Transitioning Cultures: Understanding the

Black, Collegiate Culture at a U.S.

Midwestern, Predominantly White Institution

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ABSTRACT

The number of Black students enrolling in 4-year higher education institutions in the United States is quickly approaching 2.5 million (Department of Education, 2016) leaving universities scrambling to find out more about this population, how to support them, and how to retain them through intentional programming. Comparatively, in 2013 there were almost 10 million White students enrolled in higher education institutions in the U.S. In Ohio, 75% of students in a bachelor's degree program were retained from their first year to the second year (Ballotpedia, 2016). However, at the institution where this research takes place, retention of Black students from their first to second year hovers around 49%. Tinto (1988) stresses the importance of both social and academic integration for students to increase persistence for university students. For Black students, integration may involve adapting some of their social or cultural capital including their skill set, mannerisms and even language (Bourdieu, 1985; Bernstein, 2003).

This study examines the experiences of a small group of Black students in their final years of study at Muskingum University, a PWI located in Ohio, U.S. A. The purpose of this study is to better understand the facets of the participant group, how they are supported while at the university, how studying at a rural, PWI impacts their experience, and the ways in which the participants felt they needed to change or adapt their own cultural characteristics in order to be successful within the institutional culture.

I used a phenomenological methodology to understand the experiences that the nine, undergraduate student participants were sharing (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2011).

Phenomenology allows reality to be defined by the perception of the participants which was important for me as a White practitioner conducting research on Black students (Moustakas, 1994). The study consisted of a questionnaire, an imagery component and two rounds of group interviews. The data was then self-transcribed and entered into the Atlas-ti software program and coded.

The significance of this study is that all the participants were succeeding both socially and academically despite having a different cultural capital than the culture that had power at the institution. The experiences they were able to share provided insight into why they were able to be successful including building social capital through leadership positions and having a strong sense of ethnic pride to overcome microaggressions. The results of this study are unique as they combine several retention theories including Tinto's retention and integration theory, Phinney's ethnic identity theory and Bourdieu's ideas on transferring social and cultural capital (Tinto, 1988; Phinney, 1992; Bourdieu, 1985).

The recommendations from this study are aligned with the findings and the theories that support the data analysis. These recommendations include fostering a sense of ethnic pride and creating opportunities for expanded group membership. Developing a sense of belonging for Black students that are studying on predominantly White campuses is particularly salient for students that are struggling to adjust to a new culture.

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

The racial diversity of undergraduate students in the United States is higher now than at any other time in history (Johnston, 2014). Specifically, African Americans, or Blacks, enrolling in higher education institutions have more than doubled from 1990 to 2013, growing in population from 1.1 million to 2.5 million students (Department of Education, 2016). Comparatively, White enrollment rose as well but only at a 7% increase during the same time period, growing from 9.3 million to 9.9 million students (Department of Education, 2016). In Ohio, the state of the site university for this study, the number of White (non-Hispanic) students graduating from high school in 2000 was 96,206 and in 2021 it is predicted to be 82,971 (Zellers, 2014). The number of minority students graduating from Ohio high schools in 2000 was 15,075 and in 2021 it is predicted to be 28,224. Higher education institutions in Ohio are already struggling with low enrollment numbers and schools that do not have strong recruiting and retention programs for minority students could face even harsher financial constraints. To meet the goal of having academically and socially successful Black students, higher education institutions must be prepared to understand this group of students and to assist in helping them succeed. High academic goals and comfort with the academic and social culture of an institution results in minority students being more academically successful (Phillips & Herlihy, 2009).

Race is a heavily-studied topic in the United States (Winkle-Wagner, 2009). Terminology is constantly shifting and adapting to the manner in which people want to be identified. Currently, in the Midwest region of the United States, both the words African American and Black can refer to the same racial group, although Black is a more encompassing

term that also includes those that appear racially Black but do not feel culturally connected to Africa. In choosing to use African American or Black, I will maintain the language of the study that I am citing and will use Black as the classification of choice for the student population that I am addressing. This study focuses on the Midwest region of the United States as the culture in this section of the country is very different from other geographical areas.

This research project will examine facets of the culture created and sustained by Black students sharing a common educational environment by studying the factors that influence culture followed by an original research study using participants from a private, residential-based university located in Ohio. This first chapter will explain the research questions that are the focus of the study, the significance of the research, general terms and definitions, and information about the research site. The second chapter serves as a review of published literature and includes sections on the historical background of Blacks in the United States (U.S.), the current status of Blacks in the U.S., race and racial theories, culture and cultural theories, connection race to socio-economic status and imagery.

Chapter 3 shifts into the original research project by explaining the various methodological aspects of the research. It covers the methods, the rationale behind the study, the research design, my perspectives and ethics as the researcher, site selection, the data analysis process and limitations of the study. The fourth chapter provides demographic and identity information about the participants before focusing on answering the four research questions explained in the next section. The fourth chapter is concentrated on the impact of the data from a small group of participants, the nine students that elected to be part of the study. This chapter centers on Tinto's retention theories, Phinney's ethnic identity theory, Bernstein's socio-linguistic codes and Bourdieu's ideas of habitus and capital. The fifth and final chapter of this

research combines the data generated from the participants and the related published literature to provide concluding remarks and give final recommendations.

Research Questions

The intention of my research is to add to studies conducted about Black student retention, race and culture by examining the phenomenon of Black undergraduate students studying at a rural, predominantly White institution (PWI) in the Midwestern part of the United States and by examining the cultural characteristics and experiences of the ethnic group of the participants. Harper and Quaye (2007) state that African American at PWIs often have to choose between the unappealing mainstream culture or embracing and continuously defending their own culture. It is this phenomenon that this study will examine. In order to meet these research objectives, I concentrated my research around the following four questions:

1. What are the common cultural components for this participant group?
2. How does being enrolled in a rural, predominantly White institution influence the participants' culture?
3. In what ways do the participants feel they are being supported at the institution? How do the participants feel they could be better supported?
4. Do the participants feel that they have had to change or adapt their culture while at the institution? Why do they feel this change is necessary or unnecessary?

These questions are also located in Appendix A for ease of referral while reading this document. These questions are examined through a phenomenological lens where the data collected is from a small participant group, nine undergraduate, Black students in their final years of studying at a private university in a rural setting. I chose to use phenomenology as my methodology because

it seeks to identify reality as it is determined by the participants (Moustakas, 1994).

Phenomenology is also useful for looking at the phenomena of experiences which aligns with the

data collection approach that I use to examine the research questions (Cohen, Manion &

Morrison, 2011). Answers to the research questions posed above are not meant to be indicative

of the larger population of Black, undergraduate students in the United States or even of the

other Black, undergraduate students at the site institution.

Research Significance

The overarching goal of this research is to increase retention of Black students in higher

education institutions. In 2010, Ohio's retention rates from the first year to the second year for

all students in a bachelor's degree program was 75 percent (Ballotpedia, 2016). For Muskingum

University, the site university for this study, the retention rate from the first year to the second

year for Black students has been around 49 percent for the past three years (as calculated from

internal databases). This is similar to the national average in 2009 when Black men graduated

with a Bachelor's degree at a 48% rate and Black women graduated at a 53% rate. For the same

year, 77% of White men finished their degree and 69% of White women completed their

Bachelor's degree (Ross, Kena, Rathbun, KewalRamani, Zhang, Kristapovich & Manning,

2012). All of the participants in this study were students in their final years of school and they

were succeeding both academically and socially. Harper and Quaye (2007, p. 127-8) remark, "If

student affairs educators and faculty are to better comprehend and address the dilemma of

African American male attrition and outcome disparities, understanding how persisters and

academically successful undergraduate men translate their racial identity statuses into

educationally purposeful engagement would be a useful endeavor." This study is unique in that

it examines the Black students at a rural, PWI that were able to make the cultural and social transition necessary to succeed and it examines these experiences using the theories and research conducted by Tinto, Phinney, and Bourdieu.

Tinto's theory (1988) emphasizes the need for students to feel academically and socially integrated into the school in order to be successful. While much of his work does not take race or ethnicity into account, Phinney's ethnic identity theory (1992) overlaps Tinto's idea by showing a higher level of success with students that feel good about their ethnic identity and have a sense of belonging while at the university. Torres, Jones and Renn (2009, p. 578) remark, "The more practitioners understand how students make meaning of their identities, the better they are able to assist in promoting student learning and development in higher education institutions."

Social economic status of Black students was an underlying topic that was not sought out in this study but became apparent through the data collection and analysis phases. Bernstein's (2003) socio-linguistic codes (restricted and elaborated) and a connection between economic capital, cultural capital and social capital (Bourdieu, 1985) were strongly connected to the experiences and reflections shared by the participants. In the Fall of 2015, the White students (1053 total) at Muskingum University had an average, annual family income of US $80,048 while the Black students (77 total) average just over half of that, reporting an average, annual family income of US $42,604 and students that self-identified as two or more racial/ethnic groups (45 total) had an average, annual family income of US $39,991 (Burnett, 2015). More information about the site university will be given at the end of this chapter. Socio economic status (SES) of a family is an important retention aspect as a lower SES usually correlates with lower academic performance (Rowley & Wright, 2011).

While there are many research studies that address retention of Black students from an academic perspective, it is clear that the challenges faced by Black students go beyond just academic preparation when trying to succeed at college (Tinto, 1988; Phinney, 1992). Cultural studies can provide insight in understanding how aspects of the Black culture can assist with their overall success (Guiffrida & Douthit, 2010). Matsumoto and van de Vijver (2012, p. 85) state, "The study of culture has blossomed into one of the most important areas of research in psychology." One of the main factors influencing culture is the environmental setting, conducting research on a group of students that have a common environmental setting can allow me to better understand how components of the institutional culture align or contradict with the culture of this particular group.

When examining the cultural characteristics of the participant group, Bourdieu's ideas on cultural capital, social capital and habitus became apparent (Bourdieu, 1977; Bourdieu, 1985). Winkle-Wagner (2009, p. 2) conducted a study on female African Americans enrolled in higher education programs and stated this about one of her participants, "Worse yet, she realized in her first days on campus that being in college meant that she no longer fit or was accepted back home. She felt forced-as if it were the only way to succeed- to change her language, the way she dressed, her thinking, and the way she imagined herself, embracing everything that represents the 'right' way to act on campus." While she did this it was "always with the question of why she had to change so much about herself while many of her peers (particularly her White peers) did not." This comment displays how the culture that is created and sustained by Black students at the university level is unlike the culture in their hometowns or the community settings that they lived in prior to studying at the university. Bourdieu's (1985) idea of cultural capital will be particularly salient to understanding this cultural transition. By better understanding the cultural

characteristics and the cultural shifts of this student population, those employed in higher education can work to increase the academic and social success of the Black undergraduate students at their institutions.

Terminology and Definitions

There are several terms that are necessary to understand prior to reading this study. Some of the terminology is specific to the United States and others are words that are used in a variety of ways by researchers and practitioners and some clarification is needed to understand how the terms will be applied in this research project.

College/University- While some countries differentiate between these terms, in the United States they can typically be seamlessly interchanged. However, a college can only graduate baccalaureate degrees while a university has at least one master's degree program and perhaps even grants doctoral-level degrees. The Carnegie Classification system defines the specific categories (Carnegie Classification, 2016). The institution where the research takes place is technically classified as a university but I may refer to it as a college at times.

HEI- Higher Education Institution, this can refer to any college or university.

Bachelor's Degree- This is the name of the degree granted to students in a baccalaureate program, the traditional age for students pursuing a Bachelor's degree in the United States is 18-22 years old. The traditional time to complete a degree is four years, although most HEIs measure completion rates based on six years. A master's degree, also referred to as a graduate degree, typically cannot be pursued until completion of a bachelor's degree.

Major/Minor- a specific area or discipline that is concentrated on within a student's study. There are mandatory requirements necessary to complete a major or minor.

Semester- One academic term. At the site university, a semester lasts around 15 weeks and if students complete 15-16 credit hours per semester, then they can complete their degree in 8 semesters or 4 years.

K-12- Kindergarten through 12th grade can be called K-12. This refers to the time that public school is available to children in the United States. Traditionally, children enter Kindergarten at age 5 and graduate at age 18. Some research may refer to the first half of this time as "primary school" and the second half as "secondary school".

PWI- Predominantly (or Primarily) White Institution, Traditionally White Institution. These are schools or HEIs where White students are in the majority.

HBCU- Historically Black Colleges and Universities. Created out of the "separate but equal" philosophy, these institutions are open to all racial and ethnic populations but were created to educate Blacks. Many of these HEIs have a Black majority population.

Hometown/Neighborhood- I use these terms interchangeably to describe the community where the participant resided prior to coming to the university, often the students describe this place as *home*.

Research Site

Muskingum College was established in 1837 as a training ground for Presbyterian ministers. The institution was focused on increasing knowledge in the areas of education and religion. As settlers moved from the eastern part of the United States into the western territories, the church wanted educated ministers to follow the same paths as the settlers and to indoctrinate both the European migrants and the Native Americans (Hill, 2012). Muskingum College is located in New Concord, a village founded by Scotch-Irish immigrants in 1828. Today, while

much has changed with the institution, Muskingum still strives to educate men and women that will then go throughout the world and improve their communities and the global society with a philosophy of civic engagement. Muskingum's mission statement, adopted circa 1985, states:

> The mission of Muskingum University (College) is to offer quality academic programs in the liberal arts and sciences in the setting of a residential, coeducational, church-related college and in the context of a caring community where individual fulfillment is encouraged and human dignity is respected. Its primary purpose is to develop- intellectually, spiritually, social and physically-whole persons, by fostering critical thinking, positive action, ethical sensitivity and spiritual growth, so that they may lead vocationally productive, personally satisfying and socially responsible lives (Muskingum University, 2011).

While originally just a baccalaureate-granting college, Muskingum College began granting Master's degrees in 1989. In 2009, Muskingum College formally changed its name to Muskingum University to better identify its position in an international context (Muskingum University, 2012).

Muskingum currently has an enrollment around 1700 undergraduate students and 90% of the traditional-aged undergraduates live in university residence halls. In the weekday evenings, around 1400 students pursuing master degrees in a variety of educational fields fill the classrooms and several hours later the majority travel home to prepare for their daytime roles as local teachers. In terms of the undergraduate students, they choose from 46 different academic majors in classrooms where the average student-faculty ratio is 14:1 (Muskingum University, 2014). Ten percent of the undergraduate population is made up of students that have self-identified as either: Hispanic, Asian American, Black or Native American/Inuit. This percentage is lower than the state average for universities in Ohio which had 24.93% minority students and 13.7% Black students enrolled in higher education institutions in 2012 (Ballotpedia, 2016).

The institutional culture can be best captured by its values and its geography. Situated in the village of New Concord, the village is still very rural with only 3000 residents (City-Data, 2012). The university is a private institution, which means it is not primarily funded or controlled by the state/government. The university has been accredited by North Central Association of Colleges and Schools (NCA/HLC) since 1919 and is also accredited by various discipline-specific commissions (Muskingum University, 2014). The curriculum focuses on a tradition of liberal arts education, in which "liberal arts are the subjects which a free person has to know in order to take an active part in civic life. Liberal arts includes humanities, creative and performing arts, social sciences and natural sciences" (Kanapliova, 2013, p. 51-52).

In chapter 3, I will expand upon my decision to conduct research at the same institution where I am employed. Historically, "In many ways, the story of Muskingum College is the story of American higher education in microcosm. Muskingum was one of the hundreds of institutions of higher education established in the trans-Appalachian west during the first half of the 19th century" (Giffin, Kerrigan & Worbs, 2009, p. 7). While this research took place at Muskingum University, the research can be used to assist the 172 other HEIs in Ohio or other colleges and universities through the United States (Ohio HigherEd, 2014).

CHAPTER TWO

Literature Review

This literature section of the study covers a variety of areas as culture is a broad topic covering historical and societal impacts, how culture is defined and theorized, how race and culture connect, and how both race and culture influence socioeconomic status. Imagery is a component of this study as a data collection method and the literature review will end with a discussion on how imagery has been used in connection with Blacks in the United States. Understanding societal factors and impediments to opportunities will help the reader to connect to the participants' perspectives as they share their experiences and reflections on how being a minority student impacted them during their collegiate years.

The topics in this literature review were chosen to address some of the expected themes and topics related to this study. For example, theorists such as Phinney (ethnic development theory) and Bourdieu (cultural theory) are covered in this section of the research while other theorists such as Tinto (persistence) and Bernstein (language) emerged as a result of the data. This approach is in congruence with a phenomenological study where the steps of the study include establishing a topic and research questions that have social significance and meaning and then conducting a literature review related to the topic and questions (Moustakas, 1994). Additional literature related to the findings will be shared as relevant in the results section of the research.

Historical Background

The historical background of African-descended individuals in the United States in the past 500 years is a large and complicated topic. This section will highlight the major events, particularly to inform those readers outside of the United States, as it focuses on the education of African Americans, in order to lay the foundation of understanding of the current status of higher education for Blacks in the United States today. Understanding the historical context is important in a phenomenological study on culture because it helps to understand their self-image and identity formation by placing experiences in a cultural and socio-historical context (Shinebourne, 2011). This section is relevant as it relates to how Blacks in the United States perceive themselves and their racial or ethnic group. Phenomenological studies, such as this one, examine the experiences of the participants as they perceive reality (Forrester, 2010).

The Beginning of a New Country (1492-1915)

Blacks arriving in the United States came first as indentured servants, at the end of the 15th century, and then later as slaves from the 1500s through the 1800s (Smith & Palmisano, 2000). Slaves were made to feel like a traded commodity, as nothing more than livestock (Burrell, 2010). In order to restrain the power of the African slaves, the White traders and owners would break up families, those that spoke the same language and even those that came across the Atlantic Ocean on the same ship together. In 1774, the Continental Congress declared the trans-Atlantic slave trade to be illegal (Smith & Palmisano, 2000). Slavery was abolished in a constitutional amendment shortly after the Civil War but the KKK (Ku Klux Klan) and Black Codes quickly sprang up to continue suppression of Black power (Smith & Palmisano, 2000).

Most of the southern states made it illegal to teach slave children how to either read or write (Anderson, 1988). Despite laws and policies intended to repress African Americans, strong leaders pushed for education for African Americans. In 1870, all citizens were given the right to vote. However, Black Codes, laws created mostly in the southern states, forbid African Americans from voting, owning land, or having any type of power (Smith & Palmisano, 2000). Violence raged, particularly in areas controlled by the KKK, as Black churches were burned to the ground and African Americans were beaten and lynched. Despite this, or perhaps because of this oppression, the African American illiteracy rate continued to drop from 95% (1860) to 70% (1880) to 30% (1910) (Anderson, 1988). White southerners began to try and control the education received by African Americans. The U.S. Supreme Court declared at a notable court case of Plessy v. Ferguson (1896) that "separate but equal" was acceptable (Smith & Palmisano, 2000). Whites did not have to share restaurants, drinking fountains, or other public places as long as there was a place for the African Americans to go for those services.

Education in the 20th and 21st Centuries (1916-present)

Education analysis, such as those conducted by world traveler, W.E.B. DuBois (1973) and Carter G. Woodson (1933), stressed the bias in having Whites create and implement the educational system for African Americans. "The philosophy and ethics resulting from our educational system have justified slavery, peonage, segregation, and lynching" (Woodson, 1933, p. 5). Those African Americans that were educated in this system were taught to despise his own people and that "emancipated blacks are still inferior to whites" (Burrell, 2010, p. 7).

The second part of the 20th Century was represented by the Civil Rights Movement. In regards to education, a significant court case known as Brown v. Board of Education (Byrne,

2005; Ashley, 2005) went to the Supreme Court which declared that separate was not equal in the case of education (McConnell, Hinitz & Dye, 2005). For African Americans, the impact of this Supreme Court decision gave them self-validation. After centuries of being brainwashed into thinking that Blacks were inferior to Whites, finally a high court agreed that Blacks were entitled to the same educational rights as Whites (Ashley, 2005). This led to the 1970s being a time of pride for African Americans in regards to their racial classification (Burrell, 2010).

At the collegiate level, universities that had previously been all-White began admitting Black students and college-educated Whites were more willing to accept racial equality than any other previous generations (Williams, 2005). As desegregation was enforced, White parents fled into the suburbs or enrolled their children in private schools (Browne-Marshall, 2005). Twenty years later, as recently as the early 2000s, 67% of Black and Hispanic children attended schools where the majority of students were not White and most White children attended schools where Whites were almost 80% of the total population (Williams, 2005). This population shift of Blacks into the cities and Whites into the suburbs and more rural settings helped to give rise to some of the cultural adjustment issues that the Black participants in this study had in adjusting to a rural, predominantly White university.

The position of Blacks in American society today is better than it has been in the past, but still has a long way to go in order to be balanced and equitable. Wages, when examined by lifetime earnings, depend more on the type of job, the gender of the worker and the race of the worker than the educational degree that the worker holds (Supiano, 2011). The rising costs of quality housing serves as a formidable barrier to minority families trying to improve their social economic status (Rothstein, 2004). While the educational shifts that began in the 1950s helped to create a middle class for Blacks (Byrne, 2005), "Black students have the lowest likelihood of

all racial groups of attending a well-resourced, high-performing (K-12) school, and the greatest

of attending a poorly resourced, low-performing school" (Talbert & Goode, 2011, p. 72). Even

when Blacks and Whites with similar incomes are compared, Whites perform better than Blacks.

Culture differences and variations on the longevity of being in that economic classification

account for most of the disparity (Rothstein, 2004).

  Despite an increase in affirmative action and other diversity initiatives, these efforts have

not been as effective as previously anticipated (Womack, 2010). The educational disparity

between Blacks and Whites in the United States influences the level of preparedness students

have when enrolling in a higher education institution and the ability of the institution to retain the

students.

Retention Issues at HEIs

  Higher education institutions in the United States interested in the persistence of Blacks

enrolled at their institutions are looking for ways to increase retention and improve graduation

rates. Harper states (2006, p. 7), "Nationally, more than two-thirds (67.6 percent) of black men

who start college do not graduate within six years." Increasing persistence, specifically for

Black students, is clearly a concern for HEIs in the United States. Tinto's theory of student

persistence is summarized as being committed to an educational goal and being committed to

remaining with the institution (Cabrera, Nora & Castaneda,1993). He explains that being

committed to an educational goal includes having the academic ability to support the motivation

of completing the degree. The commitment to remain with the institution entails of an

individual's academic and social characteristics being congruent with the institution's

characteristics. The gap in his theory, according to Cabrera, Nora and Castaneda (1993) is the influence of external factors on perceptions, commitments and preferences.

Lanni (1992) conducted a 6-year survey of 1261 students and revealed a trend of Black students having higher intentions of earning a degree but also higher part-time status, higher financial concerns, more students in an independent status, and more students having dependents while they were enrolled in college. In addition, more Black students were employed than White students but they had lower wages than their peers (Lanni, 1992). These are significant challenges to overcome when trying to complete a rigorous degree program.

Some main retention efforts implemented by universities include creating an early warning system to allow faculty and administrators time to intervene (Wood, 2011), using a variety of learning styles (Hughes, 2007), increasing quantity and participation of minority faculty members (Castle, 1993), and addressing reasons that students have for leaving campus (Tinto, 1988). Two particularly strong areas of connection for retention for Black students include student engagement and leadership positions.   Research shows that students that are involved on campus in extracurricular activities, including athletics, intramurals, clubs and organizations, tend to persist towards their degree at higher rates than those students that are not engaged in the campus social culture (Mendez, 2011; Anderson, 2010; ASHE Higher Education Report, 2009). Likewise, the students in leadership development opportunities, including internships and partnerships with faculty, have higher retention and completion rates (Dabney, 2010; Nagda, Gregerman, Jonides, von Hippel, & Lerner, 1998).

In order to better support the Black students and raise retention rates, it is important to understand why Black students leave their undergraduate institutions. Tinto implies that in order to be successful, students must give up the connections and culture they had before and

assimilate into the mainstream culture (Tierney, 1999). However, Bourdieu creates a more holistic picture with his ideas on cultural and social capital. These ideas will be expanded on in the section on Culture and Cultural Theories.

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Race and Racial Theories

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As race was a determining factor in selecting participants for the study, this section will examine race as a concept, racial and ethnic development theories and the implications of these development theories. During the 15th century, Western European languages described skin color or the descent of a person as a way to provide entitlement or place others into social categories (Banton, 2012). After WWII, the word race began to replace the word color in both U.S. national and international laws in order to try and curb discrimination. Race continues to be a factor of discrimination in the United States in circumstances such as mortgage lending, housing options, hiring practices, through the criminal justice system, educational opportunities, economical opportunities and in personal experiences as shared by minority groups (Griffin, Jayakumar, Jones & Allen, 2010; Dailey, Kasl, Holford, Lewis & Jones, 2010; Hochschild, 2006). African-Americans react stronger to race-based (Black/White) discrimination than color-based (lightness to darkness of skin color) discrimination, even though 8 national surveys have showed how skin tone within a race determines socio-economic outcomes. As a minority group, African Americans may not fight color discrimination within their own racial group in order to stand united against Whites in the bigger race battle (Hochschild, 2006). Race-consciousness is higher for a Black student when they are in an environment where the majority of their peers are of a different racial background. Having a knowledge of racial and ethnic development theories is helpful in understanding the developmental level of the students during their college years.

Racial and Ethnic Development Theories

In order to study the cultural identity of a group that shares a racial physical characteristic, it is helpful to look at what is already known about racial or ethnic development theories. There are three core theorists that are at the center of many racial and ethnic identity studies: Cross, Helm and Phinney. Cross's model is the most widely used (Evans, Forney & Guido-DiBrito, 1998), including by Harper, but is criticized (Worrell, 2012, p. 9) for its use of developmental milestones "as if one can have a more achieved identity if one can accomplish more tasks." Helm developed a White racial identity model that placed individuals on a scale progressing towards relinquishment of racist attitudes, actions and beliefs (Evans, Forney & Guido-DiBrito, 1998).

While the racial-based theories may not be my particular focus in this cultural study, Phinney's theory on ethnic identity development has much move overlap. "Ethnic identity develops from the shared culture, religion, geography, and language of individuals who are often connected by strong loyalty and kinship" (Evans, Forney & Guido-DiBrito, 1998, p. 80). Phinney created a tool, the MEIM (Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure), which was developed to identify participants along a continuum instead of developing through specific stages (Avery, Tonidandel, Thomas, Johnson & Mack, 2007). Phinney's 12-item questionnaire asks participants to rank on a 1-4 scale their agreement/disagreement with statements about pride in their ethnic group, their level of contentment, a sense of belonging, their knowledge about traditions, history and customs and their involvement with others of their own ethnicity in social settings (Roberts, Phinney, Masse, Chen, Roberts & Romero, 1999).

Phinney's focus on ethnic identity development as opposed to racial identity development correlates with this study's focus on the identification of a specific cultural group which shares the physical characteristic of being Black. Racial identity is connected with linked physical traits while ethnic identity is associated with shared customs and culture (Sullivan & Ghara, 2012).

Implications of Development Studies

Racial and ethnic identity theories have created knowledge about ethnic pride, self-esteem, self-image, academic success, and a broader understanding about the experiences of African Americans. Baber's study (2012) of racial identity development was a qualitative study which revealed five main themes connected together as a process:

1. Established racial identity,

2. Reconsidering identity through heterogeneous community experience,

3. Conflict between ideologies,

4. Resiliency against hostility,

5. Uncovering complexity of identity.

The 15 first-year students in Baber's research found both revamping of their perception of identity and having outside support to be important in their transition to university. It is this reconceptualization of identity that Winkle-Wagner (2009) identifies as a concern. Tinto developed an academic-social integration model demonstrating that students that are integrated into the academic and social traditions of a specific higher education institution are more likely to complete their academic degree programs (as cited in Winkle-Wagner). Tinto's model assumes that minority students need to assimilate into the culture to be successful. Likewise,

Quashie (2004) found one of his primary principles of Black culture to be discovering how to live with and adapt to change.

Other findings with racial and ethnic identity studies showed a correlation of ethnic pride and one's view of self at PWIs with an implication of Black college students needing to have sincere encouragement to thrive and that group counseling can be helpful to increase ethnic pride and encouragement (Phelps, Tranakos-Howe, Dagley & Lyn, 2001). In another study, looking at student enrollment data, Blacks were higher than both Whites and Asian Americans in student confidence, ethnic activities, self-esteem, efficacy, the percentage of students that were female, and the percentage of students coming from a working class family background (as opposed to an upper or middle class socio-economic status) and a consistent correlation was found in Black students' self-esteem efficacy and grade point average (Jaret & Reitzes, 2009). The researchers go on to state, "These results are important because they support the expectation that student and ethnic identities are linked with social psychological well-being and success in college" (p. 364).

To conduct research on the group classified as racially Black would include more than just African Americans, it would include those from the Caribbean or Africa or African-Europeans that immigrated to the United States. These are each different ethnic groups and there are vast cultural differences between the groups (Murray-Johnson, 2013). Race is just one common cultural component that the group members share within a cultural identity (Rucker & Gendrin, 2003). Cultural identity studies are more holistic, addressing more factors that impact one's identity, those of their cultural association (Chideya, 1995; Quashie, 2004; Gay & Baber 1987). From this approach, I can examine Black cultural components, such as those in the following sections, in addition to the culture at the collegiate institution where the participants are studying, in order have a better understanding of the participants' experiences.

Culture and Cultural Theories

The culture of this group, as opposed to just looking at race, is a focus of this study. To serve this purpose, this section will consist of several dimensions of culture including defining it, understanding the importance of it, examining Black culture, relating the impact of Bourdieu's cultural capital theory, transitioning cultures and finally decreasing cultural incidents and microaggressions.

What is Culture?

Culture is defined in a plethora of different ways. It is commonly referred to in the United States as big C (Culture) and little c (culture). The difference between the two is that Culture (big C) relates to fine arts while culture (little c) relates to the features of daily life or popular culture (Bennett, 1998). This study focuses on the little c aspect of culture. Tierney (1999, p. 80), a scholar that bases his work with minority students on Tinto and Bourdieu, defines culture as "a set of symbolic processes, ideologies, and sociohistorical contexts that are situated in an arena of struggle, contestation, and multiple interpretations." People in a shared culture tend to have similar ideas, practices and experiences (Chen & Starosta, 2005). These students have all self-identified as being Black, which means they belong to the same racial group, but there are many subcultures within that larger cultural umbrella. The subculture for this study is that which is based on the shared experience of attending a specific rural, Midwestern PWI.

Why Study Culture?

Studying culture has both short-term and long-term benefits. Understanding culture helps in opening up avenues of communication between individuals and groups (Chen & Starosta, 2005). Higher education institutions are able to utilize cultural understanding to capitalize on student learning (Joseph, 2012). By studying culture, knowledge can be obtained about the members of that specific group and the perceptions they have of themselves and of their world (Singer, 1998). Understanding of other peoples, cultures and groups allows humans to coexist more peacefully together. It is equally important to encourage those of the same cultural group to embrace the values and beliefs of the group (Guiffrida & Douthit, 2010). Phinney's ethnic identity model, discussed in the last section, is based on the extent to which individuals embrace the cultural or ethnic group to which they are a member (Phinney, Cantu, & Kurtz, 1997).

Defining Black Culture

The culture exhibited by Blacks living in the United States is hard to define because of the large number of diverse individuals that identify as African American or Black. However, the historical roots lend to some common characteristics related to Black culture. Slavery had such a profound impact on Black culture. Many slaves were not allowed to practice or promote their culture nor were they able to be accepted into the White culture (Seck, 2009). To compound this, colonization of the African continent by European powers influenced what was taught in schools about Blacks living in Africa prior to the 16th century (Watkins, 2009). This historical forced assimilation in the United States and the influence of European powers in Africa makes it challenging for African Americans to recapture their ethnic identity through an accurate portrayal of their African ancestors (Henderson, 1999).

Some scholars have attempted to define Black culture. In Henderson's (1999) book, *Our Souls to Keep: Black/White Relations in America*, he outlines several values that are indicative of Black culture. These include the importance of pride, a polychromic-attitude of time, a smaller distance for personal space, and a connection to nature. Joseph (2012) found that some HBCU (Historically Black Colleges and Universities) have a mission to promote Black culture and that this includes a strong sense of giving back in a service-fashion to the community.

There are also aspects of Black culture that have become negative stereotypes. Some of this has been perpetuated through images and media which will be discussed in the section on imagery at the end of this chapter. Burrell (2010) addresses these negative stereotypes to educate readers on the underlying beneficiaries of this stigma and how to move beyond it. This is an important step in Phinney's ethnic identity theory from the previous section as one's image about their own cultural group is influenced by how others outside of the group perceive the group (Phinney, Cantu & Kurtz, 1997).

There must be a balance in the appreciation of others' cultures so that groups with less power are not forced to assimilate to the culture of the more powerful culture (Seck, 2009). Chen and Starosta (2005, p. 7) stress being able to recognize characteristics of various cultural or ethnic groups but not to elevate one culture over another. This contradicts Tinto's theory of minority students needing to assimilate into the cultural mainstream of the university but Bourdieu deepens this understanding with his ideas of cultural capital and habitus as discussed in the next section (Tierney, 1999).

Bourdieu's Cultural Capital

Pierre Bourdieu was a French sociologist that has received recognition of his theories surrounding habitus and capital. This section will give a brief overview of Bourdieu's theories that are applicable to this study. This is not meant to be an inclusive examination into Bourdieu's extensive and somewhat complex views.

Habitus is the term that Bourdieu used to describe habits or dispositions that are deeply ingrained in a group (Reay, David & Ball, 2001). They refer to the socialized norms that are followed by members in the group and are transmitted from generation to generation (Robbins, 2000). Habitus can refer to components of a culture such as taste in artwork, food, or clothing. Habitus can change or fluctuate over time and varies greatly between cultural or social groups (Anderson, 2004).

The word capital normally implies economic capital or financial assets but Bourdieu extends the word to include social capital, cultural capital or symbolic capital (Bourdieu, 1977). He believed that these forms of capital, like economic capital, could be created, accumulated, exchanged and consumed (Bourdieu, 1977). Bourdieu later expanded his list of capital categories to include: economic, political, military, cultural, scientific and technological (Bourdieu, 2002). The capitals that apply the most to this study are the concepts of cultural capital and social capital. Some examples of cultural capital are skills, taste, posture, clothing, mannerisms, material goods, credentials, knowledge and educational credentials (Swartz, 2013). Cultural capital can be categorized as either embodied (such as the dialect or accent used), objectified (like a luxury car) or institutionalized (the attainment of a collegiate degree) (Tierney, 1999). Social capital is the idea of the resources or potential resources linked to a network of relationships (Bourdieu, 1985).

If a group has power based on their group status, then the capital of that group becomes the dominant capital within that specific field. While the objective for students enrolled in a university is to obtain a degree, Bourdieu discusses why earning a degree may not be enough to allow some to move to a higher social status. A degree is an objectified form of cultural capital which can be leveraged to help improve one's position in society (Robbins, 2000) but there may be additional forms of cultural capital or social capital that are needed for the individual to be able to change socio-economic classes (Reay, Crozier & Clayton, 2010). To fit in within the parameters of a more elite society, the individual needs to display similar levels of refined tastes, appreciation and dispositions or have connections with individuals or groups through their social capital. Within the field such as a collegiate setting, even though the participants in this study have finished their secondary education and obtained a high-school diploma, they may not have the cultural capital to feel as if they belong at a university that has very different cultural characteristics than their own background. Tinto's theory of persistence in university students discusses how important it is to feel integrated and assimilated into the mainstream culture (Tinto, 1994).

Decreasing Cultural Incidents and Microaggressions

As the section before discusses, it can be challenging for an individual to blend into a group that has a different cultural or social capital than the individual. Black students that have a different cultural capital than their White peers, faculty and staff may find themselves dealing with cultural incidents or microaggressions.

Cultural incidents, a term used to refer to cultural misunderstandings, occur when individuals or groups from different cultures interact without understanding the attitudes and

behaviors of the other culture (Storti, 2001). Phinney, Cantu and Kurtz (1997) recommend that

university students have strong relationships with peers in their same ethnic group as well as

with peers in other ethnic groups to increase retention rates. While building relationships with

those outside an individual's own ethnic group, there are higher possibilities of having to face a

microaggression than staying isolated within one's own ethnic group.

A microaggression is a type of cultural incident which can be subtle and often

unintentional but still have detrimental psychological or emotional effects (Forrest-Bank &

Jenson, 2015). In the United States, racism has shifted from the overt actions of the Jim Crow

laws and legal segregation to more subtle acts of microaggression (Henfield, 2011). The term

racial microaggression was first used by Chester Pierce in the 1970s to classify comments or

actions that were subtle but detrimental to the recipient(s) (Forrest-Bank & Jenson, 2015). There

are three types of microaggressions:

1. Microassaults- acts done knowingly

2. Microinsults- negatives messages that degrade or exclude others

3. Microinvalidations- comments that invalidate another race or cultural group.

Yearwood (2013) states that microaggressions are typically common and brief. The difficulty in

confronting or coping with a microaggression is that it is often unclear if the message was

intended to be hostile or derogatory or if it was stated out of ignorance. The influence of

microaggressions on the participants in this study will be discussed more in Chapter 4.

Connecting Race to Socio-Economic Status

While this study is focused on the topics of race and culture, within the context of the

United States it is remiss to discuss race and education without discussing the socioeconomic

status (SES) of Blacks in the United States and the effect on education. Within the United

States, there appears to be a correlation between skin color and socio-economic status (Banton,

2012). This section will cover the definition of socioeconomic status for the purpose of this

study, the creation and factors of the SES gap, statistical information on hurdles to overcoming

SES, and the relevance of SES to this specific study. The information in these sections will be

part of the discussion in chapters four and five as it relates to opportunity, discrimination and

social/cultural capital.

Understanding Socioeconomic Status

The words lower class, disadvantaged, at-risk, inner-city and students of low

socioeconomic status have all been used in various research studies to describe the students that

come from the poorest neighborhoods or communities in the United States. I will be focusing on

the socioeconomic status instead of the economic status to be more inclusive of the position

within society and their social capital and not just the income or wages (economic capital) of the

families. It is important to note that some Black families may have a stronger financial status

than their White counterparts but could still be listed in a lower SES because of the

neighborhood where they reside (Spivak & Monnat, 2013). In fact, White neighborhoods that

have a lower SES have better resources and opportunities than minority neighborhoods with

higher SES. This will be further discussed throughout this section. Low SES is more than a

financial situation. Being in a low SES neighborhood places individuals at higher risks for

occupational, psychological, personal, health and economic stress (Rothstein, 2004). As

portrayed in the historical section at the beginning of this chapter, Blacks in the United States

have been repressed for centuries and the color of skin has determined class-status for

generations of Blacks (Hochschild, 2006). This repeated repression has made African

Americans the least likely minority group to make a lifestyle change when their financial

circumstances improve because African Americans tend to be pessimistic about opportunities

and realistic about the likelihood of encountering discrimination in a majority-dominated

environment (Chong & Kim, 2006).

Understanding the SES Gap

When examining populations with various racial and cultural characteristics in the United

States, racial and ethnic minorities are more likely to live in disadvantaged neighborhoods

(Swisher, Kuhl & Chavez, 2013) with African Americans being overrepresented in the lowest

SES (Griffin, Jayakumar, Jones & Allen, 2010). This makes it particularly challenging for

prospective college students to obtain the social and cultural capital necessary to best prepare

them for university life. Statistics from the 2010-2011 academic year showed 42% of Blacks in

the United States population were enrolled in a high-poverty school compared to 6% of their

White counterparts (Ross, Kena, Rathbun, Kewal Ramani, Zhang, Kristapovich & Manning,

2012). One of the key reasons that Blacks in the United States are more likely to spend their

childhood in a poor neighborhood is because they are more likely to face unfair housing access

restrictions or housing market discrimination (Chong & Kim, 2006). Swisher, Kuhl and Chavez

(2013, p. 1401) stated, "The barrier of access to good neighborhoods is more rigid for blacks

than it is for whites."

Neighborhoods, particularly in urban areas, are typically segregated by race or cultural

group, a concept known as residential segregation. There are three main reasons that residential

segregation exists: difference in socioeconomic status, housing market discrimination and self-

selection preferences (Spivak & Monnat, 2013). Self-selection is understandable when families that have the social and cultural capital within the field of low-poverty neighborhoods feel more comfortable living there than trying to adjust to neighborhoods where they may fit in economically but not have the same social and cultural capitals as their neighbors (Bourdieu, 1984).

In regards to SES being a deterring factor, the cycle of poverty is hard to break. African Americans are more likely to be unemployed than their equally educated White counterparts (Griffin, Jayakumar, Jones & Allen, 2010). Seventy-five percent of Blacks that grow up disadvantaged stay poor; while only forty percent of Whites that grow up disadvantaged stay poor (Swisher, Kuhl & Chavez, 2013). There are housing market discriminations that Blacks must overcome as they have not historically been approved for higher value loans or shown available property in neighborhoods dominated by Whites. Currently, there is an increase in the unaffordability of sufficient or adequate housing for lower class families (Rothstein, 2004). The racial discrimination that can be encountered by minority populations in majority neighborhoods can have serious mental and physical health effects that cause minorities to not want to move from their original neighborhood (Dailey, Kasl, Holford, Lewis & Jones, 2010). Black families will choose to stay in neighborhoods that are comprised of lower SES families and fewer resources in order to minimize exposure to racial discrimination and stay aligned with the social and cultural capitals that they are familiar with and that have power in that field.

While it can be a hurdle for Blacks to change neighborhoods, doing so can give them a chance to improve the educational opportunities for their children. Education is the best way to improve SES and the return per investment is stronger for Black students than it is for White students (Swisher, Kulh & Chaves, 2013). "Education in the United States is not a single,

uniform system that is available to every child in the same way. Children of different social classes are likely to attend different types of schools, to receive different types of instruction, to study different curricula, and to leave school at different rates and times (Persell, 1993, p. 71).

Maintaining segregated neighborhoods reinforces segregation of public education with a growing trend of Blacks living in urban areas with limited resources and Whites living in suburban areas with expanded resources (Griffin, Jayakumar, Jones & Allen, 2010). Public schools are funded predominantly with property taxes based on the financial resources of its constituents. Communities with more expensive homes and successful businesses have greater funding, better teachers, stronger resources, more programming opportunities and cleaner facilities (Persell, 1993). Students in school districts with higher poverty rates are taught less of the federally required curriculum and are expected to do less work than students in more affluent school districts (Persell, 1993). Students in school districts that have higher SES families have higher academic achievements and stay in school longer than their lower-class peers. The economic status of the school ends up being more important than the SES of the family (Kahlenberg, 2006).

"K-12 inequalities pose greater barriers to college access today than ever before…Blacks from low-income families are less likely to get into college today than 20 or 30 years ago" (Griffin, Jayakumar, Jones & Allen, 2010, p. 243). Even when African Americans from families with low income levels pursue college, they have less contact with their faculty, study less, are less involved with student organizations, work more and have lower academic success than African Americans coming from higher SES backgrounds (Walpole, 2008). Family and economic resources influence the educational opportunities of the student which influences the academic achievement of that student and the chance that he or she will attend college and

successfully earn a degree (Walpole, 2008). As shown in the last chapter, the average income for a Black family at the site university is only half of the average income for a White family. Trying to retain Black students is particularly difficult when they have the disadvantages of coming from a lower SES background in addition to them trying to adjust to a institutional culture that is based on White norms and values.

SES and Cultural Capital

Minority groups in the United States find their economic success does not eliminate society's racial and ethnic boundaries, and opportunities are often still restricted (Chong & Kim, 2006). When opportunities are blocked, individuals become more aware of their group identity and differences between groups are noticed. Research shows that Black migrants have higher earnings than native-born African Americans and that they have stronger academic success (Manuel, Taylor & Jackson, 2012, Rothstein, 2004). The main difference between these two groups is their cultural and social capital, the cultural background and values of each group become part of their social class. For example, Caribbean parents believe that education leads to mobility between classes and they have not experienced the racial repression that African Americans have experienced in the United States (Walpole, 2008, Rothstein, 2004).

Overall, parents of different SES raise their children using different discipline methods, using different communication styles and teaching different values (Rothstein, 2004). Parents of lower SES feel judged inept by the teachers if they lack the cultural capital to discuss their child's education and teacher's expectations are then influenced by the SES of the child (Persell, 1993). Even when a family is academically or financially successful, there are still restrictions on the cultural capital being passed to their children. While Rothstein (2004) does not

specifically mention cultural capital, he does state that working class parents read and converse differently with their children that white collar parents. Within Black families, the influence of grandparents is very strong, tracing back to the importance of having a nuclear family unit during times of slavery. The values and communication styles of grandparents may be a primary influence in the lives of students even if the parents are college educated as the parents may be working outside the home while the grandparents help to raise the children (Rothstein, 2004).For families where grandparents are raising the children, the cultural and social capitals of the children may derive more from the grandparents than the parents.

The income level of a family may determine where the family lives, what school the children attend, the stores where the family shops, and even the activities that the family can do. These family characteristics then determine the social and cultural capital of the individuals in the family, the relationships they have (social capital) and the skills, tastes and clothing that they have (cultural capital) (Bourdieu, 1977). This will be expanded on in Chapter 4: Results and Findings. The final section in this literature review will cover imagery as a historical and societal topic for Blacks in the United States.

Imagery

Imagery is a relevant topic to this research project both because of the racist implications images have historically had on Blacks in the United States and also because of my use of images within the study. Images can be used to define a culture or a cultural group (Semikhat, 2010). Imagery has been used as a tool for propaganda in the United States for as long as Africans have been shipped here for slave purposes (Burrell, 2010). Posters and advertisements showed African slaves that were available for purchase with other cattle and goods (Smith &

Palmisano, 2000). Pictures are still accessible today of the cells where slaves were held until

they were purchased, of the auction blocks where they were sold, and of the living conditions on

the farms and plantations where they lived. The first advertisements in the United States were

posters about buying slaves (Burrell, 2010).

In the 1800s, prior to the Civil War, Blacks were branded to be inferior and images

showed them as having large, clown-like red lips and oversized ears (Burrell, 2010). Black

women were portrayed as overweight "mamas" baking in the kitchen. These images did not

improve after the Civil War, as postcards of Blacks being lynched were passed between Whites

and advertisements for the Ku Klux Klan were abundant (Burrell, 2010). The images both

created and distributed about Blacks showed them as inferior to Whites and this message was

overall believed by society.

Fifty years ago marks a rise in Black pride and power (Burrell, 2010). Images of Martin

Luther King, Jr. clashed with those of burning crosses. Armed Federal Agents escorting small

children to school were pictured in newspapers as well as violence used against those in peaceful

protests (Smith & Palmisano, 2000). For roughly ten years, images created by Black ad agencies

and magazine covers promoted being Black as something beautiful and positive (Burrell, 2010).

By the early 1970s, stereotypical images prevailed in the media, in both magazines and TV, to

show Blacks as only being successful in athletics or music (Smith & Palmisano, 2000). Black

women as sex symbols were particularly prevalent (Burrell, 2010).

In the 1980s and 1990s, Blacks had made some progress in the film and television

industry but power was still a major factor as Blacks were portrayed as passive or powerless

while Whites were invincible (Chideya, 1995). Racial stereotypes are still being portrayed in

film, television and print images and these stereotypes are then used to justify actions and

attitudes towards marginalized groups (Solorzano, 1997). The intention of my study is not to examine the impact of the media on Blacks, but I would recommend Kamalipour's and Carilli's (1998) *Cultural Diveresity and the U.S. Media* for further reading.

Imagery is a powerful tool of Black communicative art (Gay & Baber, 1987). Imagery is found even in language or speech, in lyrics and poems. "Imagery in speech is second nature to Afro-Americans. It fits a cultural habit of achieving 'direction through indirection' and an aesthetic that relies heavily on innuendo, metaphor, and symbolism" (Gay & Baber, 1987, p. 87). Words are descriptively used to add emphasis and paint a clearer picture and the images are compared to another item where something is as "fine as wine" or "sweet as honey" (p. 86).

As this study examined both culture and used images, it was important for me to understand how images exploited Blacks. Imagery will be expanded upon in Chapter Three as I discuss the use of images in this study.

Conclusion

All of the sections in this literature review allow for the examination of the Black collegiate culture at the PWI where I conducted my research to be placed into context using relevant historical background, an examination of the current status of Blacks studying in the United States, the impact of limited financial opportunities, racial development theories, knowledge gained from cultural studies and the use of imagery. This literature review includes studies from a wide variety of disciplines and, like culture itself, is inclusive of many facets of life. However, even when examining the culture of Black collegiates at a PWI, the root of the solution to the inequities revealed must be housed in education. "One thing that will not change in the next 50, 100 or 150 years is that for black Americans and indeed for all Americans,

education is the key to dignity, freedom and opportunity to achieve self-actualization" (Ashley, 2005, p. 17). It is with this in mind that the next chapter outlines the research methodology that was undertaken for this project.

CHAPTER THREE

Methods

This thesis utilizes a qualitative case study methodological approach with a phenomenological perspective of analysis in order to examine the distinct culture of a group of self-identified Black students at a rural, predominantly White university located in the Midwestern United States in order to increase the Black student retention rate at the site university. Using a phenomenological case study methodology, I examine the way this particular group self-identifies their culture and what the predominant cultural characteristics are for the group. In order to focus the examination of this topic, several research questions are explored:

1. What are the common cultural components for the participant group?

2. How does being enrolled in a rural, predominantly White institution influence the participants' culture?

3. In what ways do the participants feel they are being supported at the institution? How do the participants feel they could be better supported?

4. Do the participants feel that they have had to change or adapt their culture while at the institution? Why do they feel this change is necessary or unnecessary?

Study Rationale

This section will explain why this study is important to undertake and the rational of the four main research questions. The literature review section covered the hindrances in American society to providing equitable educational opportunities to Black populations. Higher education institutions, tasked with the responsibility of helping Black populations, struggle with finding

ways to increase retention and graduation rates. Utilizing a phenomenological case study approach allows me to find out more about how the participants perceive their own cultural background and how their perceptions of the institutional culture impact their group culture. Moustakas (1994, p. 52) states, "In phenomenology, perception is regarded as the primary source of knowledge, the source that cannot be doubted." The intention is that by understanding more about today's Black population, future students can benefit from the recommendations made as a result of this study.

"The study of culture has blossomed into one of the most important areas of research in psychology" (Matsumoto & van de Vijver, 2012, p. 85). Culture impacts a plethora of factors in life from ones' values and beliefs to the manner in which these beliefs are understood in society (Bennett, 1998.) As a White, outside researcher, I do not have the same cultural knowledge, beliefs and practices as the participants. A draw to using a phenomenological approach is that the focus is on how the participants make sense of their own experiences without the pressure to place the experiences into society's prescribed categories (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2010). "Phenomenology, step by step, attempts to eliminate everything that represents a prejudgment, setting aside presuppositions, and reaching a transcendental state of freshness and openness, a readiness to see in an unfetted way, not threatened by the customs, beliefs, and prejudices of normal science, by the habits of the natural world or by knowledge based on unreflected everyday experience" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 41). A phenomenological approach encourages me to understand my own assumptions and bias while seeking to better understand the experiences of the participants. Moustakas (1994) states that knowledge about another is based on knowledge about oneself, and that I have to first understand my own experiences.

Like Warde (2009) and Fields-Smith and Williams (2009), I believe utilizing a phenomenological approach is an effective way to allow participants to share their stories and experiences. This analysis approach helps me to understand the experiences of the participants at face value and to see their "behaviour as determined by the phenomena of experience rather than by external, objective and physically described reality (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2011, 18)." For example, when one of the participants described a situation that they interpreted as a racist action from a faculty member, my own experiences in the classroom led me to interpret it as a non-race-based action. The intuition of the participant was that the action was committed based on the previous actions of the Black students in the classroom and the action was interpreted as a microaggression.

Another rational for this study was for my professional role as a practitioner in the field. Chideya (1995, p. 91) states "Black Centers (at universities) may … unwittingly tend to impose a particular point of view upon all black students." As the Director of Multicultural Student Services, it serves me well to be informed about the students I serve, their cultural identification and how their culture either aligns, conforms or collides with the institutional culture. As an alumnus of the same university where I have worked for over ten years and where this research took place, I may have deeper insight into the institutional culture than an outside researcher but I also may be more biased towards the strengths of the university and quicker to defend the weaknesses. I am much less familiar with the cultural components of the students I serve and their view of the institutional culture and Moustakas (1994) states that in phenomenology the certainty comes from what the participants think, feel and perceive.

The rationale for this study also includes understanding the reasoning behind the four research questions and how they are central to understanding the broader topic of academic

success for Black students at a predominantly White, rural university in the Midwestern part of the United States. Forming the questions for the study is the first of seven steps in developing a phenomenological study (Moustakas, 1994). The first question seeks to identify common cultural characteristics of the participants to see if there are cultural group characteristics. As an outside researcher, this question is vital for the participants to answer so that I am not creating programs and trying to solve problems based on my own cultural values but on those that the participants have identified as important and central to who they are as Black students at Muskingum University. This approach of being able to suspend my beliefs in order to explain the meaning of the phenomenon as the participants understand it is known as epoche or bracketing (Moustakas, 1994). The application of this approach will be expanded upon throughout this chapter.

The second question looks at the environmental factor of studying at a predominantly White university located in a rural village and examines how the environment and social setting impact the culture of the participants. Having an understanding of some common cultural characteristics will allow practitioners to see if the institutional cultural values are in alignment or conflict with those of the students and to make sure their needs are met and that the students feel supported during their studies. The second research question allows the participants to share their experiences and reflections on how their own culture has been impacted when it is no longer the majority culture. A component of Phinney's ethnic identity theory is that while each group has its own components (values, traditions, history), they are influenced by how other groups perceive them and act towards them (Avery, Tonidandel, Thomas, Johnson & Mack, 2007).

The third research question asks the participants about the level of support they feel like they are receiving on campus. Again, as a phenomenological research project, it is not the

researcher's opinion of the support services that is important but how well the participants feel they are supported and what they recognize as their sources of support (Frost, 2011). Knowing areas of support that are weaker will allow practitioners to adjust in creating or reestablishing revenues of support from those resources. Within a university atmosphere, support can come from faculty members, staff, peers, athletics, student organizations, off-campus affiliations, and family members.

The final research question asks participants if they believe they have had to change or adapt their own culture while trying to succeed within the institutional culture. I created this research project believing that Black students from urban hometowns that enroll in rural, predominantly White universities struggle with learning the cultural and social capital necessary to succeed. Cultures collide when different cultural groups come together and students that are successful must be able to navigate those collisions (Bourdieu, 1977). All the participants in this research project were successful at the institution despite having come from a very different environment than the university. Learning how they were able to be successful could be instrumental in helping other students in similar circumstances also be successful.

Research Design

There are several different facets to designing this research project. The first is the methodological framework of the study. Next is the recruitment stage followed by the questionnaire. The imagery piece is the fourth factor to consider which led into the group interviews. Other factors of the study, such as my perspective as the researcher, the ethical considerations, the selection of the site institution, and the analysis of the data are covered in the subsequent sections after the research design.

Methodology

As mentioned in the previous section, *Study Rationale*, I chose to use a phenomenological framework to seek answers to my research questions. While other research approaches were considered, including an ethnographical approach and a feminist approach, ultimately my desire to understand how the participants interpreted their own experiences and culture made phenomenology the best match for my study. While an ethnographical approach is rooted in anthropology, this method is traditionally one of long periods of observation (Wolcott, 2008). This may have been challenging in my study as it would have been harder to gain access into places to observe (athletic spaces, residential rooms, classrooms) and conducting a study with potential participants that are known for leaving the institution could have made it difficult to obtain participants that stayed throughout a longer data collection period in order to collect a snapshot of their lives (Maynard, 2006). I also initially looked at a feminist methodological approach as it uses multiple research methods, has an interdisciplinary nature to the method, and looks at issues of power (Doucet & Mauthner, 2006). However, a feminist methodological approach tends to focus on gender where I wanted my focus to be on race and phenomenology better met the alignment of my study (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2011).

Phenomenology is the study of human experiences and how individuals consciously make sense of the experiences (Forrester, 2010). One of the principles of phenomenology as a methodology, through founders Husserl and Heidegger, was that the participants should be reflexive about their experiences and self-examine them (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2010; Moustakas, 1994). Phenomenological studies tend to be qualitative in nature (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2011, p. 18). Although I used a predominantly qualitative approach, I elected to use several ways of collecting the data in order to gather some basic, demographic information in a

quantitative fashion while having the majority of the research data be obtained through more qualitative methods. Collecting demographic information allows for a more holistic picture of the participants to be created by understanding information such as their progress at the university and the number of semesters that they have been students. I collected this demographic information through a questionnaire but the bulk of my study was conducted with a qualitative approach using photo elicitation and group interviews. Hesse-Biber and Leavy state (2006, p. 97), "by using multiple data collection methods, researchers triangulate their data, allowing them to analyze a question or topic from multiple angles, sources, and varieties of expression". This triangulation of data occurred in my study as participants first reflected on which image best represented their identity, completed a questionnaire describing various identity characteristics, and then participated in two rounds of group interviews discussing their cultural identity and sharing their experiences while enrolled at the site university. Frost (2011) recommends triangulating the data as a phenomenological approach to help give insight to the meanings of the participants in a variety of manners.

Another reason to triangulate the data was because of the student population at this specific institution. Muskingum University is nationally-recognized as a school for students with learning disabilities and as a staff member of this institution it is almost second-nature for me to think about various learning styles as I design programs and events on campus. Likewise, when I thought about how I wanted to conduct research on this campus, I wanted to allow the students an opportunity to reflect on the topic in a physical or tangible way with a representative item, then read about the types of factors that may influence their identity as depicted on the questionnaire and finally to share their experiences and feelings in an auditory setting during the

group interviews. This process emphasized a practice of reflection for the students, an important

aspect of phenomenology (Shinebourne, 2011; Moustakas, 1994).

Other options were considered for data collection methods (such as a Likert-based survey

or a lengthier questionnaire) but I wanted to hear about the individual and collective experiences

of the participants as well as to get a better understanding of how communication may lend itself

to a unifying cultural characteristic of the group. Forrester (2010) stated that conducting

research through focus groups for phenomenological research projects can be advantageous for

understanding interactions between participants, witness communication patterns such as

storytelling or arguing, and as a way to have informal discussions with selected individuals on a

particular topic. For an outside researcher, such as myself, having group interviews can be

especially important as the participants may represent themselves differently in a one-on-one

setting with a researcher than they do in a group setting with their peers. I also anticipated that I

would have a small number of participants and it would be challenging to get a high

representative sampling for a quantitative-based study.

A final part of embracing a phenomenological research method that appealed to me with

this particular study is that the ontology behind phenomenology takes into consideration the

sociocultural and historical processes that become central in understanding experiences and

views of the participants' lives (Shinebourne, 2011). Comprehending the impact of society, both

in the past centuries and in its current operation, is necessary to understanding the way in which

the participants define their experiences, particularly in regards to microaggressions and cultural

capital.

Recruitment

In order to identify potential participants, I used biological data on applications to the institution. Students applying to Muskingum University have the option of checking an ethnicity and/or race designation on their application. Those admitted students that self-selected as racially Black and were registered for classes as a full-time, undergraduate student at the time of the data collection phase of this study (Spring of 2014) were sent an invitation to participate letter to their Muskingum email address. The consent forms for the study were attached to the invitation letter. See Appendix B for a sample of the invitation letter and Appendix C for a copy of the consent form.

Ten students replied back to my email stating they wished to participate out of 114 potential participants for a return rate of almost 9%. These ten students met individually with me to ensure they understood the parameters of the study and that they did not feel coerced into participating because of their perception of the power that I hold on campus. (One student later withdrew from the study.) I also utilized this one-on-one time to explain the imagery component of the study to each participant (described in further detail in the Image/Item section). The participants chose from three available time slots and all the participants chose the two daytime options with no students requesting the evening option as their preferred meeting time for the group interviews.

Questionnaire

The first time that the participants in each group met, each participant was given a brief questionnaire to complete. A copy of this questionnaire can be found in Appendix D. The intention of the questionnaire was two-fold. First, it allowed more categorical information about

the participants to be collected. Second, it allowed potential patterns or similarities to be

connected in a more efficient manner. Some of the data on the questionnaire was basic

demographic information while other questions led the participants to describe their physical

characteristics or personality. The last question asked the participants if they believed there was

a separate Black student culture on campus. While this question was one that would be

discussed within the group interviews, I wanted to know their impression before any discussion

had taken place and then be able to compare that with what was stated in the group interviews.

This was a useful approach to triangulating the data. An added bonus to using the questionnaire

was that it allowed the participants to share their thoughts and feelings in the group interview

around a topic, that of their own identity, that they had just reflected upon when they filled out

the questionnaire at the beginning of the first session.

       The format of the questionnaire was deliberate in several ways. First, it allowed the

participant to ease into the study with basic demographic questions that would serve to provide

me with useful information regarding their age, gender, academic field of study and progress in

school. The first seven questions are all ones in which I could have gathered the information

prior to the participants completing the questionnaire through the institution's cooperation in

allowing me access to that information for my research. However, I elected to have the

participants choose what to share with me and also to start off the questionnaire with routine

questions that participants may have been accustomed to answering.

       The next section of the questionnaire (questions 7 and 8) was deliberate in asking the

participants about their hometown and the percentage of Black students that attended their high

school because the site institution is very rural with only a small percentage (6.7% in Spring of

2014) of Black students on campus. I suspected that the cultural capital that the participants had in high school was not the cultural capital of the majority at Muskingum University.

Four questions (numbers 9-12) all asked the participants to list aspects that help to define their personal identity: their physical features, their personality, their interests and unique characteristics. I wanted the participants to write down their answers before they were influenced by the group in which they were participating and I also wanted them to start thinking of their own identity as multifaceted. While their racial identity was the connecting factor for all the participants, I did not want racial identity to be the only factor that was discussed.

The final question on the questionnaire was my largest assumption going into this research project and I wanted the participants to answer it independently and to discuss it as part of the group interviews. I believed that the Black students had a unique set of cultural characteristics that thrived in their hometown setting but were challenged when they enrolled in a predominantly White institution located in a rural village.

Image/Item

Use of imagery in this study is multi-purposeful. It helped to guide the interviews, it brought up topics that may have been overlooked or not discussed, it provided the participants a chance to self-reflect, and it provided a different style of identity sharing. I was first drawn to using alternative data collection methods during my doctoral course work and have recently discovered that using photos and images is a growing trend in research with an increase in the number of academic journals that are publishing similar studies (Oliffe & Bottorff, 2007).

While using photos in research is a growing trend, it is not a new concept. Photo-elicitation is a data collection method that was developed in the late 1950s by John Collier as a

way of using pictures or photographs to gather information (Harper, 2002; Clark-Ibanez, 2004;

Shaw, 2013). In some research projects, photo-elicitation is a process where the researcher

shows pictures to the participants to lead discussions around their reactions or knowledge about

the subject in the photos. In other research projects, the participants are given a camera and

asked to take pictures about a specific topic (Clark-Ibanez, 2004). The participants in this study

selected an item or image that represents their self-identity. Harper (2002) summarizes four

main areas of study that most commonly use photo-elicitation as a way to collect information.

These areas of study include: social organization/social class, community, identity and culture.

This process has many benefits which align with many of those in a photo-elicitation study,

such as the benefits these researchers found:

- Assisted in easing into the interview and providing focus throughout (Richard & Lahman,

  2015)

- Participants felt more connected to research (Smith & Woodward, 1999)

- Helped evoke emotion and shared human experiences (Linz, 2011)

- Allowed for empirical data with unique insights (Oliffe & Bottorff, 2007)

As each participant met with me to complete the consent form, I instructed them to bring an

item or image with them to the first group interview session that they felt represented who they

were. I gave no other instructions and left it purposely vague to allow the participants to

determine what the item or image would be that they brought with them. As a triangulation

technique, I wanted to combine visual and textual data by having the participants discuss what

the images meant to them at the group interviews.

Bringing in an item to the initial group interview can help to generate conversation and

serve as a prompt, an interview technique noted by Blaxter, Hughes & Tight (2010, p. 193). It

allows the participants to have an idea of how the interview will begin and allow me, as an outside, White researcher, a manner in which to direct the conversation if I became uncertain on what to ask (Clark-Ibanez, 2004).

I was doubtful about the participants' willingness to follow through on bringing in an item and was pleasantly surprised when all the participants had an item to share. It served as another way to discover cultural characteristics about the participants and ways in which their culture may have changed or shifted as they adjusted to college life. The student participants shared stories and experiences through their images that I may not have otherwise been privy to hearing, a finding shared by Clark-Ibanez (2004), Meo (2010), and Croghan, Griffin, Hunter and Phoenix (2008).

The participants in my research had almost two full weeks to choose an image and reflect on how that image represented them prior to the first group interview. Requesting the participants to bring in an item that represented themselves impacted the participant by guiding them to thinking reflexively about their own image and their personal characteristics prior to being actively involved in the research study.   This was intentionally done in a manner similar to Shaw, who wrote (2013, p. 794), "In addition, the practice of taking photos with a particular purpose in mind required the participants to think about and reflect on their success strategies, contributions to their success, and academic life in the United States." I wanted my participants to think about who they were prior to coming to the first interview. Oliffe and Bottorff (2007) also remark on how the participants self-reflect when they share their images and experiences with the researcher during photo-elicitation studies. How my participants responded to this task will be elaborated on in the next chapter.

An additional benefit to using imagery was that it helped make the study more welcoming to various learning styles. Muskingum University is ranked among the top higher education institutions in the United States in educating students with learning disabilities. As a result, I am very conscious of working with different learning styles and ways of learning and wanted to ensure that my study was as inclusive as possible towards potential participants. Linz (2011, p. 393) remarks, "Given the different learning styles of students, it is best to use a variety of education strategies." She continues stating that many learners prefer visual learning over kinesthetic and that auditory learning is the least favored among learners. Croghan, Griffin, Hunter and Phoenix (2008) utilized their photo-elicitation study to allow the participants to show rather than tell about their identity and to use the pictures to display how they constructed their self-images. By inserting imagery into my study, I have allowed my participants the opportunity to use a variety of learning styles such as visual, verbal, physical, social and solitary. The intention of this paper is not to vouch for or critique learning styles, however I would recommend Learning Styles and Pedagogy in Post-16 Learning for an expanded discussion on learning styles (Coffield, Moseley, Hall & Ecclestong, 2004).

Group Interview

The bulk of the data in this study originated from the four individual group interviews with the participants being divided into two groups and each group being interviewed two times. One group had four participants while the other had five participants. Focus groups are one of the methods that align with a phenomenological methodology by having informal discussions about specific topics with the selected individuals (Forrester, 2010, p. 61). A semi-structured interview schedule was prepared with non-leading, open questions to maintain a balance between

a free-flowing conversational style with a rigid research agenda (Madill, 2012). The interview

script is located in Appendix E. The interview script was deliberately brief to allow participants

to guide the discussions towards areas they deemed important and to allow participants time to

reflect and try and make sense of their own experiences in alignment with the phenomenological

approach to this study (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2010). Forrester (2010) recommends the semi-

structured interview schedule to serve only as a guide to the interview and to allow for questions

to come naturally into the interview allowing the participants to be engaged in the topic and the

process. Each of the group interviews lasted between 60-90 minutes. The second interview was

7-14 days after the first interview and again lasted 60-90 minutes. I took notes on a laptop

during the interviews and had it audio recorded for transcription purposes.

Madill (2012, p. 267) recommends a standard double interview technique in which one

round of interviews is held followed by a second round a week later. This is recommended so

that the second round serves the purpose of pulling out additional information that came through

from the first round of interviews and to tease out any other emerging trends or themes that may

have been mentioned frequently in literature but were skimmed over by the participants within

the groups. For me, the double interview approach was helpful by building in time between the

interviews for me to reflect upon the answers of the participants. I tend to be action-oriented so

having forced time in between the interviews made me think about what was shared and what

areas of my research were left unanswered. Greenbank (2002, p. 795) emphasizes the

importance of researcher reflexivity in order to recognize "the influence of values on the research

process." This time lapse between interviews forced me to partake in this researcher reflexivity

stage.

I was intentional in the group assignments for the participants. I had both men and women represented in each group. There were two students that were dating each other and they were intentionally separated from each other for the study so that the response of one would not affect the response of the other. I also had two women that were more outspoken, one of which was not particularly well-liked on campus, and I placed these two women together with men that were more outspoken to try and minimize the ability of one person to dominate the focus of the group or to set the tone of the interviews. I knew all the participants in the study prior to the study, which is not uncommon for an individual in my role at a small university when my job is to serve as an advocate for the multicultural students and the participants were all in at least their third year of study.

In regards to the questions on the interview script, I started the interviews with the participants' discussion about their images or items that they brought in to represent their identity. I asked other participants if the items of their peers also represented them as I listened for commonalities in how they identified themselves. We discussed at what point in their lives the images began to represent who they were to see if a strong component of their identity had changed recently or had been consistent for quite some time. Starting with the imagery piece eased the participants into sharing information about themselves with me as a researcher and also with their peers that were fellow participants. We next discussed the topics on the questionnaire. This was also intentional in allowing the participants to discuss topics they had thought about previously and to allow what they chose to share to guide the conversation. The first round of interviews were focused on individual and group identity and identifying common characteristics when applicable.

I allowed one to two weeks between interview rounds to provide me with time to conduct a preliminary analysis of the data derived from the group interviews and determine if there was anything that was not addressed to assist in meeting the research objectives or in answering the research questions and I found this gap in interview time to be helpful in being efficient in the questions that I asked each group in the second round of interviews. The second round of interviews focused more on the institution and the environment. Questions were about the impact of the setting and discussion flowed pertaining to microaggressions and cultural clashes. After the interviews were over, I waited another ten days to transcribe the recorded group interviews. Waiting this time was deliberate as I would have a week where I would be away from work and personal distractions in order to write up the transcriptions uninterrupted and for me to reflect upon my initial impressions after hearing the experiences only one time through.

Researcher Perspective

In an effort to be as transparent as possible, I would like to explain my position as it relates to the participants. I feel as if I am an inside researcher in regards to the institution, yet I am not a member of the cultural group. While I am currently a student, it is not at the institution where I am conducting my research. On the research site's campus, I am a White administrator complete with the power that is assumed with that title. While both my domestic and international travel experiences have taken me into circumstances and environments where I was not the racial or ethnic majority, the privilege of growing up White in the United States allowed me to deal with those situations for what they were-temporary challenges.

While I was an adolescent, I did not understand the benefits that were given to me as a White child growing up in a middle-class society. Becoming cogent of the inequalities in

education (as expanded upon in the previous chapter) has impacted my desire to serving

marginalized populations. Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2011, p. 435) define marginalized

populations as stigmatized groups of people that are "economically, socially, (or) politically"

disadvantaged. They give specific examples of marginalized populations which are inclusive of

both the international and multicultural students that I serve at Muskingum University. I state

that I am an inside researcher because I have spent the past decade working with students that do

not have power, class and status. I have witnessed students struggling for every available

assistance and others throw away multiple opportunities. I view myself as a student advocate

and have a bias towards the students. The most challenging part of this research project was to

remain neutral and simply record their experiences in a way that can be meaningful for others.

The process of epoche in phenomenological research involves me blocking my own bias to

understand the meaning of the experience or phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994). When the

participants shared a story or an experience, I would follow up with an open ended question

asking for more details or ask other students how they felt about the experience that was just

shared. Even when I felt upset about an experience that a student had, I did not show my own

emotion or opinion on the outside. I countered my bias by recording the words of the

participants and using a journal, shared only with my primary advisor, to record my thoughts and

reflections from the interviews. In this manner, I was able to keep separate the bias and empathy

that I felt towards the students. In addition, I have had colleagues and other critical supporters

read through my work to keep me accountable to the integrity of the research process.

In addition to the bias that I have towards the students, I also have a strong affection for

the site institution. At several points in the interviews, the participants would say comments that

they believed to be true but that I knew differently. For example, one of the participants stated

that his first year of studies was the first year that Black History Month was celebrated at the university but I knew that it had been celebrated for at least the ten years that I had been working there. I did not correct the participant or become defensive about his statement. As a phenomenological study, I had to remember that what was important was that the participant perceived his comment to be true and that my take-away from his comment was to figure out what occurred to make him believe that his first year as a student was the first year it was celebrated and to determine if anything had changed during that time to the way the month was celebrated or how the programs for the month were advertised or implemented. Forrester (2010, p. 31) explains that phenomenology bracketing involves the researcher being able to "leave aside the question of whether people's experiences are separate from reality."

The other perspective that I carry as a research practitioner is that of a representative of the university. I thoroughly enjoy working at my institution and have no plans to leave. I fully support the mission, the goals and the overarching values of the institution. I have a good rapport with many of the faculty, staff and administrators. I genuinely like the culture of the campus or I would not have come back to work here after my prior experience here as a student. In addition, it is ultimately my responsibility to ensure that this particular cultural group is supported and served on campus. As such, it was hard for me to hear critical comments and recommendations from the students on parts of the institutional culture that should be changed when my perception was that things were going pretty well. For example, there were some cases where I believed the opportunities that were available to the students were ample and commendable but the students found them to be completely insufficient. Students stated that Muskingum University did not have anything to appeal to the Black students other than sports, that the administration didn't care about the students as individuals and that nobody at the

institution was influential for Black students. My objective with this research project is to be better able to serve the students so I gave my greatest effort to react to any constructive criticisms with appreciation and rededication.

There were experiences and stories that were shared within the group interviews that the participants perceived to be racial discrimination and I did not. Having grown up privileged, I have had the luxury of not having to define daily actions as a threat to me or my cultural group. For example, one participant shared a time in her class when three Black students were sitting together in a corner and they kept raising their hands and answering questions. After answering several questions in a row, the teacher informed them that they had heard enough from that section of the classroom and could somebody else answer the question. To my perception, the teacher was trying to see if other students in the classroom had completed the readings or assignments but the Black students that were told not to answer any more questions felt it was an act of microaggression, a situation that could be interpreted as racial discrimination because the intent of the teacher was not known. Likewise, as an outside researcher, I was not aware of the difference in cultural capital prior to this study. I was aware of the communication differences and the statistics that showed Black students, particularly male, finishing university degrees and still earning lower wages and having higher unemployment than their equally educated White peers. Yet, I was not conscious of the impact cultural capital had as Black students were going to job interviews in the predominantly White community where they were studying and their struggle to secure internships or full-time employment.

Researcher Ethics

There are multiple layers to consider when working with human subjects as participants in an original research project. The beginning step is seeking permission from the associated universities to conduct the research. Permission was sought from the IRBs (Institutional Review Boards) at both the University of Liverpool (Appendix F) and Muskingum University (Appendix G). The job of these boards is to ensure that the research is being conducted in compliance with the ethical guidelines and standards of the university. This is an important step not just because it allows me to conduct the research but also to ensure the protection of the participants and that I am taking the best actions for the participants. Awareness and compliance with both national laws, such as FERPA (Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act), and institutional research rules is only the minimum first step in the ethical protocol.

The American Psychology Association (Fried, 2012) offers guidelines to consider when conducting research including: informed consent, risks and benefits, confidentiality, randomized group assignment, participant compensation and possible costs, and research debriefing. I addressed each of these topics in my IRB proposals. This study fell into the "minimal risk" classification. This classification status means that the study will maximize the benefits of research while minimizing the risk or threat of harm (Fried, 2012). There were some restrictions in the way that the collected data was reported to help maximize the confidentiality of the participants. Maintaining confidentiality in research that uses images and photos can be more challenging than other research methods (Clark-Ibanez, 2004; Oliffe & Bottorff, 2007). For example, a tattoo is typically an easy identifier of an individual so instead of revealing the picture of the tattoo that I took, I replaced that image with a similar type of picture.

When researching minority groups, or marginalized populations, the researcher needs to be aware of the power status and the benefits of the research (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2011). My racial status and my role as an administrator placed me into a position of authority and power over the participants. Meeting individually with those that volunteered to participate prior to the study allowed them a chance to ask privately any questions that they had about the study and for me to ensure them that they did not need to participate if they did not want to. I was able to show them the locked filing cabinet where the data was to be kept and to talk through with them how their confidentiality would be maintained. Merriam (1998) stresses these factors in easing the concern of the participants and to build up their confidence in my ability as a researcher to give their experiences the attention they are merited. At the end of the interviews, I reminded the participants that, as a student advocate, I will act within my power based on the experiences they shared with me but there may not be immediate responses to their concerns.

Site Selection

There are several reasons why I selected Muskingum University as the site for this research project. The obvious reasons include the ease of contacting the students and obtaining data about which students qualify for the study but there was also the overwhelming support of the institution for me to conduct my research there and the depth of my knowledge about the institutional culture and environmental factors. In addition, there are some significant reasons to conduct research at a rural, private university in Ohio. Ohio has 172 HEIs in the state, 14 public universities with 24 regional branch campuses, 23 public community colleges and 111 non-profit colleges or universities (Ohio HigherEd, 2014). Ohio is a hub for higher education. Retention is an increasingly important topic for universities to survive and thrive in a time of declining

enrollment and economic downfall. "Legislatures, policymakers and accreditors have singled out retention as a key measure of institutional effectiveness" (Kinzie, 2014, p. 332). The previous chapter highlighted some difficulties institutions are having in retaining Black students in the United States and this institution shares that difficulty, retaining only 54.87% of Black students from Fall 2012 to Fall 2013. The entry class of Black students in Fall 2012 had 76 students and only 37 of them returned to the university in the Fall of 2013 (48.68%).

A benefit to conducting my research at the same institution where I serve this population of students is that I had already built up a level of trust with the prospective participants. I am heavily invested in the participants' acclimation and level of comfort at the university and my perceptions of the experiences of the participants align with my own research interests. Working at the institution, I have an advantage of working for the students on a daily basis and my ability to improve or change the programs and services provided to them is sincere and genuine. As this institution makes gains in serving and retaining Black students, knowledge about successful programs and initiatives can be shared with practitioners at peer institutions, including the 110 other non-profit colleges or universities in Ohio.

Data Analysis

As the data collection is multifaceted, so is the data analysis process. Each piece of data has been analyzed distinctly and compiled together in the last two chapters of this research study (Results and Findings, Implications and Recommendations). Rereading McNiff and Whitehead (2005) helped me to recognize that while I have a lot of data, only some of it will be used as evidence in my research. This section will explain how I analyzed each of the data pieces to determine if it was meaningful and added knowledge to this specific research project.

The central thought to the decisions that I made when analyzing the data was in examining how the participants understood or created meaning out of the experiences that they had by placing the data in categories according to their emotions or physical reactions to their experiences. For example, if the participant stated they were hurt or upset about an experience they interpreted as racially-based, then I would categorize it with microaggressions and cultural incidents. Starks and Trinidad (2007, p. 1373) summarize the analytic method of a phenomenology study as one that identifies aspects of the phenomenon and places them into categories to describe the common components of the experience. While there are several different patterns to follow in a phenomenological analysis, the pattern that I used, as explained by Smith, Flowers and Larkin (2010) included reading and rereading the transcript that I typed, making initial notes about the comments made, looking for emergent themes and then searching for connections across themes. I chose this pattern because it allowed me opportunities to reflect on the data as I first transcribed it and then read over it multiple times. Moustakas (1994, p. 47) states, "The method of reflection that occurs throughout the phenomenological approach provides a logical, systemic, and coherent resource for carrying out the analysis and synthesis needed to arrive at essential descriptions of experience." I utilized a data analysis computer software program called Atlas-ti. I chose the Atlas-ti software program because of its ability to code images and the way the data can be organized and manipulated into categories and easily recovered. The sections below will outline how I was able to follow a phenomenological analysis method within my study for each of the data collection methods.

Questionnaire

A visual learner, the first thing that I did with the data derived from the questionnaires was to record it into excel spreadsheets and create charts that showed common factors and trends between the answers that the participants provided. Several of these charts have been used in the next chapter to report the findings. In regards to the population of the hometowns of the nine participants, I used a census reporting site to look up the cities that the participants listed as their hometown. The beginning of the questionnaire only uses nominal scales of data (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2011, p. 604-605). This means the information is generally categorical, such as biographical data. This quantitative piece in the research study used simple descriptive statistics to present the data. For example, in the Results and Findings section, I will give the range of ages of the participants as 20 to 25 with the median age of 21.8.

The questions in the second part of the questionnaire, those that addressed individual characteristics and their feelings about a Black culture on campus, were discussed as part of the group interviews and were inputted and analyzed in congruence with the data generated from the group interviews. I input the data into the Atlas-ti program in the same manner as the transcriptions from the interviews and then went back through and coded them into the themes and sub-themes mentioned later in this chapter. The participants were asked to identify three terms that described their physical characteristics, personality and interests as various ways of thinking about identity. Shinebourne (2011) describes that phenomenology is influenced by symbolic interactionism or the idea that people give meanings to things based on social interactions of other people. Phinney's work (1992) on ethnic identity formation is based on the idea that identity is formed in part by how others outside the group perceive it. The questions

within the questionnaire allowed the participants to think about how they self-identified their own characteristics and cultural group.

As I typed up the transcripts from the group interview section where this part of the questionnaire was discussed, I looked back at the questionnaires to see if the information there reflected what the participants shared. If there were parts that were not shared in the group interview, then I added them into the Atlas-ti database to be coded. There were several connections that were drawn just from the information in the questionnaire. The participants came from background environments that were much more diverse and more heavily populated than Muskingum University's setting. The participants predominantly listed physical characteristics that were associated with being Black. Six of the participants listed music in some way as an interest on their questionnaire and all students were able to continue doing the activities that interested them while a student at the site institution. There were other parts of the questionnaire that did not have connections between the participants, such as the academic fields they were studying or the adjectives they selected to describe their personalities. The findings section in the next chapter will go through the questionnaire results in greater detail.

Image/Item

The item or artifact that each participant provided at the first group interview went through a content analysis based on the descriptions and explanations by the participants of those images. During the group interview, each participant shared what the item was that they brought and why they selected it. I did not provide interpretations for the images as "the researcher has to be alert not to over-interpret photographs or read into them meanings which are barely supportable by the material itself" (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2011, p. 591). For

example, one student brought in a large Victoria Secret bag for her item. My assumption would be that she brought in an item from an expensive store to define her identity to show off in front of her peer group but she spoke about the need to have a bag with her at all times as a comfort item. When analyzing images in a phenomenological method, it is important to listen to what the participants are saying about the item as well as to understand the bias of the researcher in alignment with Moustakas's use of epoche (1994).

The data generated as the participants discussed their images was then transcribed and inputted into the same software program that I used for the group interviews. I took a picture of each of the items brought in by the participants and I entered the picture into the Atlas-ti program. The words to describe the item, or to describe the participant in relation to the item, was coded alongside the picture in the Atlas-ti file. These images are discussed in greater detail in the next chapter.

The images that the participants brought in helped to support the data used to answer the research questions and also to bring up topics that were not discussed in any other part of the interview. For example, one participant had a picture of a musically-based tattoo and her discussion of the role that music plays in her life was a common characteristic of many other participants in the study. Another participant brought in his father's Bible as his item and this item opened up discussions about the influence of religion on the lives of the participants, a topic that was not discussed after the items were put away. The items that the participants chose to bring in and share with the group were ones that each student identified as being important to understanding who each one was as a person (Meo, 2010).

Group Interview

I took notes and also audio recorded the group interviews. I took notes on a laptop because I can type faster than I can write and I wanted to devote as much attention to the participants as possible without having an outside note taker in the room to maintain the level of trust that I had established in the earlier steps of the research process. Maynard (2006) discusses the techniques of a conversation analysis approach which utilizes observation of the participants in addition to the words that are spoken and watching for cues such as stalling or bluntness to cover for certain feelings that the participants have. I utilized some of these techniques as I wrote in my notes, and then added to the transcriptions, if they were gesturing or laughing or responding in non-verbal manner. For example, there were several times when I wrote the word laughter or smiling when the participant was describing an incident that would not typically be found to be humorous. After looking back through my notes, I noticed how the participants were able to use humor to cover up feelings of vulnerability or embarrassment.

Another technique that I implemented was based on *The Listening Guide* (Gilligan, Spencer, Weinberg, & Bertsch, 2006) where I listened to identify the stories of the participants, the values and feelings that they shared, and the corrobation of those accounts by other participants. This method of analysis was consistent with the concepts of horizonalization and thematic portrayal explained by Moustakas (1994). Horizonalization is looking at the experiences with equal value and thematic portrayal is clustering those meanings or horizons into core themes. This method helped me to see if there were patterns to the stories and experiences of the participants or if the story was an isolated incident. This can be especially salient when working with marginalized populations and possible discrimination trends. For this study, it was helpful when looking at experiences of microaggression.

The group interviews were transcribed by me and then entered into the Atlas-ti computer-generated software analysis program with each interview group being a separate entry into the program. This created a total of four transcribed interviews, a collection of answers from the questionnaires and nine pictures taken of the items brought in by the participants as the total collection of data submitted into the Atlas-ti file.

Once all this data was entered, I started using the software program to color code various common themes or components. I read through the transcriptions multiple times pulling out the comments and experiences of the participants. I was interested in the components of the experiences that were unique or stood out, a concept of phenomenology known as invariant horizons (Moustakas, 1994). Some of these themes were easily recognized because of their prevalence in the literature as a cultural trait. I was also influenced by published research that addressed retention concerns for Black students. Brooks, Jones and Burt (2013) gave a template of three items that influenced retention of African-American males: their social-emotional needs, their families/belonging, and their academic performance. Other themes were ones that I only noticed after going through the data multiple times and moving codes into common themes and subthemes. This is an important step in analysis of a phenomenological research project (Shinebourne, 2011). For instance, I did not have an overwhelming connection to athletics or sports but I did have several different areas, such as fashion and money that encompassed the same competitive nature as sports. The following list shows the categories that I had created in Atlas-ti with the number in parentheses showing the number of codes associated with that category:

Black Collegiate Culture (101)	Language (31)	Money (28)
Characteristics (75)	Gossip (30)	Music (22)
College (60)	Parenting (29)	Time (9)
Clowning (32)	Mentoring (28)	Physical (4)

Some themes that I had anticipated did not come to fruition at the level that I expected. For example, I had read a lot about the role that mentor programs have with undergraduate students (Kelly & Dixon, 2014; Campbell & Campbell, 1997) and the site university has several different mentorship initiatives so I was drawn to this theme to see if there was any correlation between these mentorship programs and the support the students felt on campus. None of the participants mentioned either program or remarked about any type of organized mentoring relationship on campus. We did have discussions about mentoring and supportive individuals or groups on campus, hence the number of times it was coded within the discussion, but the two organized mentorship programs on campus were not influential to this group of participants. This is why bracketing is so important to a phenomenological study such as this one, if I focused on how important mentoring was to me then I may not have been able to see the participants' reality which did not include an influential formal mentorship program (Moustakas, 1994).

Next, I grouped the codes into a series of themes and sub-themes based on the coded data that derived from the questionnaire, the images and the group interviews (Shinebourne, 2011). Some themes were more apparent to me because of their dominance in literature (such as language) while others were themes that became apparent due to the frequency and level of importance given to various topics by the participants (such as family). These themes and subthemes were:

- Characteristics- demographics, hometown, physical traits, personality traits
- Language- audience, terminology, cultural connector, code-switching, music
- Competition- dress, money, relationships, gossip
- Black Culture- family, spirituality, childhood experiences, tenacity, mentorship
- Collegiate Culture- transitioning, social norms, school setting, minority status, support

Selective or theoretical coding occurs when there is a core category, such as collegiate culture that has multiple other categories that are centered on this core category (Forrester, 2010). The categories of language and competition are placed within the context of the core category of the collegiate culture. With this type of coding, it is common for the coding to be abstract and that it appears frequently within the data. The themes and subthemes will be revisited in the findings section where the discussion on the research questions includes demographics and traits, language, family, competition, experiences, tenacity, and support.

Finally, I looked at each research question individually to see which sections of the data helped to answer the question. This brought out additional codes for support and factors that were influenced by the PWI characteristic of the institution. Some of these were invariant horizons, unique components that pertained to the experiences of the participants (Moustakas, 1994). Code switching is an example of an invariant horizon in my study. In order to stay consistent with the phenomenological nature of this research project, my analysis focused on the experiences as described by the participants as opposed to my thoughts and feelings about what they shared and maintained the student perspective as described in the beginning sections of this chapter (Frost, 2011). The information used to answer the research questions is compiled in its entirety in the next chapter: Results and Findings.

Study Limitations

There are several limitations that I encountered in this study including a low number of participants, conducting research at the institution where I am employed, and using group interviews instead of individual interviews. There is a rationale behind each of these limitations that may not be applicable to other research-practitioners but factored in this particular research design.

There were nine participants that contributed to the study. Originally ten students signed up with one withdrawing from the study. In the academic semester that the research took place, there were 114 students that qualified to participate in the study and each was given an email invitation. That means approximately 9% of the qualified population responded to participate. My intention was not to conduct a study that was representative of all Black, undergraduate students but to study the phenomenon of Black, undergraduate students enrolled at a rural, PWI. Using this methodological approach with the nine participants allows me to understand more about the participants' experiences and compare them with topics from other published research.

I was very conscious of my position of power and influence over the prospective participants at the site university so I deliberately chose not to push too hard for participants. I sent out one email invitation on January 15, a reminder on January 22 and the deadline to signup was January 24. Even though I had access to the potential participants' private email addresses and cell phone numbers, I chose to only contact them using their university-delegated email accounts. I also chose not to approach groups that had a higher percentage of Black students (such as the Black Student Union or the football team) to recruit participants because I did not want to use my power as an inside researcher in that capacity. In addition, I did not want this

research project to be confused with any other aspect of campus where the participant would feel they had to participate because of an association they had at the university.

Not only were the number of overall participants low, but they were all students in their last two years of school. While this allowed for some really strong insight into the experiences they have had overall at the institution, the experiences of the students in their first year or two of study was not heard from participants that had those experiences fresh in their minds. Two years ago, I conducted a series of all first-year student focus groups at the same university and I appreciate the value of hearing from students in the beginning of their studies and the empowerment I felt of being able to make changes that impacted them during the time they were pursuing their studies. It was a rewarding feeling that encouraged me during stressful times. These voices were absent from this study. Having participants that have already negotiated the transition to college life may reflect in the answers to the research questions as students at that level tend to have a higher cognitive and ethnic-identity awareness versus traditional-aged students just entering college for the first time as shown by the work completed by Chickering (Evans, Forney & Guido-DiBrito, 1998).

In addition, choosing to conduct the research on the same campus where I am employed also placed some limitations on the study. Blaxter, Hughes and Tight (2010) give some applicable examples including: it may have been harder for participants to feel a sense of anonymity, my own conclusions may be rejected or dismissed by my supervisors and colleagues, I could overlook something that would be more apparent to an outside researcher, or I may learn more by conducting my research at another campus. Yet, these limitations were outweighed by my desire to do an action research project in a setting where I could, upon completion of the project, make immediate changes that would impact the lives of the students at Muskingum

University and those in the surrounding universities as I share my findings with colleagues in my state and region. This has certainly proved to be truthful as changes to the services provided by the Multicultural Student Office were being implemented even as I finalized this written report.

The final limitation was created when I decided to use group interviews as opposed to individual interviews. I may have been able to gather much more data on each participant as an individual if I had interviewed them separately. Several research guides suggest that some participants that are more timid about speaking up in a group setting may have disclosed to me experiences and feelings that they held back from saying in the group interviews (Blaxter, Hughes & Tight, 2010; Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2011). The participants may also have wanted to present themselves in the best possible manner in front of their peers and hidden aspects about their experiences or identity that ashamed them. This is common in photo-elicitation studies as society has expectations on what should be photographed and participants may mold their selected images to those expectations (Croghan, Griffin, Hunter & Phoenix, 2008). Despite these drawbacks to using group interviews, there were benefits that outweighed the loss. I wanted the students to hear the experiences of their peers so they would know that they were not alone and that other students had persevered through some obstacles to continue to study at Muskingum. I also wanted to see how they interacted with each other and to be able to use my visual observations of the group dynamics as a way to witness the culture of the participants. As mentioned earlier, group interviews are helpful for outside researchers as participants can ask each other questions, challenge each other's statements and guide the research towards what is important for them. I did not encounter any students that were timid about speaking to the group, in fact my transcripts of the interviews are filled with my notations of overlapping conversations where the participants' comments and experiences built off of one

another to produce a rich and informative stream of knowledge. Finally, I wanted to make this an action research project that I could sustain on top of my typical workload in future years. When Coghlan and Brannick (2010) discuss action research, it is always cyclical in nature in that the results of one research project fuels the next; conducting group interviews in the future to continue to seek new knowledge about the students that I serve is something that I can commit to with my available time.

CHAPTER FOUR

Results and Findings

The previous chapter primarily outlined the way in which the research was designed and implemented. This chapter will report on the data that was collected and the evidence that was generated as a result of the data analysis. The beginning of this chapter will discuss the participants, their demographics and their chosen images to get a better understanding of the participants. The bulk of this chapter will focus on the four research questions (found in Appendix A) and will use the data to answer the questions as it pertains to the participants in this study. The final chapter of this research project will discuss the implications of these findings upon the larger population of Black students studying at primarily White, rural higher education institutions and provide recommendations to research practitioners in the field.

The results and findings reported in this chapter apply to a very specific population of students, namely the nine participants that self-identified as racially Black that attended Muskingum University and chose to take part in this study. While I could have pushed for a larger participation rate, I chose not to do so because I did not want the power of my position at the university to influence a student's decision to either participate or not participate. An unexpected result of this study that occurred was that the undergraduate students that chose to participate in the study were all students in their third or fourth year of studies at the institution. While the participation number is small, the findings can be compared to the topics discussed in the literature review for a more holistic picture.

The participants were not given pseudonyms, instead they are simply identified as a participant in the study. At times when it was necessary to report on comments made by more than one participant, I have labeled them as Participant 1 and Participant 2. Participant 1 in one

comment series is not necessarily the same participant as Participant 1 in another comment series. As the research took place at a small institution where many of the students know each other, I did not want any potential students, faculty or staff members reading this study to be able to connect comments together and recognize the identity of a participant.

Participant Demographics & Identities

In this study, there were nine undergraduate students that participated. All participants self-identified as being racially Black, 4 were men and 5 were women. The ages of the participants ranged from 20 to 25 years old with the median age being 21.8. The participants had been enrolled as undergraduate students (students pursuing a bachelor or baccalaureate degree) an average of 7.1 semesters with the lowest number of semesters attended being 5 and the highest number being 10 semesters. A semester at this institution is typically 15 weeks long and most undergraduates enroll in two semesters per academic year; typically students that are "successfully progressing" towards graduation will complete a bachelor's degree in 8 semesters.

Some of the information from the questionnaire has been collected together in the chart on the next page to allow a more holistic picture of each participant to be seen. While the physical characteristics listed tend to be descriptive of their racial or ethnic group, their personalities and interests are very individual and diverse.

Student	Age	Gender	Major	Physical Characteristics	Personality Characteristics	Favorite Activities
1	22	M	Sociology	African American, male, bigger	Silly, emotional, caring	Playing games, getting to know people, joking
2	25	M	Communications	Tall, build (bulky), Black	Funny, strong-minded, stubborn	Playing video games, hanging with friends, homework
3	20	F	Criminal Justice	Pretty hair (curly/straight), average height, "lightish" brown eyes	Caring, emotional, giving, awesome	Sleep, listen to music, workout
4	21	F	Child/Family Studies	Caramel, short (fun-size), beautiful	Joyful, talkative, friendly, loyal	Singing, dancing, watching movies
5	22	F	Criminal Justice, Sociology	Color of my skin, lips, hair	Loving, caring	Singing, watching movies, watching babies
6	21	F	Nursing	Skin color, height, extremely curly hair	Nonjudgmental, compassionate, ambitious	Writing, singing, volunteering
7	21	M	Religion	Athlete, hair, the way I dress (bright)	Ambitious, driven, determined	Make money, make more money, save
8	22	F	Political Science	Almond shaped eyes, legs, smile	Goofy, intelligent, caring	Sleeping, eating, singing
9	23	M	Marketing	Black, eyes, well-fit	Self-centered, distant/determined, carefree	Make music, football/hustle, make videos and take photography

Figure 4.1 Participants' Demographics

Some of the items on the questionnaire were looking for information on an estimate on the percentage of Black students at their high schools (Figure 4.2) and the population of their hometowns (Figure 4.3). While I asked the participants to be as specific as possible for their hometowns, many of them listed a large city name instead of a section of the city. They may have done this for multiple reasons. Perhaps they are from the very center or downtown section of the city. They may have become accustomed to simply saying they are from that city during their time at Muskingum University because of the geographical distance to their hometowns and the perceptions that others won't understand the layout of the city. Another reason could be that the students feel connected or a sense of belonging to the city in the same way they may feel like they belong to the United States or to the university. This sense of belonging as part of Phinney's theory on ethnic identity (1992) will be examined in additional sections of this chapter.

In regards to the data, the population for the cities/towns named by the participants was compiled from the 2010 United States Census Bureau (U.S. Department of Commerce). The number in parentheses in Figure 4.3 denotes the number of participants that consider that city their hometown. The demographics of their hometown are important because Watkins (2001) discusses the manner in which higher education is structured around a White, European culture and that Lee (2009) displays the difficulty in displaying a culture where others are uneducated about the identity of that culture. In addition, when studying identity development theories, both Chickering and Erikson cite the importance that environment plays in shaping experiences (Evans, Forney & Guido-DiBrito 1998). As the analysis in the following sections will show, how the participants feel about their own ethnic group, their language skills and their cultural capital are all influenced by the environment of their upbringing. All except one participant

came from high schools where they were not a racial minority. Defining and accepting their culture may not have been as necessary as it is now that they are studying in a predomently White university and village.
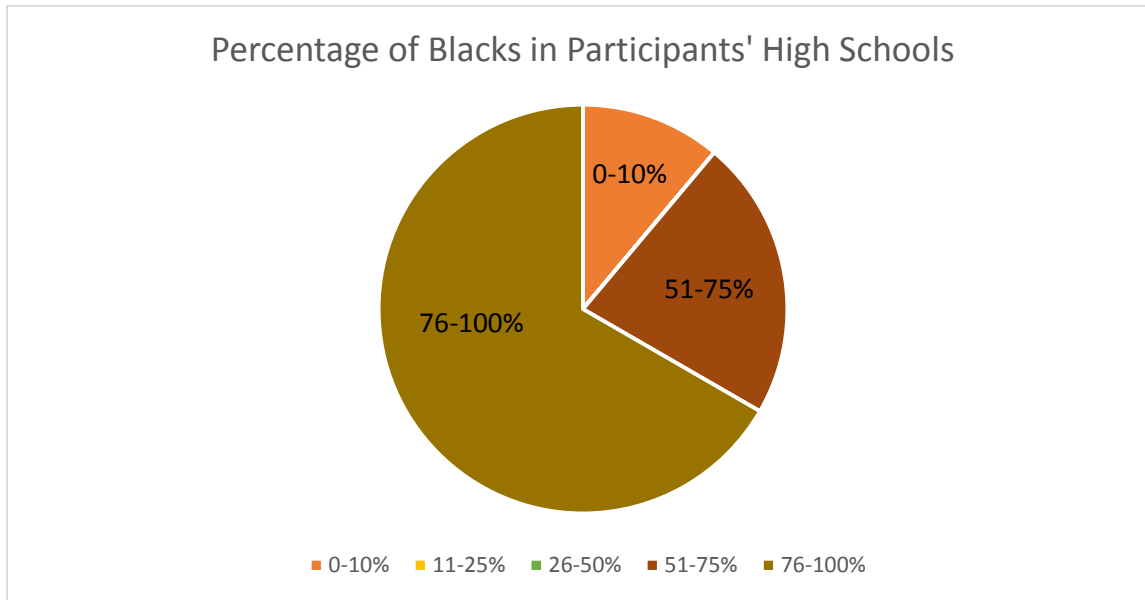
Figure 4.2 Percentage of Blacks in Participants' High Schools
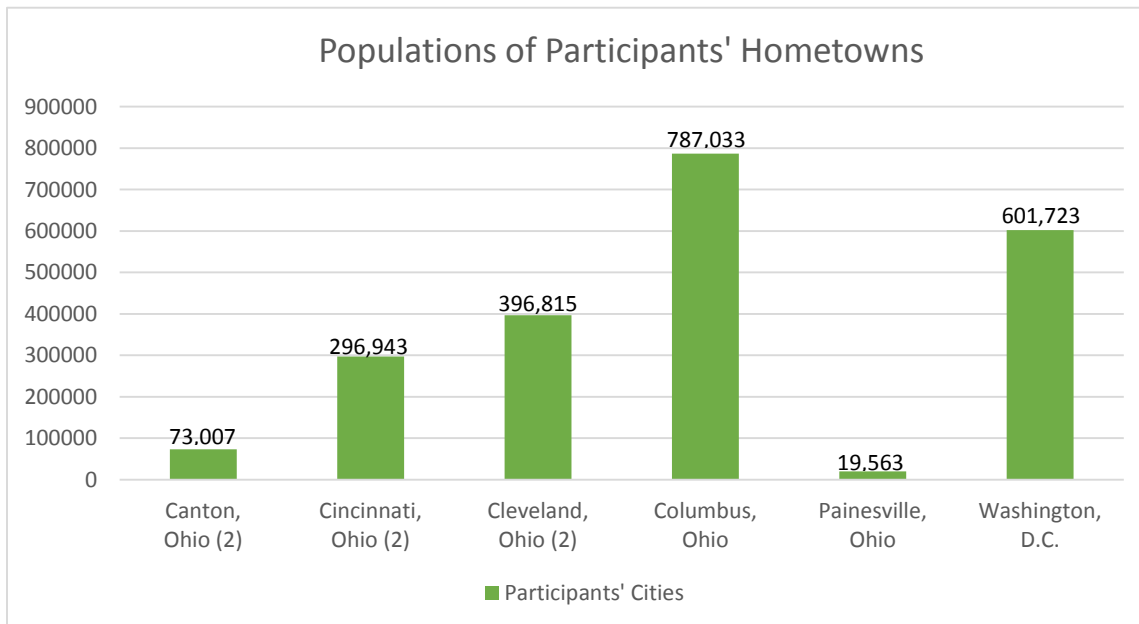
Figure 4.3 Populations of Participants' Hometowns

Identity through Images

Like the section above which provides demographic information, this section is to provide information about the participants to help give the reader a more holistic understanding of the participants. This section will just examine the images or items that each participant brought into the group interviews. These items will also be discussed again throughout the findings as various ones pertain to different research questions and themes. This format allows the reader to see separately the data derived from the images before it is triangulated together with the data from the other parts of the study.

After gaining consent, the very first thing that I asked participants to do in this study was to bring in an item that represented who they were. The participants had several weeks to think about what they would like to bring in that would best reflect their own identity. The images or items described below represent how the participants view who they are at this specific moment in their lives. Each group interview began with the participants sharing their item and why they chose that particular item or image. After each participant shared the image, the group was asked if any of the images that other participants brought in also resonated with them and finally the group was asked at what age did the image or item begin to represent the participant.

Figure 4.4 Group 1 Images

The first item shared was a black and white picture of a male lion lying down with its head facing forward. The participant stated that he chose the picture because, "I felt like I was a king, very strong, and if you threaten my pride, I'm gonna kill you. Pretty much I'm strong." He shared that he began to feel protective of his family around the time he was ten years old. His mom worked two jobs and he did odd jobs around the neighborhood as well, from typical lawn mowing to more illegal activities when his mom was not around. "She (mom) taught me how to fend for myself. I think that is where the leadership qualities come from, it started when I was ten years old." This participant shared that he was raised in a neighborhood filled with crime and that he did not know anyone else from his neighborhood that attended college. This leadership characteristic as well as the importance of family will appear again in this chapter.

The next participant brought in an oversized should bag from Victoria's Secret. She shared that she brought in "my purse, my bag. I have to carry a purse or some type of bag

everywhere I go. If I don't, then I feel like I'm missing something and I don't like that feeling. I have to carry a bag. Whether it is a big bag or a purse, it has to be a bag size. It can't be something small." Another participant said they could connect to that feeling that he had to have pockets. He was connecting her item with the ability to carry something or to have with them items that they believed to be important. However, the bag served as more than just a convenient way to carry items. When asked at what point in her life she started wanting to carry around a bag, the participant replied, "Since I started in college, when it got stressful." In this manner, the carrying of a bag became a coping mechanism as a way to raise her feeling of security as well as a fashion statement exemplifying her cultural capital.

The third participant in the first group brought in a bright green pillow that was filled with microbeads and in a cylinder shape. When she first started to share that she brought in her pillow, one of the participants was quick to ask if it was because she was lazy. She rebuffed, "It's actually the exact opposite. It's cause I am always tired. Cause I'm always working. I never have time to just sleep and relax." A different participant validated, "It's your me time." While in college, this participant works an average of 25-40 hours each week with late night hours in addition to competing in a collegiate sport. Needing to work so many hours is more likely for students coming from a lower socio-economic status. Working pulls students away from the world of the college (Tinto & Goodsell-Love, 1993) and results in a higher probability of dropping out of college (Dennis, Phinney & Chuateco, 2005).

The final participant in this group brought in a picture of himself on a stage at a summer camp surrounded by kids. He shared, "I think that this image is a good representation of me. This is me at camp. I am singing a song to all the campers and this really represents me. Laughter. Kids." When asked what age the picture started to represent him, he replied that he

didn't know in regards to mentoring younger kids but that he was always the class clown in

school and enjoyed making people laugh.
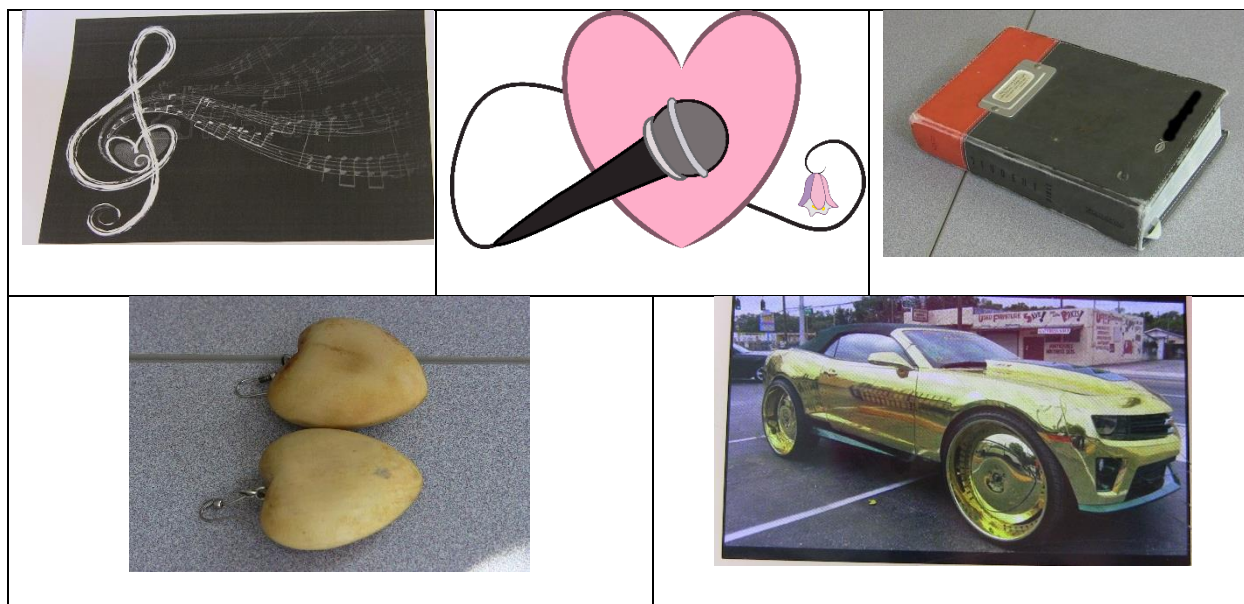
Figure 4.5 Group 2 Images

The second group had much more overlap between the images that they shared. The first

two participants to share their items both had music as the central focus. The first showed a

printed picture of a heart enclosed within the musical staff and musical notes across the page.

The participant shared, "I had an image of a heart and music because I love people-I don't know

why sometimes…but, I love music. Music is what I am and love is what I am." The next

participant shared an image of a microphone and stated, "Mine is of music because I can express

myself through music. The way I feel, the up-tempo or the words." Music, a form of cultural

capital, will be examined later in this chapter.

The third participant brought in a Bible. He shared, "This is my father's study Bible, he

gave it to me my freshman (first) year. And it has just meant a lot to me because he (father) is

the first man to introduce me to Christ and he is my best friend." After all participants shared

their items, other students in the group interview stated that they also felt connected to music or

the Bible. One stated she felt the Bible also represented her because she had been attending church since she was born. Another said the Bible and music, "For as long as I can remember, my father, since I was like 5 or 6 years old, he helped me until I was like 14 singing in the choir and every time I go somewhere to sing or anything, I think of him." A fourth participant said that music resonated with him because he liked working on videos and music videos. Another participant said she also connected with the Bible but the fifth participant stated, "not me, I question the Bible a lot so I can't say that (it represents me)." For both music and the Bible, both cultural capital items, four out of five participants said that they connected with the item brought in.

In regards to the age of the participants when they began to feel these items represented them, the one that brought in the Bible said he really felt connected to it his sophomore year (second year at college). "My freshman year, I didn't go to church, I still don't really go to church because I go home and work and I don't know, I was just kinda lost for a little bit, I questioned my own faith but I was so blessed, I just turned my back on Him (God) and He continued to bless me every day." The participant that had the picture of the heart and music said she was not sure of a particular age when she felt connected to music. She remembered seeing her older sister engaged in musical activities but the participant stated she had always been quiet growing up. Her voice trailed off in uncertainty. The other participant that had music in her image said she also was not sure at what age she felt connected to music. "I can't say I remember this, but they say as a baby when you hear music, I don't know who discovered I could sing. I have parents that listen to all types of music." Her image of a microphone and her disclosure about singing showed that it was not just listening to music but singing it that formed part of her self-identity. The participant that enjoyed making music videos said he felt connected

to music in sixth grade. "My friend, he was working on a song and I was like, yeah, I was listening to music then."

Another image that was shared within the second group was a pair of wooden heart earrings. The student explained, "These are my earrings, these are probably my favorite pair of earrings. I picked these because I love jewelry and I have a very caring heart for people, especially to be a nurse, you have to be selfless and care about people and their needs before your own, even if you think their needs aren't that important (laughs)." She stated that she was home-schooled when she was younger and that one day she saw another girl wearing some really great jewelry. "Now, I have so many pairs (of earrings). I have here (at college) maybe only half of what I have at home. I just think a good piece of jewelry, it's really expensive. It fits your personality and it can change. I'll like think of myself as a jewelry chameleon…if I feel like being a little more out there then I will put on bigger hoops or a brighter color. If I am feeling more calm (sic) then I will put on a more classic, laidback piece or I just won't put on any jewelry at all, which is very rare. It is very rare that I won't wear any jewelry at all."

The final participant shared a picture of a yellow/gold colored sports car. "I brought in a picture of a car, I love cars. This is a sports car. I picked cars because it is a means of transportation, it is the easiest way to get to where you want to go, better than like a bicycle or anything. You can go the distance with a car." He said he felt connected to cars when he was young, around three years old. "I loved cars, always, I think that is all little boys." Another participant said he also felt connected to the car picture. "I love cars. I love having my own car but I just really love cars."

Some of the images discussed had direct correlations to the topics that were examined as part of this study. Fashion, music, religion and cars are forms of cultural characteristics and also

help to define the cultural capital of the participants. Money, an indicator of socio-economic

status, was part of the description of the car, the earrings, the pillow and the bag that were

brought in. The lion and the picture of mentoring the kids at a summer camp are both indicators

of how those men felt within their group and both depicted them with leadership qualities.

The last two sections have helped to create a portrait of the nine participants by sharing

the data gained from the questionnaire and the images brought in for the study.   Relevant parts

of this data, combined with data from the group interviews, appear in the analysis below as the

four main research questions are discussed.

Research Question 1

What are the common cultural components for this participant group?

It would be overwhelming, maybe even impossible, to identify common cultural

components for all Blacks or for all students so it is important to reiterate that this research

question is only looking at the common cultural components of the nine Black, undergraduate

students that participated in the study at Muskingum University. Utilizing Phinney's ethnic

identity theory is helpful when examining common group characteristics. While each ethnic or

racial group being studied will have unique characteristics, the process of developing an ethnic

identity, as identified by Phinney, is a general phenomenon that is relevant across groups

(Phinney, 1992). Avery, Tonidandel, Thomas, Johnson and Mack (2007, p. 879-880) summarize

Phinney's theory as stating, "Though each group has its own unique history, values, and

traditions, a sense of identification with or belonging to one's own group is common to all

human beings. Ethnic identity, therefore, can be examined by focusing on the components that

are common across groups, which include self-identification as a group member, a sense of belonging, and attitudes toward one's own ethnic group.

Within my study, the common cultural components that the participants shared included language, the importance of family, a competitive nature, their self-identity, and perceived common experiences. These commonalities were apparent in the themes and sub-themes of the data as language, family, competition and experiences were all identified. Harper and Nichols (2008) also identified cultural characteristics as being more important than racial characteristics in connecting Black students and they pinpointed fashion, music and speech as key components, all of which are integrated into the themes that I identified. Language was an example given by Phinney (1992) as a shared characteristic that can be unique to a group, the importance of family reinforces the sense of belonging the participants have in their cultural group and their attitude about the group, the competitive nature of the participants is part of the developmental process of belonging, their self-identity overlaps the self-identification they have as a group member, and the perceived common experiences helps establish the sense of belonging.

Language

There are multiple facets to the way language was thematic in this study. Language can be a strong cultural connector and this appeared to be the case in regards to terminology, humor, code-shifting and its use through music. In addition, language has been identified as a piece of Black culture as indicated by Baber (1987) in his description of Black communication as encompassing both history and tradition in a unique meshing understood by those within the cultural group. One participant exemplified this difference when he stated, "When we converse with each other we use our own form of lingo or slang or whatever you want to call it."

The barriers and power that is created by language, as described in Chapter 2 (Perry, Steele & Hilliard, 2003; Sunami, 2012; Bertrand, 2010), also supports the need to look specifically at the way language is used by the participants in this research study.

Basil Bernstein was a sociolinguistic whose theory on language showed a direct relationship between societal class and language (Sadovnik, 1995). He classified speech into two categories of linguistic codes: elaborated and restricted (Halliday, 1995). Elaborated code is explicit, individualized and has a high degree of verbal planning. The intention is specific and focused. Elaborated code has a richer word choice and is used more by the middle class, Restricted code is fluent, well-organized and the intention is to reinforce the social relationship between the speaker and listener(s). Restricted code uses more tone, volume and non-verbal cues to communicate and tends to be used more by the lower class (Bernstein, 2003). When Bernstein's work was published in the 1960s and 1970s, the United States was theorizing that Black English was a language and there was push back on Bernstein's work that he was trying to connect race and restricted code or public language as he had it divided at that time (Ivinson, 2011). Bernstein was not trying to stress that one way of speaking was better or worse than another, but that society places a higher value on elaborated codes. His point was that if someone does not have access to learning elaborated code, either at home or school, then that individual is being denied social justice (Halliday, 1995).

Given the strong connections in the United States to race and social economic status, there is concern that Black students studying at universities might not have been given the opportunity to learn to communicate in elaborated codes. Specifically, the participants in this study came from some middle class homes and some lower class homes. Reading the group interview transcripts and looking linguistically at their speech, the participants were able to speak

in both communication styles, elaborated and restricted. Being able to converse in both forms

provided the participants with increased social capital with their peers and also with the

faculty/staff at the university. All the participants were students in their final years of study that

were academically succeeding at the university and being able to communicate in both styles

may be a common characteristic that they needed to be able to fit in at the predominantly White

campus without giving up their own cultural identity.

When specifically asked about having a different language, the participants laughed and

mocked those outside their cultural group that could not understand what the Black participants

were saying in past situations. "Conversation is just different, that's a given. I mean, some

people can catch some things we're sayin'," said one male participant. Another participant

added, "And some can know. There's a White friend of mine since kindergarten and he can

understand everything." Language can be used to bring together those in the cultural group or it

can serve as a divide between individuals. Restricted code is often spoken fast and is used in

informal conversations with social groups where how things are said is more important than what

is actually being said (Bernstein, 2003). While the participants probably did not know they were

using restricted code, they recognized that they were able to speak in a manner that was not the

same as their collegiate peers. One participant remarked, "We (Black men) have our own

language, my (White) fiancé read some of our text messages (gestures to another male

participant) and she was like, 'What the hell?'" Another participant immediately remarked, "It's

how you connect with your own group too. 'Cause then you have something that is just for

you." Creating a common bond within the group makes the individuals feel connected to their

ethnic group and gives them a sense of belonging. Tinto remarks that being connected in a social

group is a strong way to feel incorporated into a college and to persist towards a degree (Tinto,

1988). Language is a clear tool used by the participants to define membership as a Black college student at Muskingum University.

However, language was not just used as a barrier to those outside their ethnic group. There was one participant that had been teased by the other participants in social settings outside of the group interviews and brought up the topic of her "accent". This participant stated that she does not change the way she speaks between home and school and will only adapt her communication style for a business or professional reason. Other participants found fault with this approach and through that she should change her language while at the university to try and, as one participant stated, "Be encouraging to others." Making the decision to either change or not change their communication styles will be discussed more in Research Question 4 as they discuss what cultural shifts were made in order to fit in with the institutional culture.

Being accepted within the institutional culture is important in terms of retention for the students. Tinto (1998, p. 168) states, "The more academically and socially involved individuals are – that is, the more they interact with other student and faculty – the more likely they are to persist." Several participants shared how they used humor as a language tool to be accepted and throughout the group interviews I noticed how three of the participants in particular used humor to ease the tension or take the severity off an impactful comment. One participant shared, "I think since I was in elementary school, I was the class clown. I used to fall out of my desk as a kid to make the other kids laugh. And finally my teacher was like, 'If you are going to keep falling out of your desk then you might as well do pushups.' So I started doing that too, I used to get in trouble all the time when I was at my private school. When I went to a public school, it scared me 'cause I was never around Black kids before. So I started being good instead of funny." Using humor reinforces stereotypes of Blacks from the 1920s when they were perceived

to be clownish in appearance and in personality (Burrell, 2010). This participant may have been comfortable being the class clown with White peers because he believed that to be his role as a Black child. When he switched schools and attended with other Black children, he no longer felt like he had to represent his race and could think about who he wanted to be as an individual. This same participant was the one that brought in the image of himself working at a summer camp where he was with mostly White children and he was using humor on stage with the children.

Speaking in code is a subset of culture that is affiliated with language, as Winkle-Wagner (2009) shows to be just as relevant today at higher education institutions as it was hundreds of years ago during times of slavery (PURE Center, 2002). Although speaking in codes may not be used for such a crucial purpose as it was centuries ago, it is still used today. A participant in a group interview told how he frequently talks in code. He will be talking about getting speakers for a car when his real intention is to convey to the listener that he is talking about getting something else. The participant gave another example where he and his brother were talking about joysticks and another person with them believed they were discussing video game joysticks when the reality was that the brothers were discussing an aggravating female. Being able to converse with each other in code is a way for the brothers to communicate without those outside their social circle grasping what the conversation is actually about. Bernstein (2003, p. 114) remarks, "The ability to switch codes controls the ability to switch roles."

Music is a topic that is connected to language because of the lyrics involved and the ability that music has to pass a message along to large numbers of individuals. Music was mentioned by many of the participants in the study. By triangulating the data, I was able to see overlaps on the topic of music from all three of the data sources. Four of the nine images that

participants brought in to represent themselves had connections to music. On the questionnaire where each participant described various facets of themselves, six of the nine participants had some form of music (music, singing, dancing) listed as a self-descriptor. One of the interview groups had all five participants mention music on the questionnaire that they filled out prior to any discussions with each other and this group also had a discussion on music as a cultural connector.

One participant stated early in a group interview that Whites try to impersonate Blacks through the music that they listen to, but when the topic came up later then another participant stated, "There's no Black music, it's integrated." Another participant immediately replied, "There's no rap station around here, I thought about that yesterday." There were multiple references throughout the interviews of "our music" and music being played loud or blaring.

One participant was quite outspoken about how music resonated with him and his view of his culture. "You can't be Black (at this school), that's what I say…Let me just say this; look, at my last school, we could go into the locker (room), play our music up as loud as we want to and they wouldn't say nothin'. Here? If you talkin' like this in the hallway, they're like, 'Be quiet!' You can't even turn the radio on to any music." At the end of that interview, he added, "It doesn't matter, when I come back from break, I am bringing my speakers and I am hooking them up to my car outside and playing my speakers. So my music gonna play from outside my car, not inside. If someone tells me to turn it down, I don't care what they say, (if) it's Parents' Weekend (or) anything, it's not about that. This is how I act. This is who I am, I like loud music. Who cares if you don't like it? You gonna hear it regardless 'cause I'm playing it." These comments, in addition to the related literature and the images the participants used to

represent themselves, made it evident that music, and language as a whole, was a cultural

connector between the participants.

Tinto (1987) describes two student disconnects that lead to student departure from a

university. One is incongruence which refers to students perceiving they are substantially at

odds with the university. The other is isolation where there is a lack of sufficient interactions

between the student and others at the campus to encourage the student to integrate. While

isolation may lead to incongruence, it is also more preventable. "Congruence need not imply a

perfect or even extensive match between the individual and the institution as a whole. But it

does argue that the person must find some compatible academic or social group with whom to

establish membership" (Tinto, 1987, p. 58). Even if the student is at odds with most of the

institution, such as in the example above where the student is defiant about being able to play his

music, as long as there is at least one group in which he belongs, that can be enough to provide

the social and intellectual support that is needed to persevere at college.

Family

As shown in Hacker (1992), families are a strong factor in Black culture and this

certainly proved to be the case in this research. Several of the participants shared examples of

how their family was their support system (this is expanded upon under Research Question #3

which discusses the support the participants felt that they had) while they were away from home

studying at the university. All participants spoke positively in the group interviews when

mentioning their family in any context, none showed any bitterness or negativity concerning

their family or parents. Several of the images that the participants brought in resonated with the

family connections (lion, Bible, pillow). When thinking about the various theories that connect

with this study, several of them have connections to one's upbringing. In regards to Bernstein's language styles, the communication forms spoken at home become the native way of speaking for that individual which is why codes are transferred from one generation to the next (Ivinson, 2011). Phinney's ethnic identity theory (1992) stresses a higher satisfaction with pride in one's ethnic group to feeling like one belongs to that group, a process that often begins in the home. Likewise, Tinto (2000) states that integration into the university, resulting in persistence at that university, derives from both academic and social engagement which can be strengthened by connecting values with their peers. Ethnic groups are often based on common values (Phinney, 1992). Families are normally the place where group identity values, norms and characteristics are first learned (Armstrong, Ogg, Sundman-Wheat & Walsh, 2014).

One participant stressed the importance her family played in her decision-making process, "I honestly don't know how I am still at Muskingum. I wanted to be one of those people that didn't want to be here. I kid you not, I almost just packed up and left my first year, didn't even take finals…My mom encouraged me to go somewhere else and to this day I still don't like it here but I have a group of friends that get me through a lot of stuff so I guess I want to do this for my little sister and brothers and I will be the first to get through college." The importance of living up to the value placed on a college education is evident where the participant's mom encourages her to be in school and the participant wants to live out that value as a model for her younger siblings. Tinto (1987) speaks about intention and commitment as being vital to retention with commitment including traits such as motivation, drive and effort. The influence of family for the participant above served as the motivation she needed to persist in her educational path.

One participant remarked, "The Black kids here come from completely different households (than the White kids), probably a bit more stricter (sic) parents, they (Black kids) are more outgoing than half the White students that go here. It's like we loud, we always speak our minds when we have an issue." Speaking up is recognized as an ethnic group trait for this participant, one that he learned from his family and that he values. It has become part of his habitus and a characteristic that he associates with his social group (Bourdieu, 1977).

In another group interview, one participant shared how shocked she was at the way students addressed their parents. "Where I'm from, you don't cuss in front of your parents. I don't care how old you are or nothin'. You do not cuss in front of your parents. You don't even raise your voice to your parents. Man, I seen kids here do that and I thought if that was my momma, you wouldn't talk like that. If that was me in that situation, I would never to talk to my momma in that situation, or my dad. The way they talk in front of them, the way they talk to them. It would not slide where I am from. And I don't like it, I don't." Several studies conducted on African American families have connected the high value that respect plays within the family and particularly having respect towards elders has been shown to be a way to honor them and avoid family conflicts (Willis, 1992; Smetana & Gaines, 1999; Dixon, Graber, & Brooks-Gunn, 2008). Mannerisms are a form of cultural capital and this participant struggled with adjusting to the mannerisms displayed by her peers (Bourdieu, 1984).

Sometimes family does not mean just who lives in the household but who lives in the neighborhood and helps to raise the child. One participant grew up with a single mother that worked 1-2 jobs at a time. At one point in the interviews, he stated, "It's like teaching a boy to be a man. Like my mom did the best she could with me but she didn't teach me how to be a

man, she did the best she could with me." Some of his sense of belonging came from the older kids in his neighborhood and the lessons he learned from the street.

For one of the two groups being interviewed, discussions on family were also joined with discussions on spiritual practices or views on organized religion. These topics merged into each other because of the influence of family into the spiritual growth of the participants during their years prior to coming to Muskingum University. This connection to religion ties into Phinney's belief that shared religion is one of the characteristics that can help to develop an ethnic identity (Evans, Forney & DeBrito, 1998). Of the group that did discuss their spirituality, four of the students remarked on their Christian beliefs and the other student in the group states that he believes in God but not in an afterlife. With this group, the discussion of spirituality came at the very beginning of the first interview with the participant that brought in a Bible.

When asked if any of the other participants' images resonated with their own identity, three of the other participants stated that they also connected with the Bible. One stated, "(I connect with the Bible, 'cause I've been to church since I was born." Another participant remarked later in the interview, "Like at home, I go to a Black church and a White church and I was always around White people and it didn't bother me. I think the thing is I have been the only Black student in class and I am like, 'Okay.'" Religion, as an extension of the family cultural factor, is an important aspect for university students because of the positive correlations between religious Black students and high academic achievements as shown in Toldson and Alonzo Anderson (2010).

Competition

While competition was not an area that I questioned specifically about in the group interviews, it became apparent through the transcription and data analysis stages that the participants shared a competitive nature with other students in this collegiate environment as well as with individuals in their hometown communities. This was most apparent in discussions centered on objectified cultural capital such as money and fashion and embodied forms such as gossip about other students and comments from individuals in their hometowns (Bourdieu, 1984). While there is quite a bit of research published on athletic competition and Black students (such as Chideya, 1995; Lancer, 2002; DeMeulenaere, 2010), there is very little about how this competitiveness is portrayed in other areas. An exception to this would be a Harper and Nichols study (2008, p. 208) which stated that Black male students felt in constant competition with each other, "Overall, this competitive ethos cultivated unhealthy relationship among the Black men on these campuses…they believed the common experience of being Black men would compel them to united and support each other; however, they found that such a bond was lacking."

Financial status was one way the students felt competitive. Money was mentioned by the participants in multiple facets during the group interviews, the images, and in the questionnaire and it was mentioned by both participant groups. Two participants connected money to the image or item that they brought to represent themselves. One brought in a picture of a car and it was a "tricked out" sports car. Another brought in her earrings and stated, "I think a good piece of jewelry, it's really expensive, it fits your personality and it can change." One participant's image did not have anything to do with money, but on his questionnaire for his three personality

traits he wrote: ambitious, driven and determined. For his favorite activities, he wrote: make

money, make more money, save.

While I did not ask what the motivational factors are for the participants to be concerned

about financial status, since they are all enrolled in an undergraduate degree program then it

could be that they are trying to obtain a degree to have a better paying career then they would

have otherwise. Obtaining a higher education degree as a means to a higher salary is a common

goal in the United States and is supported by a 25-year study by Day and Newburger (2002).

This idea is also supported by looking at the demographics of White and Black families at the

site university as revealed in Chapter 1. The participants may also be familiar with the

connection between their own racial group and the lower socio-economic status in the United

States (Griffin, Jayakumar, Jones & Allen, 2010).   Regardless of their motivation, they are

correct to associate money or financial status with power. Ivinson (2011) writes about how

knowledge power has shifted from religious leaders to government/policy makers to capitalist

managers. This statement is referring to the power that religious leaders once held over social

communities and how that power shifted to government officials or those that are making

policies and enforcing them. Ivinson (2011) shows that the power now resides in those that have

the highest financial standing or economic capital. What the participants may not realize, as

Bourdieu states (1984), is that cultural and social capitals are necessary to have in addition to

economic capital in order to improve their social class standing. Bourdieu (1984) explains that

cultural and social capital change based on the field so while the participants may have been

successful or even powerful in their hometowns or on campus, the cultural capital and social

capital that they have may not be the ones needed within a different field such as a work

environment within a higher socio-economic level.

One participant remarked, "When I see something, then I have to have it, I just want to be better than before, you know?" A female participant remarked, "I know, I know the girls, the Black girls on this campus is like, attitudes. Everybody has something better, they look better, they got more money and all that." In the other interview group, a participant made a similar comment when she said, "And attitude. Everybody thinks they're better than somebody." The comments from the participants show the feelings of competitiveness between students instead of creating socially supportive groups that both Tinto (1987) and Phinney (1992) stress as being helpful to succeeding in college.

Financial status was shown as an influence in the competitive nature of the students in the manner of dress and fashion, the clothes and shoes they wore and the stores they shopped in. One female participant believed that White students tried to imitate Black students by the way that they dressed but a female in another group thought, "Blacks dress differently than Whites but it is more so to impress people."

The discussions about fashion became more intense as personal style choices or opinions were degraded. These actions are in alignment with the research conducted by Black women on other Black women (Few, Stephens, & Rouse-Arnett, 2003, p. 207) which states, "Clothing, hairstyles, makeup, and personal adornment make political statements that are deeply rooted in the African American experience, as these are cultural expressions, artifacts, and cues that influence the tempo of the information-researcher relationship." Clothing or fashion is a component of cultural capital and knowing how to dress in certain social situations may help an individual belong in a higher socio-economic class network (Bourdieu, 1984; Swartz, 2013). Their comments indicate that the participants in this research study are concerned with belonging in their own social group and ensuring their status within that group. This is not necessarily

indicative of Black students at the site university as the participants were all heavily involved in the Black Student Union on campus and other Black students that are less involved with this group may have cultural capital that aligns more with other groups on campus.

Fashion was a topic brought up early in the group interviews as an image in each group related to fashion (earrings, bag). Both interview groups discussed name brands of clothing when discussing fashion and things they would and would not wear. "No, I ain't never owned Northface (namebrand)," stated one participant. "I don't own it, I don't wear it. 'Cause it's something White people wear where I'm from so we don't buy it. Like Northface is not part of the Black culture in my neighborhood." I replied to this student "So what would you say to Black people that wear Northface?" He answered, "That's what I'm sayin', *here* (emphasis his) they (Black students on campus) dress like White people." Citing Phinney's theory about ethnic identity feelings, one research study (Murray, Neal-Barnett, Demmings & Stadulis, 2012) showed how acting White was perceived to be a negative accusation because it attacked the racial identity of the individual. The participant in my study did not want to appear to act or dress like a White person and was conscious of the brand names worn by different racial groups. The students were trying to ensure their own membership status within the Black student group, this is an important piece of Tinto's (1988) persistence model of being integrated into at least one social group on campus.

Fashion was also an important topic for the participants in the other interview group. One female remarked, "Because the way that our culture dresses, a lot of times you do see White girls dressing the same way as some of the Black girls…okay, they dress like college students. I heard that when I went home…people was like, 'You go to college.'" The discussions indicated that there were differences between what styles and name- brands were considered fashionable,

and even acceptable, from one community to the next. One participant shared his perspective

that people in his hometown community spent money on name-brand clothing, "… 'cause we

look good in the hood." When one female participant mentioned the stores in which she shopped

another female was quick to insult those choices, "I don't wear (store name). It's a mess, it looks

cheap." Outfits were used as status symbols worth bragging about and the way the participants

reacted, particularly the women, to the fashion choices of another participant were at times

derogatory and critical. The ability for some of the participants to purchase expensive items

even though they lived in low class neighborhoods reinforces the idea that some minorities will

choose to stay in neighborhoods where they feel comfortable and where the racism threat is low

instead of moving their family to a neighborhood that may be of a higher economic class but not

have the same support for their racial or ethnic group and have different social and cultural

capital. The participants knew the objectified forms of cultural capital that were acceptable

within the field of their home neighborhoods and within certain social groups at the college they

were attending but they may have to adapt or change their cultural capital to feel integrated into a

new neighborhood (Bourdieu, 1984).

The competitiveness between the women participants and the Black women on campus

was apparent throughout the interviews. Holland and Eisenhart (1990) conducted a study on the

culture of HEIs in sustaining a high pressure peer system where women are judged more on their

relationship(s) with men than their academics. While this study was almost 25 years ago and

was not racial or ethnic specific, that is precisely what has been occurring between the Black

women on campus where the trend has become to gossip and talk about each other as opposed to

supporting and building each other up in order to help each other to be academically or socially

successful. One female participant elaborated, "Let me give you an example. Apparently I came

to school this year with my hair done. And it was a whole conversation of 'We got to step our game up, b-word (bitch) want to come to school with her hair done.' Excuse me? Because I want to get my hair done, it's a problem?"

The competiveness did not stop at the perimeter of the campus property. The participants spoke openly about how others in their home communities viewed them now that they were enrolled in a private, undergraduate university. "At least for me, I've had African Americans like me that don't have the same priorities as me and as a result, I get looked at differently in my community. Like, I get looked at as uppity or snooty or overall the things they think about me. And they can think all those things because I just think about who is going to get the check at the end of the day," stated a participant. While this student is gaining in cultural capital by obtaining a university degree and is trying to give himself a better social class position that has more power, those in his hometown may think that the participant believes their lives are not good enough.

Competition can be a negative trait and a competitive student may be seen as less favorable than a cooperative student but in a 1989 study by Engelhard & Monsaas (as cited in Johnson & Engelhard, 2002) the more successful students were the competitive ones. If a cultural characteristic of this participant group is being competitive, that can be a positive quality used to help them succeed academically. While many of them were not actively involved in athletic competition as they had been when they were younger, the competition-driven characteristics and statements that they shared can be used to propel them to succeed academically. A new initiative that I have implemented to utilize this approach is to have two students each month selected to be in the "Student Spotlight" for their academic success. Students that receive this honor have a brief bio posted on a highly visible bulletin board, have

their names shared to all faculty and staff and receive a small gift. I encourage students to use their competiveness to push themselves academically instead of to discourage those around them.

Experiences

The last common cultural connection for the participant group was the perception that the Black students at the site university had similar childhood experiences, which were different than the experiences of their White peers, and that this commonality provided them conversation topics in everyday social settings. One participant stated that he believed the Black students at the university had grown up in similar, "neighborhoods too. So many of them (Black students) say they come from bad areas, and a lot of White students here don't come from that, they come from farms and working on their parents' farms. I mean there are a few exceptions, but for the most part, we just come from different walks of life." Sanchez, Lambert and Cooley-Strickland (2013) support this notion, stating that African Americans growing up in low-income, urban environments are more likely to have a negative life experience than those being raised outside of this environment.

Another continued, "Yeah, like depending on where their life is from, they have no idea where some of us come from, what some of us have been through. (We come from) bigger towns. They are not from the same environment; it is just hard for them to understand the daily situations that (Black) students have to deal with back home. I mean, look at my (White) fiancé. She is from a real small town, just a little bigger than New Concord. And the way she thinks is so different from me, my guard is always up and she is more welcoming."

The perceived common experiences provide the participants with a sense of belonging to their cultural group. A participant said, "I feel like it is the little things that we just sit around and talk about now.   You know, life in high school when people get into fights and people are just standing around on the tables, clapping, you know even though we never seen each other before that time, we've been in a situation like that before, skip class or doing different pranks, how you talk when you get in trouble, Black moms do this and fathers do that- those things that we know from our own lives. And other (Black) people are like 'Yeah, I know exactly what you are talking about.' It is just something we can talk about anytime."

Another participant stated, "We are more alike (with each other) than (with) the people back home because the people back home, I think we all have had a situation where we had to talk our way out of, people we know that got into a better situation instead of trouble or got recommended for something. Because of that, there's that drive that everyone wants to push themself (sic) further."

One participant shared some of his childhood experiences. "I been through a lot in my 25 years, more so than the average student here," he stated. "Even as a kid, you know, I had to go through a lot of counseling because I saw someone get murdered while I was playing basketball. Just blew his brains out right in front of me. I mean, that is just completely different. I was only like 8 or 9 when it happened, I can still remember everything that happened. It impacted me. And changed your perspective on life. It made me worse, you know we were just playing basketball. And I feel like even though situations like that, people in the Black community know people they have lost that they have been injured or killed and that can bring something to relate to because they can see where they are coming from. They can feel that same emotion where someone in a different culture, they wouldn't understand street culture or gang culture because in

their neighborhood they wouldn't have any type of gang. So I mean, stuff like that, the positive and the negative we can relate to."

Rivas-Drake and Witherspoon (2013) conducted a study of Black youths (11 to 14 years old) and the impact their neighborhood played in defining their racial identity. Youths that had higher stress factors in their environment tended to have higher coping strategies that shaped the manner in which they viewed themselves. In addition, in Henfield's study (2011) of Black, middle-school males, the boys already felt acts of microaggression inflicted upon them in their predominantly White neighborhood. The participants in that study felt that assumptions were placed on them that inferred they were intellectually inferior, a second-class citizen, and more likely to commit a crime. They felt like they were to represent their entire race and that Whites portrayed their culture as superior in values and communication style.

Being raised in neighborhoods where the participants were in the racial majority, and then coming to a campus where they were the racial minority impacted the participants in different ways. In many ways, I see a connection between the "silence" portrayed in the study by Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger and Tarule (1986) with some of the participants in this study. One participant tried to speak to White women on campus but just could not seem to find the confidence to maintain the conversation. A rather boisterous male that appeared to have high self-esteem and plenty of assurance to speak his views within the group shared about his hesitation in asking a table of White students if he could move a dining hall chair from their table to his table. Another student in the group is finally learning to receive help, after I have tried to reach out to him for the previous two years. He rarely will ask for assistance and acknowledges that he wasn't ready before but now he does not care how long it takes him to graduate as long as he achieves his goal of finishing the degree. Many of his high school classmates are in prison

and he doesn't know a single person from his neighborhood that completed college. These examples show a hesitation to speak up to others in situations where the others will not simply stay a stranger but will become connected to the participant as a potential friend, teammate or mentor. The participants did not feel a sense of belonging or connectedness in these situations. These examples the participants gave were all from their first two years of study at the university. As described by Phinney (1992), as the participants' feelings about their own ethnic identity increased in a PWI setting, the students were able to feel better connected to the institution.

This participant group, while not necessarily representative of all Black undergraduate students at Muskingum University, shared several common cultural traits such as their language usage, the importance of family, a level of competitiveness, shared attributes and perceived similar experiences. The implications of these traits within a higher education setting will be explored in greater detail in Chapter 5.

Research Question 2

How does being enrolled in a rural, predominantly White institution influence the participants' culture?

Being enrolled at a PWI has been shown to be an influence on various factors of Black students studying there. Baber's study (2012) shows the struggle Black students have to assimilate into the dominant institutional culture. Guiffrida and Douthit (2010) share the challenges Blacks have beyond the classroom that decrease their chances of graduating. Strayhorn (2013) tests how crucial perseverance is for Black students at PWIs. By moving from

a racial or cultural group that had power and status to one that is marginalized, the culture of the participants is one that they think about more often than before they came to college. What they took for granted in high school or in their hometown communities is not necessarily embraced in their new collegiate culture. Bourdieu addresses this cultural shift in his theories on social and cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1984) and habitus (Bourdieu, 1977) which will be discussed throughout this section.

There are three areas that I perceived to be influential to the participants while they were enrolled at a university where the majority of the students are White and the surrounding communities are also White-dominant. These three areas are the habitus embraced at the institution, the participants' resilience to racial ignorance, and the manner in which the participant group portrays their own culture to those outside of their cultural group.

Habitus at the Institution

The main factor of studying at a rural, PWI that impacted the participants was the transition from being in a social setting where they had cultural capital to being in setting where they lacked the skills, mannerisms and credentials to integrate at the university at the same level as their White peers. There are different fields of preference for cultural capital (Bourdieu ,1984). There may be one objectified cultural capital that is powerful and embraced in the hometown neighborhoods of the participants but a different one that is accepted at the site institution. All of the participants chose to study and live at a predominantly White campus in a rural village in the Midwestern section of the United States as was described in more detail in Chapter 1.

Bourdieu refers to a habitus as deeply ingrained habits, skills or dispositions that serve as an example of cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1977; Bourdieu, 1984). Anderson (2004, p. 264) describes a habitus within society as, "comprised not of sets of articulable values or ideals but of dispositions, tendencies that social structures inscribe not upon the minds but into the bodies of the agents who participate in a society's practices." The habitus of a higher education institution, as described by Thomas (2002, p. 430), "refers to more than norms and values, because it is embedded within everyday actions, much of which is sub-conscious." The institutional habitus impacted the participants in the group because many of them came from high schools and neighborhoods that were much larger in population and there was a higher number of Blacks in their social and academic settings and the institutional culture felt different than the neighborhoods they were coming from.

Looking back at the population chart from Figure 4.3, none of the participants had a hometown fewer than 19,500 people and many had hometowns with a population between 295,000-795,000 people. The university in which they were enrolled had approximately 1700 undergraduate students (Muskingum University,2014) in a village of 3000 (City-Data, 2012) residents. The student coming from the smallest population stated, "My (high) school was similar to this (college), so I felt like this is just like a bigger high school. My city was bigger, but the school, it's pretty much the same." She then remarked that she had attended a high school that was similar to the site institution in that they were both private and religiously-affiliated. This participant's cultural capital mirrored the cultural capital of most of her peers at the site institution which allowed her to have the social capital to belong in various groups (Bourdieu, 1984). She had White friends for most of her life and her taste and mannerisms reflected those of her White peers at Muskingum University.

Other participants possessed a habitus that was quite different from the habitus found at the site institution. Part of the adjustment from high school to college life was adapting to new social norms. For example, a participant from a large metropolitan city struggled at the beginning of her undergraduate experience in learning all the different rules and policies, it seemed much more conservative than living in a large metropolitan city. She stated, "I mean, I just feel like there are so many systems that I don't know about, you know? When I got into that trouble, that's the only thing that makes me really think (doubt) about coming here." Her concern is that she will break a rule not knowing she's breaking policy and jeopardize her academic status.

What helped the participants in transitioning to a new cultural setting was feeling comfortable at the university. Tinto (1988) stresses in his retention theory that students must be academically and socially integrated to be successful. To be socially integrated, Phinney states that students must feel like they belong (1992). Tinto (1987, p. 47-8) remarks, "At the very outset, persistence in college requires individuals to adjust, both socially and intellectually, to the new and sometimes quite strange world of the college." The participants remarked how they were able to adjust to living at the site university. The comments were similar to what I had heard from students of various ethnicities over the years. In this study, one participant said, "Yeah, you are not treated like a number like the big colleges. Like, if I get to interact with a teacher, it's pretty cool. If I want I can talk to a teacher. Bigger schools you can't do that, they have assistants and all. If I was at a bigger college, I would definitely not be making the grades." An important note in this participant's comment was that he felt comfortable going into a classroom or office to speak to a teacher. The participant may not feel comfortable approaching a teacher if he does not have a similar cultural or social capital as what he perceives the teacher

would expect (Swartz, 2013).

 One participant shared, "I know a lot of big schools where people can party, Muskingum's culture here really helped me a lot, like I don't like to ask for help, but here it is okay (to ask)." Another participant continued, "I said helpful because if I was at a bigger school I would have so many distractions. Dumb things distract me. Here, I've been able to find my home and get myself together." For this participant, studying at a school that values developing each individual and implementing this value through individual attention matched what he needed to be successful.

 While the close interaction with the faculty can help the students feel connected, their status within the classroom can do just the opposite. One female participant shared what it was like in the classroom as a minority student, "We used to sit and count, like, how many Black kids were in our class. Like I had class with (other Black student) and we were like, 'Humm, we the only two Black people in here,' and then (another Black student) joined the class and we were like, 'Humm, we movin' up in the world. There's three of us.' … It was a huge, huge, culture shock coming here." Another female stated that she just got used to being the only Black student in an all-White academic discipline. Tinto (1998, p. 172) stresses the importance of feeling integrated within the classroom in order to increase persistence. "Students spend more time in their academic work in part because they enjoy working together. Their connected learning experiences enable them to learn and make friends at the same time, thereby bridging the divide between academic work and social conduct that frequently characterizes student life. They become…academically as well as socially integrated." To ease adjustment into a new environment, students need to adapt their cultural and social capital to be successful. Robbins (2000, p. 26), in his book on Pierre Bourdieu, remarks, "Humans inherit dispositions to act in

circumscribed ways. In this sense, they possess an inherited concept of society which they then

modify, generating a new concept which is apt for their conditions and experiences."

And the feeling of being the only Black person around did not stop at the edges of the

university campus either. The campus is nestled between two towns, Cambridge has a

population of 10,635 and Zanesville has a population of 25,487 (U.S. Department of Commerce,

2010). Even in the larger city of Zanesville, the students said that they do not see other Blacks

very often. One remarked, "If I see another Black in Zanesville, we are like, 'What's up dude?'

Every time I see that lady working at (store name), I had to go talk to her. I was like, 'How are

you?' I say that every time I go to Zanesville." Another student continued, "I see Black people

in Zanesville and I'm excited. I'm like 'Hey, hey, what's your name?'"

One male participant said he felt the community and students were sheltered. He stated,

"Yeah, I would definitely say sheltered and rural. Man, cause I met people that had never seen a

Black person in person (another participant agreeing.) until they came to Muskingum and then

they were like, 'Whoa, culture shock.'" This rural feeling experienced by the people that the

participants encountered aligns with the description of rural and urban living where rural is

generally defined as having smaller populations and a lifestyle that is more based on the

agricultural or natural resources found in the area (Berry, Markee, Fowler & Giewat, 2000).

There was very limited research available that compared rural and urban lifestyles outside of

those associated with economic status and health differences. However, the participants felt the

differences in their daily life.

When asked how this setting impacted their experience one male answered, "It impacted

me by making me better. It made me tolerate White people more. I just figured if I can make it

here I can make it anywhere., you know, especially from Cleveland where there are a lot of

Black people and then I come here and there are 150 Blacks out of 1500 people and I'm like, 'Wow.'" Another remarked, "You tolerate. You tolerate a lot."

Racial Tolerance: Examples

Another way that the culture of the participant group was influenced by living and studying at a rural, predominantly White university is that they have had to tolerate racial ignorance or stereotypical comments and actions from their peers and within the community where they reside. These experiences were typically in the form of microaggressions. Microaggressions are actions that are detrimental and subtle, often even unintentional, but still have a psychological and emotional effect on the recipient (Forrest-Bank & Jenson, 2015). The perception of the recipient is crucial as they have to understand the action as a transgression and they also have to decide that it is based on race as a factor (Burrow & Hill, 2012). For the students, the field had changed and they no longer had the powerful attainment of the cultural and social capital which led to uncertainties about the treatments that they received, that uncertainty about the intention of the act is a key factor in a microaggression (Murray, Neal-Barnett, Demmings and Stadulis, 2012).

For all but one of the participants, the participants reported that their high schools had at least 50% Blacks and they had to adjust to being a minority everywhere they went on campus and in the surrounding communities. Bassey (2007) claims that racial oppression is the common Black experience, which is the tie that binds this racial group together even more than their perceived shared childhood experiences discussed in the last section. The participants in this study discussed situations that they had encountered at the site university that required them to have racial tolerance towards their peers. As they shared their experiences, they became more

confident about telling what happened to them. As one participant shared a racist joke told in his presence and how he reacted, another shared a similar experience and then another told about a situation where he was called a racist name. Burke, Cropper and Harrison (2000) state that allowing participants to vocalize their experiences helps to challenge the power in the setting in which they are describing. It becomes almost therapeutic for the participants to be able to share what they had experienced.

Being confronted with derogatory comments about one's ethnic group identity creates a feeling of anxiety, inadequacy and inferiority (Murray, Neal-Barnett, Demmings and Stadulis, 2012). In order to increase the pride they feel for their group, Murray-Johnson (2013) states that sharing experiences and having open communication between members are valuable tools to validate their feelings and raise their attitudes about their own group and how they identify as a group member. Several of the participants shared experiences when they had to confront what others believed to be true about their cultural group.

One female shared an incident in her residence hall her first semester at school, "When I first came here, I came in spring, I lived in the first-year building and I was the only Black girl on the floor and the White girls would come and ask questions and they would irritate me. Like, you know, like hair questions, or like, 'You wash your face in the mornin?' That bothered me. I was like, 'Yeah, we wash our face. Do you wash your face?' Yeah, I wash my face. Right, I know, most of the White girls on my floor would see me in the morning washing my face and they'd be like, 'Why you washing your face?' We don't put on our makeup at night and then get up and go. We wash our face, we wash our face. I was like, 'Are you serious right now? For real? For real?'"

A female participant shared her experience at a place where she regularly volunteered, "Okay, for me it wasn't actually on campus, it was (a local church). It wasn't like outright offensive, but this olderly (sic) lady, she was giving out Christmas presents. But she wrote happy Kwanza on my card (laughter) and I was like, 'Kwanza? What?' I was like, 'No. I don't celebrate Kwanza.' On top of that, she also gave me a picture of the Obama family, no one else got this, just me, so she kinda singled me out and I'm like, 'Wow.'" Harper's study (2006, p. 9) shared how participants in his study also had to struggle with microaggressions, "many black students must contend with feelings of alienation and isolation, racism and discrimination, and environmental incompatibility at PWIs."

Several participants shared experiences of hearing the "n-word" and their reactions to it. There are layers of social and historical perplexities in understanding the power behind this one word, as expanded upon in Kennedy's 200-page book examining the issue (2002). Within my study, one participant shared "My freshman year, he (a White student) was like, 'Let's go beat-up some niggers.' And I was like, 'Are you serious?' They were like, 'He drunk. He drunk' and he was like, 'You not no nigger, you Black.'" Another participant remarked, "Some of them (White kids trying to act Black) hang around the Black kids and they are around the n-word and then they start to get comfortable with saying the n-word."

One woman participant stated, "And I don't want White girls saying it with the 'a' on the end, at this school, it's too much. And you can't do anything to them cause then you have to go in front of the (judicial) board and you should have walked away." A participant in another group interview shared this sentiment, "Cause people say 'So and so called me a nigger' and I'm like, 'Did you fight them?' and they like, 'No, I didn't fight them.' And I'm like, 'Why not?'"

Another participant was amazed when a fellow undergraduate used the word "colored" to describe the Black population. "I was sittin' in the hall with my cousin and we were talking to these White guys and this guy was like, 'Man, there sure are some colored girls here.' And I was like, 'What?' I had never heard that before, never." The participant laughed after retelling of this experience and showed amazement at the outdated and inappropriate terminology used to describe his racial group. The examples given by the participants shows that they were able to persist at this university despite racially-focused comments or actions directed towards them because they had built up a level of tolerance. Yet, the responsibility to be tolerant does not rest solely with the students. Godwin, Ausbrooks and Martinez (2001) state that it is the school's responsibility to be proactive in creating more tolerant individuals.

The experiences and stories shared by the participants are aligned with the subtle, racial microaggression pattern that has replaced much of the blatant racism that permeated American society. Hunn, Harley, Elliott and Canfield (2015) stress the importance for African-Americans and other minorities groups to have validation when these experiences occur and may need help processing the effects. Grier-Reed (2010) cites research that states Black college students at PWIs may have a racially-based microaggression experience an average of once a week. Repeated exposure to negative comments or actions from peers, faculty and staff can impact the students' self-esteem, increase their stress levels, and result in physical and psychological health concerns (Boysen, 2012; Yearwood, 2013). Students struggling with microaggressions may question their own ethnic identity and have lower self-esteem (Phinney, 1992). These students may also lack the social capital to move from their original class membership into the class membership embraced by their peers (Bourdieu, 1984; Sullivan, 2002). Providing support for

students that battle microaggressions will be discussed more in the next section on coping strategies and will be revisited in the recommendations section.

Racial Tolerance: Coping Strategies

The examples from above all occurred at the site university but the students there are not alone in their experiences. Johnson-Ahorlu (2013) found that the biggest barriers today for African Americans in higher education are stereotypes and stereotype threat. Larnell, Boston and Bragelman (2014) found similar findings in their study of academic situations where stereotyping has created an overrepresentation of African Americans (such as in remedial math courses). The literature review showed how Blacks have been marginalized in the area of education for hundreds of years in the United States and that educational disparity still exists today. Talbert and Goode (2011) showed how Black students had the lowest possibility of any racial or ethnic group to receive a highly-funded, quality educational experience at the primary and secondary educational levels. Burrell (2010) and King (2009) furthered this illustration by showing how Blacks have been portrayed to both Whites and Blacks within the educational system throughout primary and secondary schooling. This historical background creates the setting for stereotypical beliefs and presumptions to be confronted at the university when students are typically at the developmental stage, as described by Erikson, when they are questioning their identity and role in the world (Torres, Jones & Renn 2009).

A study conducted by Brown, Morning and Watkins (2005) showed that African American students had a more favorable perception of their undergraduate experience and higher academic success if they had a lower perception of racism and discrimination. Typically, there would be fewer cultural incidents and discrimination in settings where that cultural group holds

the power and controls the resources so Blacks studying at PWIs would need to develop ways to adapt in order to thrive in a setting where they have little power and control and the number of cultural incidents and discrimination is higher. The participants in my study shared their coping strategies when confronted with uncomfortable situations. Coping is a specific adjustment trait that Phinney and Haas (2003) mention as they explain that students that were coping well did not mention needing support of their peers or faculty/staff but those students that struggled coping to college stated they wished they had additional support.

One participant shared, "We cope with it. Like we all had friends our freshmen year and (he) was like I can't stand White people, I don't wanna be around White people, especially after a few incidents happened, (he) was like I don't wanna be here at all. And I was just like, 'Look, back at home, you never catch a group of Black guys walking down the street without at least one White guy,' so I think we just learn how to work with different ethnic groups and stuff. That has a lot to do with it."

A male participant talked about his approach to defying the perception of Black inferiority; he stated, "I love being in group projects. 'Cause I'm like the only Black person and they expect me to be lazy and when we all meet together I have all my shit together and I'm like now where is all y'all shit at (laughing)?" His strategy was to change the way that others perceived his ethnic group and in this manner he was able to have a high satisfaction level of his status as a member of his group. This participant sought out an embodied cultural capital given by his classmates, he had a desire to be recognized by them for his work and to validate that he belonged at the institution (Bourdieu, 1984, Tinto, 1988).

Another mechanism that the participants used was humor to avoid showing they were hurt, even within their own cultural group. One participant shared, "I raised my hand and when

she (the teacher) called on me everyone laughed. That really bothered me, real bad, for real.

That made me feel like shit (laughs while retelling the story)." Humor can also be used as a way

of degrading another, as indicated by the racially-focused jokes that were told to the participants

during their time studying at the university. While there was general laughing over the retelling

of the jokes, there was also a serious discussion on what should be an appropriate reaction to the

joke-teller and if the one saying the joke was trying to be degrading to the Black student or if he

or she was ignorant and needed to be informed on why it was inappropriate to tell jokes about a

specific racial or ethnic group.

Other comments that the participants made throughout the interviews led to other

examples of how the students found ways to cope with life at the university and to feel

comfortable both within their own group and at the institution. Not only is peer support helpful

for academic adjustment in college (Tinto, 1993) but peers offer psychological assistance and are

resources for overcoming adjustment challenges (Dennis, Phinney & Chuateco, 2005). For

example, each participant stated they found a way to pursue their favorite hobbies or interests

during their time on Muskingum's campus. The participant that displayed a bag for her item

used the purse or bag as a security item. Another participant found comfort in his Bible and a

third participant spoke about how she was always busy and working which she could have been

using as a means to escape the social interactions that she was uncomfortable having with other

women on campus. While their racial identity is a particularly crucial component of their

identity on a campus where the participants are not in the majority group (Jaret & Reitzes, 2009);

their individual identities also need to be nurtured. Being able to participate in the interests that

they have as individuals helps them to feel like they belong on campus and be integrated with the

campus culture (Murray-Johnson, 2013). Despite having experienced situations where some of

the students felt degraded, all the students were succeeding at the university in the academic sense. They created a way of coping based on persevering through the adversity and becoming stronger in their own cultural identity as explained in greater detail in the perseverance section of this chapter.

Cultural Representation

Minority students often feel as if they represent their entire racial or ethnic group with their actions (Winkle-Wagner, 2009). The participants in this research project are a racial minority in an almost homogeneous White university and community. The students make decisions on how to represent not only themselves as individuals but also as a racial group on campus. Phinney's (1992) theory on ethnic identity states that self-concept formed from membership within a group impacts one's ethnic identity which impacts one's social identity. As my goal as a Student Affairs practitioner is to have academically and socially successful college students, I needed to take into consideration how the participants felt about their ethnic group and what perceptions they believed others had of their group. The most public example is the use of the group BSU (Black Student Union). The BSU is a student-created organization used to promote diversity on campus in a manner that the student members choose. At times, I serve as the advisor to this organization and at other times I have an assistant that will advise the group. Having the group on campus allows those looking for a membership group with predominantly Black students to meet that need with this student organization. As stated earlier, even if the student is at odds with the majority of campus groups, having sufficient support from one group of which they are a member can be enough to retain them at the university (Tinto, 1987).

Both published research and my personal experiences over the past decade lead me to the understanding that some minority students want to belong to a formalized group representing their culture and others do not. Wortham (2013) conducted a study at one of Muskingum's peer institutions in Ohio and asked African American and minority students about programs and services available prior to their arrival at the university and stated, "The majority of minority students expressed the concern that they didn't want to be associated with any race-specific organizations or events. They were more interested in 'blending' into the predominantly white general student population in hopes they would be accepted for who they were rather than what ethnic group they represented" (Wortham, 2013, p. 21). Winkle-Wagner (2009) had a similar finding with the African American women in her study at a different Midwest university. There were separate Greek (social) organizations and learning communities for the minority students and the women felt like the divide between the racial designated groups implied that the White students did not want the Black students around and participating in their organizations. However, for Harper and Quaye (2007, p. 137), the most successful Black leaders in his study were involved in racial groups and not mainstream groups on campus at both public and private universities but "they clearly understood that in order to be successful they needed to forge relationships with people from different backgrounds." The site institution has over 90 various student clubs or organizations, some of which involved interests mentioned by the participants such as music or religion. While some of the participants are involved in campus groups other than the Black Student Union (for example, the nursing major was a member of the Nursing Student Organization), some Black students may be hesitant to join groups or organizations if they feel like they lack the cultural or social capital to integrate into the group (Bourdieu, 1984).

Looking at the Black students at Muskingum University, many of them do not choose to join as members of the Black Student Union on campus although many will come to events sponsored by the organization. Within the participant group, not only were the majority of them involved in the group, they had held officer positions in the organization. This supports Tinto's (1987) persistence theory of students staying enrolled in the institution if they feel like they were socially integrated and had membership within the university. Harper (2007, p. 128) also states, "Those who were more engaged outside of the classroom, especially in predominantly Black or culturally based groups, expressed stronger Black identity attitudes." While the comments about the Black Student Union group may not be reflective of the feelings of most of the Black students at Muskingum, they are very relevant to the participants in this research project where the participants were able to gain both cultural and social capital to become integrated leaders at the institution and to become academically successful.

The participants in this study spoke about their desire to strengthen the Black Student Union on campus. It was important to the participants to have the image of the Black Student Union be one that creates a positive image about the Black students on campus. Institutionally, the group is important to the campus climate because having cultural-specific groups provide programming for the campus community is beneficial as Grasmuck and Kim (2010) have shown a connection between interacting with someone of a different race or ethnic background and an increase in cultural awareness and college satisfaction as well as a stronger commitment to racial understanding.

Minority students can utilize cultural-specific groups as a way to inform others about their culture and as a place to provide support to their own racial or ethnic group, again supporting Phinney's ethnic identity theory. "Groups define themselves not merely in terms of

shared culture but in relative terms, in opposition to the perceived identity of other ethnoracial groups" (Grasmuck & Kim, 2010, p. 223). The roots of prejudices and stereotypes that students have when coming to college are based on their childhood experiences and what they have been taught (Carignan, Sanders & Pourdavood, 2005). Fife, Bond and Byars-Winston (2011) also showed that students with stronger feelings of academic self-efficacy not only had a high level of comfort with their own ethnic group but also with other ethnic groups. This could be an area to be improved, as one male participant remarked that he did not think his culture was displayed on campus but that "I think it is kind of our fault. Cause there are not enough students in BSU (the Black Student Union). Students don't want to do anything. So it is kinda our fault."

The abundance of research connecting academic achievement with strong ethnic group identification allows me to believe that it is not by chance that the participants in this research study are the ones involved in the Black Student Union and are also students that are academically successful several years into their studies at Muskingum University. The ability to be leaders in an organization gives the participants a higher level of social capital to develop relationships and networks necessary to effectively lead their organization (Bourdieu, 1984; Sullivan, 2002). Harper and Nichols (2008, p. 207) remark, "the participants viewed Black men who were actively involved or held leadership positions in prominent campus organizations as socially privileged." Tinto (1998, p. 169) connects social integration and academic experiences with student persistence. "The academic and social systems of college overlay both classroom and college settings in such a way that experiences within and beyond the classroom both impact upon student persistence." Jaret and Reitzes (2009) connect high academic performance with high self-esteem. Cross (Evans, Forney & Guido-DiBrito, 1998) connects high self-esteem with high ethnic pride. The participant group was able to succeed academically at the institution and

be proud of their cultural group while on campus.

Being enrolled in a rural, predominantly White setting has influenced the culture of the

participants in this research study. The habitus of the institution, the expectation for racial

tolerance and the manner in which their culture is portrayed are all influential aspects of their

lives at Muskingum University that have impacted the way the participants share and celebrate

their own cultural characteristics.

Research Question 3

*In what ways do the participants feel they are being supported at the institution? How do the
participants feel they could be better supported?*

This research question particularly resonates with the retention aspect of this study. As a

practitioner in the area of multicultural student services, I want to be as effective as possible in

ensuring that minority students feel supported and are able to meet their goal of graduating with

an undergraduate degree. The support that the participants perceived that they received on

Muskingum University's campus was low in comparison to the ways that they discussed how

they could be better supported. This is a bit troubling as Baber's study (2012) specifically sites

the important significance that outside support plays in the lives of Black students as they

transition to university. Support for college students can come from faculty/staff, peers,

athletics, student organizations, off-campus affiliations and/or family members. For this study, I

identified within the themes the importance of support for the participants coming from peers,

groups, faculty/staff and families. The areas that were highest reported as lacking in support was

from the staff of the athletic department and student organizations.

Peers

Undergraduate students at the multiplicity stage in Perry's Scheme begin to recognize peers as credible knowledge sources (Evans, Forney & Guido-DiBrito, 1998). When discussing gathering support on campus, the participants in this study also vocalized that their peers provided a strong sense of support. One participant felt that his biggest support came from the friends that he made while in college.

He remarked, "My support was myself, my friends, my friends driving me home so I can be there. For me, it was my friends, my friends changed me a lot... my freshman year, my three roommates, they were all crazy. It was interesting growing up in that room, seeing different views. I know a lot of minority students live with other minority students, but I had three Caucasian roommates and all three were different types of people. One was always buzzed and high, one was all about football and one was a Christian; so yeah, I have a lot of different stories from that year. So, it was a fun time and I grew from there. I had some failures. I failed two classes, I did a lot of new things. I got injured for the first time playing football, I was on crutches, so my roommates helped me a lot. So I had that support and that was good."

While Phinney (1992) stresses the importance of belonging to increase ethnic identity, this student was able to find that sense of belonging from those outside of his traditional cultural group. Tinto (1987, p. 48) states, "Entry to college requires that individuals at least partially separate themselves from past forms of association and patterns of behavior. Among the majority of youth who enter college from high school, some degree of disassociation is called for from the youthful habits, norms, and patterns of association which characterize the life of the family, the local high school, and neighboring peer groups." Collegiate peers can offer a great level of support to undergraduate students, as Brittian and Gray (2014) found in their study on

African American students. Wortham (2013) found that informal social networks were

significant for students at Wittenberg University (a similar institution to Muskingum University

that is also located in Ohio) for their on-campus satisfaction.

In order to help each other become adjusted to life at the university and in a community

where Blacks are the minority, there was some recognition on behalf of the participants that they

needed to work together and serve as mentors to the next group of new students. One participant

stated, "We, as a subculture, we need to come together to relate to each other better. We share a

lot of the same likes and social norms. Coming to a new place like MU, where you are not used

to, you look for those you can relate to and they have a distinctive culture on campus…when you

come to a different place, you want to look for those people that you can relate to (and) you have

likes with. That's why your sports teams can come close together but some people that don't

have sports, don't have those groups. They have sororities and fraternities on this campus for

those reasons but it doesn't fit those norms, African- Americans don't feel accepted into those

fraternities and sororities, we have to make our own group."   These students may not feel

comfortable in the predominantly White fraternities and sororities because they don't have the

class habitus or social capital to fit in (Bourdieu, 1984). The connections that the Black students

have and the ingrained traits and values that they have been raised with are not congruent with

those of their White peers. Group membership is such an important part of having confidence in

one's ethnic identity (Worrell & Gardner-Kitt, 2006) and helps to determine one's social capital

on campus (Reay, David & Ball, 2001). Group membership is also important, because as stated

by Harper (2009, p. 40), "college students who are actively engaged inside and outside the

classroom are considerably more likely than their disengaged peers to persist through

baccalaureate degree attainment." The concerns voiced by the participant will be revisited in the

next section on groups as well as the recommendations section of Chapter 5.

There was one point in the interview where I asked a group about meeting new Black

students at the university. Listed below is the conversation that I had with one of the

participants (R=researcher; P= participant):

> R: Think back to the beginning of the school year, you guys are upperclassmen. You
> meet brand-new Black kids coming in.
> P1: I don't like 'em.
> R: Why don't you like them?
> P1: 'Cause they come in cheesy.

The inclination for some of the participants was not to reach out to the new students to help them

but instead to judge them and ridicule them or just ignore them altogether. One Black girl in

particular found it much easier to make friends and communicate with White girls than other

Black girls-but this is the same participant that went to a high school where she was the minority

and had lots of experience interacting with Whites prior to coming to college. She stated, "I feel

like the Back girls just hang out with the other Black girls, like there aren't all these other girls on

campus. I didn't hang out with Black females until second semester of last year. I didn't care, I

didn't feel the need to make friends with them when I had all these other people, when they

stayed in their little group. I had different friends every week. I feel like with girls it is

completely different, their attitudes can change with a roommate. Like I roomed with a friend

from high school and we ain't even friends no more. We started hanging around other people as

soon as we started rooming together."

Fortunately this was not the case for all of the participants as a male participant in his last

semester at the university shared his style of leadership, "That's what I do every year, it's

probably a bunch of freshmen that know me every year cause I just talk to them, the dos and the

don'ts about coming to Muskingum. Even now, I live in (Residence Hall), I live with all

upperclassmen and I know probably 30 freshmen males just going around, doing little activities.

To be honest, I've never just sat in their lobby like hung out for days and days. I just come

around and say like, 'How you doin'?' And slowly but surely, I don't have the time to be their

best friend but I get to know them well enough to know their friends' names and basic things that

they do and basic ways we can relate to each other. So they have respect for me and I have

respect for them." This study participant had already figured out how he could increase his own

social capital on campus and had already navigated through the new rules, he understood it was

important to pass this knowledge on to the students in their first and second years of study to

ease their transition and help them to succeed.

One male participant in particular believed that there would be stronger mentors for the

new Black students if there was a Black fraternity on campus, "You'll see upperclassmen that

have certain connections once they get to a certain level. Coming back and talking to the youth.

We start this year and just building and building and building, look at where we be at now. Let's

say we started it at freshmen year, this year, you and me (gesturing to another participant), let's

say we graduated last year and we got high paying jobs and we came back to talk to them. I

think they need some sort of guide, influence." The potential for the upperclass students to serve

as mentors to their peers in the classes below them is there but has not yet been tapped as a

resource. Winkle-Wagner (2009) discussed the Sister Circle group from the university where

she conducted her research and disclosed the ways in which the group was used to allow peer-to-

peer mentoring and support. The next section will discuss how groups at the site university were

underutilized as a support system.

Groups

One possible way to allow students to mentor to each other or to support each other is in a group setting. Robbins (2000, p. 30) indicates the importance of groups by stating, "Individuals modify their situations positionally by reference to groups; groups by reference to classes; and classes by reference to the total structure of society." Having supportive groups, both formal and informal, would help increase retention rates and students would have support when transitioning. Tinto and Goodsell-Love (1993) provide collaborative learning approaches as an example of how having good peer support and learning with peers helps to raise student persistence in college. This group could come in the form of an organization, an athletic group, an academic club or any other group that is active on campus. Baumeister and Leary (1995) have done a lot of work to show how significant belonging to a social group is for humans so having strong groups on campus to support the students would be widely beneficial to the students. Additionally, Phinney's work on ethnic identity pride is focused on group membership and a sense of belonging as being a supportive mechanism to campus integration and providing the support that the students may have received before from their families (Dennis, Phinney, & Chuateco, 2005).

In regards to organizations, the participants discussed the Sister Circle (at Muskingum), athletics, and getting students involved in campus organizations. The participants remarked on ways that these groups could be improved and strengthened to better support the Black students. The Sister Circle is a female-only group on campus. This group was created with the intention of bonding together the Black women on campus and creating a support system for them by connecting them to each other in a positive way. One participant shared her thought that the Sister Circle began to have problems when the women began talking about each other. "Here's

the thing, with Black people, if something free then they gonna go (laughter) and then afterwards, they will walk right past each other and call each other names." Another agreed, "This (Sister Circle) is just a back-stabbing group, that's just the way it is. It's like in high school again, if there is someone you don't like, that's just what it is." Integration to campus occurs mostly through social interactions, both with faculty and staff and with fellow students (Tinto, 1988). When students feel like they are not accepted by their own ethnic group, particularly when that group is a minority ethnic group on campus, they can feel a disconnect between themselves and the institution and may struggle with their own ethnic identity (Phinney, 1992).

One male participant shared his experience, "When I played football, when I played football it was, I don't know, I don't know how to put it, it was so cliquey. Like the Black kids kicked it with the Black kids, you don't kick it with no White kids. It was like, you told to come together as a family, as a family, but then we break out of our practice and we each go our separate ways, you see this person and you don't even talk to 'im. Nothing."

Another student expanded upon that, "I feel like, the thing is, that people don't want to be here. They came here for a specific reason. African American males came to play sports. And if you are here for those reasons, you don't care to help start an organization that is not going to affect your life. It is not going to make the stats go up for your team. Your main objective here, for a lot of male athletes, is just to play sports- that is why you came to college and why you came to Muskingum University. They don't have that interest. And I don't blame them for that because nothing here is appealing to them."

This topic came back up when one group was asked why they were still enrolled at the institution and succeeding academically. A participant shared, "I would say we use our

resources wisely. And by resources, some of us got into stuff, (gesturing towards participants) her nursing, I cheered, football, football, Black Student Union, and we use y'all (Student Affairs staff members) to the best of our abilities." This shows the groups are being supportive at some level, but there is certainly room for improvement.

As Tinto (1987) stresses the importance of higher education institutions assisting students in growing socially and intellectually, it was disappointing to hear from the participants about various organizations and groups on campus not being used to support the students that they are intended to serve. Groups and organizations can allow students to feel as if they belong, which raises academic success for African American college students in their first year of study (Hausmann, Schofield, & Woods, 2007). Tinto (1998, p. 169) states, "Involvement matters most during the first year of college." However, creating supportive groups is not the responsibility of the students, every club and organization has a faculty or staff advisor and every athletic team has a coach.

"I feel that the Black community, it is not that we are lazy or we don't have the interest, we don't have the push. We don't have any leaders that say we are going to have this program and all you have to do is show up. It don't just come from students, it has to come from the people above that want to have those programs and have programs that stick."

Faculty/Staff

A recent article by Vincent Tinto (2014) stated that while opportunity to access higher education is important it is worthless without the proper support mechanisms in place. His article focuses on classroom or academic success. Understanding retention or support through the curriculum is not the intention of this study but I did ask about the relationships of faculty

and staff towards the participants. Thomas states, "If students feel that staff believe in them, and care about the outcomes of their studying, they seem to gain both self-confidence and motivation, and their work improves." Specifically, "Students seem to be more likely to feel that they are accepted and valued by staff if lecturers and tutors know their names and exhibit other signs of friendship, are interested in their work and treat students as equals" (Thomas, 2002, p. 432). When the participants were asked about support that they received from the faculty and staff level, they all provided various names. The names were from both faculty and staff and from a variety of departments and academic disciplines. All of the participants had found at least one person that they had connected with at the university and that he or she felt supported by them as an individual.

Despite being able to name individuals that they had connected with, one participant remarked, "You don't have the support of the administration, you feel like they don't care like you care, you just want to get in and get out. You don't care about nothin' that is goin' on." A female student collaborated, "He's absolutely right. For the Black students here there just aren't influential people. Nobody that we can just come to, anytime, we can just walk in there." Faculty relationships are cited as being crucial to the success of African American students in a study conducted by Sandoval-Lucero, Maes and Klingsmith (2014) and significant relationships with faculty and staff appeared to be a gap in the support network that the participants found at the site university in my study.

A different way of looking at faculty and staff support is to evaluate the opportunities that are created on campus for the students. One participant stated that she felt supported because she had the freedom to do the things that interested her while being a student, "I think there's a lot of opportunity for me to express myself in my spare time. I write for the student blog here at the

school and I really just want to get a different perspective on it. Because obviously what a White person perceives and what an African American perceives are two different things so I thought it would be good if I was the African American perspective."

Like the peer support and the group support, the faculty and staff support for the participant group did exist and was perhaps stronger than some of the other support mechanisms mentioned, but it still lacked the ability to make the participants feel supported at a continual level while they pursued their undergraduate degree.

Families

When I examined support for the students, I was looking at institutional factors but for one participant in particular she felt the strongest backing she received came from her family. While family was mentioned earlier in this chapter, her comments specifically about the support she received from her family are necessary to share in this section. She stated, "Mine was my mom and my dad as far as my support and then myself also because when I first came, I came by myself, not knowing anybody. Once I started to know people, I realized, I am still here by myself. No one is going to do this for me, I have to do this myself. I have to do this myself, nobody is going to do it for me. And to a certain point, being here, I kinda feel like I'm alone, until I call home. And I still sorta feel that way now. So I feel like my support comes from my mom, my dad, and myself saying you have to do this, nobody's going to do it for you. I mean, it's like pep talks, you got to pick yourself up and do it. No one is going to pick you up and make you do it, not even those people you think are your friends. Not even people you think you roll with or whatever. They are not going to pick you up and make you do it, you got to do it yourself. That's where my support comes from." Other students remarked on the influence of

their families, but it was not as all-encompassing as it was for the participant above, who felt like her family was her only support while she was a student.

Research Question 4

Do the participants feel that they have had to change or adapt their culture while at the institution? Why do they feel this change is necessary or unnecessary?

None of the participants said it was easy to transition from high school to college life. This was alluded to when one of the participants shared with the group that she started to feel like she needed to carry around a bag with her all the time, "I think this (carrying a bag) started in college when it got stressful." This student carries a bag with her as a security item. She feels lost without it. As the students seek to transition into a new culture, they must decide what types of capital they are willing to give up or trade in order to integrate into the college environment (Bourdieu, 1984). Tinto is often cited for his work in the field of retention and it is his belief that minority students need to integrate into the culture of the institution, both socially and academically, in order to be successful (1988).

The last question on the questionnaire asked the participants if they believed there was a separate Black culture at Muskingum and each participant replied that they believed there was a separate culture. As they filled out the questionnaire before the group interview took place, this would have been their initial thought before talking to each other about it. There were two general categories where I believe the participants changed embodied forms of their cultural capital in order to succeed within the institutional culture: they had an increased motivation to persevere through adversity and they adapted their communication style.

Perseverance

An increase in perseverance or an increased drive to succeed is one area where the participants were more likely to excel academically if they made changes. One student made the adjustment to college by becoming determined and learning how to cope, "I can honestly say, my first semester here I had bad grades, but now I get it. It is a lot different than where I came from. I had to learn the grade system."

Other students did not fare so well. "Now, a lot of others (Black students) just failed out. Sometimes it's just not in their hands in the situation. So, we get the lessons, like some people may slack off at the beginning of the semester, then they try to catch back up and get caught cheating or something… The stuff that I am learning in college, I never did in high school. I got like nothing out of high school, its just stuff I picked up. I feel like college, you just pick it up and roll with the punches, you take your Ls (losses) in some classes where you gonna have a bad grade and then some classes are supposed to be easy so you can relate to the teacher but you just gotta roll with punches."

When comparing this drive to succeed academically to Phinney's theory of ethnic identity development (Phinney, 1992), I see a correlation between the ability to succeed socially and academically with their ability to adapt to the institutional culture. The participants shared experiences from their first year at the university when they were put in situations in which they were unsure how to behave, jokes or remarks about their racial group were told in their presence or they were asked a stereotypically-based question by a peer. According to Phinney (1992), when faced with threats to ethnic identity, it is helpful to be able to share those experiences and to validate feelings with those in the same ethnic group.

Fleming, Lamont and Welburn (2012) conducted a study of 150 African Americans to understand how they handled racial stigma. The participants in both groups found strategies to cope with their experiences. Participants in my study used humor, vented their frustrations within their support networks, and found a balance between standing up for themselves and developing a high level of tolerance for the ignorance of others. Other coping strategies mentioned in the article by Fleming et al. that I did not see portrayed by the participants in my study included: asserting cultural membership, downplaying differences, separating out "ghetto blacks" from "middle-class blacks", or teaching the ignorant (Fleming, Lamont & Welburn, 2012).

The participants in the study are the exception to the retention trend at Muskingum University. They are the students in the latter half of their academic career that have persevered through years of academic, social and cultural transitions to arrive at the developmental level where they currently are. Out of 124 total Black undergraduate students making up the student population at the beginning of the 2013-2014 academic year, only 8 of those graduated in May 2014. With low retention rates from one year to the next, the number of Black students at the top of their studies is fewer and fewer the further advanced the studies become. In Winkle-Wagner's (2009, p. 69) study with African American women, she noted that these academically succeeding students felt alienated on their campus, "It is as if the women are present but don't feel they are an integral part of the campus." Those in the first few years of studies that are not being retained may be missing that sense of belonging that Phinney stresses as important or becoming integrated with the community that Tinto states as crucial to success.

A drive to succeed academically combined with a high level of tolerance has been studied in 111 African American college women (Thomas, Love, Roan-Belle, Tyler, Brown & Garriott,

2009). Despite a lack of institutional support, maintaining a high level of self-efficacy combined

with motivation geared towards specific goals was shown to be a successful formula for

adjusting to the academic demands of university life for the women in the study. The

participants in my study also shared a feeling of lackluster support for their cultural group from

the university (as elaborated on in the third research question), but stayed focused on their

academic goal or became refocused on graduating after an initial setback. Several of the

participants, all men, discussed how they did poorly their first year at college and were placed on

academic probation before making great strides to improve their classroom work and behavior.

Communication

     Some participants in the study were more willing to adapt or change in order to make

their culture more cohesive with the institutional culture. This was most apparent to me by the

comments the students made when discussing their communication styles. Bernstein (2003, p.

32) states, "Language is considered one of the most important means of initiating, synthesizing,

and reinforcing ways of thinking, feeling and behaviour which are functionally related to the

social group." One participant remarked, "As far as being with Black girls or White girls, to a

certain extent, I feel like I can't talk to White girls. Like, I see White girls talking to White girls

and they have a whole long conversation. They have all kinds of things to talk about. But when

I try to talk to them…our conversation is done (snaps fingers)." While this participant is

enrolled at the same small university with similar classes and residential life experiences, she

struggles to communicate with her White peers. It could be that she is communicating in a

different code than the other women or that she does not possess the same cultural capital as her

classmates.

Several female participants acknowledged trouble communicating with other women, Black or White, stating that it was easier to talk to males. The men in the group interviews spoke of not having any difficulties speaking to either men or women, White or Black. However, the men tended to adapt their conversation style more frequently than the women.

One male participant stated, "Like I would talk to (another Black man) different than I would talk to one of these preppy White boys. Different like, I talk *way* (emphasis his) different than I do back home, *way* (emphasis his) different. Because I adjust to my environment." This same participant remarked, "I feel like just growing up, you change the way you speak. Like, when you're younger and you're in college, it's okay to have some language, but once you get out of college, why do you talk like that? You need to have a conversation regardless of age, race, gender. I believe you should be able to have a conversation so that anyone you're talking to can understand you." Bernstein (2003, p. 75) supports this for individuals that have the ability to speak in both restricted and elaborated code, "Individuals will of course shift from one to the other according to the form of the social relationship and so their usage is independent of the personality and intelligence of the speakers."

I specifically asked one group if they used a different language when communicating with Blacks than when they were communicating with Whites. One male responded, "We purposely say things that we hear White people say. We say it in jest, that's our inside joke. Like, we pretend to be White (loud laugh)… 'Cause that's just what we do, like, 'Hey, guys!'" Adjusting their communication style or using an elaborate code instead of a restricted code, may also allow them to have a wider diversity of friends. The decision of the students to have friends that are in the same cultural classification as themselves may depend upon their experiences in high school (or secondary school) and their ability to communicate effectively both linguistically

and in topics of conversation. Black students that come from a predominantly White setting may opt for friendships that are out of group while Black students that come from a high school where they were the racial majority may seek out group friendships. "Every university has its particular campus culture, traditions, and social environment where choices about friendships occur" (Grasmuck & Kim, 2010, p. 226).

One man believed he needed to communicate so anyone could understand him and he changed his vocabulary and pronunciation depending upon the setting and the other individuals he was with at the time. This shifting from restricted to elaborate code allows the participant to speak with a higher level of structural organization and to use extensive linguistic patterns (Bernstein, 2003). A female stated that she did not change her language or communication style from her time in a majority-Black high school to a majority-White university. Judging just on academic progress and grade point average, the female is the more successful student academically. The male grew up with a single mom that worked two jobs, he witnessed a murder at a young age, he used to be a drug dealer and now he is paying his own way through school by working and studying at the same time, is well known and liked on campus, does not have a judicial record at the university, and has his own apartment and car about 20 miles from campus. The female student was consistently teased by those in her cultural group for the way she spoke, has withdrawn into herself, has had the same boyfriend for the past 2 years and is friendly and nice but not well known. They are very different and both are succeeding but in very different terms. The one willing to speak in both restricted and elaborated codes has greater socialization on campus with his peers, faculty and staff than the participant that only spoke in restricted code (Bernstein, 2003).

When beginning this research, I suspected that there was a need for the participants to change or adapt their culture in order to fit in at the university and that those that took on more of the institutional cultural traits would be more successful. As a practitioner working with marginalized populations, I do not support forced or enticed assimilation; ideally each cultural group would be appreciated in their own right. However, it appears that some of the Black undergraduates have had to change their own cultural identity at Muskingum in order to be successful. "The structure and formulation of college campuses were designed to serve predominantly white students. Black students were thus expected to adjust to the environment even when they did not feel affirmed by its culture" (Jones & Williams, 2006, p. 25). A male participant in the group followed suite, stating, "It's huge, the music, the people, I mean, (laughing) it's a big change. If I can make it here I can make it anywhere, live anywhere, you know?"

Smith (2002) found that students sharing a school's culture and behavior are more successful in that environment than those that do not adjust their culture. The literature shows the development of education centers, including higher education institutions, are founded in an analytical thinking and teacher-focused climate whereas African Americans tend to be more relational thinkers (Smith, 2002). Black students conditioned to believe that doing well in school is a "White" trait will find it shameful to succeed academically, such as the example of Rocky in Grantham's study (2004), a gifted Black student that was mocked by his peers as trying to be like a White boy when he chose to participate in the gifted and talented program that he was selected for. But the dominant classes, in this case the White upper and middle classes, have the higher education cultural capital which gives them the power and status to control educational opportunities (Thomas, 2002).

Conclusion

In conclusion, the data derived from this research study provides a deeper understanding about the experiences and feelings of the nine Black, undergraduate participants that chose to attend a predominantly White university in a rural village in the Midwestern part of the United States. These participants shared several common cultural characteristics including the usage of language, the importance of family, a sense of competitiveness and perceived common experiences. This shared culture was influenced by the institution and community in which they studied, the level of racial tolerance the participants had to assume, and the way in which they portrayed their culture. While feeling undersupported, the participants did share some feelings of encouragement from their peers, groups on campus, the faculty and staff at the institution, and their families. In order to improve their chances of succeeding, the participants felt like they had to change themselves by increasing their level of perseverance and their communication style. The next chapter will summarize the key points of this research paper as well as provide a variety of recommendations to higher education institutions, research practitioners and personal recommendations that I have for myself based on the analysis of the data.

CHAPTER FIVE

Conclusions and Recommendations

The previous chapter answered the four original research questions using the data provided by the nine participants and connected the data with theorists such as Tinto, Phinney, Bourdieu and Bernstein. The first part of this chapter will look at that data and the information in the literature review (Chapter 2) to provide a summary of the research data and analysis and the significance of this study. The final sections of this chapter will be recommendations for higher education institutions and for research practitioners and self-recommendations to propel the action research portion of this study into practice at the site institution.

Conclusions

This study is significant because of the original experiences which shared the ways in which successful Black students were able to adjust to the transition of studying at a rural, predominantly White institution even when they did not begin with the cultural or social capital of their peers. Additionally, this study is important as the recommendations provide direct actions that can be taken by institutions in order to help Black students with this transition. Harper (2012, p. 1) remarks, "For nearly a decade, I have argued that those who are interested in Black male student success have much to learn from Black men who have actually been successful." Where many studies focus on gaps between cultural groups or why students do not persist, this study uses a phenomenological approach to examine the stories and experiences of those that are successful both socially and academically. While Tinto's work focuses on retention and persistence, his research lacks the residential campus experience from the

perspective of Black students. This study has taken his theories of persistence and overlapped them with Phinney's ethnic identity theories and the importance of belonging within the field of higher education. Harper's research focuses on retention of Black men using Cross's racial identity theories but this study goes further by showing how relevant the notions of Bourdieu's cultural and social capital are for the success of the participants and by addressing some concerns related to students from a low socio-economic status background. In summary, there are three main areas of importance for this study: the originality of examining retention through the acquisition of cultural and social capital, the relevance of establishing a sense of belonging in a new field, and the impact integration plays for ethnic groups that must transition to a new culture.

Retention

The intention of this research was to study the phenomenon of the cultural transition that Black students enrolled at rural, predominantly White institutions go through when coming to college and to help them meet their goal of obtaining a bachelor's degree. The overarching goal for the site university, a non-profit higher education institution, is to have students that are mentally, physically, emotionally and socially successful while studying at the university level. The retention rate of 49% of Blacks from their first year to their second year, as shared in Chapter One, at the university where this research took place is a bleak predictor for new Black students coming to college for the first time.

This is not just an issue at the site university, but is a concern throughout much of the mid-western part of the United States. In Baber's 2012 study on first-year, African American college students, she discussed how research shows rising enrollment numbers for Black students

at PWIs but low campus engagement and connection. Tinto's (1988) retention theory

demonstrates the importance of being integrated into the university both academically and

socially in order to persist successfully towards graduation. Black students are at a higher risk

than their White peers of coming from economically disadvantaged homes which creates another

obstacle towards their integration to campus (Rothstein, 2004). Significantly, the participants in

this study all found ways to connect with college life through leadership positions or

memberships within various groups. While having leadership positions is not representative of

the Black population at the site institution, it is indicative of Tinto's theory as the participants

had all successfully matriculated and integrated into the university.

Sense of Belonging

Black students that choose to attend predominantly White campuses have obstacles to

cross that their White counterparts do not (Brittian & Gray, 2014). Marginalized populations

tend to feel that they represent their entire cultural, ethnic or racial group even when they do not

want to (Winkle-Wagner, 2009). In addition, Black students, such as those in this study, are

thrust into a campus culture that was founded on White, European ideals (Watkins, 2001) where

they may have felt they had to create their own cultural identity in an environment where others

were undereducated about their cultural group (Lee, 2009). For the participants in this study,

some parts of their cultural capital was different from that of their White peers such as their idea

of what was fashionable or the types of music they preferred. However, other parts of their

cultural capital overlapped. This overlap assisted them in their transition to the university,

particularly in the areas of mannerisms and skills (Bourdieu, 1985). The participants shared a

high level of open-mindedness and forgiveness of others, acceptance for their situation and their

limited power, and an ability to adapt or assimilate into the institutional culture. Harper (2012)

stated that Black students that were high-achievers do not respond to microaggressions with

anger but instead wait to reflect on a racist encounter. Harper shares their strategy of calmly

confronting the comment or action to reverse the insulting feeling back to the original individual

or group. In a similar fashion, the participants in this study were able to keep composed and

learn to tolerate the ignorant comments of their peers. The participants described acts of

microaggressions that they had to confront and yet they were able to still feel connected to the

university and become a viable member of the community. Harper (2012, p. 7-8) remarks that

Black men at PWIs "routinely encounter racist stereotypes and racial microaggressions that

undermine their achievement and sense of belonging." The participants in this study were able

to be successful in spite of these encounters because they had a strong sense of pride in their own

ethnic group (Phinney, 1992). Having a stronger sense of identity provided the participants with

higher levels of self-esteem (Johnston, 2014). By exhibiting these traits towards their White

peers and faculty/staff, the participants were able to expand their social capital with new

relationships and networks that may provide them with additional resources (Robbins, 2000).

The microaggressions experienced by the participants from their peers, as shared by the

participants, creates a hostile environment leading students to feeling as if they don't belong at

the university, a crucial element in Phinney's ethnic development theory (Phinney, Cantu &

Kurtz, 1997). Feeling disconnected from the university does not motivate a minority student to

continue, especially when there are other hardships such as financial and academic barriers as

faced by many new Black, university students (Tinto, 1988). This disconnect, coupled with

trying to learn the cultural and social capital necessary to succeed in a new field, can be

overwhelming (Bourdieu, 1984). The participants in this study felt like they belonged at the university and used that confidence to overcome acts of microaggressions.

Integration

As retention and persistence to graduation for Black undergraduate students are the ultimate goals of this study, integration into the campus culture is crucial (Tinto, 1988). The participants had to trade various forms of capital in order to integrate into the university. An example from this study shows how their language was impacted (Bernstein, 2003). The participants adapted their communication style when in the classroom or with their White counterparts as a way to fit in with the institutional culture. The participants were from various parts of the state and even one from out of the state, yet they all had communication styles that were more similar with each other than it was with the White students that lived geographically closer to them. Being able to make this linguistic shift from restricted into elaborated code may be indicative of a student's ability to be successful at a rural college or university (Bernstein, 2003). While being able to communicate with each other within their own coded system may help the students to feel connected to their cultural group (Ivinson, 2011), Tinto (1993) believes individuals also need to integrate into the mainstream culture to feel connected and to understand the socialized norms.

Some participants had to trade their social capital as perceptions that others had of them in their hometown communities changed when the participants began attending a private, White university (Swartz, 2013). Their relationships with individuals and groups that they had in primary and secondary schools were no longer helpful for the students, they needed to find new support and resources at the university. For the participants in this study, they were able to find

that support through a combination of networks at the university and with their own families. A

2010 study compiled by Guiffrida and Douthit spoke highly of Black families that supported

their college children by telling them to focus on academics and not issues that were occurring at

home. Tinto discusses the importance of separating from their lives prior to university in order

to transition and integrate into the new society at college (1993). He believes that students must

be able to establish membership within the new society to feel integrated. Rodgers and Summers

(2008) corroborate Tinto's theory of persistence by stating that in order to succeed, African

Americans at predominantly White institutions (PWIs) must develop a way to function in the

majority culture.

The participants in this research study proved that students can be successful at

institutions even when the culture of the student does not align with the culture that has power at

the institution. The students needed to make various adjustments in order to gain the social and

cultural capital necessary in the new field. They achieved this by taking on leadership positions

in campus organizations to become integrated to the campus. The participants were able to

overcome racial microaggressions with a strong sense of ethnic pride. The success of the

participants is significant as this study shares the experiences they had and the choices they made

in order to be academically and socially successful in obtaining their higher education goals.

Recommendations

This section will look at the findings from this study and the theories that support it to

make some recommendations towards improving retention and a sense of belonging for Black

students at rural, predominantly White higher education institutions. The participants in this

study are not representative of the Black population at the site institution as those that selected to

participate were all students in their last two years of study and they became well connected on campus. The recommendations in this section will be directed at higher education institutions, then research practitioners, followed by self-recommendations to help me improve my own practice. The recommendations have been aimed at areas that research-practitioners, such as myself, have the ability to influence and change.

Institutional Recommendations

The recommendations in this section are aimed at higher education institutions desiring to retain their Black student population by working in congruence with Tinto's theory of retention and the importance of belonging in Phinney's ethnic identity theory. Some of the recommendations in this section will be discussed in the final section on self-recommendations as I share my plans to implement the recommendations from this study. There is a responsibility on behalf of the institutions to work to help Black students succeed. Harper (2006, p. 19) states, "More than two-thirds of all black men who start college do not finish and worse yet, there is virtually no accountability for this level of institutional mediocrity."

One recommendation is to try and decrease the alienation that Black students can feel on predominantly White campuses by having a diversity initiative. From a study done with Black collegiate women: "The word 'alienation' generally connotes a sense of estrangement or separation from something, in this case, the mainstream campus. It is as if the women are present but don't feel they are an integral part of the campus (Winkle-Wagner, 2009, p. 69)." In order for students to successfully persist, the students need to feel like they belong, that the place where they are living, studying and socializing is their home. A sense of belonging and feeling

connected to the institution has been a prevailing theme throughout this study. Higher education institutions should find ways to increase how students are connected on campus.

Working with clubs, athletic teams and organizations to be more supportive to its members would be one recommendation. The participants in the study remarked on the lack of support they felt from their athletic groups and their student organizations. In ways to help Black students persist at PWIs, Guiffrida and Douthit (2010) cite the impact that Black student organizations have in the lives of the students. These groups tend to be made up of the students that have already navigated the institutional culture and academic demands. Connecting first year students with these knowledgeable upper-class students can give them someone to support them as they transition to university life. Institutions can work with their coaching staff to help them recognize discriminatory acts or to train them on how to facilitate cross-cultural connections between their players.

Raising the level of openness of different groups to Black students would be another recommendation. This recommendation is supported by Harper and Quaye (2007) as they remark that getting White groups to be more open to Black students is a way to help the students succeed. At the site institution, there are over 90 different student clubs or organizations. Connecting students' interests with these various groups will help the students to feel as if they are an integral part of the campus community and be socially connected (Hausmann, Schofield & Woods, 2007). For example, in this study both music and religion were interests that the students had and there are organizations on campus that are focused on music and religion. Helping students to become involved is particularly important for Black students that do not want to join groups that are predominantly Black but feel that they lack the social capital to join a group that is predominantly White. While there is literature supporting the role that Black

fraternities and sororities can have for Black students (Chambers, 2014), smaller campuses like

the site institution may not have Black-focused social groups on campus. These campuses can

focus on helping the fraternities and sororities that are on campus to be more open to minority

students. One study recommends promoting student groups that already practice inclusive

behavior and institutions can try and identify which groups on campus already do this (Hunn,

Harley, Elliott & Canfield, 2015). Becoming involved in fraternities or sororities raises the

graduation rate for African American more than their European American counterparts (Severtis

& Christie-Mizell, 2007). For all clubs, organizations or athletic teams, having Black students

that are not just members but are part of the leadership of those organizations will not only allow

for stronger integration into campus but also will help in raising the social capital for those

students to help them beyond their time at the university.

Another institutional recommendation is to create common experiences for students,

particularly in their first six weeks at the university (Tinto, 2000). Many U.S. universities have a

first-year experience class and components of that class can include service projects, reading a

common book, listening to guest speakers or attending campus events. A few higher education

institutions even require all their students to have a study abroad experience before graduation.

These common experiences serve as conversation topics between students, particularly first-year

students that are trying to socialize in a new setting. It provides the students with social capital

to feel connected and becomes a restricted code that all students at that campus understand even

when those outside of the institution do not (Sadovnik, 1995). One unique study conducted in

the last few years had first year students conduct common readings on why students fail to

complete their first year of college and the students had to keep a journal on their reflections

(Brooman & Darwent, 2012). Institutions can be flexible in what they choose as the common

experiences for their students to meet several institutional goals at the same time. "The only control the college has over student retention is in the development of its educational processes and programs throughout the freshman year. This includes providing a culture that is student-focused and offering services supportive to the needs of each student." (Veenstra, 2009, p. 19).

Recommendations to Research Practitioners

Culture is always changing, always evolving to fit the people, their needs and the environment in which the people live. This creates a constant need for research to be conducted in understanding various cultures, such as the Black undergraduate culture of the participants as shown here, in order to support those that higher education is trying to reach and serve and, on a broader scale, to coexist peacefully together. New knowledge was gained because of this study but this research is certainly not the beginning nor the end of what can be learned about this population. This study showed connections between the changes and developments of the students during their undergraduate years, the experiences they were willing to share, how they connected to the university and their ability to be successful in a rural, collegiate setting.

This study overlapped with Bourdieu's idea of social and cultural capital being a limiting factor and the students adjusting to living at a rural university. Having different cultural experiences and language codes than their White peers, some students struggled in making friends or even communicating with those outside their own ethnic group. Further studies could be done with larger groups of participants to examine the different ways social capital affects Black students at predominantly White institutions. For example, Robert Putman divides social capital into bonding (homogenous social groups) and bridging (heterogeneous social groups) (2000). It could be helpful to see which social group, or both, is better for retaining Black

students and how the students can obtain the social capital necessary to feel comfortable in those groups or organizations.

Another recommendation area for further research that is related to this study is examining how social class is connected to Black cultural characteristics, retention and academic success. While I did not specifically ask the participants in this study what their SES was or questions about their family's income, I do know that the family income for students that self-identify as Black or two or more ethnicities have, on average, half the family income as White students at the site institution (Burnett, 2015). A limitation of this study is the connection between SES and the other areas of the research. Combining Bernstein's theory on restricted code and SES with Phinney's stress on the importance of belonging and Tinto's theory of integration would be an area worthy of additional research.

Self-Recommendations

This study was not just a phenomenological study towards a contribution of research, but also an action research project aimed at the practitioner role that I have working at a higher education institution in the United States and serving the multicultural student population. I began my doctoral program because I felt stuck in the programs and services that were being offered, I was getting burned out and my work felt repetitive from year to year. I am providing my insights into how I will be using this research to improve my own practice because it may assist another practitioner in his or her work.

There are several tangible ways that I believe I can better serve the Black undergraduate students enrolled at rural, predominantly White institutions. The recommendations that I have for myself include raising the social capital of the students, creating programs that help the

students to embrace their own cultural identity and enhance their institutional connection, and continuing the benefits of the group interviews by having open discussions about their experiences.

One way that I would like to assist the Black students at my institution is by raising their social capital and, to a point, their cultural capital, so that they can be successful. The participants shared with me how they do not always fit in in their hometown neighborhoods since coming to a private, White university. Overall, at my institution, the students have the cultural capital to be accepted. The clothes they wear and the music they listen to are often emulated and perceived as cool. However, socially the students struggle to join groups and organizations, either with peers of the same ethnic-background or other ethnic-groups. Phinney, Cantu and Kurtz (1997) state that retention is highest when students have strong relationships with both types of groups. Beyond working with them at the entry of their higher education degree, I also need to be cognitive about the transition they must make beyond graduation. Having a university degree is not enough if the students cannot speak and dress in a professional manner. As Bourdieu discusses, it is not just how the students are speaking, but the topics that they are familiar with when speaking to others (Swartz, 2013). If they are interviewing for a job, they need to be able to casually converse with the interviewer or company representatives about a variety of topics. They must have the manners and posture to match what the company is looking for and even a taste for the same types of fine art or foods to show that they emulate what the company wants in a representative. Some of this can be done by working closer with the Career Services Office and developing workshops, networking events and mock interviews. Video recording these events and having the students watch them back while they look for ways to improve may be a helpful reflection for Black students that are seeking internships or jobs for

after graduation. The goal is not to change who the students are, but to make their habitus more cohesive with the social class they are seeking.

It is a careful balance when cultures are meshing and colliding so that the majority culture does not dominate the cultures with little power. Another self-recommendation that I have is to develop programs and activities that embrace the cultural identity that the Black undergraduate students have when they come to Muskingum University. Rodgers and Summers (2008, p. 183) would say this is a good retention strategy as "characteristics of ethnic identity may be stronger predictor variables for retention of African American students at PWIs" as compared to other psychological processes such as self-efficacy or motivation. However, I side more in believing that each person is important as an individual and that each culture should be embraced and celebrated. I want to better understand the students both as a group and as individuals.

The comments from the participants gave me some direction as to what they were looking for on campus. Students coming from urban environments are used to having lots of people around and options for various activities. I have already discussed some of their general concerns with my coworkers and we have increased the number of activities planned each weekend and made sure that there was something occurring each weekend. We added new activities such as poetry slams, zip lining, and various musical performers and comedians. We are trying to figure out the logistics for a foam party as that has been a request from Black undergraduate students for several years. They commented on the manner in which events were advertised so we have hired students to work in the office that have been trained in using the computer software system that we use to advertise events to students and to maintain a campus calendar. I want to make sure that I am not just listening to what they want and creating it, but

involving them in the process of having programs and events at the university so they have a vested interest in the activities and there is another level of connection between the students and the institution.

Another way that I can increase retention is by trying to decrease critical incidents that occur on campus. In the beginning of my career, I had been so focused on creating programs and services for the minority students that I was doing very little to educate the non-Black population. Hearing stories of racial remarks or downgrading situations occurring on campus was especially disturbing. I already conduct diversity training for businesses and several student leadership groups on campus but I have to do a better job of getting those workshops and training sessions into venues that other faculty, staff and students can attend and learn from. New students have enough to cope with when transitioning to college without having to deal with ignorant members in their community.

A final self-recommendation comes from how the participants reacted within the group interviews as they shared their experiences with others in the room. The interview sessions seemed to be therapeutic for the participants. They were eager to share their stories and some questions made them pause and reflect on their experiences and actions which were beneficial to their personal development and cognitive growth. Grier-Reed (2010) conducted a study with lunchtime support groups for Black students to help them understand and cope with the culture of a predominantly White institution. This group helped the students deal with microaggressions and feel connected and empowered within their institution.

Boysen (2012) remarks that the most effective way of dealing with microaggressions is indirectly talking about it outside of the place where it occurred and the second most effective way is to facilitate open discussions. I have a very strong rapport with the multicultural students

on campus and it has taken me years to build up this trust with them. I attend events and I talk to the students, if they are hanging out in front of an academic building between classes then I go and sit with them. I ask them about their lives and I remember what they tell me. When they bring me problems or concerns, I do what I can to ease the burden or find a solution. This year I have had a number of first year students come to my office to ask me for help because an older student on campus told them to come to me. Meeting informally with them and supporting them where they are at is helpful for the students that I see. I need to continue serving the students on an individual level so they feel valued and important as an individual. Grier-Reed (2010) states that a trusting relationship is vital to creating a safe zone and that Black students need to be supported and encouraged to counter the negativity that they are already receiving at PWIs.

Going beyond these informal and mostly individual interactions, I could implement small-group discussions that allow the Black students at the site institution to discuss their experiences in a more structured setup. Hunn, Harley, Elliott and Canfield (2015) stated that African-Americans and other individuals that confront microaggressions on a regular basis may need validation of the experience and assistance in processing it to help to mitigate the effects. To begin with, this can be done within the existing Sister Circle group and the male equivalent group that has been implemented during the time of writing this research. I can also hold group discussions more regularly to allow students to give feedback to me and to allow them an opportunity to work through the emotions tied to their experiences. As I learn more about the microaggressions experienced by the students, I can share them with other university constituents as raising knowledge about microaggressions helps to decrease the unintentional incidents that occur (McWhorter, 2014).

Overall, examining the existing literature, learning about the experiences shared by the participants and using my personal knowledge from working with this population shows me how I can better serve students. Furthermore, by raising the social capital of the students, creating programs that embrace their cultural identity and enhance connections with the institution and by extending the therapeutic benefits from the group interviews through open discussions, I can assist the Black undergraduate population in meeting their academic objectives and creating a healthier personal and social life for them while they are at Muskingum University.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Research Questions

1. What are the common cultural components for this participant group?

2. How does being enrolled in a rural, predominantly White institution influence participants' culture?

3. In what ways do the participants feel they are being supported at the institution? How do the participants feel they could be better supported?

4. Do the participants feel that they have had to change or adapt their culture while at the institution? Why do they feel this change is necessary or unnecessary?

Appendix B: Invitation Letter

Invitation to Participate - Message (HTML)

FILE   MESSAGE

Ignore   Delete   Reply   Reply   Forward   More | Personal   To Manager   Team Email | Move   Rules   Actions | Mark Unread   Categorize   Follow Up | Translate   Find   Related   Select | Zoom

Delete   Respond   Quick Steps   Move   Tags   Editing   Zoom

Wed 1/15/2014 3:21 PM

Valerie Smith <vsmith@muskingum.edu>

Invitation to Participate

To   vsmith@muskingum.edu

Message   Thesis Participant Consent, v 2.0.docx (100 KB)

Welcome back Muskies!

I am doing a research project between now and Spring Break and would like to have you participate. The attached consent form explains the project and why you are receiving this email. You may know me as an advisor to multicultural students on campus but this research is being conducted separate from that role, although the results may help me improve my ability to serve the students by better understanding you, your experiences and your cultural identity. This research is primarily being conducted as a requirement to my doctorate degree through the University of Liverpool.

If you agree to participate, you will be asked to share one item or picture that represents who you are, complete a short 5-10 minute survey and participate in two group interviews (each one lasting approximately 60-90 minutes but dependent upon how much participants want to share). All participants will receive a coupon for a free F'Real milkshake or smoothie from the Bait Shop.

You do not have to participate. Please do not feel like you should do this just because you know me (if relevant) or because I work at the university that you attend. You should do this if you feel like you want to help identify the Black collegiate culture at Muskingum University and are interested in improving the programs and services the multicultural students receive at this university.

If you are interested, please read the attached consent form and meet with me before Friday, January 24, 2014. I want to make sure you understand the process and potential risks before the research begins. The first round of group interviews/discussions will be the week of Feb. 3, 2014 and the second round will be Feb. 17, 2014 so all commitments should be finished by the end of February 2014.

Please let me know if you have any questions and I look forward to meeting with the interested students this week and next week!

Sincerely,
Valerie Smith

Valerie Smith moms school work

Links   Muskingum   Free Hotmail   Suggested

Appendix C: Participant Consent Form

UNIVERSITY OF
LIVERPOOL

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET and CONSENT FORM

Research Project Title:
Transitioning Cultures: Understanding the Black Collegiate Culture at a Midwestern PWI.

You are invited to take part in a research study examining the cultural identity of Black students at Muskingum University. The researcher is inviting self-identified Black undergraduates enrolled at Muskingum University to be in the study. This form is part of a process called "informed consent" to allow you to understand this study before deciding whether to take part.

This study is being conducted by a researcher named Valerie Smith, who is a doctoral student at the University of Liverpool. You may already know Valerie Smith as she is also an employee at Muskingum University, serving as the Director of International/Multicultural Student Services. This study is being conducted separate from that role.

Background Information:
The intention of this project is to understand the phenomenon of culture creation and sustainment by Black undergraduates studying at a predominantly White university in the Midwestern part of the United States. The aim is for the researcher to identify cultural components that are either created, perpetuated or challenged by the members of the cultural group to better assist this group of students during their undergraduate experience. The research activities are designed to assist the researcher in her own research skills and to apply them in an action research method to her practices at the institution in order to facilitate a successful transition to university life and studies for this cultural group.

Procedures:
If you agree to be in this study, you will be asked to:
- Meet with the researcher prior to the study to complete this consent form and ensure you are aware of any potential risks. You will have an opportunity to ask questions and withdraw from the study at any point.
- Complete a short questionnaire which will take approximately 5-10 minutes.
- Find and share an image or item that best represents you.
- Sit in a conference room, on two separate occasions, for approximately 60-90 minutes with other participants and share experiences and concerns.
- Allow the researcher, Valerie Smith, to record the group interviews (either video recording, audio recording or through note taking) without providing your identity or any identifying characteristics.

Voluntary Nature of the Study:
This study is voluntary. Everyone will respect your decision of whether or not you choose to be in the study. No one at Muskingum University will treat you differently if you decide not to be in the study. If you decide to join the study now, you can still change your mind during or after the study. You may stop at any time.

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Risks and Benefits of Being in the Study:
Being in this type of study involves some risk of the minor discomforts that can be encountered in daily life, such as becoming upset about telling of your experiences. Being in this study would not pose risk to your safety or wellbeing. Even so, all participants taking part in a University of Liverpool ethically approved study have insurance coverage. In addition, counseling services are provided for free through Muskingum University Counseling Services, 740-826-8142.

Compensation:
All participants will receive a coupon for a free F'Real milkshake or smoothie from Muskingum University's Bait Shop.

Privacy:
Any information you provide will be kept confidential. Your name will only be disclosed on the consent forms and these forms will be locked in a Student Affairs file cabinet for a period of 5 years. The researcher will not use your personal information for any purposes outside of this research project. Also, the researcher will not include your name or anything else that could identify you in the study reports. Data from the focus group will be kept secure on a password-protected computer. Data will be kept for a period of at least 5 years, as required by the university.

Duty to Report:
This study is to take place at Muskingum University and the researcher, Valerie Smith, is obligated to report any criminal activity or abuse that is revealed as part of this research project as specified in Title IX and the Clery Act. If you have questions about these acts and what specifically must be reported, please contact Muskingum University's Director of Student Conduct, Anthony Polito via apolito@muskingum.edu, (740) 826-8087.

Contacts and Questions:
You may ask any questions you have by simply replying to the email that this form was attached to. Or if you have questions later, you may contact the researcher, Valerie Smith, via vsmith@muskingum.edu, (740) 826-8094. In addition, Valerie Smith is available in the Quad Center, TOC 216, from 8:00 AM to 5:00 PM, Monday through Friday. If you want to talk privately about your rights as a participant, you can contact the Chair of the Research Ethics Committee via 001-612-312-1210 or liverpoolethics@ohecampus.com . When contacting the chair, please provide the details of the name or description of this study (Transitioning Cultures: Understanding the Black Collegiate Culture at a Midwestern PWI), the researcher (Valerie Smith) and the details of the question or complaint that you wish to make.

Results:
Anonymous results will be compiled and reported within the University of Liverpool to fulfil course requirements and shared within Student Affairs at Muskingum University to improve practice. Participant data will be made unidentifiable, which means that not only are names removed, but potentially identifying characteristics and demographic information will also be stripped from any shared data.

Once signed, the researcher will give you a copy of this form to keep. You may also print off an unsigned copy on your own.

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Statement of Consent:

I have read the above information and I feel I understand the study well enough to make a decision about my involvement. By signing below, I am agreeing to participate in the study as described above.

Printed Name of Participant

Date of consent   _____

Participant's Signature   _____

Researcher's Signature   _____

Appendix D: Questionnaire

Transitioning Cultures Questionnaire

Please fill out the following questionnaire to the best of your ability. You may skip any question(s) that you do not feel comfortable answering or choose not to complete any of the questionnaire. You may still participate in the group interviews even if you choose not to completely fill out the questionnaire.

Please circle or fill in the blank with the answer that best describes you.

1. What is your gender?   M   F

2. How many semesters have you been enrolled as an undergraduate? _____ semesters

3. What is your classification in school? First-Year   Sophomore   Junior   Senior

4. How old are you? _____

5. What is your major(s)? _____

6. What is your minor(s)? _____

7. Where is your hometown? (Be as specific as possible, don't generalize to the nearest city.)

   _____

8. To the best of your knowledge, what was the percentage of Black students at your high school

   when you were there?

     0-10%   11-25%   26-50%   51-75%   76-100%

9. What are the top three physical characteristics that you would use to describe yourself?

   _____

10. What are the top three personality characteristics that you would use to describe yourself?

    _____

11. What are your three favorite activities or things you enjoy doing in your spare time?

    _____

12. What do you think sets you apart from most students at this school?

    _____

13. Do you think Black undergraduate students at Muskingum share a culture distinctive of the rest

    of the campus population? _____ Explain why or why not._____

    _____

Appendix E: Group Interview Scripts

Interview Questions, Round 1

(Welcome, explain conducting a study examining the Black collegiate culture here at M.U. Reminder to maintain confidentiality in the study that anything that is disclosed in this room is not to be repeated. Reminder of counseling services and who to contact to report any violations

As everyone gets settled in, please take a few minutes to complete the questionnaire on your own and then just turn it over.

- Please describe the image or picture that you brought with you today and why you selected it.
- Is there another image that someone brought today that you think also represents you? Why? (Who else thinks image W represents them?)
- Do these images represent who you were before you came to college here, after you came to college or both? How?
- Let's discuss some of the items on the questionnaire. Start with the identity-focused questions. How would you describe yourself?
- What did you list as your interests? How have you been able to do those while a student at Muskingum?
- The last question asked if you thought the Black undergraduates here have their own unique culture. Does anyone wish to share their thoughts?
- If yes to own culture- In what ways is your group's cultural characteristics displayed on campus? Who can join? How is membership decided?
- If yes to own culture- Every university has a distinct campus culture. How does the culture of the Black undergraduate students fit in with Muskingum's culture? (Muskingum is rural, predominantly White, religious affiliated,
- If no to own culture- Every university has a distinct campus culture. How do you fit in with Muskingum's culture?
- Is there anything additional that anyone wants to add on the topics we discussed today? Remember our next group interview time is _____.

(Before they leave- I would ask that you not talk to others outside of this room about this study. Do not tell others what people said, what you did or even comments that you made. Other participants or groups may not have the same discussions as this group and that is okay and even expected.

Interview Questions, Round 2

(Thank you for returning to the second and final round of group interviews. Reminder about confidentiality and typing of notes. Participants can review notes following interview if desired.)

{I will review the information shared from the questionnaires and from the first round of interviews before deciding on the script for the second round on interviews. The purpose of the interviews is to answer the main research questions so the second round should ensure these areas have been addressed.}

- Think about who you were before enrolling at Muskingum. Has anything changed? Explain.
- Have you been affected by the environment on campus or in the village? Please explain or give examples.
- What part (characteristics) of this setting has impacted you the most?
- In what ways do you feel supported at Muskingum?
- How could Muskingum better assist you?

If the cultural components is not clear from earlier data, direct questions about various cultural characteristics, for example:

- Talk to me about how language and word choice affects you. Please give examples.
- How does your choice of your personal style and dress reflect who you are? Do you think this is a component of your culture? What about how others in your cultural group dress?

Appendix F: Approval from University of Liverpool

UNIVERSITY OF LIVERPOOL | ONLINE PROGRAMMES

Dear Valerie

I am pleased to inform you that the Virtual Programme Research Ethics Committee (VPREC) has approved your application for ethical approval for your study. Details and conditions of the approval can be found below.

Sub-Committee:	EdD. Virtual Programme Research Ethics Committee (VPREC)
Review type:	Expedited
PI:	
School:	Lifelong Learning
Title:	
First Reviewer:	Prof. Morag A. Gray
Second Reviewer:	Dr. Ian Willis
Other members of the Committee	Ewan Dow, and Kathleen Kelm

Date of Approval: 08.01.14

The application was APPROVED subject to the following conditions:

Conditions

1	Mandatory	M: All serious adverse events must be reported to the VPREC within 24 hours of their occurrence, via the EdD Thesis Primary Supervisor.

This approval applies for the duration of the research. If it is proposed to extend the duration of the study as specified in the application form, the Sub-Committee should be notified. If it is proposed to make an amendment to the research, you should notify the Sub-Committee by following the Notice of Amendment procedure outlined at http://www.liv.ac.uk/media/livacuk/researchethics/notice%20of%20amendment.doc.

Where your research includes elements that are not conducted in the UK, approval to proceed is further conditional upon a thorough risk assessment of the site and local permission to carry out the research, including, where such a body exists, local research ethics committee approval. No documentation of local permission is required (a) if the researcher will simply be asking organizations to distribute research invitations on the researcher's behalf, or (b) if the researcher is using only public means to identify/contact participants. When medical, educational, or business records are analysed or used to identify potential research participants, the site needs to explicitly approve access to data for research purposes (even if the researcher normally has access to that data to perform his or her job).

Please note that the approval to proceed depends also on research proposal approval.

Kind regards,

Morag

Chair, EdD. VPREC

Appendix G: Approval from Muskingum University
(double-click to read clearly in Adobe)

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November 6, 2013

Dear Valerie Smith,

Based on my review of your research proposal, I give permission for you to conduct the study entitled *Crossing Cultures: Understanding the Black Collegiate Culture at a Midwestern PWI* at Muskingum University. As part of this study, I authorize you to use university databases to identify multicultural students and recruit them for your study, to use university statistics and documents as it pertains to your study and to share the results of the data collection and analysis. I also allow you to identify and disclose Muskingum University as the research site within your thesis work. Individuals' participation will be voluntary and at their own discretion.

We understand that our organization's responsibilities include: providing a confidential setting in which to conduct the study, allowing storage of forms and documents created from the study in a locked location for a period of five years, providing access to licensed counselors for the participants if necessary and direct supervision of the research by myself during the length of the project. We reserve the right to withdraw from the study at any time if our circumstances change.

I confirm that I am authorized to approve research in this setting.

I understand that the data collected will remain entirely confidential and may not be provided to anyone outside of the research team without permission from your university's ethics committee.

Sincerely,

Janet Heeter-Bass
Vice-President for Student Affairs/Dean of Students