communication styles influences decisions to continue matriculation. The research gathered as part of this dissertation will be critical since little to no research has been devoted to exploring African American male identities as negotiated in interactions with peers at a PWI. Even though the research of participation rates of African American students has expanded, more research needs to be devoted to the specific factors impacting participation rates. Identity negotiated through interactions with peers might be a factor.

13. **Duration/Time:** Participants will be involved in this research study to commence immediately following approval from the Office for Research Protection (September) until the later part of January, 2011. Participants will be interviewed once. All interviews will last approximately 90 minutes to a two-hour session. All interviews will be conducted at a setting selected and approved by the university.

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The PI will listen to the tapes and simultaneously type the data being heard into a word processing program at the PI’s office. The information will be coded by the PI on the tapes and in the PI’s word processing program according to numbers (order of interview: interview 1, interview 2, so on). Participants will be identified by their assigned pseudonym. Tapes will be destroyed by the summer of 2011. For the duration of this study, only the principal investigator (Wayne M Gersie) and research advisor (Dr. Edgar I Farmer) will have access to participants’ identity and access to any and all data.

15. **Right to Ask Questions:** You can ask questions about this research. Contact Wayne M Gersie at (office) 814-863-1649, (home) 814-238-9296, or by E-mail at wmg109@psu.edu or Dr. Edgar I. Farmer at 814-863-3858 or by E-mail at eif1@psu.edu with questions. If you have questions about your rights as a research participant, contact The Pennsylvania State University’s Office for Research Protections at (814) 865-1775.

16. **Voluntary Participation:** Your decision to be in this research is voluntary. You can stop at any time. You do not have to answer any questions you do not want to answer.

You must be 18 years of age or older to consent to take part in this research study. If you agree to take part in this research study and the information outlined above, please sign your name and indicate the date below.

You will be given a copy of this signed and dated consent form for your records.
Appendix E

Pre Screening Questions

1. Are you at least 18 years old?
   - [ ] Yes
   - [ ] No

2. What is your gender?
   - [ ] female
   - [ ] male
   - [ ] transgender

3. With what racial/ethnic group do you identify?
   - [ ] African American/Black
   - [ ] Chicano/Latino/Hispanic
   - [ ] Asian/Pacific Islander
   - [ ] White/Caucasian
   - [ ] Middle Eastern
   - [ ] American Indian/Alaskan Native

4. Did you complete your K-12 education at predominately Black schools?
   - [ ] Yes
   - [ ] No

5. Did you complete your K-12 education in the United States?
   - [ ] Yes
   - [ ] No

6. Are your parents U.S. Born Citizens?
   - [ ] Yes
   - [ ] No
7. Do you attend University Park Campus?

☐ Yes

☐ No

8. Which Academic College or Division are you enrolled in?

☐ Agricultural Science ☐ Engineering

☐ Arts and Architecture ☐ Health and Human Development

☐ Communication ☐ Information Science and Technology

☐ Division of Undergraduate Studies ☐ Liberal Arts

☐ Earth and Mineral Science ☐ School of International Affairs

☐ Eberly College of Science ☐ Smeal College of Business

☐ Education
Appendix F

One-on-One Interview Questions

Introduction/Background

1. Tell me about your life. For example: When and where were you born? What was your family life like? Tell me about your parents and/or the people who raised you.

2. Tell me about how your life was growing up. For Example: Who did you play with? Who did you hang out with? Who did you roll with?

3. What were some difficulties you experienced growing up and how do they affect you today?

4. What did the neighborhood and the environment you grew up in look like? What do you see, who do you see when you think back about it? What do they look like?

5. Who are you culturally? How do you define yourself culturally? Do you feel you belong to a certain cultural group?

6. Do you feel that your culture defines you?

7. Describe yourself to me?

Campus environment

8. Describe your current surroundings. What do you see, who do you see, what do they look like?

9. In this environment who do you interact with, who do you roll with, who do you spend time with?
10. Who do you interact with regularly?

11. Who do you interact with the most?

12. Who do you interact with the least?

**Interaction with non-White peers**

13. Describe your interactions with your non-White peers? What are they like?

14. When do your interactions with your non-White peers occur? How do they occur?

**Ready-to-sign contracts**

15. How would you define a meaningful interaction?

15b. How would you describe your meaningful interactions with folks on campus? Who are the people? What are their roles? Are they peers, advisors, mentors?

16. Where do they take place?

17. How often do they take place?

18. Who do you have these of interactions with? What do they look like? How do you relate to them?

**Quasi-completed contracts**

19. Describe interactions that you pursue with others? What are the like?

20. Do you have interactions that continue outside the structured environment they were created in?

21. How often does that happen?

22. Do you continue them? Why or why not?
Co-created

23. Describe your interactions with people that are by your accord
24. How do they come about?
25. What do you have in common with the people you have these type of relationships with?

SOCIAL NETWORKING

26. What web-based social networks are you involved with or a member of?
27. Describe interactions that you pursue with others on these social networks? What are the like?
28. Do you have interactions that continue outside these networks?
29. How often does that happen?
30. Do you continue them? Why or why not?
Appendix G

Focus Group Questions

1. What sort of values did you learn growing up? Specifically, what values were learned from parents? From peers? From local community? From family? Elaborate.

2. Did your neighborhood influence who you are today?

3. How do you define yourself culturally? Do you feel you belong to a certain cultural group?

4. How would you describe this college campus environment? What do you see, who do you see, what do they look like? How do they behave in general? How do they behave toward you?

5. Who do you hang out with regularly? Who do you hang out with the most? Who do you hang out with the least? Did you intentionally choose friendships with people of a certain race? Why or why not?

6. What sort of things do you notice about Black male students and their friendship networks? How do you interpret that? What is happening in those situations?
7. How do you and they maintain social group networks? Do you use social media like facebook, twitter, etc? How often and how many hours per week do you use these social media?

8. Do you have interactions that continue outside these networks? How often? Why or why not?

9. How would you characterize the relationships between Black males and Whites on this campus? Do you perceive the relationships to be different between other minorities? What about between Whites and other minority groups?

10. Have you ever felt that you had to change who you are, how you behave, or how you talk around Whites? Do you feel that you have to do this around other minorities or other Blacks as well? Why or why not?

11. When you walk in a classroom and you see a person of color what goes through your mind? Where do you decide to sit?

12. What goes through your mind when you see a minority professor? Does that change your orientation to the class?

13. When you are required to be a part of a project team for class who do you pick and why?
14. When you see someone that looks like you on campus what goes through your mind?

15. Do you seek out resources on campus that are dedicated to minorities?

16. In your mind, what does success look like? How do you arrive at success? What resources do you rely on to get there? Resources can be people, financial, etc.?

17. What sort of extracurricular activities are you involved in on campus and why did you decide to pursue those?

18. Describe your favorite place to hang out and why? What is your least favorite place and why?

19. What is the safest place for you on campus? Where do you feel are the least comfortable versus most comfortable spaces and places?

20. Is there anything we have not mentioned that you want to discuss before we conclude?
Appendix H

October 15th, 2010

Student name
Address
Address

Dear:

I hope your semester is going well and that you are making great strides toward completing your degree.

As part of my dissertation, I am conducting research on how African American men at a predominately White University negotiate their identity. This study is very important and will give some insight as to how undergraduate males like yourself experience college. This research can be helpful in designing and creating policies that will ensure success of undergraduate African American males.

I would like to invite you to participate in a focused group audio taped interview with other participants and myself so that you may share your experiences on campus. Prior to the interview you will be asked to complete pre-screening questions to determine your eligibility for
the study. If accepted, you will participate in a one and a half hour interview. No risks are anticipated as a result of completing the online survey.

The focus group will take place in room 220 Grange building. To protect your identity, you will be assigned a number code and pseudonym. After the interview is completed, I will transcribe the audio recording of our interaction. After the recording is transcribed, it will be kept in a securely locked cabinet in a secure office. This is a highly secure, confidential process. However, as with all research we can protect the data to a certain extent. No guarantees can be made regarding the interception of data sent via the Internet by any third party. We have no reason to believe that anyone would be interested in intercepting this data given that no personal or financial information is being collected.

The Pennsylvania State University’s Office for Research Protections and Institutional Review Board, and the Office for Human Research Protections in the Department of Health and Human Services may review records related to this project. There will be no identifying information on any data.

Please contact Wayne M Gersie at (office) 814-863-1649, (home) 814-238-9296, or by E-mail at wmg109@psu.edu with questions, complaints or concerns about this research. You can also call this number if you feel this study has harmed you. If you have any questions, concerns, problems about your rights as a research participant or would like to offer input, please contact The Pennsylvania State University’s Office for Research Protections (ORP) at (814) 865-1775.
The ORP cannot answer questions about research procedures. Questions about research procedures can be answered by the research team.

Your decision to be in this research is voluntary. You can stop at any time. You do not have to answer any questions you do not want to answer. Refusing to participate or withdrawing early from the study will involve no penalty or loss of benefits you would be entitled to otherwise. You must be at least 18 years of age to participate. Please keep a copy of this form for your records or future use.

Thank you in advance for your participation.

Sincerely,

Wayne Gersie, Ph.D. Candidate
Workforce Education and Development
Ocotber 15th, 2010

Student name
Address
Address

Dear:

I hope your semester is going well and that you are making great strides toward completing your degree.

As part of my dissertation, I am conducting research on how African American men at a predominately White University negotiate their identity. This study is very important and will give some insight as to how undergraduate males like yourself experience college. This research can be helpful in designing and creating policies that will ensure success of undergraduate African American males.

I would like to invite you to participate in a one on one audio taped interview with myself so that you may share your experiences on campus with me. Prior to the interview you will be asked to complete pre-screening questions to determine your eligibility for the study. If
accepted, you will participate in a one and a half hour interview. No risks are anticipated as a result of completing the online survey.

The interview will take in my office in 220 Grange building. To protect your identity, you will be assigned a number code and pseudonym. After the interview is completed, I will transcribe the audio recording of our interaction. After the recording is transcribed, it will be kept in a securely locked cabinet in a secure office. This is a highly secure, confidential process. However, as with all research we can protect the data to a certain extent. No guarantees can be made regarding the interception of data sent via the Internet by any third party. We have no reason to believe that anyone would be interested in intercepting this data given that no personal or financial information is being collected.

The Pennsylvania State University’s Office for Research Protections and Institutional Review Board, and the Office for Human Research Protections in the Department of Health and Human Services may review records related to this project. There will be no identifying information on any data.

Please contact Wayne M Gersie at (office) 814-863-1649, (home) 814-238-9296, or by E-mail at wmg109@psu.edu with questions, complaints or concerns about this research. You can also call this number if you feel this study has harmed you. If you have any questions, concerns, problems about your rights as a research participant or would like to offer input, please contact The Pennsylvania State University’s Office for Research Protections (ORP) at (814) 865-1775.
The ORP cannot answer questions about research procedures. Questions about research procedures can be answered by the research team.

Your decision to be in this research is voluntary. You can stop at any time. You do not have to answer any questions you do not want to answer. Refusing to participate or withdrawing early from the study will involve no penalty or loss of benefits you would be entitled to otherwise. You must be at least 18 years of age to participate. Please keep a copy of this form for your records or future use.

Thank you in advance for your participation.

Sincerely,

Wayne Gersie, Ph.D. Candidate
Workforce Education and Development
Wayne M. Gersie  
wmg109@psu.edu

EDUCATION AND TRAINING:

Ph.D., Workforce Education and Development, defended on 9/14/15  
The Pennsylvania State University, University Park, PA

M.Ed., Counselor Education, May 2002  
The Pennsylvania State University, University Park, PA

B.S., Exercise and Sports Science with Health Education Minor & Gerontology Option, May 1997  
The Pennsylvania State University, University Park, PA

HIGHER EDUCATION EXPERIENCE:

Director  
August 2013 - Current
The Multicultural Engineering Program (MEP), The Pennsylvania State University

- Responsible for the creation implementation and coordination of all the college of engineering (COE) MEP strategic plan for multicultural initiatives with the goal of creating safe and welcoming climate for all COE and university stakeholders.
- Provide vision and leadership for the planning, implementation, management, supervision, and evaluation of the MEP
- Lead, create, support and implement the COE strategic plans and goals to recruit and retain multicultural students at both the graduate and undergraduate level by identifying students at national conferences, fairs and recruiting events; partnering with minority serving institutions; organizing and arranging both individual and group COE recruiting visits to University Park
- Work closely with the COE department faculty and graduate officers to identify the best and brightest prospective multicultural graduate students
- Collaborate with senior director of graduate equity to create a university strategy to attract the best and brightest prospective multicultural graduate students in STEM
- Work closely with Associate Director of Multicultural Outreach in the Undergraduate Admissions office to attract prospective undergraduate students in STEM
- Represent the college on university-wide committees such as the Administrative Council of Multicultural Affairs and the College Council of Multicultural Leadership (CCML) with the goal of fostering and influencing a university wide commitment to diversity by making recommendations that range from curriculum to organizational development
- Co-chair the CCML
- Represent the university on national boards and committees such as the National GEM consortium and National Association of Multicultural Engineering Program Advocates to drive the conversation in developing a national collaborative effort in recruiting and retaining both undergraduate and graduate students in Science Technology Engineering and Math (STEM) discipline
- Manage and oversee overall program budgets and expenditures
- Responsible for the direct the supervision, evaluation, hiring and training of MEP staff, graduate interns and undergraduate personnel including the overall supervision, coordination and implantation of all summer bridge and orientation programs.
- Solicit external funds from corporate partners, alumni and alumni groups as well as government agencies and private foundation through proposal writing opportunities.
- Serve on the College of Engineering Dean’s Advisory Board and make recommendations on strategic planning and initiatives.
- Created and lead the Engineering Diversity Roundtable an advisory board made up student organizations in the college of engineering. The goal of the roundtable is to recommend and assist the COE with its implantation of diversity initiatives.