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Lived Experiences of Black Bahamian Students at a Faith Based Institution

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LIVED EXPERIENCES OF BLACK BAHAMIAN STUDENTS

AT A FAITH BASED INSTITUTION

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A thesis

Presented to

The School of Social Sciences, Education & Business

Department of Higher Education and Student Development

Taylor University

Upland, Indiana

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In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts in Higher Education and Student Development

_____

by

Rachel McGregor

September 2017

Higher Education and Student Development
Taylor University
Upland, Indiana

CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL
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MASTER'S THESIS
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This is to certify that the Thesis of

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entitled

Lived Experiences of Black Bahamian Students at a Faith Based Institution

has been approved by the Examining Committee for the thesis requirement for the

Master of Arts degree
in Higher Education and Student Development

September 2017

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Abstract

This study utilized a qualitative phenomenological research design to gain understanding of the experiences of Black Bahamians at a small, private, residential, liberal arts, faith-based university in a rural part of the Midwest. In an attempt to validate interview findings, interview data was coded, themed, and then triangulated in a focus group. The Bahamian student experience is, in essence, shaped by Black identity development, integration processes, campus racial climate, and the students' sense of belonging. Despite many challenges, the growth that occurs on campus makes the experience worthwhile. Implications for practice include investing in faculty training, providing microaggression training for all campus members, and creating consistent space for thoughtful, guided interactions among Bahamian students.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

A young Bahamian woman named Jazzy transferred to a small Christian liberal arts college after completing a year at College of the Bahamas in Nassau. She grew up in a staunchly Christian family; however, many of the women she encountered on her new campus were taken aback by her blunt attitude and the way she openly talked about taboo topics.

Jazzy bumped into a classmate when she was walking to the gym, and he asked if she was planning to play basketball. The question seemed strange to her, given her small stature. It occurred to her that perhaps he had asked because she was Black; this was her first encounter with race-based stereotyping. Later that week, Jazzy attended her first Biology Pre-med major class, where a young woman asked Jazzy if she really felt prepared for the demands of the major, given her "lack of good English skills." The young woman falsely assumed that Jazzy's accent indicated poorer academic abilities; this was her first encounter with neo-racism. This story captures only a glimpse of Bahamian student experiences in America.

Purpose of the Study

The Bahamian college student population in America is small but growing, much like the general international college student population (Haynie, 2014; Institute of International Education [IIE], 2015). During the 2014-2015 school year, America hosted

398,824 international students, and just 1,395, or 0.34%, were Bahamians (IIE, 2015). The selected institution deviates greatly from the national population. Bahamians make up 17% of their international student population and a significant portion of the number of Black students living on its predominantly White campus.

Naturally, the small number of Bahamian college students elicits little attention in the research world; thus, this project is rooted in research conducted on other international student populations, minority student experiences, and diversity in general. A large body of research investigates the impact of diversity upon the higher education environment (e.g., Hu & Kuh, 2003; Umbach & Kuh, 2006; Zuniga, Williams, & Berger, 2005), and many of these studies indicate the benefits of welcoming diversity on campus (Chang, 2007; Chang, Astin, & Kim, 2004; Terenzini, Cabrera, Colbeck, Bjorklund, & Parente, 2001). However, there is growing concern that ethnic diversity and international student recruitment are encouraged and pursued without prioritizing the development and attainment of minority students themselves (Chang, 2002, 2007). Creating support for Bahamian students is important given the size of the Bahamian community, their intrinsic value as scholarly individuals, and their unique need to fit into the American culture.

Context

The Bahamas is composed of over seven hundred islands, but the vast majority of Bahamians populate two dozen of the biggest islands. Since only 4% of its 388,000 citizens are White (World Population Review, 2015), Bahamians studying in America have left a context in which they were the ethnic majority and entered into a new minority experience. This study begins the process of understanding their experiences.

Many international students of color have their first encounter with racism in college, generally coupled with the presence of neo-racism, which is essentially racism based on a devaluing of culture and national order (Hervik, 2004). This sort of encounter greatly increases acculturative stress and, if left unaddressed, may inhibit healthy integration and racial identity development (Boafo-Arthur, 2014; Lee & Opio, 2011).

Implications of the Study

A growing body of literature explores the experiences of particular international student groups (e.g., Ahn, 2012; Boafo-Arthur, 2014; Poyrazli & Lopez, 2007). Most find that, no matter the color of their skin, international students experience acculturative stress, including confusion, feelings of isolation and alienation, discrimination, language barriers, and loneliness (Constantine, Myers, Kindaichi, & Moore, 2004; Johnson & Sandhu, 2007; Lee & Rice, 2007; Leong, 2015). However, international students of color often have a more difficult experience, especially if they are a part of the majority population in their home country. Given the expected difficulty of adjusting to college (Chickering, 1969; Schlossberg, 1981), it is no surprise that adding cultural and minority factors only compounds the international student development experience.

Research Question

This study aimed to examine the experiences of Bahamian students at a faith-based, rural, Predominantly White Institution (PWI). The themes that emerged were organized into factors that define the experience. These themes provide insight into how best to improve the Bahamian student experience. As such, this study was guided by the following question:

What is the lived experience of Black Bahamian students in America?

Chapter 2

Literature Review

The Bahamas, an island nation near the United States, sends many of its young people across the ocean to earn college degrees in the States. These young Bahamian international students are motivated to study abroad by a variety of factors, but since little research examines the experiences of their small population, included in this review are studies concerning the broader international population and the experiences of Black international students from various nations. Some literature was reviewed before conducting interviews in order to improve the researcher's knowledge on international students and students of color, while other segments of the literature were included after interviews, based on the themes that emerged.

Emerging International Student Population

In 2010, data collected by the Institute of Higher Education identified a variety of factors that influence international students' decision to further their education in the U.S. (as cited in Boafo-Arthur, 2014); these factors include the following, listed in order of importance: broader variety of schools and programs; higher quality education; a welcoming posture; scholarship availability; and quality student support services. The motivation these factors provide international students does not negate the reality of their difficult experience upon arriving. Adjusting to a new environment is challenging, and that experience is compounded by the culture shock international students generally face,

leading to acculturative stress (Berry, 1994). Black international students tend to experience acculturative stress at the highest levels, since many of them experience minority status for the first time when they come to the States. Thus, they must adjust not only to a new culture but also to a new perception of their ethnicity.

Despite the high levels of acculturative stress Black international students tend to experience, the Immigration and Naturalization Act of 1965 increased Black immigration to the United States (Anderson, 2015). In fact, a Pew Research Center analysis of U.S. Census Bureau data found Black immigrants account for 8.7% of the total U.S. Black population. Caribbean nations are the primary source of Black immigration to the U.S., supplying more than 50% of all Black immigrants (Anderson, 2015; Deaux et al, 2007). However, Caribbean nations supply only 1.7% of all undergraduate international student enrollment. Of the U.S.'s 399,000 (approx.) undergraduate international students, about 7,000 are Caribbean; of those, 20% are Bahamian (IIE, 2015).

These Bahamian students, like all international students, provide valuable chances for intercultural exchanges on American campuses. An assortment of studies shows positive educational benefits result from opportunities for cross-racial interaction on campus (Chang, 2007; Chang, Astin, & Kim, 2004; Denson & Chang, 2009; Terenzini et al., 2001). However, there is growing concern for the development and retention of minority and international students themselves (Chang, 2002, 2007; Lee & Rice, 2007).

Integration

Integration refers to the gradual process of learning to share and practice in a community's normative attitudes, values, culture, and structural requirements (Pascarella & Terrenzini, 1991; Tinto, 1988). All college students experience transition and

integration, but international students, especially non-white international students, face extra integration inhibiting factors. Integration experiences, both academic and social, are either negative or positive. Negative experiences outweigh any positive experiences, and they tend to hamper integration, distancing the individual from community and "promoting the individual's marginality and, ultimately, withdrawal" from the community (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991, p. 53).

With this in mind, many university faculty and staff members work to help their international students adapt and cope. This effort assumes international students ought to persist, overcome their discomfort, and adapt to the norms of the host society (Bevis, 2002; Hechanova-Alampay, Beehr, Christiansen, & Horn, 2002; Heggins & Jackson, 2003; Klineberg & Hull, 1979; Pritchard & Skinner, 2002; Zhao, Kuh, & Carini, 2005). Some of these studies acknowledge a need for increased sensitivity among the domestic population but only as a smaller part of the integration process. Fewer studies consider the role institutions and individuals play in purposefully or unknowingly marginalizing international students (Beoku-Betts, 2004).

Racial Identity Development

Cross's Nigrescence theory purports five stages of racial identity development: Pre-encounter, Encounter, Immersion-Emersion, Internalization and Internalization-Commitment (Cross, Parham, & Helms, 1991). Black international students native to a primarily Black nation coming to the U.S. for the first time likely embody a Pre-encounter stage. Race may have been relatively unimportant to their identity thus far because they lived as part of the majority group. This holds true for Bahamian students, whose nation has a white population of less than 5% (World Population Review, 2015).

As Black international students persist, they move through Cross's stages of racial identity development. Constantine, Richardson, Benjamin, and Wilson (1998) described this as a process of becoming Black. During the Encounter stage, students of color likely personalize race and see the way it affects their experience. They may have never given their skin color much consideration. A student in the Encounter stage likely feels compelled to change in some manner. This sort of awareness generally arrives early in Black Americans' lives, given the publicity race relations and inequalities receive and the personal encounters with racism most Black Americans experience at an early age.

Black international students who have moved into the third stage, Immersion-Emersion, may hold conflicting thoughts and emotions about their Black identity. They may reject Black community in one moment and defend it in the next. This sort of dualistic experience, like other racially charged experiences, happens in tandem with everyday life experiences. In the end, if Internalization occurs, students blend their old self-concept with their new racial awareness, and gradually race becomes a smaller element in their identity. At this point, some students may work toward racial reconciliation in relationships and communities around them, as expected in the last stage, Internalization-Commitment.

Neo-racism

Notably, the racial identity development Black international students experience is greatly affected by encounters with neo-racism. Spears (1999) explained the difference between neo-racism and racism:

Neo-racism rationalizes the subordination of people of color on the basis of culture, which is of course acquired through acculturation within an ethnic group,

while traditional racism rationalizes it fundamentally in terms of biology. Neo-racism is still racism in that it functions to maintain racial hierarchies of oppression. (p. 13)

In other words, neo-racism is discrimination based on culture and national order (Barker, 1981; Hervik, 2004; Spears, 1999). It thrives when cultural differences are used as justification for discrimination (Lee & Rice, 2007). In addition to racial discrimination, international students endure discrimination based on their accents, cultural norms, language, and stereotypes about their country of origin, among other things (Boafo-Arthur, 2014; Lee & Opio, 2011; Lee & Rice, 2007).

Deaux et al. (2007) explored the effect of stereotype threat on performance of first- and second-generation Afro-Caribbeans. They defined a part of the problem facing that population in the following manner:

On the one hand, [Black Caribbeans] are an immigrant group whose first language is English, thus giving them some advantage over other immigrants who must learn a new language before having ready access to educational and occupational opportunities in the United States. On the other hand, because the majority of these immigrants are Black, they enter a country in which their skin color becomes the basis for discriminatory treatment. (p. 385)

While Black Caribbeans have this benefit over non-English-speaking immigrants, they face many difficulties unique to their population due to their skin color and culture.

Sense of Belonging

Literature on belonging provides a framework for understanding a key factor in student success and retention. A sense of belonging develops when students feel they

matter, which is communicated through messages of being valued, respected, important, or cared about by others (Strayhorn, 2012a). This sense of belonging thus comes from meaningful relationships with peers and faculty, and it builds relatedness (France & Finney, 2010; Strayhorn, 2012a). It counters feelings of isolation (Clegg, 2006), contributes to academic success, and improves retention (Dixon Rayle & Chung, 2007).

Among other things, Strayhorn (2012b) found that international students tend to have a weaker sense of belonging than domestic students. Meanwhile, Hurtado and Carter (1997) found that frequent interactions with faculty members and membership in athletic teams increase sense of belonging, both factors that are features of either the campus ethos or common to the Bahamian student experience, respectively.

Black students' sense of belonging connected to campus racial climate. Inside Higher Ed and the American Council on Education recently surveyed college presidents and student affairs professionals regarding campus racial climate (Espinosa, Chessman, & Wayt, 2016; Kruger, 2017). These surveys point to an increase in attention to the campus racial climate conversation—presidents say that the racial climate at their campus has become significantly more a priority in just the past three years (Kruger, 2017).

Hurtado and colleagues' (2008) campus climate construct identifies several factors that play into a healthy campus racial climate by reviewing over 90 instruments that measure multiple dimensions of campus climate, diversity initiatives, and more. This examination allowed them to refine understanding of campus climate into four broad factors—structural diversity, the historic legacy of the campus, psychological climate, and behavioral dimension—all of which intersect and influence the campus racial and diversity climate. Concepts like culture shock, faculty diversity numbers, student

diversity enrollment, rates of racist incidents, individual and institutional support of diversity, and individual and institutional awareness of discrimination or racial conflict on campus fall under the umbrellas of these four factors that shape campus racial climate.

Since belonging is built on feelings of safety, mattering, respect, and care, campuses with unhealthy racial or diversity climates encounter barriers in fostering a sense of belonging for minority students, especially Black minority students. However, Glass, Wongtrait, and Buus (2015) theorized, when campuses shift focus from the barriers to the resiliency and growth students gain when facing such barriers, they create more supportive environments and build greater senses of belonging amid the population.

Summary

The areas of literature discussed above are most relevant to understanding Bahamian student experiences at PWIs. The researcher lightly explored racial identity development and integration before conducting the interviews in order to form questions connected to common international student of color experiences; however, she did not deem it relevant to explore literature on the emerging international student population and sense of belonging until after conducting interviews and the focus group.

The literature affirms that Black international students frequently face many obstacles during the integration process. In particular, racial identity development shapes their experiences, both in positive and negative ways, often forcing students to examine their values and identity through a new lens. Resiliency and growth may occur through encounters with neo-racism and experiences adapting to American classrooms. The process of adapting to a new landscape and new social networks shapes the Bahamian international student experience in significant ways.

Chapter 3

Methodology

Research Design

This study used a qualitative phenomenological research design to understand the experiences of Black Bahamians at the institution studied. Phenomenology is recognized as an appropriate means for exploring lived experiences of people groups. The method reveals a shared phenomenon based upon the "specific statements and experiences" gathered in interviews (Creswell, Morales, Plano, & Hanson, 2007, p. 252).

Numerous studies explore the lived experiences of minority students: Black African students, Asian students, Middle Eastern students, Black American students, and more (e.g., Ahn, 2012; Boafo-Arthur, 2014; Carr, Koyama, & Thiagarajan, 2003; Poyrazli & Lopez, 2007). Unsurprisingly, given there are fewer than 50,000 Bahamians in the United States, no known research touches on the experiences of Black Bahamian students. The studied institution's history of recruiting and enrolling many students from the Bahamas necessitates a better understanding of their experiences. Phenomenological research was conducted to begin the process of understanding their experiences.

Participants and Context

This small, private, residential, liberal arts, faith-based university in a rural part of the Midwest enrolls approximately 2,160 students, including 17% minority students and 7% international students. The 25 Bahamian students make up less than .02% of the

population but approximately 17% of the international population. In its purpose statement, the university commits to things like learning experiences based on a Christian view of truth and life in order to foster intellectual, emotional, physical, vocational, social, and spiritual development. These goals can only be achieved in the Bahamian community when their experiences are more fully understood and accounted for.

To more fully understand the Bahamian experience, all 25 Bahamian students were invited to participate in the study. Ten agreed to participate. Individual, face-to-face, semi-structured interviews and a follow-up focus group were conducted with students who had been at the university for at least one semester. Thus, the researcher interviewed students with significant time spent at the university. All potential participants received an email explaining the study and inviting them to participate.

In an attempt to validate interview findings, interview data was coded, themed, and then triangulated in a focus group. Triangulation is "the process of corroborating evidence from different individuals, types of data, or methods of data collection in descriptions and themes in qualitative research (Creswell et al., 2007, p. 259).

Table 1

Number of Potential Participants: Longevity and Gender Breakdown

Class Rank	Male	Female	Total
First Year	7	6	13
Second Year	1	2	3
Third Year	1	3	4
Fourth Year	2	3	5

Procedure and Interview Protocol

Personal emails (Appendix A) sent to all 25 Bahamians explained the general purpose of the study, offered a food incentive, and asked if the student would like to participate in an individual interview. After individual interviews were completed, a second email (Appendix B) was sent out to the 10 individual interview participants asking if they would like to participate in a follow-up focus group.

Before the interview, each participant received a description of the interview protocol (Appendix C) and signed an informed consent agreement (Appendix D). The protocol included the context and purpose of the study, described the time needed for interviewing (45-60 minutes), and ensured confidentiality. During the interviews, the study's context and purpose were reviewed. The researcher collected basic identifying data about each participant before asking open-ended questions. After a "grand-tour" icebreaker question that relaxed the participant and started conversation (Creswell, 2008, p. 233), the researcher asked core questions that addressed the major research question. An extensive list of possible questions and topics was used to guide the conversation (Appendix E).

After the interviews were completed and coded, a focus group was conducted to review the factors identified, since focus groups are useful for triangulation (Morgan, 1988). Creswell (2008) defined triangulation as "the process of corroborating evidence from different individuals, types of data, or methods of data collection" (p. 266). All participants were invited to the focus group, and 7 out of the 10 attended. Focus group participants had the opportunity to confirm or challenge the value given to each factor and add a fuller perspective to the identified factors.

Participants were given a description of focus group protocol (Appendix F) and signed another informed consent agreement in advance (Appendix G). Informed consent ensured confidentiality. Focus group protocol described the time needed for group discussion (approximately one hour) and the goal of the time (to receive feedback on the identified defining factors). Each focus group participant received a notepad during the session to record their thoughts while waiting for a chance to speak.

Data Analysis

With their permission, all interviews were recorded, transcribed, member checked, coded, and then destroyed. The coding process narrowed the scope of information from the interviews until common themes were revealed (Creswell, 2008). These common themes were categorized, and four factors emerged as the defining factors of the Black Bahamian student experience.

The factors that emerged in these interviews and the follow up focus group provided excellent insight into the lived experiences of Black Bahamian students. These factors may point university stakeholders in healthy directions for improving the experience they offer to Bahamian students. As Bahamian students' experiences improve, their ability to contribute to university culture in positive ways will increase, and, more importantly, they will leave college more equipped to lead impactful lives.

Chapter 4

Results

This study explored the experiences of 10 Bahamian students. Their experiences were explored first in individual interviews and then in a focus group. The focus group convened three months after the individual interviews, which allowed participants to better identify if some of their comments had become less relevant with time, in particular the many comments made concerning the 2016 presidential election.

Three major themes and one minor theme emerged during the interviews and were triangulated and confirmed during the focus group. The three major themes were as follows: 1) Black Identity Development, 2) Integration, and 3) Sense of Belonging. The minor theme was Growth. Participants agreed that development of their Black identity is the most significant factor of their experience; thus, the nuances of Black Identity Development are given slightly more attention in this chapter.

Seven of the ten original participants joined the focus group. The names of the participants have been changed, and their demographics have been described in tables below.

Table 2

Individual Interview Participant Demographics

	Number of participants	Percentage of Total Participants
Female	7	70%
Male	3	30%
First Year	4	40%
Third Year	1	10%
Fourth Year	5	50%

Table 3

Focus Group Participant Demographics

	Number of participants	Percentage of Total Participants
Female	4	70%
Male	3	30%
First Year	3	43%
Fourth Year	4	57%

Major Theme I: Black Identity

Individual interviews created space for reflection on the extensive ways that participants journeyed through a process of Black identity development, or Nigrescence. Eight participants described significant experiences attached to forming a Black identity during their individual interviews, and during focus group triangulation,

the seven participants agreed that becoming aware of their Blackness was the most significant part of their experience. They felt unprepared for "being Black in America" and still experience a great deal of tension as they develop their Black identity.

The ways that participants described their experiences as Black students have been divided into three subthemes: 1) "I didn't know I was Black," 2) "How I think about myself," and 3) "How others think about me."

Subtheme 1: "I didn't know I was Black." In individual interviews, nine participants talked about a new awareness of their Blackness. Deja said, "I didn't know I was Black until I came to (college), like . . . I knew I was black, but like . . . Like, you know what I mean!" Shannon laughed as she said, "I identify myself as . . . I guess . . . Black?" Deja explained that being a part of majority culture in the Bahamas meant she did not consciously think of herself as a Black person—black with a capital "B." She knew the color of her skin (black or dark brown), but that did not mean much about her identity. Two participants mentioned the negative effects of colorism, or privilege based on degrees of lightness or darkness of black skin. However, they only mentioned colorism's existence in the Bahamas as a way of highlighting the more significant and heavy presence of racism in the United States.

Participants described becoming aware of their Blackness in many different ways. One participant described long conversations with his family about their concerns with sending him to America for college, while Jada reflected on the following moment:

Ok, so . . . One of the things that annoyed me about, like, racial questions? Sometimes it says Black, sometimes it says African American. When I first started filling out stuff like that, I used to put Pacific Islander. Cause I was like,

I'm not American! I'm not African American. But now I put African American

cause I know it just means Black. But I feel like we shouldn't be seen as Black, I

feel like we should be seen as Caribbean or, um, international, and not African

American, cause I'm not African, and I'm not American. So. That's what I'm

trying to, I'm just . . . But I see myself as somebody from the Caribbean, a

Bahamian. I see myself as my twelve-year-old self putting pacific islander, cause,

I'm from an island.

Jada's reflection on her own slow process of exploring the Black label and sometimes

being grouped incorrectly into African American labels captures the dissonance

Bahamians experience when they first become conscious of their Blackness.

Subtheme 2: "How I think about myself." Participants spent a good deal of

time describing how having black skin while in America affects the way they think about

themselves. Some spoke of "living as a Black American" and trying to understand the

stereotypes associated with Black American. Six participants mentioned constantly

questioning how they did or did not fit into those stereotypes. Shaneil stated,

No one wants to feel uncomfortable. No one wants to feel uneasy about

something. The thing is, I'm always uncomfortable. You know what I

mean? Like, I'm always painfully aware, painfully aware that I'm a Black

woman. It's never, I don't turn it off.

Not only did six participants describe questioning their own understanding of their own

identity, but eight participants discussed how they imagined others might understand their

identity. They noted feeling like they were never enough or had to try to be better rather

than simply being on-par in any given situation, especially in their careers and in the

classroom. These efforts to "be better" were often described as fruitless or insufficient to change how others think about them. Some detailed navigating what it means to be "woke," or to be an active agent in conversations about racial reconciliation. C. J. said,

> Do I speak up for Blacks and be targeted, or do I stay in the backline or do I just not get involved, or . . . ? So I was kind of feeling my way out because I didn't want to get part of the racial mess, but I also wanted to identify myself with the other Blacks that were here.

In addition to navigating these questions about their identity, many participants described navigating interactions with others based on misinformed perceptions.

Subtheme 3: "How others perceive me." Seven of the ten participants told of significant experiences encountering and responding to other people's perceptions of them as a Black person. Participants frequently mentioned feeling sensitive towards the way majority students think of them and unsettled by the way they are understood. They felt perceived as angry and intimidating in one moment and "not really Black" in the next. Preston said, "I've gotten this a ton of times that, 'I was scared to talk to you because you're never smiling. You look so hard to approach.'" Patrice described the following encounter with a white American male student:

> He was just like, "You're Black, but you're not really Black." I was just like, "Expound on that," like, let me hear what you mean. He was like, "You know, I expected you to like speak a different way, you talk so, you speak so *well*, you carry yourself so *well*, like you're not *angry* and obnoxious," and all these things, and I was just like "Sooooo because I'm Black, you expected me to not be able to speak well, you expected me to behave a certain way, and you expected me to,

um, be angry at you during these conversations?" . . . . I was furious. I was like, I

can't believe! I can't believe that these words are being said to me right now. I

was like, so because I'm not all the things that the media has portrayed Black

women to be, or Black people to be, I must not be Black.

This dichotomy of being "not really Black" to some people while still seeming

intimidating and angry to others leaves participants feeling offended and unsettled.

Often, they are not even secure in their identity as a Bahamian. C. J. stated,

When I came to (college), it was just first, like, the pressure of knowing your

Blackness from the African Americans. You already felt that pressure, like, "You

should know!" or the pressure of you need to be "woke." And then being, like,

um, the already like, pre-judgement from the white Americans that we are Black

Americans, and we already have a spirit of opposition. So they automatically lock

us out.

Other focus group participants agreed with C. J.'s observations. They echoed the reality

of many encounters with students who simply assume Bahamians fit all of the

stereotypes, culture, and history that come with being a Black American. In individual

interviews, participants mentioned how others were intimidated by them if they were not

talkative or did not smile enough; they noted that Americans avoid walking close to them

and question them at a supermarket while White American friends were not questioned.

Major Theme II: Integration

This theme captures the way Bahamians integrated into campus life by

highlighting common Bahamian characteristics and values and exploring the way those

affected their academic and social experiences. The theme of integration holds two

subthemes: "Who 'we' are" and Transition. "Who 'we' are" captures participants' descriptions of Bahamian values and characteristics, while the Transition subtheme analyzes the way Bahamian identity affects the integration process.

Subtheme 1: Who "we" are. The researcher's posed questions were not explicitly designed to reveal Bahamian culture, but, naturally, through the course of conversation, the participants described themselves as a subculture of the university and their culture at home. Participants referred to Bahamians as either quick-witted and somewhat insensitive, or perhaps more likely to make light of one another's struggles as a form of empathy. During the focus group, Patrice said,

> You know what I mean? [Bahamians are] just rough around the edges. Because you [have] been taught all your life to be very thick skinned. You've been taught all your life to be independent. You've been taught all your life to suck it up. Brush it off and move on.

When asked about values, six participants mentioned food, while seven mentioned family. A senior participant said, "With Bahamians it's all about family, and all about sticking together, and like helping each other climb up." This was said in contrast to what three of the four seniors described as American individualism, something they noted with a certain amount of distaste. Participants identified these pieces of their Bahamian identity as significant in their integration experience. When they arrive, Bahamians undergo a major transitional process as they attempt to adapt to their new environment.

Subtheme 2: Transition. There were two distinct experiences in the transition process: those who came to college with preexisting Bahamian friendships and those who did not. Those who entered with preexisting friendships tended to describe their

transition process as slightly easier than those who came without. During the focus group, this concept received much attention. When some participants who had an easier transition heard the frustrations of the others, the conversation moved into acknowledging a need for more intentional Bahamian interactions. David said,

> I had an easy transition because of the people that I came into contact with, but like, now hearing these stuff about other people saying that it's like [difficult], that's why we need stuff like where Bahamians could be connected rather than just having a party, we could just have serious discussions where we could tell how each other feel.

Those who did not enroll with preexisting Bahamian friendships still agreed that other Bahamians eventually connected with them and became a positive factor in the integration process. This concept is further discussed in the section on belonging.

Expectations. Five participants spoke about their frustration with the way they felt encouraged to come to the university because "this is the best place on earth and no wrong goes on here," when instead they found that their needs were not always met, they frequently felt othered, or ostracized, and the advertised university ideal experience was unattainable for them. Andrea, an underclassmen, made the following observation:

> Like, okay, when they search out for international students, we probably should speak with someone who will have the shared experience that we will probably soon have, so that we can know what kinda to expect? And even the ones who like, reach out to us, who would have that shared experience, they could do a better job of letting us know what's going to happen because the experience that is flashed about, like the [institution] experience? I don't know if that's

necessarily the experience for, like, I don't know . . . I don't know if that's the

experience for international students. I don't know if we necessarily fit into that. I

don't know if we fit into that. So maybe if they could tell us, "This dream that

we're about to sell you is not necessarily the dream that you'll get."

Shaneil, an upperclassman, made a similar statement in her individual interview:

"Come to [The University], you will be accepted here, you will be loved here,"

you know like, "we can treat you well." So you come here with this expectation

of "okay, I'm gonna come here and I'm gonna be taken care of, I'm gonna be

looked after", and then after two weeks, it's like "well, what happened to all

that?" You know? You made it seem like they were gonna be checking for me

and no one cares. Literally no one cares. So. And I don't think that's just a

Bahamian problem, I think that's an international problem, so I don't wanna just

say ohhhh they don't care about Bahamians, they don't care about anyone.

These reflections capture the way expectations play a role in shaping Bahamian student

transitional experiences.

> *International students.*   Interactions with other international students impacted

the integration process significantly. One participant stated that the first days on campus

for international orientation were super helpful to her, four mentioned the International

Student Society as a support, and seven described ways the Office of Intercultural

Programs had served as a safe space for forming friendships and connections with

students who shared the sense of displacement and minority status at the

university. These friendships are further explored in the section on sense of belonging.

Culture shock.   In addition to the shock of their new minority status, encounters with racism, and the clash of American values and Bahamian values, eight participants described what felt like barriers to their integration process, and some described how they overcame, or are working to overcome, those barriers.

Taboos and behavioral norms.   During either the individual interviews, the focus group, or often both, every participant shared stories of minor offenses and awkward or uncomfortable moments. These stories captured the participants' culture shock connected to taboos and behavioral norms. Participants spent a good deal of time describing both being offended by and offending Americans. As noted above, Bahamians tend to be more frank and direct in their communication. This approach can sometimes offend Americans, whom participants described as sensitive.

The concept of American awkwardness received significant attention during the focus group. For instance, Preston said,

> I feel like it's forced a lot, and to try and let me reach out to someone, you
>
> know? But it's like, it comes off really awkward you know. It's completely
>
> different though because, I feel like white Americans, like they, let's say a guy on
>
> my floor, he'll hail me every time he sees me. In the Bahamas I'm not doing
>
> that. Like if I just see Dana five minutes ago, I'm not turning around and saying
>
> "Hi Dana," again. Like, I walk straight past Dana.

This interaction and several others contribute to the process of adjusting to American cultural norms. Several participants described feeling offended by what they perceived as disrespectful ways of addressing others, such as saying "good afternoon" when

entering a room or passing a stranger on the street or asking "Could you please repeat that?" instead of "What?" when communicating with an elder or person of authority.

Christianity. In individual interviews, all participants acknowledged some degree of adjustment to what felt new, but five participants described feeling an overall sense of dissonance with the sort of Christianity they encountered on campus. Only one felt like the dissonance lessened after freshman year. The primary sources of their disconnect differed: feeling judged, feeling their Catholicism disrespected, feeling like Christianity was being forced on them, noticing evangelical support of Donald Trump, and feeling turned off by the uptightness and rosiness of white American Christianity.

By contrast, two participants had an overall sense of positive engagement with Christianity at the university. They cited the openness and vulnerability of the community and the incorporation of faith in the classroom as contributing to their positive reception of Christianity at the university. Tiffany said,

> I went to a Christian school, but it was just the basic, oh we had to go to religion class but we really didn't learn any depth, about things that mattered, about like the Christian world, so, yeah I think that surprised me that oh, people you don't even know them and they'll be so open to talk about their personal faith and walk with God, and stuff like that, I think that was really cool when I came to [the university], and it actually encouraged me to be more open, like, talking about stuff even if it's like stuff I'm struggling with, I know that people are willing to listen to you and give you advice and stuff like that.

The three remaining participants described their engagement with Christianity at the institution in an overall neutral way but mentioned that the experience had been new and

that some growth had occurred due to the experience. This sort of growth is further explored below as a minor theme in the section "Growth."

Academic transition. Themes related to the academic transition were not as prevalent, and there did not seem to be as much agreement on a common experience. Three participants mentioned feeling prepared academically, while two felt unprepared. Three students mentioned feeling satisfied with their learning process, but others felt unsatisfied, as noted above in the section on neo-racism and as explored further below.

Major Theme III: Sense of Belonging

While the integration theme captures the way that factors like culture, taboos, and values affect the transition process and shape Bahamian integration, sense of belonging captures the way that long-term interpersonal interactions affect the Bahamian experience. This theme is particularly nuanced, since participants described finding a sense of belonging in several different ways. Most participants do feel a sense of belonging; in fact, seven mentioned "the people" as one of the most positive parts about their university experience, in response to the prompt "Describe two or three things you like about the campus community." Those who did not describe a positive, overall sense of belonging were able to identify more narrow spaces in which they do find belonging.

Thus, the sense of belonging theme is divided into five subthemes: 1) campus racial climate, 2) Bahamian community, 3) faculty and staff interactions, 4) American friendships, and 5) international and minority friendships.

Subtheme 1: Campus racial climate. Six of the ten participants spent a significant amount of time describing their disappointment or frustration with the campus racial climate. Throughout their interviews, they collectively made the following

observations. Therefore, this section of the results ought to be considered a gathering of campus racial climate indicators, rather than an agreed-upon, common Bahamian experience. Collectively, an understanding of the campus racial climate can be observed through interactions related to the 2016 presidential election, incidences of neo-racism, faculty and staff involvement in race related conversations, the makeup of the student body, the frequency of conversations on race, and general feelings of safety.

   Presidential election of 2016. Six participants talked at length about the election during their individual interviews in January. Their observations and reflections were heightened by the 2016 presidential election, which had occurred just weeks before. Experiences and perceptions of xenophobia, racism, and neo-racism were particularly high in the months leading up to the election; thus, many participants spent the majority of their interview discussing their fear of America and disappointment with the college's response. However, during the focus group in April, participants felt the election itself should not be considered a major theme of their experience since those who had been on campus long enough knew that things were different before this school year.

   Nonetheless, incidences of racism and neo-racism were described by many participants as significant to their experience. For example, Shaneil stated,

   And a lot of American's think that "Oh, you're international, you don't know

   what's going on." But I know just what's going on! I listen to BBC every day,

   don't mind me. You know what I'm trying to say? Like, I pride myself on being

   an educated woman and I think that when people look down on you because I'm

   international or whatever, I'm just like . . . But I know. I know what's going

on. And I need you to respect my opinion. And I think a lot of times because I'm

international "I don't know" or because I'm Black "I don't know."

Such devaluing encounters, combined with seeing Trump signs on campus and in town

and hearing stories of Black people assaulted at gas stations and traffic stops, left several

participants feeling unsafe, undervalued, and jaded towards the university's declarations

of faith and community.

Faculty and staff.   One thread of connection to gauging campus racial climate

was that of faculty and staff involvement. Two students described professors being vocal

about a need for racial reconciliation or increased diversity awareness but that those

professors were not received well by majority students. Two other students suggested

that faculty do not care about conversations concerning racial injustice and, in the next

breath, suggested that "[the university] doesn't care," connecting lack of faculty

engagement to their overall perception of the university. Another described being

surprised when a professor asked how she was doing after a racist incident on campus,

because that professor had never previously engaged in race-related conversations. Other

students highlighted a significant lack of diversity among faculty and staff, as well as the

fact that most classroom content is geared for a white market or a white audience.

Students.   Another connecting point when gauging campus racial climate

emerged in relation to student life. One participant noted the lack of diversity in student

leadership, while three others pointed out the general lack of diversity on campus. Three

students pointed out that they are almost always the only Black or minority person in the

classroom. During her freshman Foundations of Christian Belief class discussion,

Shannon described being "shocked" by the opposition her classmates felt to the idea of

white privilege: "I felt bad that I didn't have the chance to speak out about it. But being the only international student in my class, I didn't really know how to deal with it."

Many other participants discussed frequently speaking up in conversations on racial reconciliation; however, they also generally described leaving those conversations feeling frustrated and disappointed. Three participants said that conversations with White Americans, both students and staff, concerning race are generally not engaged, negatively engaged, or misunderstood. However, two others felt that conversations on race are received well. All five of these participants described conversations on race as happening frequently. For instance, Patrice stated,

> [I've had] multiple conversations about race. I felt like we had Black week every
> week last semester to be honest. I was kind of tired of it, if I'm being real.
> Because, I don't know. I feel that we were kind of screaming at people at that
> point. It was a lot. But it was the most tension-y that campus has been for a very
> long time. Or like, even since I've been here. I've never experienced that much
> tension on campus.

It is important to clarify that, although many participants felt fatigued by the number of disappointing conversations on race, most agreed that domestic students are generally interested in their culture and nationality and respond positively in those conversations.

Feeling unsafe. Six participants talked about feeling safe or unsafe on campus. Five specifically described a moment when they started to feel unsafe, often in connection with the 2016 presidential election or to police brutality and the highly publicized murders of Black men. Deja mentioned what it was like to hear of repeated incidents of violence against Black people: "That's when I started to feel unsafe, because

anything can happen to any one of us." Participants explicitly noted many encounters with racism and neo-racism that made them feel unsafe, as described in a later section.

The sixth student who talked about safety did so in terms of the low crime rates on campus. The institution has much lower crime rates than those of the Bahamas, so David said that he felt safe because "you don't really have to look over your shoulder or worry about anything being stolen or anything like that."

Neo-racism. It is challenging to distinguish between incidences of racism and incidences of neo-racism. In conversation, participants frequently said things like, "I don't know if it has to do with actually being Bahamian or just being a minority?" At the same time, several shared experiences or incidences of racism that somehow seemed as though they could be justified by cultural or national differences. For instance, a hiring manager at a job fair in Indianapolis told a senior Bahamian man that they do not hire internationals and asked him if he could even afford a winter coat. The participant felt extremely insulted, left the job fair, and later found out she was lying about her company's hiring policy.

In reverse, when three students' Bahamian flags were stolen from their dorm rooms, that may have seemed like purely a crime of nationalism; however, because the victims of that crime are Black, it is also an incidence of racism, given the reality that Black people have less power in general and on campus, evident in the lack of diversity in administration and among faculty and staff. Four students noted this incident and the fear or frustration it engendered in them, especially with no apparent resolution. They communicated a present desire for action and justice in follow-up to that incident.

All but one participant recounted an incident of neo-racism or racism that had happened on campus—seven described neo-racist or racist things that had happened to them. Of the three who did not recount their own racist encounters, two were freshman, and one said she assumed she simply had not consciously experienced racism yet but likely would.

Disbelief at intelligence. The most commonly described neo-racism incidents involved a disbelief of intelligence. This theme came up in two interviews and in the focus group, when three participants described multiple incidents, and the other four agreed that they had had similar experiences. This theme was explored through stories related to group projects and achievement. Bahamian intellect was also discounted in conversations about the 2016 presidential election, a theme discussed later in this section.

General agreement was expressed about encounters that entailed, as Patrice described, a white American saying something like, "I was so amazed at how you spoke so eloquently on the topic! You just had so much, like, intelligence within you. You just had so many constructive things to add!" This conversation assumed that Patrice, who had been asked to speak publicly at an event, would not speak eloquently or would have nothing to add because of her status as a foreigner and as a Black person.

Three students described being ignored or discounted during group project work and student leadership work, unless there was a need for a "Black perspective" or an "international perspective." Preston said, "I've had these instances where my ideas have been *bomb* ideas, like, top notch ideas, and they've been pushed to the side because . . . I'm the minority, you know?"

The same students frequently noted how surprised their peers were with their classroom achievement. Some described peers who seemed overly shocked by a project created by a Bahamian, while others described moments when peers distrusted Bahamian input during a group quiz and thus scored poorly. Preston recounted the following:

I've gotten questions like, you'll have exams and they be like, "Oh, what you got on the exam?" I be like, "Okay, I got a 95." And they be like, "What!!! You got higher than me?!" And like, it's not possible for me to get higher than you? Can I not study and get higher than you?

As Preston described this interaction in the focus group, others participants agreed. This shared experience leaves Bahamians feeling frustrated and disconnected in the classroom, as is further explored in the sections below on integration and sense of belonging.

Subtheme 2: Bahamian community. The most significant subtheme of students' sense of belonging emerged in conversations about the dynamics of the Bahamian subculture on campus. As mentioned in the section on transition, of the 25 Bahamian students currently enrolled, at least 9 enrolled with preexisting Bahamian connections. During the focus group, these connections were pointed to as a source of support in easing the strain of transition and in forming positive Bahamian community. However, some participants said they received the impression during the recruitment process that finding support and belonging in the Bahamian community on campus would happen naturally, but this is not always the case. One student shared the following:

And I think too, coming in, um, I don't know if this was everyone's case, but like in coming in before you would arrive, people would be like, "Oh, well, a lot of Bahamians at [the university]! Oh, you have a big group of Bahamians at [the

university]!" And they kind of sell you that expectation like, family! Like, them Bahamians, they hang tight, like, that's a family! This will be so legit, like, you'll have a base there, you know, and, to be honest that was a big part of my life back home, family too, so it's like, I kinda like a big group? Because my family is big? So I kinda like a big group but, coming in with that expectation, like, "Oh, this big group could be your family, your brothers, your sisters, your cousins!" And it kinda isn't that case? So I think coming with that approach you could get a lot of your feelings hurt, and you could get a lot of your soft spots crushed, in a way that you didn't expect those soft spots to be crushed by people who supposed to be Bahamian, just like you?

Upperclassmen in the focus group affirmed that this echoed their experience during their first couple of semesters but that gradually Bahamian students became a primary source of connection and belonging. In individual interviews and the focus group, participants shared stories like the following to demonstrate the warmth they felt for one another:

I remember the first day I met Preston. I was in the cold, I was walking to, what is it, um, Nussbaum? And Preston literally stopped me, I don't know how he knew who I was, and he was like, "You's the new Bahamian?" and I was like, "I guess so?" and he was like, "What your name is?" and I was like, "Andrea," and he was like, "You cold eh?" and I was like, "I's a little cold." And he wasn't wearing a jacket and all, and I was like, "What are you doing?" and he was like, "I so used to this weather. Anyway, see you later. When you come to the DC or whatever, make sure you sit by us." And then when I did came, and he did see me, he did pull me to come sit with them, and I was like, ok that was interesting.

And that's been characteristic of a lot of Preston and I's encounters . . . I don't know, but I felt like, I feel like if any of, especially the younger Bahamians, if any of them were to come to me with an issue, I'd try to help them as much as I can.

Maybe I put my own personal feelings as the assumption on the group as a whole.

This story was received by focus group participants with much positivity, however, the importance of paying attention to the nuance of this group dynamic cannot be stressed enough. Moments later, one participant cried as she confessed that she felt excluded from the community, and others were quick to describe the ways in which they did not feel like they could rely on the community to support them:

I wouldn't tell a lot of Bahamians a lot of the issues that I faced during my time [on campus]. Like I had a really hard time a lot of the times and not everybody knew that. Like, I fell really hard financially, I fell really hard spiritually, and there were a few times when I didn't know I would be able to attend college again. A lot of people here don't know that, because I wouldn't readily rely on Bahamians to tell them that, because I was just like oh, how would that make you feel to know that about me, or how would you react? Because of the way that people have reacted in my past about it, that were Bahamian. And so I felt like having somebody outside of that circle that didn't know my past, that didn't know everything that came with me would be more readily accepting, sad to say, of my situation, even though I was completely foreign to them. I mean, not everything is all happy go lucky in the circle of Bahamians.

Focus group participants spent time discussing the ways they would like to be more intentional about spending time together. They acknowledged that they frequently use

humor to make light of one another's troubles and felt that striving for a more supportive, intentional community would be beneficial in both building a sense of belonging and in easing the stress of the integration process.

Subtheme 3: Faculty and staff. Participants had many positive things to say about faculty and staff. Many participants thought of their interactions with professors as one of the best parts of their experience. Faculty members' willingness to help out, desire to make students feel at home, and involvement in students' lives were mentioned several times as key reasons for participant appreciation. Seven participants described professors as caring, involved, open to conversation, and/or passionate about their work.

Further, some participants described specific ways faculty and staff offered support in times of race-related tension. Tiffany reflected on a conversation she had soon after the 2016 presidential election:

My advisor asked me, that was the first time she really seemed concerned about . . . the Black race? Not in like, a mean way, because I know that she's a really sweet person, but she just asked me, like, "Oh, how are you doing, have you had anything that happened to you?" Because she heard about the [white supremacist] video being sent around campus, but, yeah. I was surprised she actually knew about that and she came to talk to me personally.

Subtheme 4: American friendships. During individual interviews, several participants described positive relationships with American students, but upon reviewing the data, it was unclear what sort of satisfaction Bahamian students had overall with their white American peers or the majority community. In the focus group, the researcher asked participants to talk about their satisfaction with white American friendships. All

seven said that they were satisfied with their majority student friendships, despite the fact that, for three, satisfaction meant they had nearly no authentic friendships with white Americans but were perfectly satisfied with that reality.

Subtheme 5: International students and minority students. As mentioned previously, participants identified interactions and relationships with other minority students, both students of color and international students, as positive sources of support and belonging. During the focus group, when asked about his friendships, Preston said,

> No deep type friendship with anyone of the white category. But a lot of my
> friends are really minorities, like, well of course most of them are Bahamian, and
> then, if they're Bahamian, they're minorities. That being Black or other
> international students. So. We just connect easier . . . We all have this one
> struggle, and we're all basically oppressed at [the] university, so we connect.

Other focus group participants seemed to agree, and many noted their own experience of finding community most easily with students of color and international students.

Minor Theme: Growth

In response to the final individual interview question, "In summary, what is the essence of your experience?" six participants framed the essence of their experience through the lens of growth—growth in identity, growth in maturity, growth in understanding, spiritual growth, and more. The four participants who did not highlight growth in their description of the essence of their experience mentioned it to a lesser degree or mentioned it elsewhere. For example, Jada said, "Hmm, I think at [the university] I really had time to discover who I really am."

When triangulating the growth factor during the focus group, participants again indicated they all ought to gather more to discuss their shared experience and support one another, since they are all likely experiencing similar stretching and growing processes.

Conclusion

The Bahamian student experience, in essence, can be described as follows: shaped by Black identity development and integration processes, as well as influenced by campus racial climate and their sense of belonging. Despite many challenges, the growth that occurs on campus makes the experience worthwhile.

Chapter 5

Discussion

The present research unveiled many positive Bahamian student experiences. As mentioned before, six of ten students explicitly highlighted the fact that, in essence, their experience was overall positive and filled with growth. However, given the nature of research and its goal to continually assess the quality of student experiences and improve them, this study has highlighted many negative experiences.

The findings of this study echo much of the existing research covered in Chapter 2. Student affairs professionals can employ this research to further equip and expand their understanding of Black international student experiences to enrich student learning and connection across campus. In order to engage this research well, student affairs colleagues might keep in mind the assessment principle of continuous quality improvement—learning how to better understand students' experiences ought to push practitioners to achieve more and grow in their work.

Black Identity

The participants agreed that entering the process of Black identity development was a significant part of their experience and a part they felt ill equipped to handle. Given this reality, faculty and staff who are already attentive to Bahamian student experiences might consider pursuing further education on racial identity development theory. Since the participants seemed at different stages of Cross's Black identity

development, it is necessary to engage Bahamian students in whatever stage they are, in both conversation and programing. Eight students described entering college in the Pre-encounter stage.

While nearly all participants began college in Cross's Pre-Encounter stage, they also described significant encounters in which they were treated differently because of the color of their skin (Cross et al., 2001). These encounters quickly pushed participants through Pre-encounter into Encounter and into Immersion-Emersion, a stage marked by discovering Blackness and trying to understand how one fits into Black culture. Students in this phase often become somewhat exclusive in their friend groups, finding more sense of belonging in community with other people of color. An important distinction between the process for Black Americans and the Bahamian participants may be the way several of them felt such disconnect with Black identity, given their own outsider status. In fact, many mentioned wishing they were not called Black. Shaniel, who is actively engaged in conversations on racial reconciliation on campus and yet is more likely in the Immersion-Emersion stage than the Internalization-Commitment stage, said the following:

Because like, identifying myself as Black here attaches so many stereotypes to that label. You know what I mean? It's not just me identifying the color of myself, or me identifying myself racially, it's me identifying myself as a person. You know what I mean? So like, I don't know, I don't even know if I like that term. Being identified as that, or having to think as identifying myself as that.

This indicates the reality that Black Bahamian students experience the stages of Black Identity development differently than Black American students and that many may verbalize a rejection of Black identity in one moment but promote racial justice in the

next. At the same time, three participants felt they were rarely treated differently because of the color of their skin and were more indirectly aware of their Blackness but quite sensitive to their identity as Bahamian, especially in light of the 2016 presidential election and the xenophobia students witnessed across the country and on campus.

Integration

Much of the focus group discussion revolved around the way participants would hope to support one another, both in the major factor of Black Identity Development and in their integration experiences in general. There seemed to be some regret that the Bahamian student community spent more time in somewhat unintentional, party-style interactions rather than in deeper, more intentional conversation about the nature of their shared experience and its challenges. Because participants understand one another's national identity well, they postulated the best integration coaching would come from upperclassmen Bahamians. They expressed a desire to coach one another through the integration process, explain taboos, and provide empathy after moments of culture shock.

In 1977, the functional model of friendship networks developed by Bochner, McLeod, and Lin pointed to creating space for international student subgroups to connect and discuss shared experiences as a valuable part of the integration process. This research affirmed that international students' primary friendship network is composed of co-nationals, or friends from their home country. Given the way the participants described themselves as rough, witty, and insensitive, it is likely that this group would function with a slightly different style or tone than other support groups; however, if lead by a Bahamian student, the nuances of Bahamian culture and communication would be well considered.

Similarly, Chickering's (1969) Psychosocial Theory of Identity Development affirms that environment and crisis often shape identity, and many participants described their experience as a time filled with growth in pieces of their identity (e.g., spiritual, holistic, open-mindedness). Even more substantially, participants described growth that aligns with Schlossbergh's (1981) Transition Theory, which posits that transitions provide opportunity for growth and development. In reference to this growth, focus group participants agreed that more support from within the Bahamian student community would be beneficial to healthy transition and growth.

Faculty and Staff

Meyers' (2009) integration of theory and research affirms that caring is an important dimension of the student experience. Knowing that students value feeling cared for sets a good framework to understand and appreciate participants' praise of faculty and staff. A significant amount of positivity, weight, and agreement came to light concerning the impact of faculty and staff on the participants' experiences. Participants identified faculty and staff as providing a strong sense of belonging and also as generally sensitive to their integration experiences. This is no small thing. Meyers affirmed that, when students can tell their professors care about them, they enjoy class more, attend class more often, and feel more motivated to learn, among other positive benefits.

Not only do students perform better in classrooms when they sense professors care, but conflicts are also more quickly resolved:

In fact, the most effective strategies to reduce conflicts when they occur with

students center on improving rapport, such as (1) communicating respect, interest,

and warmth toward the student; (2) speaking with the student outside of class; and

(3) focusing on the student's feelings. (Meyers, 2009, p. 206)

Faculty and staff ought to feel encouraged they already positively impact their Bahamian

student experiences. At the same time, an effort to heighten faculty sensitivity to

incidences of neo-racism is in order, since when faculty care, they better mediate conflict.

Faculty and staff can also be encouraged by the knowledge that their frequent interactions

with Bahamian students have increased their sense of belonging, just as Hurtado and

Carter's (1997) research predicts.

Campus Racial Climate

A factor actively working against Bahamian students' sense of belonging on this

particular campus is that of the campus racial climate. Participants touched on three of

Hurtado and colleagues' (2008) four factors of campus racial climate, and in many ways

the university comes up short. First, participants made observations about the school's

structural diversity, or "the physical presence of underrepresented groups" (p. 207). They

said the student body feels very white to them, and, in comparison to universities

nationwide, the selected institution does have a minority student population half the size

of the national average, coming in at 17% in 2016-2017 compared to the national average

of 46% in 2015, which is the most current data available (NCES, 2014). Students also

expressed disappointment with the diversity of the institution's faculty and staff.

The psychological dimension of the climate was touched on during interviews as

well. This element "is meant to capture the extent to which individuals perceive racial

conflict and discrimination on campus, feel somehow singled-out because of their

background, or perceive institutional support/commitment related to diversity" (Hurtado

et al., 2008, p. 208). This dimension was captured in participants' recounting of stories they had heard of their peers' encounters with discrimination, as well as in their own perceptions of people's attitudes or beliefs. For instance, one participant said,

> . . . I was kind of shocked to hear some of the responses [after a chapel on race] . . . . . Okay, they were saying, they're not privileged because of the color of their skin. Which, I totally understand. But it's like, they are? Like different? There are minorities who get treated differently in some ways.

Encounters like these enforce the idea that white students on campus do not care about or understand issues of diversity, thus negatively affecting students' of color psychological experience of the racial climate. Likewise, the way students believe that the university does or does not care about race relations affects their psychological evaluation of the climate. Most of the explicit comments concerning the institutional commitment to positive race relations were negative, and there were several comments of that nature.

At the same time, the behavioral dimension of the climate factors into Bahamian students' experience. The behavioral dimension of campus racial climate refers to "intergroup relations on a campus or level of engagement with diversity" (Hurtado et al., 2008, p. 209). This measure differs from the psychological dimension in that it evaluates actual interactions, both informal and campus-facilitated. Students described several of their own encounters with discrimination on campus, as well as those of their peers. Two participants felt as though they had never experienced any racial profiling but were aware of the ways their Bahamian peers and Black peers had been profiled on campus.

The historical legacy of inclusion or exclusion, Hurtado and colleagues' fourth element influencing the campus racial/diversity climate, did not receive attention during the data collection process.

Neo-racism. Perhaps the heaviest negative factors affecting Bahamian students' experience of the campus racial climate are their encounters with neo-racism. These encounters can be sorted into two groups: xenophobia expressed through the platform of the election and micro-aggressions. Both Spears (1999) and Barker (1981) explained that neo-racism thrives when white American students use cultural differences as justification for their exclusion of Bahamian students or other international students of color. Participants described being discredited in group projects, subtly told they were not qualified to participate in discussions about the election, physically robbed of their national flag during the peak of election season, and being labeled either "not really Black" or "ghetto" depending on the way they did or did not speak with their Bahamian dialect. These negative encounters are best addressed through continuous education. Glass and colleagues (2015) described how Valparaiso University fosters "a culture of learning [that] requires that professors develop an in depth understanding of the cultural and ethnic backgrounds of the international students they teach and advise" (p. 106).

Implications

Practice. Student affairs practitioners would do well to consider the ways that consumer input technology can benefit large subcultures of international students like the Bahamian student group studied. Consumer input technology is the way that learning is enhanced when students are given time to reflect and share with one another, learning from each other's experiences rather than from a lecturer. Participants identified in

themselves a felt need for intentional support from one another, and the literature confirms that integration processes and sense of belonging are improved through positive peer interactions and support.

There is a significant amount of literature and programming developed around micro-aggression training. Perhaps a stronger, more visual effort to educate the student body on common micro-aggressions would diminish the occurrences of such regrettable interactions. For instance, student affairs professionals might consider hanging posters that boldly quote common simple micro-aggressions to draw attention to phrases that are offensive but often unconsidered by majority population.

In their recommendations for practice, Glass et al. (2015) encouraged investing in faculty learning and professional growth:

> Often, university administrators focus on efforts designed to help international students adapt to a U.S. style classroom. We believe, however, that institutions must place an equally strong focus on helping faculty to adapt their teaching styles and develop their cultural sensitivities towards non-U.S. students. (p. 106)

Glass and colleagues recommend many other practices for creating a supportive integration environment for international students. For instance, faculty can travel to the home country of international students to develop sensitivities to those cultures.

Areas for future research. The data collected during the present research unveiled many ways in which Bahamian student experiences ought to be further researched and explored. A few female participants mentioned the way they felt their gender differently affected their experience. Likewise, there seemed to be agreement that the experience of first-year Bahamians differs significantly from that of upperclassmen

and that more support is needed during that first year to positively establish the remainder of the students' time on campus.

The themes and subthemes identified in the current study ought to be further investigated in a quantitative study, so the commonality of themes can be better understood, and individual campuses can understand their own Bahamian student population well. Likewise, a case study of Bahamian group dynamics would be pertinent to understand how the group as a whole experiences one another and the campus.

Finally, an explorative study of the university's many Bahamian alumni experiences would provide a better understanding of the way that current students' experiences shape them in the long run, preparing them for life after college.

Limitations

A number of limitations affected the data collection and analysis in this research. In its fairly unprecedented nature and the absence of much preexisting literature on Bahamian student experiences, it is likely that the researcher was able to capture the essence of Bahamian students at the university but not that of all Bahamian students, since the research was conducted at a single university.

A second limitation is researcher bias. The researcher held a preexisting relationship with nearly all of the participants. Since the researcher's husband was a Bahamian student at the university merely three years ago, they both continue to live in the same town as the studied institution, and she continues to work at the university, thus having strong ties to the researched community. Such a connection may have affected the data collection process in any number of ways—some Bahamians may have chosen not to participate because of outstanding relationship complications, while others may

have chosen to participate out of a sense of obligation rather than out of real interest in fully communicating their experience.

Similarly, a third limitation may be the researcher's status as a white, American, female staff member at the university. All four of these different identity statuses may have had various limiting or censoring effects on what participants felt comfortable sharing during their interviews or during their focus group.

A fourth limitation may be that of the timing of the research. Individual interviews were all conducted during the peak of the 2016 presidential election season, when many students of color, women, and international students—among other segments of the population—felt alienated and discriminated against due to xenophobic, sexist, and racially insensitive comments made or affirmed by President Donald Trump. It is impossible to know how future student experiences will compare with those of this generation, who experienced the alienation of the election.

Conclusion

The Bahamian student experience is, in essence, shaped by Black identity development and integration processes, as well as influenced by campus racial climate and their sense of belonging. Despite many challenges, the growth that occurs on campus makes the experience worthwhile. It is imperative that higher education professionals gain awareness of Black Bahamian student experiences in order to provide appropriate care and support so Bahamians and the other international students they encounter may flourish.

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Appendix A

First Email

Greetings,

My name is Rachel McGregor and I am a current graduate student in Taylor's Master of Arts in Higher Education Program.

I am emailing you because you are a registered as a Bahamian student. I am hoping to interview Black Bahamian students during the first two weeks of January 2017, to learn more about their experiences in college. Your input will be valuable to my thesis paper, which I hope will inform the university of the depth of Bahamian experiences, perhaps prompting some needed changes in university practices.

If you agree to be interviewed, you will meet with me in my apartment, or somewhere else of your choosing. I will make banana bread, tea, coffee, or dinner to enrich our time together. Your time is valuable, and I am asking for approximately 45-60 minutes to conduct this interview.

Please respond to this email before December 30th if you are willing to participate. We will then schedule a time to meet between January 2nd and January 10th. If you are not on campus during those days, we may schedule a phone or video interview.

I am happy to answer any questions you might have regarding the nature of my research. Please see the attached summary of key interview questions to know more about what to expect. Your answers to interview questions will be kept confidential through the use of a pseudonym.

Thank you for considering my request. I would be honored by the opportunity to hear about your life.

Rachel McGregor

Appendix B

Second Email

Greetings,

Thank you so much for honoring me with your time last month. I've learned so much from you and the other Bahamian students I interviewed.

I am emailing to invite you to discuss my findings. I hope to gather at least seven Bahamian students together to share the defining factors our interviews unveiled, and collect feedback concerning my discoveries. Your feedback will be valuable to my thesis paper, which I hope will inform the university of the depth of Bahamian experiences, perhaps prompting some needed changes in university practices.

If you agree to join the focus group, we will meet in my apartment during the second week of February. I will make dinner for everyone to enrich our time together. Your time is valuable, and I am asking for approximately 1.5 hours to conduct this focus group discussion.

Please respond to this email before February 3rd if you are willing to participate. We will then schedule a time to meet between February 8th and February 13th.

I am happy to answer any questions you might have regarding the nature of my research. Please see the attached summary of key focus group questions to know more about what to expect. Your answers to focus group questions will be kept confidential as much as possible, given the nature of a group discussion.

Thank you for considering my request. I would be honored by the opportunity to receive your feedback concerning my discoveries.

Rachel McGregor

Appendix C

Individual Interview Protocol

A. Have interviewee review and sign informed consent. Remind him/her that I cannot ensure complete confidentiality since responses will be used in my study, with pseudonyms.

B. Remind interviewee that they are free to withdraw from the study at any time.

C. Explain that I do not expect our time together to exceed an hour.

D. Read purpose statement:

    a. The purpose of this interview is to understand the experiences of Bahamian students.

E. Ask semi-structured interview questions:

    a. Biographical questions:

        i. When and where did you start college?

        ii. When did you begin classes?

        iii. Why did you decide to attend the institution?

        iv. What is your major?

    b. Starter questions:

        i. In what ways have your experiences on campus so far met your expectations? Talk a little bit about what you expected college to be like and what it has actually been like for you.

       ii. Describe two or three things you like about the institution's

           community.

      iii. Describe two or three things that are hard for you to relate to at

           here at the institution.

      iv. If you could choose only a few words/phrases to describe what it is

           like to be "you" as a student at this college, what would they be?

c. Questions related to your experience:

        i. What have you learned about your own Bahamian culture while

           here?

       ii. Could you describe some of the support services the institution has

           in place for Bahamian students? And then explain which are

           actually helpful and which are not?

      iii. Do you believe domestic students at the institution are open to

           learning from Bahamian students? Why or why not?

      iv. Have you ever been asked for your thoughts on improving

           programing designed for improving experience here? What

           thoughts do you have?

       v. What has it been like to experience Christianity at the institution?

      vi. If I mention Bahamian values and American values, what comes to

           mind?

     vii. How do you identify yourself racially?

    viii. Did you think much about that identity before you began college?

      ix. Have you had any conversations about race at the institution?

1. If so, could you please describe those conversations?

2. If they mention the election, ask if they can further describe what it has been like to experience an election season.

3. If they mention racial tension, ask them to further describe their experiences connected to race at the institution.

d. Closing questions:

   i. In summary, how have you felt prepared or unprepared for this experience?

e. What has your experience of being a student at the institution really been like? The essence of your experience?

Appendix D

Focus Group Protocol

A. Have all participants sign the focus group consent form. Direct participants to keep the contents of the group discussion confidential but also remind everyone that I cannot ensure confidentiality due to the nature of a focus group.
B. Explain that I do not expect our time together to exceed 1.5 hours.
C. Share each factor discovered through individual interviews.
    a. Quote particular phrases connected to each factor.
    b. Ask questions regarding each factor.
        i. How does factor X resonate with your experience?
        ii. Please share with me any thoughts you have regarding factor X.
        iii. How impactful has factor X been in your experience?
        iv. What are steps you would like to take in order to further learn from factor X?
        v. What are steps you would like the university to take in order to further address factor X?
    c. After someone answers a given question, I will ask participants to raise their hand if they agree with the essence of that answer.
    d. Concluding questions:
        i. As you think about all we've talked about here today and in individual interviews, is there anything missing?
        ii. What else do you think I need to know about your experiences at the university?