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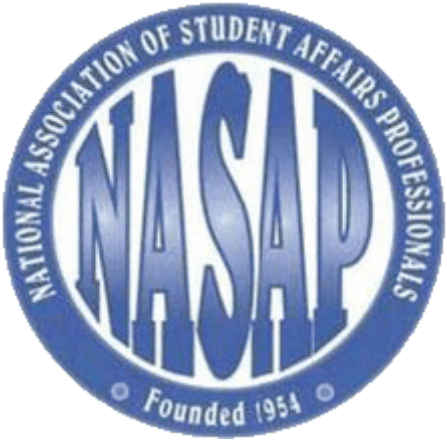
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The National Association of Student Affairs Professionals (NASAP) addresses issues, solutions and professional development opportunities for student affairs professionals serving at Historically Black Colleges and Universities and for those professionals who serve minority populations in diverse settings around the country. From its inception in 1954 on the campus of Howard University as the National Association of Personnel Workers, NASAP has provided experiential growth and leadership opportunities for professionals and students through dynamic annual conferences and the publication of the NASAP Journal and NASAP Focus Newsletter.

The NASAP Journal of Student Affairs is the official peer-reviewed research journal published by the National Association of Student Affairs Professionals and the Executive Ph.D. Program in Urban Higher Education at Jackson State University.

This journal was created to provide space for research, knowledge, dialogue, debate, critique and collaboration among a diverse community of Student Affairs professionals and scholars. This publication welcomes original research, theoretical contributions, reviews of literature, critical commentaries, case studies, book reviews, and research in progress. The aim for this edition of the NASAP Journal is to be a publication of excellence that is relevant, thought-provoking and inclusive of diverse voices and perspectives that includes graduate students, academic researchers, scholars and student affairs practitioners.

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The National Association of Student Affairs Professionals (NASAP) Journal

Spring 2014• Volume 14, Number 1

Table of Contents

Articles

Intraracial Diversity at Historically Black Colleges: Understanding African-American Student Perceptions *7*
Kendra L. Preer, Ph.D., James Samuel Maddirala, Ph.D.

The Role of Psychological Well-Being in First Generation Graduate Students *51*
Dr. Andrea T. Cunningham, Dr. Walter A. Brown

Looking Back on the Upward Bound Bridge Summer Experience Through the Lens of African American Students *78*
Phillip "Flapp" Cockrell, Ph.D.

Criminal History Screening in College Admissions: Putting Diversity and Public Safety at Risk *104*
Devin L. Randolph

An Examination of the Differences of Social Work Students' Attitudes Toward Gay and Lesbian Adoption with Regard to Students' Age and Gender *127*
Donna Gibson, Ph.D., LGSW

Factors Influencing the Selection of Course Delivery Methods by Nontraditional Students *148*
Carlos Wilson, Ph.D.

2014 NASAP Journal Call for Manuscripts/Manuscript Guidelines *179*

2013-2014 NASAP Executive Board/Officers *182*

INTRARACIAL DIVERSITY AT HISTORICALLY BLACK COLLEGES: UNDERSTANDING AFRICAN-AMERICAN STUDENT PERCEPTIONS

by
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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to investigate African-American student experiences and perceptions of intraracial campus diversity and learn more about their overall beliefs regarding the institutional practices and policies associated with diversity at historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs). Specifically, the study sought to gain a greater understanding of the role and influence of intraracial differences and gain insight into how Black students experience diversity on majority campuses. The study represented a break with the small body of research examining African-American student heterogeneity, which largely consists of dialogues about racial and ethnic diversity viewed primarily from a Black versus White dichotomy.

The study utilized a qualitative research design by first obtaining a student background questionnaire followed by semi-structured, in-depth interviews and focus groups with 16 undergraduate students at two HBCU campuses. Survey results, interview data, field notes and institutional data regarding campus diversity policies, procedures and practices were analyzed using triangulation for emerging and consistent themes.

Introduction

Twenty years ago, Levine (1991) described campus diversity as one of the largest, most urgent challenges facing higher education. Today, altruistic reasoning and a social justice standpoint are no longer the primary arguments for embracing diversity on America's university and college campuses (Williams and Wade, 2008). Despite the recent past of legal challenges regarding affirmative action and admission practices faced by higher education, embracing diversity has become a widespread

and inevitable part of American culture (Hurtado, 2007). Williams and Wade (2008) explain that the multiple dimensions of diversity are now fundamental to contemporary society. Higher education research has shown that opportunities for students to experience diversity on campus and in the classroom have a positive impact on student development, educate students beyond academic discipline, and prepare them to succeed in the workforce and global society (Hurtado, 2005). Higher education institutions are among few settings where diverse groups of people converge for long periods of time and thus, make these environments ripe for diversity research, including the study of differences and similarities among Black students (Smith and Moore, 2000).

Structural and interactional diversity challenge the premise of American higher education, which historically has not embraced Black students (Chang, 2002). Closson and Henry (2008) note that it was segregation by which HBCUs arose in U.S. Southern states while civil rights advocated for equality and access. This historical aspect is important in proving insight into the establishment of diverse campus environments at HBCUs since a complete examination of how a social institution came into existence is a critical factor in gaining understanding of that institution (Jewell, 2002). The philosophical open-door traditions of HBCUs were extended to women at institutions such as Spelman College, an HBCU founded in 1881, to educate Black women and thus, has found that the institutional diversity discourse does not center on interracial conflict, but intraracial dynamics such as nationality, socioeconomic status, and other cultural differences (Billingslea and De Allen, 2008). Billingslea and De Allen (2008) further explain that like many HBCUs whose student body was formed in an era of segregation, racial sameness and unity are salient characteristics. The challenge today becomes finding ways to embrace the intraracial difference among students at majority campuses in more contemporary times.

Statement of the Problem

The experience of African-Americans, Hispanics, Asians and non-white minority groups on predominantly white institutions (PWIs) account for the abundance of the literature exploring classroom and campus diversity (Closson and Henry, 2008). Dialogue about difference has primarily

been examined within majority institutions, yet Billingslea and De Allen (2008) found there are still important parallels to be examined in the dialogue around difference because of students' need to negotiate the social indifference, inequality and silence felt by those who deviate from established campus norms. A more comprehensive exploration of campus diversity will remain incomplete until more research includes HBCUs with regard to investigating structural, classroom and interactional campus diversity (Closson and Henry, 2008). Because the historical legacy of HBCUs is different from PWIs, the context of studying diversity within these institutions must be carefully considered and appropriately framed (Jewell, 2002).

Most importantly, historically Black colleges and universities are called to embrace multiple dimensions of diversity and resist the notion that racial and ethnic groups are fundamentally monolithic (Billingslea and De Allen, 2008; Guy-Sheftall, 1997). Guy-Sheftall (1997) notes that even within the curriculum, diversity at HBCUs has traditionally been viewed as an oxymoron; however, students at majority and minority serving institutions (MSIs) need an inclusive curriculum and campus environments which include issues of race, ethnicity, religion, disability, sexuality, class and gender.

Using the framework of Critical Race Theory (CRT), Closson and Henry (2008) attribute the absence of HBCUs from the diversity literature as color-blindness, which is used by dominant groups to maintain their self-interests. Additionally, Billingslea and De Allen (2008) purport that HBCU campuses do not do enough to teach students to resist racial/ethnic hegemony but to fit within its confinement in an effort to reach collective class goals. These conflicts represent the most critical gap in the diversity literature: the absence of research examining the suppression of dimensions of diversity among racially homogenous campus groups and the complex issues of diversity at historically Black institutions of higher education (Billingslea and De Allen, 2008).

While state and federal mandates have fostered the diversity movement in all institutions, including HBCUs, issues of relevance, mission, the pressure to increase minority enrollment and the vulnerability of research outcomes have all hampered the examination of HBCUs and their role in the higher education, diversity discourse (Closson and

Henry, 2008). Additionally, the post-civil rights rhetoric of racial unity has left some in belief that political, social and economic discrimination is no longer relevant and is often silenced by the discourse of progress (Billingslea and De Allen, 2008). Yet, we know that race, diversity and multiple other variables of student identity play a role in college choice, identity formation (Van Camp et al, 2009), friendship groups (Smith and Moore, 2009), student engagement (Harper, Karini, Bridges and Hayek, 2004), and the overall college experience among African-American undergraduates attending HBCUs.

Only further empirical research will unveil how undergraduate students attending HBCUs experience intraracial diversity. Previous studies have either examined intraracial diversity in PWI settings or the experience of non-Black students at HBCUs. This research will approach the investigation of intraracial diversity among African-American students at HBCUs from a heterogeneous race perspective in which African-American students are viewed as culturally and socially diverse.

Research Questions

The challenge presented to HBCU higher education administrators is to understand how students experience diversity in settings where ethnic/racial oppression and greater minority inclusion is not the primary focus of campus diversity initiatives. Exploring diversity at historically black colleges and universities can provide needed insight for other HBCUs and MSIs, inform campus decision-making and future diversity research. As suggested by Marshall and Rossman (2006), the research questions that will guide this investigation have been designed narrowly to delimit this study, but broadly enough to allow for the characteristic flexibility of qualitative research:

1. How are student perceptions of African-American, intraracial diversity among students at HBCUs described?

2. What role do gender, socioeconomic status, and physical attributes play in student perceptions and attitudes about intraracial diversity at HBCUs?

3. What specific experiences shape African-American student perceptions of intraracial diversity at HBCUs?

4. What variables beyond gender, socioeconomic status and physical attributes play a role in shaping African-American student perceptions of intraracial diversity at HBCUs?

5. Overall, what are students' perceptions of the institutions' diversity policies, procedures and practices based on their lived experiences with campus intraracial diversity?

Conceptual Framework

In the absence of tested, heterogeneous race theories, this research study will primarily be guided by Celious and Oyserman's (2001) heterogeneous race model (HRM) in which the scholars provide a conceptual lens that acknowledges and embraces intraracial differences and dispels the notion of one collective experience of the individuals who comprise ethnic groups. HRM represents a break from previous racial identity research which views race from a dichotomous lens of Black versus White. Previous research has failed to address the larger complexity of within-group differences and by default approached campus diversity research from a homogeneous perspective.

In this study, which focuses on Black student perceptions and experiences of campus diversity in a historically Black university setting, Celious and Oyserman's (2001) idea of studying race through multiple dimensions which define individual racial identity provides an important approach for research in light of today's social reality. The researchers contend that for current generations of Blacks, racial identification perhaps is more symbolic and contextual than for previous generations whose racial identification denoted more common experiences and more generalizable assumptions about their experiences as Black people. The construct of race itself promotes a measure of belief of in-group homogeneity, however Celious and Oyserman (2001) theorize the following: (1) it is imperative for social research to move beyond homogeneous and dichotomous views of race, (2) there is evidence that within-group differences do matter among African-Americans

and color their daily experiences, and (3) the complexities of socio-economic status (SES), gender and physical attributes foster varied and heterogeneous Black experiences. Students from a shared ethnic/racial background do not constitute a homogenous group and will likely hold a spectrum of viewpoints and ideologies which indicate differences in lifestyle, attitudes, beliefs and values (Celious and Oyserman, 2001). The heterogeneous race model (HRM) provides a framework for exploring these in-group differences.

Data Analysis & Findings

Significant themes emerged from the interviews and focus groups conducted at two historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs). This includes an overview of the two research sites, a demographic profile of participants followed by a thematic summary of their perceptions of intraracial diversity. The analysis and data is presented in four sections: (1) a description of the selected HBCU sites, (2) participant profiles, (3) demographic background of participants, and (4) thematic presentation of findings.

The participants were randomly selected and overwhelmingly described complex intraethnic interactions and experiences, yet were not always aware they were discussing an aspect of intraracial diversity. It appeared that students were accustomed to discussing diversity in an interracial context and throughout the interviews and focus groups and began to understand their own experiences as intraracially diverse among their peers. The data from this study enriches the existing literature by examining intraracial diversity among African-American undergraduates at historically Black colleges and universities where the dynamics between White and Black students is no longer the most pertinent campus diversity issue.

The hybrid qualitative approach was used which included both individual, in-depth interviews and small focus groups. Small focus groups allowed for the collection of information-rich data in which intraracial diversity was discussed in the context of group dynamics that fostered debate and discussion as well as the individual in-depth interviews where personal experiences where more apt to be disclosed. The focus groups and interview protocol was established based upon

the review of existing literature and the theoretical underpinnings of the study. The focus groups lasted approximately 45 minutes in length and were audio taped and transcribed immediately following each session. Likewise, the in-depth interviews ranged from 20 minutes to 40 minutes in length, were audio taped and transcribed immediately after the session to increase the accuracy of transcription. There were a total of 16 participants in the five, on-site focus groups and two, on-site, in-depth interviews conducted. All participants self-reported their current enrollment, involvement in one campus organization and good academic standing. Participants represented a range of majors, campus clubs and organizations and were from a variety of states across the United States.

Thematic Analysis of the Findings

The findings have been categorized into seven overarching themes: (a) sexual orientation, (b) gender differences, (b) organization affiliation, (c) socioeconomic status, (d) phenotype and physiognomy (e) crabs-in-a-barrel in-fighting, and (f) HBCU support for diversity. While students appeared to find the discussions cathartic and gained some sense of awareness during the in-depth interviews and focus groups – some going so far as to say "thank you" and another conveying that he enjoyed the opportunity to discuss what he termed "real talk" – most of the students voluntarily reported their overall HBCU experience to be a very positive and collectively characterized by a supportive, family environment, personal empowerment and educational opportunity. Participants were careful to point out that intraracial heterogeneity and the existing divisions among students were viewed as a "fact of life" or attributed to being a "societal issue" rather than a phenomena exclusively characteristic of their institutions. This protective stance was characteristic of each individual interaction. Students appeared to possess an increased level of comfort in the small focus groups with discussing the diversity issues, which exist between African-American students with their peers.

Overall, gender, socioeconomic class (SES), color and phenotypic features were found to play a role among students in their intraethnic relationships and their perceptions of intraracial campus diversity among the African-American undergraduates. Participants reported the focus group or interview was the first time they had openly discussed intraracial

diversity or formally discussed campus diversity with their peers. Considering the many dimensions of intraethnic differences among African-Americans, for students, one aspect of intraracial diversity was identified as being personally significant because of a specific, past experience. Yet, it remained a subject infrequently discussed among their friendship groups. One female participant acknowledged that phenotype particularly influenced interactions among Black students on campus, but it remained rarely discussed. She expressed, "I never hear anybody talk about it. But, it's still there [referring to intraracial diversity conflicts based on phenotype]. You still see it. But, I never hear anyone just you know, talk about it in a conversation or anything." Her response illustrates the typical responses conveyed by interview participants that intraethnic differences and the resulting conflict is universally acknowledged among Black students, yet a campus discourse is notably absent.

Sexual Orientation

In the effort to understand how African-American students experience diversity at HBCUs, the participants, in response to the interview and focus group protocol, disclosed several issues. Differences in sexual orientation were broadly reported as the most significant intraracial diversity issue among African-American students. One female student identified the division among straight and openly gay students as the first line of demarcation among Black students on campus:

> Mavis: So far from what I've experienced, yes, it is. [GLBT (gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender) and heterosexual student division]. Because I never hear about anything else. I only hear 'every time you turn around there's another gay person.' So that's pretty much the only thing that I really hear. So that's a big problem here.

Mavis elaborated that while sexual orientation has not impacted her personally, she has friends who have been labeled as gay and have been impacted socially by campus labeling and homophobia:

> Yes, I do. I have one friend in particular and a lot of people

> think he's gay and he's not. And you know they automatically judge him or label him as being a gay person and he's not and it does bother him. So as far as that goes, yes…

Among African-American male participants, many divulged heterosexist attitudes, which influenced their social, personal, and classroom interactions and markedly used inflammatory language in their discussions regarding sexual orientation. However, female participants were more open to interactions and campus friendships with GLBT students and were acutely aware that many men on campus held heterosexist attitudes. A female education major at Johnson State University reported, "There are a lot of gay people on this campus…they have their own circle." Another focus group participant and elementary education major agreed, "They [GLBT students] hang together…and not only that, most males that aren't gay won't want to talk to gay dudes." The most revealing response was from Allen, a junior from Cardinal State University, who described feeling marginalized as a heterosexual, African-American male on his HBCU campus. Allen, an exercise science major and student athlete explained, "No. The only thing you gonna' get here is if you a female or if you a fag… If you female or if you gay." The student's response indicated a sentiment that women and non-heterosexual students were more likely to reach positions of student leadership on the campus. Allen continued,

> Just look around. All you gotta' do is look around here and you'll see. About 80% of the leaders here are women or fruits [referring to gay students]. Fruitcakes. I'm keeping it real. For real…the leaders here.

Another African-American, male student, from the same institution, echoed the feeling of being marginalized based upon his sexuality and gender:

> Tom: We have the GPA and the skills to be in that sector [referring to student leadership], but we are this type of person. That's what we get… we're this type of person. They feel this way

about us. You know what I'm saying?

Tom's comments imply that opportunities for campus leadership are based on how students are stereotypically categorized. Allen elaborated,

> It's the same as the student body. If you're not a part of an organization, you're not a woman… you understand me? …Or a quote un-quote fruitcake. You really not going to be accepted in those types of crowds in terms of student leadership and all that.

Socially, the third focus group comprising three male participants who also attended Cardinal State University concurred that social interaction with non-heterosexual students was not personally or socially acceptable among their friendship group. Paul, a full-time undergraduate and student athlete expressed,

> Like, I'll tell you like this. This girl I was talking to, she hang with a gay dude. I had to tell her. We had an argument for about an hour about that shit is wrong. Don't bring them around me. Like, if they come sit by me while we eatin' sitting in here [referring to the dining hall], I'm getting up to move. Don't come sit by me. I don't like that. That's not cool. Not cool.

While sexual orientation was reported to impact social interaction among students, with several male participants reporting they would not interact with a gay male socially, the data evidenced an impact upon classroom interaction among students as well. When probed further to explore their feelings, students were asked to comment on their ability to complete a group project with a non-heterosexual student for a class project. Allen was passionate in his response:

> Absolutely not. I would feel uncomfortable, but if I had to, I would not really interact with them. But, if I had to be in the group, I would just have to be in the group. As far as interaction? Naw… I would have to deal with the other three. If it was a four person group or the other person... I can't do it. If I had a

> choice? I can tell you right now. If I'm in class and a homosexual sit by me, I'ma get up and go and walk somewhere else. 'Cause I'ma tell you, I believe this: I'ma make you feel uncomfortable because I don't think you should be doing this. 'Cause its wrong first of all. It's a sin and you insane if you... you a man and you think you're a girl and if you're a girl and you think you're a boy. You need to be in a mental institution for real.

Moreover, there was indication by Allen, that the sexual orientation of the faculty and staff in his academic department made a difference to him. The student also conveyed that outward expressions of his lack of tolerance for GLBT students may or may not be addressed by a professor during a class session based upon his experience:

> I mean they'll probably be offended. Honestly, it depends on who the instructor is. The instructor might laugh and some might get offended. The staff members as far as teachers… I don't know about the rest of the teachers because in my department everybody that's a man is a man and everybody that's a woman is a woman, you feel me? Ain't none of that going on in my department.

As expressed by a female participant, gay, lesbian bisexual, and transgender students are a part of HBCU campuses. While there may be issues and reluctant acceptance, it is a fact of campus life and diversity as noted by one student. Mavis noted, "Well as far as the gay and lesbian go, I do hear a lot about that because a lot of people don't approve of it. But I mean, once again, it's here, so what can you do?" The divide between heterosexual and non-heterosexual students on HBCU campuses was identified by students at both institutions as being the greatest demarcation between African-American students. In their narratives, there was a tenor of fear and lack of understanding among participants. This fear among friendship circles was articulated in the cautious acceptance of Derek, a student at Johnson State University who said:

> Some of them [gay students] are cool and some of them hang out with each other. Like we got a couple gay folks that have come and hung out with us at times. Not all the time, but at times. I ain't got really nothing against them – just don't try me.

Adding insight was Harry, who while he admittedly avoids interactions with gay, lesbian bisexual, and transgender students on campus, admits his own ignorance and lack of knowledge regarding this aspect of diversity:

> …I know on a lot of HBCU campuses, the gay population on HBCU campuses…Compared to regular campuses, is outnumbering than what it is on regular campuses because I've been to both. It's like they [HBCUs] embrace it. And it's not that we don't like it. I think it's just that we don't understand it. You know what I mean? We don't understand why it's accepted, or and we don't understand why they do it. So, it's not that we don't like it. We just don't understand it. We just stay away from it and not speak on it. That's not me, so I'm going to stay away from it.

The issue of sexual orientation differed somewhat among gender lines, as there were notable differences in how male and female students openly discussed interactions between heterosexual and GLBT students. Responses from female students appeared more open and accepting while male students were generally unsupportive and expressed a high level of anxiety and discomfort in discussing non-heterosexual students. Three female students from focus group one, expressed these sentiments about GLBT students on campus as Mary discussed,

> …You got your people who make fun of them. But, I think all together as a whole, they like embrace. For real, we talk to all the gay people. We embrace the lesbians and the dikes you know? You have your cool people of course, who might say something every now and then. But, I think as a whole… just last semester there was a gay boy who had his own fashion show. It was

his and he's gay. You know what I'm saying? So I think as a whole we embrace that. They let them get up on stage and flaunt they little... I think as a whole we do embrace it.

Her two friends, and fellow participants of the first focus group, had this to add:

> Pam: It's so small here, people still be talking to them.
>
> Natalie: The weirder you are, the cooler you are, like.

While sexual orientation is a great source of intraracial differentiation among students, there is indication, that interaction among straight and GLBT students may impact African-American students personally, academically and socially.

Gender Differences

African-American males disclosed strong emotions resulting from what they conceive as micro gender-inequities on campus. Even in the context of supportive HBCU settings, some male students felt marginalized with regard to gender in addition to sexual orientation. Kenny, a student at Cardinal State University who is from the South expressed,

> I would say the only thing in the classroom is your sex…your gender – male and female. That's the only thing I would say is a problem, because certain professors do show favoritism to a certain kind of gender. But, other than that… I know one of my science teachers…for the females…he helps them out. But for the guys, it's like if you don't come to his office hours, you ain't gonna know it.

Allen, rationalized the behavior this way in response to Kenny's observation:

> That professor may feel that men just need to find a solution to the problem. He might feel like women need more help.

> Instead of him coming to them because he favors them, he may just feel they need more help and a man can figure it out on their own eventually.

Several college women agreed, giving voice to their perceptions that their campus experiences were in fact different than their male counterparts. Pam offers this example of how these differences unfold academically on campus:

> I think in the classroom, it play out more like girls versus boys than like color. I think like far as like male professors tend to gravitate toward the girls. But I think like female professors, they gravitate more toward the boys. You know what I'm saying? It always seem like your lady professor have her favorite male in the class, and your male professor have his favorite female student in the class like…

Gender is described overwhelmingly by male and female participants as the campus issue which has the greatest negative bearing on African-American males. Across gender, students concur that female students "have it easier" than males on their campuses based upon their observations in the classroom, interactions with classroom professors, rising to campus leadership positions, and dress code leniency. Mavis shed more light, recalling her observations:

> I think that it does because in the classroom, there are things the females can do and get away with like the male students can't. Like female students can wear hats, and soon as a male student walk in with one on, you know it's a problem. So, that's just one example. There's a big difference.

While Mavis was not the only female to note differences in dress code expectations, she also added:

> Yes, much of the professors are much more nicer and lenient on the female students than they are to the male students as far as

> grades go and giving extra credit and things like that.

Offering another dimension, Pam admitted that she may have the upper hand with professors because she's a woman and "uses it to her advantage." Her further comments were:

> I do. I ain't gonna lie. I use it to my advantage. I be talking to him [referring to her professor] and stuff. You know? I mean if he's going to show some attention towards me, the least I can do is give it back.

As themes emerged throughout the interviews and focus groups, the idea of heterogeneity among African-American college students was brought into sharper focus, yet it was also clear that the complex interconnectivity of race, class, sexual orientation, skin tone and other phenotypic features was mediated by gender. One example is a discussion which occurred in focus group two where the participants were not only intrigued by the opportunity to discuss their experiences with campus diversity and how it impacts their academic and social existence, they also expressed an awareness of the potential gender differences with one young man noting, "we don't think like them," and another asking, "what did the girls say when you asked them these questions?" These and similar comments will be discussed in the last section of this chapter entitled overall campus diversity which includes an in-depth discussion of students' overall perceptions of intraracial campus diversity.

Socioeconomic Status

Socioeconomic status (SES) proved to be another factor recognized by students as an element which shapes their personal, academic and social campus experiences. One student was quite direct in saying, "money is power." Nearly all participants disclosed that class certainly makes a difference on their campus specifically in terms of opportunities, relationships with faculty, establishing friendship groups and their overall campus experiences. A male student, Alex, who characterized his HBCU experiences to be extremely positive, commented,

> Oh, yeah. It's [class] always gonna' effect you. You'll have a friend who understands the struggle, and then you also have a friend who don't understand the struggle, which is like, he can call his parents because they married and ask for anything… which we can't. So…

The importance of socioeconomic status varies by students' individual experiences with some connecting wealth and poverty to support which in turn impacts persistence. While Alex poignantly illustrated that students' SES meant more parental support from home, Mavis understood the diversity of SES to be a factor in student motivation to succeed and persistence. She said,

> I don't know…they [students who grew up in a better household] where parents had more money – they [parents] set different standards for 'em [students], they, I don't know… they may feel more inclined or they may feel more of a will to do better than some students and then like some students they grew up poor...we want the same things. We are just too quick to get discouraged sometimes.

Natalie understood SES in terms of a students' social standing on campus. She related this to the importance of skin color: "I don't think it even go on skin color among us. I think it go on money. Like your social standing. It's like a high school." Alternately, Pam noticed SES difference in terms of financial aid. She noted,

> I know people who like parents make a lot of money, they don't get a refund check. Like, I get a refund check, but she [pointing to her friend who was a member of the focus group] don't get a refund check.

Socially, students voiced a concern that their status on campus was influenced by SES. Pam advised, "[People are more popular] 'cause they dress nice, got a car… people gravitate toward people who look like they got money." Mavis agreed that there is a culture of the haves and have-

nots on campus, superficially evidenced by material possessions and superficial stereotypes:

> In a lot of cases, I think they are. Whether we like to admit it or not… the way people dress…we are still judgmental. We are only human. There are students who dress very well and you'll find they are very popular, and there are students that don't dress so well and nobody wants to be around them because you automatically judge them. It's not right, but you know…

Overall, the financial and economic status projected by students appeared to be the most important factor to students socially, yet students also expressed awareness beyond the superficial in roommate situations or among friendship groups where economic disparities become more relevant on a personal level. Harry offered,

> I understand the question is about the social and financial differences among campus. I mean there's people on this campus who are blessed who are freshman and have a car and drive around and not worried about gas or how much the prices are. Then there's who live in the same dorms who are probably not roommates who don't have as much or are just spending the dollars they have to just go to school. So, I mean there is that diversity within an HBCU.

Less frequently, students conveyed that SES also impacts them academically in terms of formulating quality relationships with faculty or campus interactions projected by a student's image. Valerie, a 21-year old education major claimed "if you look like you don't have anything, people won't want to be around you…Students and teachers too sometimes." When asked to expound on the relationship with faculty based upon perceived SES, she furthered, "Just a relationship. The relationship is better if they [students] have more money." Sam, a 22-year old, pre-physical therapy major espoused this belief about how SES can impact students and what he also believed to influence an outward appearance of intelligence:

> Pretty much what you look like is what they gon' expect. How you dress…you looking nappy…nappy hair…they gon' think you broke. So they gon' judge a book by its cover and think you're not smart, don't know how to be professional.

Sharing another dimension of how SES manifests itself into the overall campus experience for students, Derek, who transferred from a neighboring HBCU, had this to say about the children of alumni donors,

> …if your mom or dad or somebody went [here] or an aunt or somebody and they're giving back to the school and the student know that and the teacher knows that their parents are giving $100,000 to the school each year, they gon' make sure that student's got everything they need so their parents won't stop giving the school money. So, yeah, students of alumni, that's a whole other ballgame.

Physical Attributes: Phenotype and Physiognomy

Perhaps the most inflammatory subject in focus groups, aside from sexual orientation, was that of physiognomy and phenotype and how it impacts students academically, socially and personally on their campuses. Some students appeared shocked that it was brought up; others regrettably acknowledged it was an issue but commented that it was not their personal view. Others, however, were very open in discussing an issue that is too often taboo terrain in formal or informal, intraracial discourse. A male student named Alex commented in an individual interview that he "was raised" to respect people regardless of their physical appearance. He expounded, "It don't. It don't affect me, not at all. It don't matter what color you are, if you disabled, you albino, White, Black, orange, green, purple… it don't matter." Yet, further discussion with students uncovered that it does matter, and in some cases, the experiences female students compared to their male counterparts indicated that skin tone was an attribute most concerning to African-American females versus their male counterparts, as Pam, a female student, expressed:

> …I mean, you know, you hear comments like, 'Oh she's pretty

> for a dark skin girl.' 'Cause we was talking about that earlier this week. We was saying [referring to her friends and fellow focus group participants] we glad we ain't dark skin because we wouldn't want nobody saying that about us. Like, 'Aw, you pretty to be a dark skinned girl.' Why I can't just be pretty and dark skinned?

Acknowledging that for some colorstruck individuals, there is an unwritten rule to have dark skin and be beautiful, you are somehow an exception. The statement led students into a debate that had obviously touched a nerve with other focus group participants. While Pam recanted her earlier conversation with her friends, she noted that she too was guilty of making similar comments about other women on campus using skin tone as a disclaimer. Mary added, "But, the guys do it all the time." In agreement, the women agreed in unison, "all the time." Clearly acknowledging strong feelings about the subject of skin tone and its role defining a dimension of their social experiences, Natalie summed up her experience with commentary she often overhears from males on campus: "She cold. If she dark skin, she gotta be cold. Cold means she gotta be beautiful… she gotta be bad." Additionally, Mary included, "That's like everywhere. A lot of guys like light skinned chicks all the time."

The women felt that African-American men perpetuated intraracial colorism, although they were admittedly guilty themselves. Natalie disclosed she was recently approached by a male suitor and her sentiments were, "He's Black. He be trying to talk to me and I be looking at him like no. He's too Black [referring to his skin tone]. During the second focus group with a group of men on the same campus, Harry acknowledges that he does make social decisions based on stereotypes,

> Yea, a lot of people think if you see a girls with long hair, light skin, she dressed nice… you automatically going to assume she's stuck up and all into herself rather than if you see a girl who is a little bit darker in complexion, you know what I'm saying? … still dressed nice, but has shorter length hair or maybe a little bit shorter. You're gonna think she's more down to earth. Stereotypes are a part of our life.

Finishing Harry's sentence, Andy added, "Image says a thousand words." Unknowingly, the male students expressed sentiments about skin color that have been validated by empirical research finding economic, social and educational disparities between dark and light skinned individuals. When asked if they indeed prefer fairer skin tones, there was a hesitancy to answer. Kenny, an African-American male originally from the Southern U.S. and a student athlete responded, "Redbones, redbones, redbones" [a reference to Black women with light skin] inciting a collective chuckle from the group. Harry was quick to note that his background was different, "It doesn't' affect me at all. I come from California and everybody is mixed. It's a big melting pot. If I don't see diversity, then something is wrong."

It was apparent that socially, phenotype plays an important role in the social existence of the students, yet had less an impact on their academic life. Amy, an elementary education major, felt this way, "You can be the darkest person and make all A's and you can be the brightest [referring to light skin] and be dumb – don't know nothing." Valerie, a 20-year old education major and part of the same focus group disagreed, "I mean sometimes a teacher can treat a female a certain way based on their looks or appearance. I think some teachers might." Yet as a whole, students felt that outside of outward indicators of SES, phenotype and physiognomy had little bearing on their life inside of the classroom and interactions with faculty and staff.

Further probing unveiled that skin tone stratification among Black students was interconnected to another theme in the journey to understanding intraracial diversity – the Black Greek letter organizations. The historical legacy of colorism once existent among Blacks at the turn of the century and found in the sanctum of many Black Greek letter organizations (BGLOs) and social clubs has attributed to the intraethnic stereotypes among contemporary Black college students. Three women, Pam, Natalie and Mary, engaged in a discussion about skin color on their campus during the first focus group:

> Natalie: These AKAs were dark skin, light skinned, big, tall, there's a real, real dark one, there's one that wears glasses… there's nerdy ones, popular ones. It's all kinds. But you hear a

> lot of the students saying, 'Did you see them AKAs that they crossed? They don't even look like AKAs!' Yes, 'cause these two said it! [pointing to her two friends who are also participating in the focus group]…[the entire group erupts into laughter]. Yes, and I was defending them [referring to the stereotypical, non-traditional AKAs] because you know the AKAs used to do the lighter than a paper bag test back in the day. Times have changed. It's dark skinned AKAs now.

Another participant, Pam, responded:

> You know AKAs are supposed to be real pretty like – just not ugly or funny looking. Deltas are the more like rough or you look like you supposed to be a Zeta or something, but you're an AKA. That's just not what it's supposed to be.

The women engaged in heated debate in which the vortex of class and color met again with one student proclaiming that color plays a more diminished role today than it has previously played if a young woman, perhaps a beautiful woman of a darker hue, who represents a break with stereotypes, expressed interest in a BGLO in which she stereotypically did not belong:

> Pam: But, she's beautiful.
>
> Mary: Naw... if she's got swag [charisma] or if she's beautiful, then she'll probably get accepted. It's like. We don't' know about other schools down South. We do stereotype them though.
>
> Natalie: The thing is, anybody who wants to as long as you have the money and long as know your history and you get it all together. It don't matter what you look like.
>
> Mary: It don't, but it play a part. There's a lot of stuff people still do that's not right.

> Pam: Places still do that and that's how it was. People still do that. I'm not the one that made it up. But, that's how it's perceived to me.
>
> Natalie: Yeah, color does make a difference.

Acknowledged by all that there are male and female students who are 'colorstruck,' a female student from Johnson University concurred with the women from Cardinal State University. Mavis summarized:

> Yes, I think it's an issue. Like I said before, some people seem to think that if you are light skinned or your hair is straighter, then you're prettier which is not always right. So, I think it's a big issue.

Club Affiliation and Black Greek Letter Organizations

Voicing similar, but varied concerns, group affiliation with leadership groups and Black Greek letter organizations on campus further complicated the color paradox and intraracial diversity campus dynamics. One student attributing HBCUs for the divide among students affiliated with campus fraternities and sororities and all other students. Derek expressed,

> It's a lot of stereotypes. Just like, basically, the HBCUs have basically divided it up for us when they came out with the divine nine Greeks. So you got the AKAs that's supposed to be the pretty seductive girls, then you got the Deltas that suppose to be the hood, but still cute girls, then you got the Zetas who are the not so cute ones, but still the good ones. Then you got the males divided up. You got the Que-dogs; they supposed to be the nasty ones, the hood brothers. You got the Sigmas who are just like 'em. Then you got the Alphas who are supposed to be the smart boys who are cool and laid back. Then you got the Kappas. They divided it up for us into their own little cliques. That's how they basically stereotyped. For the ones that are not – they fall into the stereotype because they're trying to be just like them.

Another student who attended Cardinal State University felt similarly:

> Well to me, when you say diversity. I always think about splittin' apart. What's the differences between the two…? So to me, it's no differences. The only differences to me on our campus is the fraternities and sororities. So, they have more leeway. Like say for example, if they get in trouble it, it would be a lighter punishment than a regular student. That's everywhere on campus. I have no problem with any frat or any sorority. It is what it is.

As with color and class, affiliation with BGLOs added another aspect to consider when unraveling the divisions which exist among Black students. Participants described skin tone as less a point of division among students, but a form of intraracial capital which could elevate their social standing. Students described membership in BGLOs in terms of skin tone and personality characteristics. Natalie illustrated that fraternity and sorority membership was also a form of social capital and may compensate for students lacking other forms such as fair skin tone and phenotypic features such as light skin and wavy hair that she described as "a little Mexican look":

> Just like the Kappa Clay – he's black [referring to skin tone, not ethnicity]. Like if he wasn't a Kappa or something, he probably wouldn't be getting girls, all that... Being a part of fraternity can help them out.

It was agreed among focus group participants that affiliation with a fraternity heightened a male's status in their eyes and could essentially help him transcend dark skin, which was characterized as a liability.

The undergraduates also closely associated affiliation with campus groups not only with skin tone, but with class and the overall engagement they felt on campus. Described by Allen as "an inner circle" that if you are not appropriately affiliated, you are a "peasant." He continued,

> You have to have a certain kind of personality to succeed here.

> It ain't so much as your class. 'Cause you can be poor and you could have the personality or change the personality once you get here to fit one of these social groups or student government association or something like that or one of these Greek groups, and it doesn't matter where you from or what your background. You can be down as long as you think this type of way or act this type of way. And that's what a lot of people do. They come here, and they change their personality a lot of times…

What is unclear is if the participant-described acceptable personality type is closely aligned with conservative campus norms as suggested to exist at HBCUs by previous literature. What were evident were the divisions among students belonging to campus groups and organizations, even those outside of the BGLOs. Kenny clarified such with these remarks:

> But it's all different though, because college is all about… You got your Greek life. You got your athletes, and then you just got the normal people. It's basically all different types of groups. You got the rainbow clique [referring to GLBT students]. You got the band. So it's basically everybody is in their own group. The basketball team. Basically, everybody is in their own clique. So, it's different.

Overwhelmingly, discussions about SES sparked student discussion about membership into what they perceived as the exclusive organizations or campus leadership groups. The parallels with larger Black culture who sought to establish elevated and distinct classes based in part on elite social clubs whose membership was at times predicated on phenotype and physiognomy. Mavis, described her perceptions:

> Because some people… I don't want to say the Greeks or the Deltas, or you know how they are, but a lot of them kinda like separate themselves from everyone else. I mean they'll talk to everyone else, but then at the same time, a lot of them feel like, Okay, I'm a Delta or I'm an AKA, so you not on my level. I

> don't want to talk to you. I only want to talk to people in my sorority or fraternity. But, not all of them are like that. But, I have experienced a few that are like that, so…

Students collectively reported that faculty, staff and administrators were perceived to be largely supportive of the diverse types of African-American students who make up the largest ethnic majority at both institutions. Despite shaping the idea that BLGO membership was a form of campus division among Black students, nearly every participant identified fraternities and sororities or campus organizations as the second most prevalent intraethnic difference.

In-Fighting and Lack of Unity among African-American Students

A common theme woven throughout the interviews and focus groups was the disappointment and somewhat existential despair students communicated about their ability to get along and work collectively despite individual differences and goals. One female student expressed the following sentiments about the internal conflict that exists among Black students on campus:

> Mavis: Among all of us? Umm…(pause). My biggest thing is a lot of us… We feel that we tend to act like we are against each other instead of helping each other. I mean, I've been in situations where I've had to be a part of a group and instead of everyone working together and instead of someone wanting to help the other person… it's you know… I have this GPA and I'm going to this grad school, and I'm gonna' do this and you all aren't capable. And you know, we're here to do the same thing. That's a big problem, and we all need to realize that we're here for the same thing, and there's nothing wrong with helping each other. 'Cause if we help each other, we'll get to where we're trying to get to faster.

Like many of her peers, Mavis was unable to identify specifically the reasons for such internal conflict, yet was clear in her idea that the larger

climate of American racism, inequities and discrimination were a factor. She further explained,

> I don't know if it's because you know for so long a lot of us have gone without, and then we look at other races as Whites, and they have so much of what we don't have that we have to grab it while it's there and we have to fight for it. And if you don't get it, then you don't get your allowance. I have to fight for mine. I don't know if it's bad or if it's the way we were raised, or I'm kinda leaning more towards the racial thing of White people having more and us having less – then when we do get the opportunity, we have to fight the others out to grab that chance.

Ironically, despite the supportive HBCU setting, Mavis was still acutely aware of the interracial economic disparities outside of the campus which she felt led to the competition for resources intraethnically for African-American students. Despite an abundance of campus resources to support students, intraethnic strife and the mind set of intraracial competition exist among students. She expressed her final analysis of in-fighting among Black students:

> Well, I think that's the way we feel [responding to the idea that to get ahead students must push others out of the way.]. I don't think it's so much about us not having the resources here. I think they are here – I think we just have to realize that. 'Cause a lot of us are still set in that… we still have the mind set where… 'Hey, well, this is my chance. I got to get it, so you get out my way.' But, this is all of our chances, so, you know we have to you know, help each other out sometimes.

Mavis was not alone in her beliefs. Derek, a 21 year old student attending Johnson State University concurred in his expression of his disappointment with jealousy, in-fighting and lack of unity among Black students:

> In a way it bothers me to see the race that I'm in go down…So, I

> don't want nobody in my race to go down. We need to rise as a nation. Whereas the White person, they help each other. But us as a Black race, we get jealous because somebody else has something that we don't. Instead of workin' like they getting out there and work and get it.

Calling for a stronger sense of collectivism among Blacks on his campus and beyond, Derek continued:

> I feel we need to come together as a nation and try to follow what our forefathers have set for us to do instead of being jealous of each other and teaming up with the White folks to get something. We already know how to work because we were working for White folks. We were slaves before we were anything else, so we know how to work. There is no sense in us living out here on welfare, letting the White man run us. We already got a Black president, so it's time to stand up as a nation and do something about it.

HBCUs as Supportive Environments for Intraracial Diversity

Although participants were aware of the many issues surrounding intraracial diversity, they attributed them to social forces extraneous of their HBCU as the foundation for such conflict. Many expressed, that these issues were simply a fact of life that one may experience on a job after graduation. Harry expounded, "Stereotypes are just a part of our life…I think it's how the world is though. You may have a boss that's the same way. We something we just have to deal with and overcome." Students at both institutions felt their institution and administration valued and cared deeply about diversity. Derek explained that it's evident on his campus: "I'm a senior and I see it everyday. [The institution] makes everyone feel like they are equal."

Consistent with previous research, it was apparent that students at the two HBCUs all viewed intraracial differences as important and influential in their overall campus experiences, yet a paradox remained in that each student expressed a greater sense of concern regarding interracial

issues so intricately connected to the conflicts existent between African-Americans. Overall, the prevailing interracial issues usurped any differences among Black students at HBCUs, as Alex expressed,

> There is a slow kid that goes to school here, and we protect him so much. We want to see him succeed. The other day, my friend said, 'Man, I got this kid and he really need to get in summer school. You know his mom just dropped him off.' We told one of the hall residents he tried his hardest to get him one of these dorm rooms and get him in summer school, so he can get the proper help that he needs, get the medicine or what he needs so he can be safe. So it's not a problem about your academics, what classification you are, or, it don't matter what skin tone you are. It's just a lot a love here. I'm a living testimony.

Harry, a bi-racial student who identifies himself as an African-American male, summarized eloquently the phenomena of intraracial campus diversity,

> Our school is open enrollment. So, they're giving the opportunity to anybody who wants an opportunity because you learn from people whoever you interact with…you…somebody who has everything might learn from somebody who has nothing and vice verse. So, you know, I think it's a great thing to have diversity on campus – especially at an HBCU campus where people may think it [diversity] doesn't live on an HBCU campus. I think it's great.

Summary

These views summarize the beliefs and ideas regarding intraracial diversity at two HBCUs according to 16 undergraduate participants. The themes which emerged offer insight as to how students understand their interactions with other African-American students from a heterogeneous perspective. Overall, students were fully aware of intraethnic conflicts and schisms related to class, color, and gender. Throughout the study other areas also emerged such as organizational affiliation, sexual orientation and the overall feeling that an interracial in-fighting, jealousy

and divisiveness indeed existed among them. However, despite this fact, a paradox remained in that students maintained a measure of ethnic allegiance which usurped their concern with intraracial conflict and differences. These issues were deemed secondary in the greater context of the American racial order.

Summary, Recommendations, and Conclusion

This study, examining the intraracial diversity at historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs), is important as it serves as a starting point of viewing Black collegiate experiences from a homogeneous to a heterogeneous perspective. Accounting for the intraethnic differences which make undergraduate student experiences unique despite their shared ethnicity with other African-American students, the theoretical lens of Celious and Oyserman's (2001) heterogeneous race model was used. Black students were no longer studied as a monolith, but as complex being with multi-faceted identities. Specifically, the purpose of this study was to better understand African-American student perceptions and experiences with campus diversity while attending a historically Black university where the Black versus White dichotomy of race was no longer the salient diversity issue.

A hybrid qualitative approach was implemented using in-depth interviews and small focus groups to collect information-rich, qualitative data. Participants included 16 African-American, undergraduate students attending two HBCUs in the Midwest and Southern regions of the United States. Characteristic of phenomenological research, there was a specific interest in excavating the feelings, emotion and detail of students' intraracial campus interactions. The analysis herein makes sense of the data collected from individual, in-depth interviews and small focus groups after coding, and triangulation of the data. This chapter presents a discussion and analysis, significant findings, recommendations for future research, implications for policy and practice, followed by the conclusion.

The small focus groups offered the opportunity to identify overarching themes and produced meaningful debate and discussion among participants. Densely-informative data was found by conducting both individual interviews and focus groups with each serving a

different purpose. As discussed by Krueger (2004), focus group data, is often complimented by the data gathered from semi-structured, in-depth interviews utilized to gain micro-analysis of student's personal experiences. The same was true of this study. The detailed interview and focus group protocol (Appendix F) posed questions aligned with the three constructs identified by Celious and Oyserman (2001) – gender, socioeconomic status and phenotype. Data from each interview and focus group was audio-taped, transcribed and analyzed in order to gain insight into how the participants interpreted and characterized their experiences with intraracial campus diversity.

Summary of Significant Findings

This research unveiled the importance of campus diversity in the context of an HBCU setting where the majority of the students were African-American. As Celious and Oyserman (2001) theorized, there is evidence that differences among African-American's do matter; thus, it is imperative for social research to approach race differently. The findings of this study further support this proposition. As gender, skin tone, and SES were also found to be factors which impact students' intraracial interactions with each other and their overall campus experience. Several other themes emerged through the data collection and were deemed important to the analysis, and new insights were presented regarding sexual orientation, clubs/group affiliation, and a culture of in-fighting and lack of unity among Black students. Among the findings, three significant and compelling discoveries were made: (a) the perceived boundary between heterosexual and GLBT students was markedly identified by participants as the most divisive intraracial campus issue, (b) HBCU intraracial campus diversity was viewed both positively and negatively by Black students and explained by participants as having an impact upon students personally, socially and academically, yet it remained consequential to interracial dynamics outside the campus boundaries, as well as the American racial order and (c) African-American students expressed an overall disappointment with intraracial interactions with their same-race peers and acknowledged that the issues presented in the themes presented a bleak outlook for students ability to work together collectively as African-American students despite the HBCU campus environment.

Discussion and Analysis of Findings

The findings presented a complex interconnectivity among the previous constructs identified by Celious and Oyserman (2001) and the themes which emerged from this research. There was an extraordinary amount of overlap connecting each theme in a complex manner. Celious and Oyserman (2001) dispelled the idea of one collective experience for individuals who comprise an ethnic group. The premise of the heterogeneous race model (Celious and Oyserman, 2001) was corroborated by the findings of this research. This study embraced the notion of the viewing of race through a lens with multiple dimensions, and thus, represents a break with previous research. Importantly noted, this lens represents a paradigm shift not only for those studying race and diversity but for the participants themselves. Students, all of whom were African-American, identified multiple dimensions to their identity through their detailed accounts of their campus experiences. Even though the concept of intraracial diversity was explained to participants prior to the focus groups and interviews, at several junctures during data collection, there was a propensity among students to begin discussing diversity from an interracial perspective, not uncommon, since the previous literature has determined that intraracial diversity is a phenomena rarely discussed (Cole and Guy-Sheftall, 2003; Taylor, 2004). So while students were clear in their descriptions of how the identified intraracial diversity themes impacted their campus experiences, viewing those experiences as a dimension of diversity was new to them as one student suggested, "It's [diversity among Blacks] just not something people talk about." This silenced discourse will be further analyzed in the discussion of the specific experiences recollected by students.

Student Perceptions of Intraracial Diversity

Participant perceptions described both positive and negative aspects of interracial diversity. While the majority of students acknowledged the phenomena under study did exist at their HBCU and was indeed problematic, only two students minimized the divisions among Black students, electing to keep the larger scope of the support and access provided by HBCUs as being more important. For example, a male student attending Cardinal State University charged that class is "always

gonna effect you," yet he ended his interview adamantly by adding "it's nothing but love here." His views were parallel to those of other participants who were careful not to attribute the perceived intraracial demarcations as negative reflections of their institution. Another African-American male attending Johnson State University agreed and added that the intraracial divisions were so prevalent on campus, they were considered normal among this peer group. However, he was alone in expressing a resilience based upon his self-proclaimed "confidence" in which he felt he could overcome any intraracial barrier be it gender, SES or phenotype by hard work and personal motivation. Overall, students reported intraracial diversity as having the greatest bearing on their social and personal experiences on campus, thus, making this research important for student affairs practitioners. However, included in these findings are also important outcomes for academic affairs professionals, as there were reported feelings from a smaller number of participants that suggest their academic ability is frequently assessed by students and faculty using physical attributes, SES, and other perceived intraethnic markers of status among African-Americans.

Intraracial Diversity and the Student Experience

As previously mentioned, a compelling aspect of this research is that while students were not accustomed to discussing diversity in the context of their own ethnic groups, student accounts identified specific personal experiences which shaped their views. Students' positive and negative viewpoints of intraracial diversity appeared to be more influenced by their actual campus experiences and interactions versus any institutional initiative or institutional plan to address or foster diversity. None of the participants identified a curricular or programmatic campus diversity initiative in their discussions. Students' rationale was all rooted in personal campus interactions. When asked how she would describe her experiences with diversity at Johnson State University overall, Mavis, a 27 year old student observed,

> It is very diverse. It's extremely diverse and for some, it's hard to deal with. But, I mean, you just have to understand that… it's diversity. That's how the world is. It's just many different

> cultural and many different thoughts. You know people are brought up differently. I mean, it's just a lot of things that could define diversity, so…

Mavis was not alone in establishing that while many students on her campus were African-American, cultural differences based on family background also make a difference. This student's comments echoed the underlying sentiments of other students who were unable to make the connection between campus diversity and the campus administration. She continued,

> As far as the administration goes, umm…I have yet to experience anyone within the administration that has a problem with the diversity here. Not to say that it won't happen or hasn't happened. I just haven't experienced it. My personal experience with diversity is…I don't know. I haven't really experienced anything bad [referring to the administration].

This lack of dialogue was evident in that they could not identify campus diversity initiatives beyond new student recruitment and the presence of international students on campus.

The opportunity for HBCUs to foster diversity among students and prepare them for a global society is an opportunity which has been missed by Cardinal State University and Johnson State University based upon student responses. The fact that students equate diversity as a liability and chose phrases such as "divided up" to describe diverse interactions with their same-race peers, indicates that students are missing a critical component to the educational experience of diversity as deemed beneficial across recent scholarship (Milem and Hakuta, 2000; Gurin, et al, 2002; Milem, 2003; and Hurtado, 2005). While students like Valerie, a 20 year old education major, points out, "I haven't had a bad experience with diversity while I'm here, but I can't say that they [the administration] promote it [diversity]. I haven't had that experience. I really don't know." These issues are discussed further in the section of this chapter discussing student perceptions of campus policies and procedures in relation to diversity.

The Role of Gender, Socioeconomic Status and Physical Attributes

Consistent with empirical research examining phenotype and physiognomy (Coard, et al, 2001, Maddox and Gray, 2002 and Hochchild, 2007), students' outward appearance and other phenotypic features such as skin tone and hair texture, influenced their perceptions and attitudes toward intraracial diversity. Consistent with the findings that students' awareness of interracial diversity were based on their campus experiences, students recount noticing the skin tone of campus queens, who for decades were consistently fair in complexion, was consistent with a Westernized beauty prototype of campus queens, as outlined by Tice (2005). Natalie, a student at Cardinal State, had this to say about the skin tone of campus queens, "[At other schools] they are getting lighter and lighter, but here, we got dark skin [queens], but it don't be like that at other schools [HBCUs]." The student expressed a sentiment that intraracial diversity among African-American students had not progressed as much as interracial diversity between Blacks and Whites on her campus. She expressed this comparison between intraracial and interracial diversity in this way, "They [the campus queens] are getting lighter, but I mean, we be seein' White boys at the parties." If interracial diversity has progressed on HBCU campuses, the finings raise this question, why then has intraracial diversity been virtually ignored? This discovery is aligned with the research of Billingslea and De Allen (2008) and Guy-Sheftall (1997); student responses confirmed that embracing multiple identities is difficult and they are often balanced with the idea that discussing differences in some way undermines racial solidarity. According to Billingslea and DeAllen (2009), students confirmed having similar feelings, apparent in their comments regarding the lack of unity among Blacks discussed later. This is yet another example of the complex interconnectivity and overlapping of themes.

Further, many of the themes and constructs present in the findings differed along gender lines. Physical attributes such as skin tone were found to be more important to female students than they were to males. One male participant expressed an interest in what "the females" on campus said about these issues. His same-sex peers and fellow focus group participants were also interested in the responses of women on campus.

When their thoughts about skin tone and class were summarized, the men agreed that their viewpoints were certainly different. One student offered, "That's how girls think. We don't think like that." The men continued to discuss the issues of class and color among themselves and felt that those were not critical issues among the African-American males but were more important to the women on campus. The female focus groups discussed issues of color and class, and while they were able to acknowledge their own participation in colorism, they implicated African-American men for socially preferring women with fair skin, which was thought to perpetuate the intraracial divisions around color differences.

Gender was found to be important issue on HBCU campuses as both men and women described their HBCU campus to be more supportive toward Black women than Black men. The marginalization of the African-American male, despite attending an HBCU, was consistent with the findings of Harper and Gasman (2008) who examined Black male heterogeneity and conservative HBCU campus environments. Furthermore, the broader, societal gender disparities among Black men and women discussed by Cole and Guy-Sheftall (2003) were also confirmed as being critical issues manifested and heightened in the HBCU environments discussed here. Along the same lines, students noted that gender, SES and physical attributes are "human nature" and sometimes discussed as though they are considered norms which matter not only in student to student interactions, but student interactions with faculty and staff.

Variables Defining Intraracial Diversity

The exploratory nature of phenomenological research includes excavating the constructs which shape a phenomenon. Intraracial diversity was understood to encompass gender, SES and phenotype at the onset of this research. There are two themes which emerged from student comments regarding their intraracial diversity campus experiences. First, the mentioned benefit of being affiliated with certain campus organizations and Black Greek letter organizations (BGLOs) commonly occurred with nearly every participant. Club affiliation roused vibrant discussion in focus groups vigorously documented in field

notes. Similarly, the lack of unity and in-fighting among students was characterized as an important issue on each campus, which the literature describes as an intraethnic concern among many marginalized groups (Russell, Wilson and Hall, 1992).

Club and Organization Affiliation. The findings brought forth additional variables which contribute to the intraracial diversity dynamic in a majority campus setting. They included affiliation with social clubs and organizations, particularly BGLOs, which have historically played a role in Black class structure. Our Kind of People (Graham, 2000) provides one of many personal accounts of the historical context of the American emergence an elite class of African-Americans and documents what club affiliation affords Blacks in terms of intraethnic status and privilege. The HBCU students voiced similar experiences on their campuses, noting that affiliation rendered a form of social capital that could in essence help them overcome aspects of gender, SES or phenotype that were not considered personal assets. Participants spoke about these affiliations in a fashion that further confirmed that the intersection of class, color, and belonging to the 'right' groups were constructs that were not exclusive, but worked in tandem to create their overall sentiments about intraracial relationships among their peers.

Lack of Unity and In-Fighting. A common parable expressed in the African-American community describes the "crab theory," first heard in the early work of Booker T. Washington and Marcus Garvey. The etymology of the crab theory can be traced to the African folklore of Southeastern Ghana and Togo. Summarized, the theory expresses the inability for marginalized groups to work collectively and support the efforts of their peers in lieu of participating in destructive behaviors against one another (Polk, 2006). The participants were vocal in their disaccord with the level of "jealousy" among each other, instead of appreciating the intraracial diversity among them which only enriches their experience as students. One participant explicitly viewed the differences among students as "a good thing," instead of viewing these differences as divisive. It was clear that an intraracial diversity education is needed on each campus. This need was further established by one student's final

estimation of why students are not open to non-heterosexual student interactions: "We just don't understand."

Student Perceptions of HBCU Campus Diversity Policies and Practices

As previously discussed, students affirmed that intraracial diversity is an important issue on their campus impacting their lives although a formal discourse inside and outside the classroom was not something participants could recollect. While the outcomes of this study confirm that intraracial diversity has the greatest impact on students personally and socially, there were some student accounts of how the distinctions within their own race impact them academically. Some of those distinctions stem from their own family SES status and background according to which two students expressed that a lower SES family background was associated with less overall support for their academic endeavors. Additionally, narratives indicated that students who appear to have a higher SES or their parents were financial donors to the institution were advantaged, which can color their classroom and academic experiences in the form of "better relationships" and institutional support.

Responding to inquiries about campus diversity as it relates to HBCU campus policies and practice, students were very reflective in their responses, yet many could not identify concrete experiences beyond the work of new student recruitment and international students programs where campus diversity was discussed. One Cardinal State University student had this to say,

> Cardinal does try to get a lot of different people in here. You know cause its people from all over who go here. There are Africans who go here. There are people who kinda got a little mental problems, you know…who have IEP classes. I think they do [Cardinal State University administration] when they try to get people to come here… I think they do look at different varieties. I remember last year there was people here from Alaska, there was people here from Hawaii, Italian people…

While the male and female perspectives were different across several

constructs and themes, this is an area where they agreed. A male student from Cardinal State asserted, "You know what? I'm startin' to see more Caucasian people here, and they gettin' along with the Black folks like it ain't nothing."

The literature characterizes HBCUs as national treasures understood to cultivate positive, supportive climates for diverse populations of students since their inception (cite). Like all institutions, they are not perfect, as the previous research by Gasman and Harper (2007) found the conservative campus climate at some HBCUs influenced the retention of African-American males who also expressed feeling marginalized in this study. Similarly, students involved in this research felt their institutions indeed valued diversity, despite the cultures that may not fully accept the many dimensions of their personalities. There are lessons which can be learned from students' resilience and embracing of the many facets of their diverse identities – acknowledging their own uniqueness is described definitively by Kenny, an undergraduate at Johnson State University. He proclaimed,

> I think the thing about individuals that makes you so unique is being yourself. Everybody is going to be different in your own way. Everybody say I'm different and I love that. That's the only thing I know is to be me. Everybody else is taken. All you know is to be yourself. Whatever message they [HBCUs] try to send, I'm going to be myself regardless.

Recommendations Based on Findings

The findings of this research have been synthesized into the following four recommendations: (a) implement diversity initiatives throughout the organization by including diversity in strategic planning, (b) assess the campus climate for diversity and include student, faculty and staff perspectives, (c) consider new and existing models of campus diversity and (d) implement student support initiatives for non-heterosexual students.

The research indicates that intraracial diversity among African-Americans impacts students' overall campus experience academically and socially. Despite this finding, students also reported a lack of

understanding regarding a range of diversity issues as well as feeling ill-prepared to navigate the challenges intraracial diversity presents, as it is traditionally not openly discussed in Black communities. Based upon the research findings, strategic diversity plans which include aspects of intraracial diversity education are suggested. Throughout the research, while students verbally recognized that there were some aspects of intraracial diversity they were not comfortable with, the non-verbal communication by all participants demonstrated a discomfort with the subject matter. These non-verbal indicators included nervous laughing, verbalized pauses and disapproving facial expressions.

Further examination of how intraracial diversity is experienced from both a student, faculty and staff perspective will prove beneficial, as the campus climate for diversity includes faculty and staff. Students within this study were comfortable using inflammatory language regarding diverse groups of students who shared their ethnic background but represented a culture or lifestyle different than their own. More concerning was the certainty among students that some faculty would address such language in the classroom and others may not. Additionally, the research points to the fact that people often behave based on their own ideas regarding phenotype, class and skin tone, so understanding faculty and staff viewpoints will provide a better picture of intraracial diversity on the campus as a whole. Including the perceptions of all campus stakeholders will render a more complete understanding of the phenomena.

The third recommendation is to foster the organization of student support groups which support the many facets of students' identities. The two most important groups which emerged from this research were GLBT students and African-American males, though there were other sub-groups identified by students such as students who break with the African-American Christian tradition and students immersed in hip-hop culture. There is a documented history of HBCU campus unrest due to diversity issues as the result of campus heterosexism, making GLBT support a priority. The barrier which exists between heterosexual and GLBT students was a prominent issue in this research which fueled intense debate among students. The experiences of the growing population of GLBT students and African-American male students garnered the most intense and passionate sentiments from both male and female student

participants.

Finally, new models of examining campus diversity which include viewing all students from ethnic groups with a heterogeneous lens are needed. Additionally, this research calls for the cultivation of new ways of implementing diversity across campuses which view diversity more broadly and consider the entire student. Specifically, this shift toward ethnic heterogeneity will change the way African-American students are supported across institutional type.

Recommendations for Further Research

This research was exploratory in nature and its findings provide a starting point for further research. The wealth of complex and interconnected findings, such as the ones found in this study, can lead researchers in many directions. However, an important next step would include replicating this study at a PWI in order to determine if intraracial diversity is experienced differently than in an HBCU setting. Such a study may uncover more variables which influence the social, personal and academic experiences of African-American students and provide more detail regarding the phenomenon under study. Coupled with the findings of this research, broader conclusions can be drawn to the support of Black students at HBCUs.

Implications for Policy

These findings are easily related to the larger context of American higher education which has identified diversity as an important issue in light of the demographic trends indicating increased numbers of African-Americans, Latinos and other ethnic groups entering higher education. Diversity is a key topic for AACU, The American Association of Colleges and Universities, which devised the "Inclusive Excellence" diversity model being adopted by campuses nationwide. The implications nationally are twofold in that there are multiple aspects of student identity. Viewing any group of students collectively by generalizing their needs based on one shared trait, if it race, gender or sexual orientation, is a dated model. As our understanding of diversity evolves in tandem with the flattening of the American racial hierarchy, it is then that students can be viewed as complex beings and not boxed into monolithic categories, which only

represent a part of their identity.

Implications for Practice

Campus administrators and diversity thought leaders could facilitate such discussion by implementing campus wide diversity training for students, faculty and staff. Additionally, integrating diversity across division, curriculum and student affairs initiatives will begin the process of slowly peeling away the homogeneous cocoon, which encapsulates African-American student populations at PWIs and HBCUs. By acknowledging intraracial difference, it leads the way for important discussion, dialogue and even debate surrounding taboo and secret distinctions that have been closeted by shame, ongoing racial oppression and the hard work of campus diversity which all American colleges and universities face. The cathartic responses conveyed by research participants can also occur on college campuses as the result of programming, co-curricular activities designed to educate students in cross-cultural literacy as graduates and future alumnae. Another aspect of the student-described empowerment gained by attending an HBCU can be further enhanced by teaching students to embrace their own intraethnic differences yet remain collectively vigilant against racism and oppression of all kinds – including those stemming from intraracial bias.

Conclusion

Intraracial diversity issues characterized by intraethnic divisiveness surrounding issues of phenotype, physiognomy, class, gender, sexual orientation and club affiliation have emerged as important intraethnic diversity issues for African-American students attending historically Black colleges and universities. Similar to other sensitive, yet relevant, student affairs issues HBCU campuses face such as band rites of passage rituals and the legacy of hazing among Black Greek letter organizations, intraracial diversity is identified as an equally important issue for historically Black colleges and universities. Furthermore, the inclusion of a new model for examining diversity at HBCUs, which includes a range of considerations beyond the familiar constructs of gender, age, sexual orientation, and class, would certainly be instructive in developing campus diversity initiatives and policies at HBCUs. For example, student

narratives suggest a myriad of campus sub-groups existing among Black students based upon their background and interests.

The conclusive findings of this study are based upon the collective experiences and perceptions shared by 16 participants' in-depth interviews and small focus groups. The themes and overall findings emerged after careful triangulation of the data. The purposeful sample of students, while sufficient for grasping overarching themes of intraracial campus diversity, did not provide the most diverse cross-section of students. For example, none of the participants disclosed their sexual orientation to be gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgender. As sexual orientation emerged as a prominent theme throughout the study, the voice of GLBT students is an important one missing from the analysis. Additionally, while all participants were engaged in one or more campus clubs or organizations, ranging from science clubs to athletic teams, none of the participants were members of Black Greek letter organizations or student government associations. Many noted in their responses, they were "not student leaders" despite their aforementioned campus involvements. Similarly, students perceived affiliation with these selective organizations as a divisive point between students. Their perceptions of BGLO and student government affiliations were often discussed in relation to class and socioeconomic differences among students. However, because none of these participants were members of BGLOs, an important campus voice was not heard. Also, this study is portraiture of two HBCU campuses; therefore, its generalizability to other HBCU campuses, variant by type and regional location, is limited.

While the limitations above are acknowledged, the result of this research indicates that diversity plays a role among African-Americans in the context of historically Black colleges and universities where the Black versus White dichotomy of race is no longer the most salient diversity issue. It also points to the issues of the imperative need for new paradigms of discussing intraracial diversity. In essence, the intraracial issues that arose among HBCU students are a reflection in part of the race secrets, the airing of dirty laundry, taboos, or public discussion of private, intraethnic issues. Intraracial diversity must be conceptualized differently, to include the range of contentious topics avoided historically in the face of racial oppression.

This research underscores the idea that deeply rooted intraracial issues still exist and impact the college experiences of African-American students. For years, it has been collectively understood that the popular media is not a place to discuss sensitive intraracial issues plaguing the interactions and relationships of African-Americans with each other. Yet, ironically, these issues have been discussed more thoroughly in popular media than in the context of empirical research. One of the common arguments is that for Blacks in American, there are few forums where a private discourse, absent of interracial factors, for these dialogues to take place. There is no better medium than the supportive, nurturing majority setting of our nation's historically Black colleges and universities as the ideal setting for the discourse and education surrounding intraethnic issues which hamper the complex intraracial relationships between African-Americans.

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THE ROLE OF PSYCHOLOGICAL WELL-BEING IN FIRST GENERATION GRADUATE STUDENTS

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to extend previous research conducted by Wang and Castaneda-Sound (2008) that examined the influences of generational status, self-esteem, academic self-efficacy, and perceived social support on undergraduate first generation college (FGC) students' wellbeing. This research explored how the previously mentioned variables affected FGC students on the graduate level. It also attempted to confirm the findings on students on the undergraduate level.

As first generation college (FGC) students continue to increase in numbers at colleges and universities, administrators must acknowledge and deal with the issues which accompany them. This is especially true for first generation students on the graduate level. If challenges such as lack of preparation for college and psychosomatic issues are not mitigated on the undergraduate level, the persistence of graduate students may be affected.

This study used a quantitative methodology to investigate the relationships, if any, between academic self-efficacy, self-esteem, and perceived social support from family and friends on first generation graduate students' psychological well-being. The results of this study have implications on the retention and persistence of first generation students who wish to go on to pursue graduate degrees. The study allows higher education administrators an opportunity to see some of the challenges today's first generation graduate students face.

Introduction

The term "first-generation college" (FGC) student was coined around 1982 by Fuji A. Adachi (Hodges, 1999). Commonly defined as individuals whose parents did not receive an undergraduate degree

(Choy, 2001; Nunez & Cuccaro-Alamin, 1998; Pascarella, Pierson, Wolniak, & Terenzini, 2004), FGC students represent approximately 27–34% of all graduating high school students (Pascarella et al., 2004). Compared to students whose parents attended college, they lack the skills that will prepare them for college success (Choy, 2001; Horn & Nunez, 2000; Pascarella et al., 2004; Thayer, 2000; Warburton, Bugarin, & Nunez, 2001). Saenz, Hurtado, Barerra, Wolf, and Yeung (2007) purport that FGC students tend to have lower expectations than non-FGC students in respect to continuing their education beyond an undergraduate degree, with a relatively consistent difference of approximately 10 percentage points separating the two groups.

One study in particular has shown that first generation college students are at a distinct disadvantage in gaining access to post-secondary education (Chen & Carroll, 2005). These students enter college with mixed feelings, as they are less likely to receive assistance in preparing for college, feel less supported to attend college, and lack a sense of belonging (Choy, 2001; Terenzini, Pringer, Yager, Pascarella, & Nora, 1996). Since 1971, the proportion of FGC students within the overall population of first-time freshmen entering college at four-year institutions has steadily declined, primarily due to lack of parental encouragement (Saenz et al, 2007). Studies have also shown that non-FGC students tend to have higher SAT/ACT scores, have higher grade point averages (GPAs), are more likely to have taken college intensive high school courses, and are less likely to be employed part time (Strayhorn, 2006). In contrast, FGC students are more likely to work long hours, drop out of a four-year institution by their second year, and have fewer credits by their third year (Prospero & Vohra-Gupta, 2007).

On average, FGC students are more likely to be older than their college peers (Giancola, Munz, & Trares, 2008), which may lead to more responsibility outside school, such as taking care of a family or working full time. FGC students are also less likely to engage in activities that are believed to enhance college students' experiences, such as living on campus and participating in extracurricular activities (Pascarella et al., 2004). This may result from FGC students' need to work long hours to support themselves financially. Parental involvement was also shown to be an important predictor of success in college (Barry, Hudley, Cho, &

Kelly, 2008). However, a study by McCarron and Inkelas (2006) suggested that the importance of receiving good grades was more significant for success in college than parental support.

Earlier discussions focused on FGC students and the issues affecting their academic success in undergraduate programs. FGC students who matriculate into graduate programs are also an important portion of the picture: "The sparseness of research on the first generation college experience beyond the undergraduate level implies an assumption that critical elements of student success end once the FGC student completes his or her undergraduate degree" (Brewer & Weisman, 2010, p. 9). The purpose of this study is to extend previous research conducted by Wang and Castaneda-Sound (2008) that examined the influences of generational status, self-esteem, academic self-efficacy, and perceived social support on undergraduate FGC students' well-being. This research will explore how the previously mentioned variables affect FGC students at the graduate level and if what was found for students at the undergraduate level will be confirmed.

Statement of the Problem

Researchers have most commonly used FGC students to define undergraduate students; however, a significant portion of graduate students identify as first generation (Gardner & Holley, 2011). Hoffer, Sederstrom, Selfa, Welch, Hess, Brown, & Guzman-Barron (2002) assert that 37% of doctoral recipients reveal that neither of their parents completed a college degree. There have also been many empirical studies documenting the struggles and challenges of undergraduate FGC students, but little empirical research has been conducted describing the challenges and opportunities encountered by this demographic of students at the graduate level, particularly at the doctoral level (Gardner & Holley, 2011). Correspondingly, research shows that the number of FGC students enrolling in college has increased steadily since the 1920s (Billson & Terry, 1982), yet little has been written on the experiences of FGC students (Riehl, 1994). Chaffee (1992) maintains that many scholars have depicted the experiences of FGC students as comparable to entering an "alien culture." FGC students have to learn this "alien culture" as well as the academic and social rules of the campus. They must deal with

issues of having to work and live in "two cultures," the world on campus and the world of their families and communities as well (Orbe, 2003).

Furthermore, Fentress and Collopy (2011) purported that academic preparation, financial difficulty, identity, and social capital are all variables that have been used to explain why FGC students are at a higher risk of dropping out of college. It was concluded that FGC students' low academic performance may be due to the fact that their perceptions of their own academic ability is low, which may account for the higher dropout rates of FGC students (Fentress & Collopy, 2011). The strain of financial difficulty contributed to these higher dropout rates. Likewise, FGC students worry about financial difficulty twice as much as non-FGC students (Saenz et al., 2007). FGC students may leave college prematurely because of identity conflict, as well. The students may feel like they are not integrated into the university and may therefore feel like outsiders. Then, once a degree has been obtained, FGC students may feel some degree of isolation from their families and communities (Billson & Terry, 1982). Furthermore, when FGC students feel that they must choose between an education and their families and communities, they may give up on who they would like to become to choose their families and communities.

Similarly, social capital is an important factor for students as they continue their college education. Social capital includes a student's network of social avenues and knowledge of how to access that network, such as how to choose a major or find financial aid. Subsequently, given that academic ability, financial difficulties, identity, and social capital have all been used to illustrate why FGC students are at higher risk of dropping out of college, little research has been done to explore the way these variables affect students and the way students overcome these obstacles (Gardner & Holley, 2011).

Many existing studies on FGC students have been based on academic persistence (Lohfink & Paulsen, 2005), variables that have contributed to performance and level of attainment in school (McCarron & Inkelas, 2006) and adjustment to college and university environments (Bui, 2002). In fact, few research studies have been conducted to explore the influence of self-efficacy and stress as predictors of academic success in college, and an even smaller number of studies have been conducted on the effects of stress and self-efficacy on persistence for college students

(Zajacova, Lynch, & Espenshade, 2005). Multon, Brown, & Lent (1991) contended that academic self-efficacy tends to differ among different types of students. However, Elias (2008) maintained that no research has been done to explore the potential impact of demographic characteristics on academic self-efficacy levels.

FGC students have the difficult task of trying to navigate the waters after they have completed their undergraduate degrees, including whether to pursue a graduate degree, where they will pursue graduate study, and how to make the transition from college to graduate school (Lunceford, 2011). To that end, Lunceford (2011) also states that one of the issues faced by FGC students as they prepare to enter graduate school is that faculty have not developed relationships with the students assigned as their advisees. Lunceford (2011) also suggested that it is necessary for faculty to write letters of recommendation for students whether they plan to attend graduate school or not. Equally important is for the faculty member, as an advisor, to assess the student's aptitude and desire for graduate studies. Advising can also come from another faculty member whom the student has chosen as his or her mentor. For the necessary assessment to take place, the advisor or mentor must understand the student's goals, desires, and values (Lunceford, 2011).

Gardner and Holley (2011) concluded that many FGC students who decide to attend graduate school do not receive assistance when trying to access the higher-education system. They also do not know how institutional types and institutional rankings could affect their career choices in the future. Students and their families were more than likely unaware of financial aid and how to gain access to available resources. As a result, one of the obstacles to graduate school was the ability to obtain funds to pay for school (Gardner & Holley, 2011). Further, the study found that for many of the FGC graduate students, given that they come from working-class backgrounds, having financial support was crucial. While many of the students did receive fellowships and assistantships, these were not enough to cover their expenses. Consequently, one of the conclusions found in the Gardner and Holley (2011) study was that graduate students completed their degrees with large debt loads. Moreover, Hoffer et al. (2003) reported that 34% of first generation doctoral recipients used their own funds to cover graduate school expenses, as compared to 22% of

non-first generation doctoral students. Consequently, a major concern of graduate students with already large debt loads is accumulating more debt as they continue their education (Gardner & Holley, 2011).

Another issue facing FGC students is the sense of belonging in graduate programs and on campus in general. Gregg (1972) found that a sense of belonging was closely tied to one's satisfaction in graduate school. In addition, students who entered graduate school sometimes faced the challenge of imposter syndrome (Gardner & Holley, 2011). This term was used initially to depict "a phenomenon initially described among high-achieving women (Clance & Imes, 1978), but one that can also be applied to those who reflect differences when compared to the perceived majority of an institution" (Gardner & Holley, 2011, p. 87). According to Clance & Imes, "FGC students who exhibited characteristics that are different from the norm may also have feelings of 'intellectual phoniness'" (1978, p. 241). These students do not always experience a sense of internal success, regardless of the praise they receive from their peers and their academic successes (Gardner & Holley, 2011). Imposter syndrome has been linked to academic self-concept in graduate students as well (Ewing, Richardson, James-Myers, & Russell, 1996).

Gardner and Holley (2011) maintain that FGC students' status results in more stress and pressures and creates more stressful situations while attending graduate school. To obtain economic success, FGC students must gain more social and cultural capital by obtaining a graduate degree. Consequently, once a student has obtained the necessary capital, there will be a physical and intellectual distance from his or her family. Gardner and Holley (2011) found that some students felt the need to be conscious of how they spoke and behaved when around their families and peers, while others felt there was a total disconnection from their families and backgrounds. Conversely, in a study conducted by Mare (1980), it was found that students who decided to enroll in graduate school were not affected by family background, and the study concluded that "for college graduates, the influence of social origins on their decisions to pursue further schooling is virtually nil" (p. 301).

Moreover, Santiago and Einarson (1998) maintained that there has been little research conducted that explores academic self-confidence in graduate programs and "virtually none" related to academic self-efficacy.

Another factor that must be taken into consideration in conceptual models for graduate students is the extent to which graduate students' external and nonacademic responsibilities affect the students' academic self-efficacy (Etzkowitz, Kemelgor, Neuschatz, & Brian, 1992). Attention should also be paid to the quality and quantity of students' interactions with faculty (Hurtado & Carter, 1994). Furthermore, according to Wang and Castenada-Sound (2008), no studies on the effects of generational status and race on students' well-being have been conducted.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to extend previous research conducted by Wang and Castaneda-Sound (2008) that examined the influences of generational status, self-esteem, academic self-efficacy, and perceived social support on undergraduate FGC students' well-being. This research explores how the previously mentioned variables affected FGC students at the graduate level and if what was found for students at the undergraduate level is confirmed.

Research Hypotheses

Based on the purpose and theoretical framework of the study, the following hypotheses will be the focus of this research:

1. There will be significantly lower scores for FGC students in psychological well-being, academic self-efficacy, and perceived social support than for non-FGC students at the graduate level.

2. Self-esteem, academic self-efficacy, and perceived social support will be significantly associated with psychological well-being among FGC students at the graduate level.

3. Self-esteem, academic self-efficacy, and perceived social support will have differential predictive effects for psychological well-being of FGC students.

Theoretical Framework

Ecological Model of Human Development

Urie Brofenbrenner's (1979) Ecological Model of Human Development framed this research study. The theory purports that development is the result of interactions between the characteristics of an individual and the environment of an individual during one's life (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998). Additionally, the model described five embedded ecological systems centering on the individual: the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem, and chronosystem (Cerezo, O'Neil, & Benedict, 2009).

Further, the ecological model stressed how process affects human development. It was initially used to analyze and interpret life span, but it is an applicable model in many situations in which individuals change as a result of conforming to changing surroundings and can be used to try to understand these changes. As a result, it provides an appropriate framework for understanding how college students reason with their sometimes constantly changing roles in life (Bronfenbrenner, 1979).

Bronfenbrenner (1993) maintained that "development is an evolving function of person-to-environment interaction" (p. 10). These individual interactions, which were most often face-to face, usually took place in unattached surroundings, described as a microsystem. The microsystem was comprised of such groups as family, peers, university, and other groups that have a direct influence on students' environment (Cerezo et al., 2009). If there was interaction between more than one microsystem, this was described as a mesosystem (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Some of the components that may make up a student's mesosystem are jobs, parents, spouse and children, religious organizations, college classrooms, and college peer groups. These compose the student's interrelations in the microsystem and closely resemble the conflicting experiences students have when trying to deal with several commitments at the same time. All of these commitments require attention and energy from students in the form of time and psychological effects (Bronfenbrenner, 1993).

Likewise, Cerezo et al. (2009) maintained that the mesosystem consists of the relationships that occur within the groups in the microsystem, such as interactions between family and peer groups. The resulting influences

of these interactions on individuals may be positive, neutral, or negative in nature. Factors in the environment that are not directly involved with the individual, such as university policies, are part of the exosystem. Further, the macrosystem consists of "societal values that define cultural experiences such as gender role expectations" (Cerezo et al., 2009, p. 2). Finally, the chronosystem is characterized by relationships between the environment and individual over the course of time (Cerezo et al., 2009). This system also includes "bidirectionality," which is "the dynamic and influential relationship between the individual and each of the contexts in the model" (Cerezo et al., 2009, p.2). Not only does bidirectionality suggest that each experience in an individual's ecology influences her or him as an individual, but they also influence each level of one's ecological systems (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). According to Cerezo et al. (2009), recognizing bidirectionality is critical to helping students understand their ability to effect change in the networks functioning in their lives.

Moreover, when speaking of college students, academic success is a function of both personal characteristics, such as mental ability, academic skills, motivation, and goals, and the characteristics of the environment (Muuss, 1996). In addition, Bronfenbrenner and Morris (1998) focused on the interaction between the person and the immediate environment. Face-to-face interactions with and support from family members and peers are among the most common and important processes for adolescents and young adults and play an important role in academic outcomes (Muuss, 1996).

In the study conducted by Cerezo et al. (2009), utilizing an ecological framework allowed them to take into account the distinguishable adversity and social difficulties which were helpful in improving the "social and academic success of Latina/o college students" (p. 5). In like manner, the framework assisted college counselors in efficiently responding to Latino students because "the contextual issues they face are centrally and not peripherally considered in assessment and intervention (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Furthermore, failure to consider person-environment interactions results in interventions that are at the best ineffective and may pose serious harm to the client (Chronister, McWhirter, & Kerewsky, 2004)" (Cerezo et al., 2009, p. 5).

Research Methodology

To assess the self-efficacy of the students, the College Self-Efficacy Instrument (CSEI) (Solberg, O'Brien, Villareal, Kennel, & Davis, 1993) was used. The Social Support Appraisals Scale (SS-A) (Vaux, Phillips, Holly, Thomson, Williams, & Stewart, 1986) was used to measure the extent to which the individuals believed that they are loved and supported by family, friends, and others. The stress section of the Rhode Island Stress and Coping Inventory (Fava, Ruggiero, & Gimley, 1998) was used to measure the level of stress of the participants, as well. The Brief Symptom Inventory (Derogatis & Melisaratos, 1983) measured the somatic and depressive symptoms of the participants, and lastly, the Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS) (Diener, Emmons, Larson, & Griffin, 1985) was used to measure the life satisfaction of the participants.

Sample Selection

The sample for this study came from a population of 678 graduate students. The sample included all students who were enrolled in graduate programs at the institution. The sample was representative of all of the different colleges and disciplines across the campus. After a review of student enrollment data and demographic information for the 2012-2013 academic year published on the university website, it was shown that 92% of the student population was African American, 5% was white, and that other races/ethnicities made up the remaining 3% of the student population. The male population of the university was 46%, whereas the female population was 54%, and in addition, the population of males enrolled in graduate programs was 30%, and the population of female students enrolled in graduate programs was 70%.

Date Collection

The participants were asked to complete surveys anonymously online and by hand in the classroom setting. The online surveys were available to the students from March 18, 2013, through April 26, 2013. The classroom-administered surveys were administered during the same time period.

All potential participants were sent an email that briefly described the study as an online survey to investigate the influences of generational

status and psychosocial variables on college students' well-being, requested their voluntary participation, provided information on their rights, and provided the potential participants with a website link to access and complete the study should they agree to participate. At the request of the publisher, one questionnaire was administered in the classroom.

Summary of Significant Findings

This research provided a statistical overview of the variables that may have an effect on the psychological well-being of first generation students in academic programs on the graduate level. There were two classifications of variables. The first one was psychosocial which included self-esteem, academic self-efficacy, and perceived social support from family, perceived social support from friends; the second one was psychological, which included depressive symptoms, somatic symptoms, life satisfaction, and stress.

A chi-square analysis was conducted on the data to determine if there were any significant differences between the different categories of the demographic information and to describe the frequencies in the data for first generation and non-first generation college students. The data analysis showed that there were no significant differences in the demographic information. In addition, to test hypothesis 1, a 2(FGC vs. NFGC) x 2(ethnic majority vs. ethnic majority) MANOVA was conducted to examine the significance of the group differences between FGC students and non-FGC students, while at the same time considering the influence of the students' race or ethnicity. The results revealed that there were no significant differences between the two groups when examining generational status and racial/ethnic status and academic self-efficacy, psychological well-being and perceived social support.

The data analysis revealed that FGC students scored higher on somatic symptoms and lower on academic self-efficacy than did non-FGC students. The data showed that there was a significant difference in the stress variable between the students groups, meaning non-FGC students had higher levels of stress than FGC students, as well. Conversely, there were no significant differences detected between ethnic minority students and majority students on self-esteem, perceived social support

from family and friends, and life satisfaction.

A bivariate correlation matrix was conducted to explore the relationship between self-esteem, academic self-efficacy, perceived social support from family and friends, life satisfaction, stress, depressive symptoms and somatic symptoms (psychological variables and psychosocial variables). The results revealed that there were correlations between depressive symptoms and self-esteem, somatic symptoms and self-esteem, and academic self-efficacy and satisfaction with life for FGC students.

To further test this hypothesis, three parallel multiple regression analyses were conducted examining life satisfaction, stress, and psychological symptoms as the criterion variable for each analysis. In the first model, academic self-efficacy was able to predict life satisfaction of first generation graduate (FGG) students. In the second model, race/ethnic status and academic self-efficacy were predictors of stress for FGC students on the graduate level. In model three, there were no variables that were significant in predicting psychological symptoms for FGC students on the graduate level.

A hierarchical multiple regression was conducted to examine hypothesis 3, which investigated the ability of psychosocial behavior of FCG and students to predict psychological well-being (life satisfaction, stress, and somatic and depressive symptoms), after controlling for race. The analysis of the model for life satisfaction showed that, after entering race as the only predictor variable, the model was significant. Two of the six predictor variables were statistically significant, self-esteem and academic self-efficacy.

The analysis of the stress model revealed that, after entering race as the only predictor variable, the model was not significant. One of the six predictor variables was statistically significant, academic self-efficacy. Further, the analysis of the model for somatic and depressive symptoms showed that, after entering race as the only predictor variable, the model was not a significant predictor of somatic symptoms for graduate students and none of the predictor variables were statistically significant.

Recommendations Based on Findings

The results from this study showed that academic self-efficacy was a predictor of satisfaction with life for FGG college students. College

administrators, to address any academic deficits that FGG students might carry into their graduate programs, may use this data. In addressing these deficits, initiatives or programs should be created for FGC students who go on to the graduate level. The academic challenges faced by students in undergraduate programs may not necessarily be corrected before the baccalaureate program is completed. These initiatives could include programs to assess areas of weaknesses of students in graduate programs and programs to assist students with courses in their academic disciplines, if needed. Programs to assist students to gain entry into graduate programs could likewise be included in these initiatives. If graduate students feel that the challenges of graduate school are manageable, they will do well in their courses which will lead to less stress and worry, which in turn will lead to an overall higher level of life satisfaction. Colleges and universities should take a more active role in helping graduate students, particularly FGC students on the graduate level, in persisting and completing their programs.

The current study found that academic self-efficacy and self-esteem were predictors of stress for FGG students. Higher education administrators, to determine if programs such as mentoring, professional development and leadership training should be offered or incorporated into graduate programs, may use this data. These types of programs, in conjunction with the previously mentioned programs, should be implemented and offered to graduate students, particularly FGG students, to increase the students' levels of academic self-efficacy and self-esteem, and therefore decrease the level of stress for the students.

There were correlations between depressive symptoms and self-esteem and somatic symptoms and self-esteem for FGG students revealed in this study, as well. Students with higher levels of depressive symptoms and somatic or physical symptoms had lower levels of self-esteem. This finding illustrates the need for graduate students to feel that they have full access to all of the services provided on the undergraduate level, such as counseling services and health services on college and university campuses. These services may in fact be available to all students, but it must be emphasized to graduate students that these services are available to the student population at large. If it is felt that students can go to counseling centers on campus when depressive symptoms are

experienced and health centers on campus when somatic symptoms are experienced, the symptoms could be mitigated, which would in turn have a positive effect on the self-esteem of the student.

Implications for Practice

Many implications for practice were revealed as a result of this study. Research shows there are correlations between academic self-efficacy, self-esteem, stress, and life satisfaction, as discussed in the literature review of this study. When developing programs for FGC students on the undergraduate level, administrators should be mindful that FGC students on the graduate level might need programs, as well. Most universities do have outreach programs for undergraduate FGC students but not very many for FGC students on the graduate level.

The findings of higher physical symptoms in FGC students and higher levels of stress in graduate students in general emphasizes the need for administrators to ensure that college and university health and counseling centers reach out to graduate students and make it known that the services of these centers are open to all students on campus. As graduate programs may cause some students to experience more stress that may result in more physical symptoms, the responsibility is that of the college or university to ensure that students are aware that there are support services available if needed. This may even be incumbent upon administrators to include the information, if they have not already done so, in their graduate student handbooks and literature.

Further, college and university administrators should take into consideration that as found in previous research literature, most FGC students are not adequately prepared for undergraduate study, and consequently, they may be ill prepared for graduate study, as well. The research illustrated that academic self-efficacy was a critical variable in the psychological well-being of FGC students on the graduate level as related to overall satisfaction with life. Programs to address the issue of lower self-efficacy should also be implemented. Moreover, based on the findings of this study, graduate faculty should be equally aware of the issues that face FGC students on the graduate level. Faculty should recognize and acknowledge that stress levels may be higher in graduate study, and as a result, somatic symptoms and depressive symptoms could

be higher for graduate students, particularly for FGC students on the graduate level. This directive should come from the dean through the chairs to graduate faculty as a part of policy.

Many times, students are left to their own devices in order to navigate the system when applying to graduate school. Graduate school may be a difficult experience for students, particularly for FGC students, who may not have access to information about the intricacies of graduate school. Colleges and universities should conduct graduate school orientations that are effective in helping students understand the academic and financial landscape of the school. The orientations should include presentations from a variety of offices on campus such as financial aid, student accounts and receivables, the university library, information technology, student health and counseling centers, as well as the graduate school. Current students and faculty should be included in order to have an open discussion with students to address the critical issues to be successful in graduate school.

Implications for Policy

Saunders and Serna (2004) purported that the obstacles found for undergraduate students were likely to persist as students continue their education to obtain an advanced degree. As a consequence of more students in general pursuing graduate degrees, more than likely many FGC students will one day become graduate students. The issues that face FGC undergraduate students such as employment status, family situation, and assimilation, will be just as critical, if not more so, in graduate school. A study such as this one is imperative because of the examination of how students change as a result of conforming to changing surroundings when they begin graduate programs. For this reason, federal and state agencies should imply that colleges and universities should offer support beyond undergraduate study to support FGC students with their programs to ensure that they will gain entry into and persist in graduate programs.

Further, higher education institutions are increasingly held more accountable for graduation and retention rates by state and federal agencies, particularly public higher education institutions. This call for more accountability has led graduation and retention rates to be placed high on the public policy agenda. Therefore, it would be prudent for state

and federal higher education policy makers to provide more financial support for higher education institutions in the state, as well as the federal budgets, so institutions may make efforts to increase graduation, retention, and persistence rates. Increased financial assistance in the form of low interest loans and grants should be made available to the students, as well. The funds may come in the form of state appropriations or federal grant funds. In addition, some of the allocated funds should go specifically to support programs for FGC college students. These programs should be targeted to improve the academic self-efficacy and self-esteem of FGC students.

Conclusions

In anticipation of completing the data analysis of this study, the researcher expected that what was found on the undergraduate level for FGC students would in turn be found on the graduate level; however, that was not the case. All of the variables were shown to have an effect on psychological well-being on FGC students on the undergraduate level. The current study found that academic self-efficacy, self-esteem, and psychosocial symptoms had correlations and predictive effects on the well-being of first generation students on the graduate level, whereas perceived social support of family and friends had no effect. Stronger correlations between the variables were expected to be found as well in the current study. Since stronger correlations were not found, this leads the researcher to believe that as FGC students complete undergraduate programs, generational status, academic self-efficacy, self-esteem, and perceived social support from family and friends have a lesser effect on the psychological well-being of FGC students who go on to the graduate level.

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Looking Back on the Upward Bound Bridge Summer Experience Through the Lens of African American Students

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Abstract

The Upward Bound Program challenged higher education with the premise that a summer experience on a college campus would have a transformative impact on the lives of low-income students from minority backgrounds. It was Examined whether that premise is supported by the research by reviewing findings on the experiences of students in Upward Bound Summer Bridge Programs at Historically Black Colleges and Universities – after the bridge summer and again after the first semester of college. Findings include impacts on students' perceptions of themselves, of academics, of their families and friends, on their aspirations and on their confidence in their ability to complete college. In addition, the findings from this study yield recommendations as to what Upward Bound and similar programs can do to support students in their transition from high school to college and steer them toward college graduation.

Keywords: First-generation college student, Low-income student, Pre-college program, TRIO programs, Upward Bound Program, Upward Bound Program – Summer Bridge Program

Introduction

First-generation, low-income, African American college students experienced many barriers to obtaining a college degree (London, 1989, 1992; Richardson & Skinner, 1992). Some of these barriers included working full-time, raising children, a lack of confidence regarding their ability to be successful in college, and inadequate support from family members and friends. Many of these barriers led to students' inability to matriculate through the academic rigors of college. One avenue that

was successful in helping African American college students enroll and persist in post-secondary institutions was the Upward Bound Program (Edmonds, 2003).

Upward Bound Programs were founded to encourage students to attend post-secondary institutions through their participation in cultural enrichment programs and providing monetary awards for their successes (Barber, 1982; McQueen, 1984). In a national evaluation of Upward Bound Programs, results indicated that students who participated in these programs sought to take more academic courses and complete more schooling after enrolling in the program (McLure & Child, 1998). Students who benefited from the program the most were those who had lower academic aspirations (Moore et al., 1997).

The federal government has provided resources to many colleges and universities to implement programs and student support services, such as TRIO Programs to address the needs of first-generation and at-risk students (Council for Opportunity in Education, 2008). These programs are academically based year-round programs including summer transitional programs (i.e., TRIO and Upward Bound Programs) that provide students with resources to bridge the gap from high school to college and prepare them for the academic demands of obtaining a college degree (Hicks, 2003, 2005). After their establishment, these programs further created opportunities for administrators to develop academic support services to aid in retention and persistence (Edwards, 1993; Levine 1993).

Many colleges and universities (i.e., public and private four-year institutions throughout the United States) offer pre-college programs during the summer to help at-risk students (i.e., first-generation college students [FGCS]) transition to college (Hunt & Strumpf, 1993). Capriccioso (2006) indicated that only one in six freshmen are considered first-generation college students. The over-arching theme of pre-college programs and services has been to improve the academic, personal, and social experiences and to increase graduation and retention rates among at-risk students (Hicks, 2003).

Over the past 50 years, college administrators have attempted through specially implemented programs and courses (i.e., extended freshman orientation, transition seminars, and study skill courses) to improve the

overall experience of FGCS (Murtuza & Ketkar, 1995). As budget cuts within higher education continue to impact pre-college programs and services offered by universities and colleges across the nation, FGCS will continue to be under-prepared for higher education (Council for Opportunity in Education, 2008). Introduction to college level coursework during these pre-college programs and services provides under-prepared students with skills necessary to obtain a college degree and a sense of hope about being successful in postsecondary institutions (Gullatt & Jan, 2003). Research shows that students who participated in pre-college programs are likely to be retained at the institution, get involved in programs and services, and graduate (Hicks, 2003, 2005). Hicks (2003) conducted a quantitative study of two summer programs to ascertain if differences existing among students' expectations of college and their ability to matriculate in college changed prior to and after participating in pre-college programs. The results of the study indicated that students who participated in pre-college programs increased their ability to adjust to college and chances of persisting toward a college degree (Hicks, 2003, 2005).

Researchers have examined pre-college experiences of first-generation college students as opposed to race, generational status, and socioeconomic status and its impact on students' experiences. Research regarding the former was introduced in the 1980s and continued throughout the 1990s (Brown, 1997; Fallon, 1997; Fishman, 1997; Justiz & Rendon, 1989). However, these studies focused more on first-generation college students' characteristics and experiences prior to college as opposed to experiences while in a college setting.

Bemak's (1975) study sought to learn how Upward Bound Programs impacted participants politically, socially, and personally as a result of their participation in an Upward Bound Program located at a university in the northeastern part of the United States. Bemak examined student experiences based on the following factors: relationships with family and friends, self-perceptions, academic performance and attitude, and ability to see future opportunities clearer. Results from his study indicated that the 12 students interviewed felt their participation in the Upward Bound Program had a significant influence on their personal lives.

Dalpes (2001) further examined first-generation, low-income, Latino

college students and their experiences after completing Upward Bound Programs in two northeastern states. Dalpes interviewed 12 first-generation, low-income, Puerto Rican Upward Bound students who completed one year of college. Results from Dalpes' (2001) study were consistent with Bemak's (1975) study in that Upward Bound had an influence on students' academic performance in high school, college preparation, self-perceptions, family relationships, social relationships, and future goals.

While many studies have assessed experiences of first-generation, low-income, African American college students who participated in Upward Bound Programs after completing one year of college, limited if any research has evaluated these students' experiences after completing one semester of college and the Upward Bound Program – Summer Bridge Program. Summer Bridge Programs were designed to provide students with an opportunity to become acclimated to the college environment prior to enrolling in their first semester of college (Kezar, 1999). This study sought to contribute to the literature (Bemak, 1975; Dalpes, 2001) and unveiled unanswered questions regarding first-generation, low-income, African American college students' experiences after completing one semester of college and the Upward Bound Program – Summer Bridge Program.

Research Question

1. What are first-generation, low-income, African American college students' perceptions of the following after completing the Upward Bound Program – Summer Bridge Program and their first semester of college:

- understanding of self,
- academics,
- family and social relationships, and
- future aspirations and ability to succeed?

FIGURE 1. Tinto's and Edmond's Theory of Student Departure

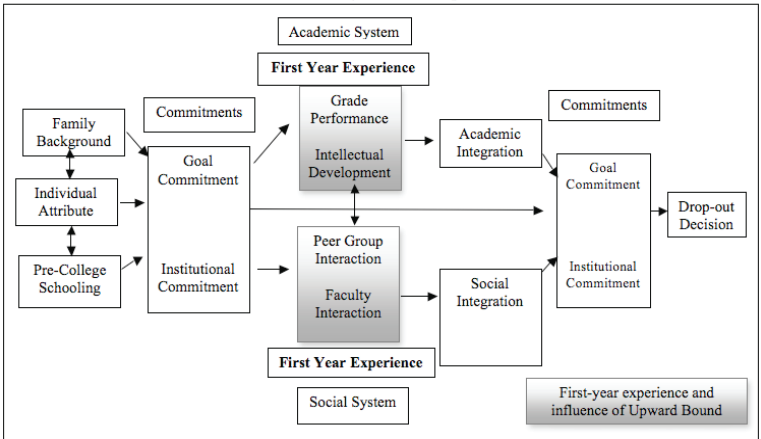

Figure 1. The impact of Upward Bound Programs on first-semester experiences of first-generation, low-income, African American college students. Adapted from "Dropout from Higher Education: A Theoretical Synthesis of Recent Research," by Vincent Tinto, 1975, *Review of Education Research, 45*, 89-125 and Upward Bound as a Model to Deter Attrition during the Freshmen Year in Postsecondary Institutions, by Willie Edmonds, 003, Dissertations & Theses: Full Text. (Publication No. AAT 3073319). Ed.D. dissertation.

Figure 1 describes how students move through the conceptual framework longitudinally (Edmonds, 2003; Tinto, 1975). Edmonds (2003) utilized this framework to indicate how Upward Bound influenced participants to persist throughout their first year of college. Students decide to enroll in institutions with values and influences from their family background, individual attributes, and pre-college schooling. The majority of the students who enroll in Upward Bound Programs are first-generation and low-income individuals. Furthermore, the program was designed to assist these students with completing secondary education and enrolling in post-secondary institutions with hopes of obtaining a degree. A student then moves to the next stage, which is goal and institutional commitment. In this stage, students who possess the qualifications of the institution are recruited and accepted. It is during this time that students are asked to commit to their goals and the institution, which is pertinent to obtaining a college degree. The next stage of the process, according to Tinto, is academic and social systems where students are immersed in the academic culture of the institution. The Summer

Bridge Program provided students with an overview of what to expect and how to be successful in post-secondary institutions through their experiences taking college level courses, participating in workshops and programs, living in the residence halls, establishing a major area of study, and building community among their peers (Kezar, 1999; Wilson, 2006). As students proceed through this stage, they realize that in order to develop academically and intellectually, interaction with peers and faculty members is essential. The students' level of academic and social integration determines their ability to persist toward the final stage, which is commitment. During this stage, students have an opportunity to either persist or drop out of the institution.

For the purposes of this research, the middle section of the conceptual framework including the academic and social integration of first semester experiences was the focus. This section provided a framework for understanding how students integrate (grade performance, intellectual development, peer group interactions, and faculty interactions) into the academic and social environments within institutions throughout their first year of college. Pre-college experiences and experiences within a college setting have been found to determine whether or not a student persists or drops out of college (Wilder, 1994). Wilder (1994) found that students decided whether to remain in college within the first six weeks of college based on how well they adjusted to the college environment.

Pre-college experiences included participation in summer transitional programs and pre-college programs such as Upward Bound Programs (Hicks, 2003, 2005). Experiences within a college setting included their ability to manage the academic rigors of college, ability to engage in family and social relationships, self-perceptions, future aspirations, and success within a post-secondary institution. The factors considered for this study included academics, self-perceptions, family and peer interactions, and future aspirations which provide a better understanding of first semester experiences of first-generation, low-income, African American college students who participated in an Upward Bound Program – Summer Bridge Program. Furthermore, the study contributed to the literature on what impact, if any, the Upward Bound Program had on their first-semester experiences.

These factors can have an impact on how well students will adjust to the college environment, which is what Upward Bound Programs were designed to accomplish (Terenzini, Rendon, Upcraft, Miller, Allison, Gregg, & Jalomo, 1996). The Summer Bridge Program was one method that helped low-income and minority students enter and graduate from college (Mitchem, 1996; Edmonds, 2003).

Methodology

Qualitative research methods based on former protocols used by past researchers (Bemak, 1975; Dalpes, 2001) were utilized to interpret responses from participants in this study. Data collection included in-depth interviews with participants to learn about their first-semester experiences. Through employing in-depth interviews, the essence or essences of shared experiences of first-generation, low-income, African American college students as a result of completing an Upward Bound Program – Summer Bridge Program and one semester of college were examined.

The sites selected for this study were public and private four-year Historically Black Colleges and Universities located in the southeastern part of the United States. Participants utilized in this study were from three private institutions and one public institution. These sites were chosen to provide an opportunity to determine if similarities or differences existed among the students who participated in an Upward Bound Program – Summer Bridge Program at diverse institutions. Upward Bound Program – Summer Bridge Program participants who completed the Upward Bound Program and fall 2010 semester and enrolled in classes during the spring 2011 semester were surveyed. The Summer Bridge Program provided students with an opportunity to enroll in at least six hours prior to the start of their freshman year. The purpose of this Program was to expose students to college life early, in efforts to aid in their transition from high school to college. This program further retained these students and provided opportunities for this population to advance as other students (Kezar, 1999). An attempt was made to secure participants for this study from public and private Historically Black College and Universities (HBCU) and Predominantly White Institutions (PWI). However, this study only garnered interest from three private and

one public HBCU.

The 12 participants selected for this study were identified by contacts with Upward Bound Programs in Louisiana, Mississippi, and Tennessee. The participants were first-generation, low-income, and African American. In addition, the majority of the participants entered the Upward Bound Program as high school freshmen at the age of 14 or 15, completed at least three or more years of the Upward Bound Program, the academic and Summer Bridge Program components, and one semester of college. Academic sessions are generally offered throughout the fall and spring semesters on Saturdays, while the summer sessions are between six to eight weeks during the summer. At the time of this study, each participant was currently enrolled at their institution as a second semester matriculating freshman.

Standardized, open-ended interview questions were used to conduct the study. Each participant was interviewed once for 25 to 30 minutes based on the protocol used in previous studies (Bemak, 1975; Dalpes, 2001). All interviews were audio-tape recorded and transcribed to allow for comparison and saturation of thoughts participants provided. The protocol implemented by Bemak (1975) reflected the concepts included in the literature as indicators for post-secondary success for first-generation, low income students (Dalpes, 2001).

Six sets of questions were employed during the interviews to garner more information about these students' experiences (Bemak, 1975; Dalpes, 2001). The first set of questions provided an opportunity to learn about the participants' involvement within the Upward Bound Program. For example, participants were asked about their favorite memories from the Upward Bound Program – Summer Bridge Program. Furthermore, the questions were designed to develop a rapport with the participants and help them reflect upon their experiences. The second set of questions examined participants' feelings about themselves and the impact the program had on their personal development. Participants were asked to describe their feelings toward obtaining a degree and if they changed as a result of completing the program and one semester of college. The third set of questions provided the participants with an opportunity to reflect on their perceptions of their academic experiences after completing the Upward Bound Program and one semester of college. For example,

the participants were asked to express the impact the program had on their first semester of college. The fourth set of questions explored the participants' perceptions of their relationships with family and friends. Moreover, these questions examined if any changes occurred in family's and friends' support as a result of the student pursuing post-secondary education. The fifth set of questions examined participants' perceptions regarding their future plans and degree aspirations. Participants were asked to describe their feelings about their future goals as a result of completing the program and one semester of college. The sixth set of questions examined participants' overall perceptions of the Upward Bound Program – Summer Bridge Program. To this end, the participants were asked to share their perceptions of the program as well as recommendations for improving the Upward Bound Program – Summer Bridge Program.

The data for this study consisted of audio-tapes from the interviews as well as audio-taped transcriptions and field notes. The data were transcribed and coded at the conclusion of each interview. Coding was a method Bogdan and Biklen (2007) identified. This method provided the researcher with an opportunity to identify emerging patterns, themes, categories, and topics related to the research questions included in the interview guide through a process known as narrative coding (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). Furthermore, narrative coding provided an opportunity for the researcher to learn about the experiences of the participants as they told their stories, which was the overall purpose of this study.

Audio-taped transcriptions were utilized from the interviews to interpret and categorize the experiences of each participant. These data were organized in a spreadsheet based on the responses to the questions to ascertain if any themes, patterns, or norms existed. Once themes, patterns, or norms were identified, narrative coding was used to summarize the experiences of each participant. The narrative coding provided opportunities to respond to the research questions based on the themes that were identified through the audio-taped transcriptions and field notes. Furthermore, these themes reflected the participants' responses to the questions posed during the interview.

Field notes were utilized to safeguard against the researcher's personal biases for the Upward Bound Program – Summer Bridge Program.

To further ensure the accuracy of the information presented, a verbal summary was provided of the field notes to the participants at the conclusion of each interview. In addition, these field notes were used along with the audio-taped recordings to summarize the findings from the study as well as identify emerging themes. Furthermore, established protocols and narrative coding were used as methods to reduce bias in data analysis.

Findings

The Upward Bound Program – Summer Bridge Program participants in this study believed that as a result of their participation in the program and completing one semester of college, they were more mature, self-confident, and aware of what tools were essential to progress and achieve their goals. Results of the study indicated that the participants' perceptions of their academic experiences provided opportunities to learn about college prior to enrolling for the fall semester. In addition, they felt academically prepared for this first semester of college and more aware about academic resources on campus. The participants believed their relationships with family and friends were stronger, which led to more encouragement and support as a result of completing the Summer Bridge Program and one semester of college. The participants indicated they exhibited more self confidence and motivation to persist towards obtaining a degree. Overall, the participants felt the Summer Bridge Program contributed to their overall success as a first-generation college student.

Perceptions of Self

Themes based on the participants' understanding of self were feelings of more self confidence in their abilities to persist toward obtaining a degree, feelings of being more mature, and awareness of what mechanisms were essential to obtain their goals. These themes reflected the participants' responses in that they exhibited the confidence to pursue their educational aspirations. Furthermore, the participants believed the Summer Bridge Program exposed them to various resources such as past program participants, campus administrators, and community leaders who reflected success. More self confidence and motivation emerged

as themes regarding their future endeavors. The participants believed the program gave them the support and guidance to pursue their future goals. The following remarks highlight the students' perceptions of self:

> Kimberly: I became mature and responsible. I mean I was already mature, but not really because you know I still felt like I could turn and count on people and they had things to do and depend on everybody else, but being in college is like basically being on your own although I live with my mom and dad, but at the same time it's like I'm getting older, so I won't be able to depend on them all the time. So, it showed me how to be independent from staying on campus and living by myself.

> Sandra: I would like to say that I'm more mature. I think I've grown a lot within myself. I think the Upward Bound Program, the Bridge Program helped with that because they not only made us focus on academics, but we had to have discipline. We had to have discipline and had I not gone through that, I probably would be still I guess a little naïve and immature.

> David: I would describe myself as a more open individual because I was not so much shy, but kind of ostracized about things, so after going through the Bridge Program, I met new people who were also going through it who were also freshmen in college. So, once I got through with the Bridge Program, I met new people. and it opened me up and I was able to express myself more. Then after my first semester, I really knew the routine of things and how things worked here at college, so afterwards, I think I'm a better person.

Perceptions of Academics

The themes that emerged regarding the participants' perceptions of their academic experiences were feelings of being prepared academically, satisfaction with GPA, awareness of available academic resources on campus, and struggles with balancing academics and engaging in social activities. The participants believed the program contributed

to their academic success by incorporating workshops and programs that enhanced their understanding of what to expect during their first semester of college. Resources such as the aforementioned helped determine their academic success at the institution. Reflections of the students' experiences are as follows:

> Jane: It had a big impact. As far as my hours also because I saw it affected my second semester kind of, because I didn't have as many hours as I would have by following the catalog. I had already taken speech and my free elective; therefore, it cut me down to about 15 hours each semester because I would have had 18 my fall and spring. So, that cut me down. Also, it helped to raise my GPA, and I think because I didn't have so many hours, and I had more time to focus on each and every one of my classes. So, that really helped me…those two classes in the summer time and my GPA was great. I made the Dean's List.
>
> Anthony: My first semester of college, I was…basically… I think I was ahead of the game and above more than half of the freshmen who come to a college or university. I had already taken college class during previous summers, so when I completed my first year/first semester here last fall; I had a 3.8 GPA, which is pretty good.
>
> Sandra: Wow, my first semester of college was awesome because of the Upward Bound Program. I say that because had I not Bridged, I would have came into my first semester and I would have been lost. I would not have known what to do or where to go. I would have been completely lost. I would not have known about the campus for one thing. I wouldn't have known any of the teachers because the Summer Bridge Program what it did was it gave me insight, you know, on everything that was going on campus, so had that not happened, I would have been completely lost coming into my first semester of college.

Perceptions of Family and Social Relationships

The themes identified regarding the participants' perceptions of family and social relationships were feelings of more support and encouragement and stronger relationships among family and friends, and assistance from Summer Bridge staff members during times of difficulty. Participants believed their family and friends contributed to their overall success while enrolled in the program and throughout their first semester of college. Below are responses from the participants:

Samantha: Family, I've become closer because I'm trying to learn more about life. I'm more, I'm not going to lie. I was like more shy, I really didn't talk to people about a lot of stuff, but now I'm opening up to parents more.

> Lacy: Stronger. Because I can always count on my family to be there when I need them, but I never thought I could have such good friends to also be there when I needed them, and when I needed them the most, they were there.

> Johnny: We were…we were more closer because they…we missed each other and when I go home to see them, it's like we became closer. It looks like one big happy family because now like whenever I do go home, everybody be like they missed me because they haven't seen me in such and such time, and I can't say I don't miss them because sometimes being away from my mother, you know it is kind of hard.

Perceptions of Future Aspirations and Ability to Succeed

In regard to their thoughts regarding the overall Summer Bridge Program experience, participants believed the program was beneficial and an asset to participants. In addition, the participants felt the program did not need any modification. Themes that emerged from the participants' feelings about Summer Bridge Programs were that the program adequately prepared participants to enroll in post-secondary institutions and contributed to the participants' overall development. In essence, the program was a contributing factor to the participants' satisfaction and their ability to enroll and be successful during their first

semester of college. Selected participants' comments are as follows:

> Jane: Yes, it did influence my future goals. With the program being on the university's campus and I did not know what I wanted to do and so looking up the university and always hearing about the university and the medical field and the pharmacy it pushed me towards trying to do that because I never knew what I was really good in. So the university always asks, What are you good in. We also had this surveys What are you good in? What you want to do, what do you want to be. And taking these test and it comes back and it comes back to tell you what you are good in. You know, it kind of helped me choose my major for my future.

> Tonya: Yes, but before I did bridge, I was set on being a meteorologist. When I started doing Bridge, I realized and said you know what…I need to get out of the "I need to make money" mindset, I need to make money. But I really wanted to work with animals so maybe I thought I could just do biology and work with animals. Being in Bridge, I was able to talk to a professor in the biology department, and he told me I could just change my major and work, and it wasn't that bad and you can be a vet and do anything with a biology major. Being in bridge helped me to talk to professors before I even got to college, which was really helpful because a lot of participants are unable to do. So, meeting with them and them embracing what I really wanted to do helped me for right now.

> Samantha: Yes, to go to college and to go to an HBCU. They influenced me because I found out what college I wanted to attend through Upward Bound. I found out that I didn't like big classes, that I liked classes that were a little bit smaller and I wanted the teachers to know me and as well as my advisors. I found out through Upward Bound through the college seminars we had before we graduated from Upward Bound that I wanted to go to an HBCU, and that I wanted it to not be big, but smaller.

Perceptions of Overall Summer Bridge Program Experience

The participants believed the program adequately prepared them for college. The participants expressed that the program prepared them academically and socially as well as for what to expect during their first semester of college. The participants attributed their success during their first semester of college to the Summer Bridge Program. Overall, the participants expressed satisfaction with the programs and services provided by the program as in the following citations:

> Jane: I mean, I feel like I was even blessed to be in that situation. We had free books. Even though the trips around the country to see schools weren't free, I still feel like it was an opportunity something that my parents didn't give me. It's not that they didn't want to; they couldn't, so I think that they taking us around to see different colleges and also free books for the Summer Bridge, free classes and you getting credits for it. Like it's helping you toward your future and the support verbally, mentally, and physically. Being there and if you want them or need them to be somewhere that you have accomplished something at a meeting or graduation or anything, they are there. They are very supportive.

> Lacy: I think it's a program that everybody should do because it's highly fun and entertaining. It's just an experience of college life. And with the bridge program, you are actually doing college now. If it was up to me, I would allow anyone to do it, because with the bridge program, the only difference is now you are a college student.

> Sandra: Doing Summer Bridge Program was awesome. Upward Bound helped me. They let me borrow books, and I didn't have to pay for the books. I just had to return them at the end of the semester. And they helped me with a lot of other things like helping me to get into a program that had tutoring and things of that nature. So, it is a very good program for participants who need academic help. For participants who just need something

to do to keep them out of trouble and for participants who just want to have a great experience. Upward Bound Summer Bridge is the greatest program.

Discussion

Based on the findings from this study, the participants' perceptions of their understanding of self, academics, family and social relationships, and future aspirations were influenced by the Upward Bound Program – Summer Bridge Program. Many similarities exist between this study and previous investigations from Bemak (1975) and Dalpes (2001). Bemak's (1975) study was one of few qualitative research studies that examined experiences of Upward Bound Program participants after completing the program. The study revealed after completing the Upward Bound Program – Summer Bridge Program and one semester of college, the participants exhibited a stronger commitment to the institution as well as a dedication to obtaining a college degree. Summer Bridge Programs were established to provide students with an opportunity to be immersed in a college environment and learn about available resources that would assist them during their first semester of college (Kezar, 1999). Overall, these participants believed the Summer Bridge Program prepared them for their first semester of college.

First Semester Understanding of Self

Tinto's (1975) conceptual framework describes students entering post-secondary institutions with a variety of attributes: individual attributes, family background, and pre-schooling experiences. Tinto believed the interrelationships among the variables determined whether a student would persist toward obtaining a degree. The participants were all first-generation, low-income, and second semester matriculating freshmen and had completed their first semester of college at the time of this study. The majority of the participants in this study had completed four years of the Upward Bound Program, which provided them with an opportunity to learn about the college choice process prior to their enrollment in the Summer Bridge Program component.

The review of the literature indicated that first-generation, low-income, African American college students often struggle with assimilating into

the academic and social systems of post-secondary institutions (Gibbons & Shoffner, 2004; Overton-Healy, 2010). However, this was not the case for the participants in this study. These participants exhibited high self-esteem and believed their goals were what they termed "obtainable." After completing the Summer Bridge Program and one semester of college, these participants' experiences regarding their understanding of self were similar to the findings from other research studies in that they felt motivated, a desire to graduate, and an interest in returning to assist other Upward Bound Program participants (Bemak, 1975; Dalpes, 2001; Hughes, 2007).

The participants in this study highlighted their desire to participate in the Summer Bridge Program because they believed it would prepare them for their first semester of college as well as assist them with getting a head start on their college career. Tinto (1975) theorized that it is during this stage that these students commit to their future aspirations. This stage was termed goal and institutional commitment. In this study, the participants' commitment to participating in the Upward Bound Program throughout the academic and summer sessions and enrolling at the institution reflected their dedication to the program and desire to obtain a college degree.

According to Tinto's (1975) model, once a student commits to the institution and demonstrates a desire to obtain his or her goals, the student then moves to the next stages of the conceptual framework, which are the academic and social systems. During these stages, the variables (i.e., grade performance, intellectual development, peer group interactions, and faculty interactions) are interconnected and dependent upon one another to encourage persistence toward a college degree.

First Semester Perceptions of Academics

As outlined in the conceptual framework, the academic system, according to Tinto (1975), includes grade performance and intellectual development. Tinto indicated that grade performance and intellectual development play a major role in whether a student decides to persist. Participants from this study highlighted the influence of the Upward Bound Program – Summer Bridge Program on their ability to do well academically and learn about various career opportunities. The

participants attributed their success during their first semester of college to the Summer Bridge Program. Furthermore, participants described their interactions: workshops with various campus personnel and mentor relationships with faculty members and staff members that helped them solidify a major area of study and/or career ambitions according to their personal interests. The participants felt academically satisfied with their first semester of college based on their level of academic preparedness, awareness of campus resources, and grade point averages. As a result of participating in the Summer Bridge Program, the participants felt their ability to succeed within post-secondary institutions was "obtainable."

According to the review of the literature, first-generation, low-income, African American college students sometimes exhibited feelings of inadequate academic preparation prior to entering post-secondary institutions (Thayer, 2000; Wilder, 1994). The participants in this study believed the Summer Bridge Program prepared them to face the academic rigors of college as well as provided them with resources to be successful, not only during their first semester of college, but throughout their entire academic career. The results of this study are consistent with previous researchers' findings regarding Summer Bridge Program participants' satisfaction with the program's ability to provide guidance, enhance their study skills, prepare them for college, and give them exposure to college environments (Bemak, 1975; Dalpes, 2001; Edmonds, 2003; Maples, 2003).

Overall, the results from this investigation confirmed the review of the literature and conceptual framework regarding program participants' perceptions of their academic experiences. The participants believed the Summer Bridge Program adequately prepared them for their first semester of college, which ultimately led to satisfaction with their intellectual development and grade performance. Not only does a participant need to be stimulated academically to be retained within post-secondary institutions, but they also need to be socially engaged with peers and faculty members, as well (Tinto, 1975). The next section will highlight the social system which is interconnected with the academic system.

First Semester Perceptions of Family and Social Relationships

Tinto (1975) believed that in order for students to persist toward a degree and be retained at the institution, they must be engaged academically as well as socially. The social system includes peer-group interactions and faculty interactions. The results of this study indicated that the participants believed as a result of the Summer Bridge Program, their relationships with their family and friends were stronger. According to the review of the literature, first-generation college students are often not supported by their families and friends due to their interest in pursuing a college degree. These participants indicated that they felt ostracized and unable to relate to family and friends after returning home from college (Olenchak & Hebert, 2002). The participants in this study believed that support from their families and friends and encouragement of their academic endeavors throughout the program and first semester of college were positive factors for them to persist toward obtaining a college degree. Bemak (1975), Dalpes (2001), and Edmonds (2003) indicated that Summer Bridge Program participants expressed positive interactions with their family and friends during or after completing the program. The participants in this study indicated similar findings in that their interactions with their families and friends were positive and served as motivation to persist towards obtaining a degree. The participants in this study also felt they had positive interactions with their faculty members as well. For example, the participants believed that as a result of participating in the Summer Bridge Program, they were introduced to faculty members who helped them solidify a major.

Previous research indicated that first-generation college students spend less time interacting and connecting with faculty members (Pike & Kuh, 2005). The participants in this study stressed the importance of meeting and engaging in conversations with faculty members which assisted them with identifying a major and learning about the content of their courses. Furthermore, they shared their interactions with faculty members during the Summer Bridge Program, which further established mentorship opportunities. These participants believed the faculty members had their best interest at heart and wanted to see them excel toward obtaining a college degree.

As a result of completing the Summer Bridge Program and one semester of college, the participants in this study believed the program prepared them both academically and socially. Tinto (1975) theorized that it is the student's integration into the academic and social systems of a post-secondary institution which determine whether they will be retained at the institution. Furthermore, their academic and social integration within these environments will lead to goal and institutional commitments, the final step of the model. The indication of clear and obtainable goals and institutional commitments leads to whether a student will decide to persist toward obtaining a degree. The final question in this study examined these participants' perceptions of their future aspirations, which highlighted their determination to persist toward graduating from college.

First Semester Perceptions of Future Aspirations

Tinto (1975) believed students decide to persist or drop out of an institution based on their goal and institutional commitments after examining their individual attributes, previous commitments to their goals and institutional commitments, and integration within academic and social systems. These factors are interrelated in that they determine how a student persists throughout their time in post-secondary institutions. Furthermore, Tinto believed the lower a student's commitment to their goals, the higher they are at risk of not being retained at the institution. However, if the students indicate strong commitments to their goals, they are more likely to be retained.

The participants in this study believed the Summer Bridge Program contributed to their desire to complete their degrees. The participants felt strongly that their goals were obtainable based on the support, encouragement, and guidance provided by the staff members. In addition, the participants believed their goals were consistent with the institutional goals because they had an opportunity to learn about the various career opportunities from meeting with faculty members, attending workshops and seminars, and speaking with former Summer Bridge Program participants.

The literature indicated that as a result of participating in the

Summer Bridge Program, the participants felt their future was positive. Furthermore, they were determined to complete their degrees and return to the program to assist future participants (Hughes, 2007). The findings from this study were consistent with Hughes' (2007) results in that these participants expressed strong interests in wanting to complete their degrees to help them achieve success. High expectations and strong words of encouragement provided by the Summer Bridge staff were the essence of the conversation with the participants. Overall, these participants exhibited stronger self-confidence and motivation to persist towards obtaining their goals as a result of participating in the Summer Bridge Program.

Summer Bridge Programs continue to serve as a model to increase college participation and completion rates among first-generation, low-income, African American college students. Based on the review of the literature and Tinto's (1975) and Edmonds' (2003) conceptual frameworks, multiple themes indicated the impact Summer Bridge Programs have on self, academic, family and social, and future perceptions of first-generation, low-income, African American college students.

Recommendations

Three recommendations were identified as a result of conducting this study: Upward Bound Programs should (a) provide more workshops on time management, (b) involve parents and family members in sponsored activities, and (c) conduct counseling sessions periodically throughout the program to monitor academic and social progress. A recurring theme in this study was time management. The participants believed they struggled with managing their time both academically and socially. These struggles often led to procrastination and feelings of dissatisfaction with their grades. More workshops and seminars throughout the program with examples on how to structure one's time in post-secondary institutions can serve as a method to decrease procrastination. In addition, encouraging former Summer Bridge Program participants who are currently enrolled at the institution to share their experiences regarding how they managed their time can help alleviate procrastination among these participants. Summer Bridge Program staff members are also encouraged to provide more support services (i.e., structured study time

in which they can monitor the success of these students). Mechanisms such as these can help deter participants from procrastinating as well as provide a method of monitoring academic progress throughout the year.

The participants in this study indicated stronger relationships with family and friends as a result of their participation in the Summer Bridge Program. Furthermore, the participants felt their family members were supportive and motivated them to obtain their goals. Since these students are first-generation, the program can enhance the understanding of their family and friends of post-secondary institutions by incorporating and inviting them to various activities sponsored by the program. In addition, these interactions can have an influence on other family members who have an interest in pursuing post-secondary education. Incorporating family and friends into the programs and services can also provide opportunities for a deeper understanding of what is entailed in the college choice process. As indicated in the review of the literature, family members and friends of first-generation college students are often unaware of the college choice process; therefore, they are unable to provide accurate information and resources to help the student matriculate through college.

Participants in the study indicated that counseling prior to and throughout the program could be beneficial to future participants. Additional counseling that highlights the purpose and steps one will encounter during college can help alleviate the stress about college for some of the participants. Collaboration between high school guidance counselors and Upward Bound Program counselors can increase awareness about steps necessary to navigate and matriculate through college. In addition, these counseling techniques can be structured during the Summer Bridge Program and throughout the academic year to encourage the participants to persist towards obtaining a college degree. Counseling can further serve as a method to identify which students may have difficulty grasping the concepts presented within the classroom. Identifying these struggles early can ultimately determine whether a student excels at the institution.

CONCLUSION

Upward Bound Program – Summer Bridge Programs have been instrumental in the development and success of many students nationwide. Very few investigations involving qualitative research methods have addressed the experiences of first-generation, low-income African American college students who completed Summer Bridge Programs and one semester of college. Results of this study indicated no difference between Upward Bound Program – Summer Bridge Programs at public or private institutions. This was achieved by interpreting the data from the interviews and identifying patterns and themes based on the participants' responses to the interview questions. The participants' perceptions were consistent, which indicated the positive impact of the Summer Bridge Program on a participant's ability to succeed. The data from this study will serve as an opportunity to explore this population of students as they continue to be underrepresented in colleges and universities.

The results of this study expounded upon the existing literature regarding the impact of Summer Bridge Programs as well as the success of African American students within post-secondary institutions. The findings indicated that these participants can and will succeed in their desire to pursue higher education when supported and provided with the tools to succeed. This study highlighted in-depth personal experiences of these participants that quantitative research methods could not examine. These results provided for a clearer understanding of how these participants were able to persist toward their dreams, despite the obstacles they encountered.

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Criminal History Screening in College Admissions: Putting Diversity and Public Safety at Risk

by
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Abstract

In 2009, the Center for Community Alternatives (CCA) conducted a survey of College and University Admissions officers in collaboration with the American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers (AACRO), which explored the use of criminal history screening in college admissions. In 2010, CCA released its report, The Use of Criminal History Records in College Admissions Reconsidered, which contained the findings of the survey and a series of recommendations. Beyond the survey and recommendations, this report will situate this growing trend in higher education in the context of the current state of the criminal justice system, its expansion over the past three decades, and the undeniable racial disparities that occur at every juncture of the criminal justice continuum. I will discuss the questionable predictive value of criminal records, campus and public safety, and the role of higher education in reducing recidivism and promoting citizenship. Lastly, I will argue that policy implications at the federal and state levels have been largely mixed, and that reduced funding for educational programming has impaired the ability of persons who have been incarcerated to fully integrate back into society.

Keywords: college admission, diversity, recidivism, higher education, campus safety, citizenship

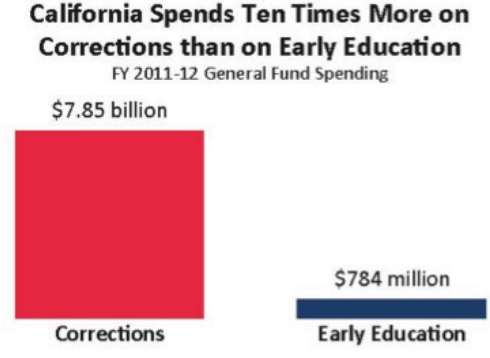
Introduction

There is a growing racial and economic divide developing as a result of the enmeshed (collateral) consequences that result from criminal convictions. The poor and people of color are groups that are systematically affected by this trend. As a result, the racial disparities that overwhelmingly pervade the criminal justice system have become

a proxy for race or ethnicity, creating a new challenge to diversity. The barrier to higher education caused by the growing use of criminal history screening in admissions is one of these collateral consequences. In fact, there is no evidence that criminal history screening increases college/university campus safety, yet it has substantial negative implications for society as a whole.

The burgeoning growth of America's prison population during the past three decades is unprecedented. At the turn of the twenty-first century, prison expansion disproportionally involves young Hispanic and African American men. In 2008, the Pew Center on States reported that incarceration levels had risen to a point where 1 in 100 American adults was behind bars. Given the systemic issues that many states are contending with, including the nation's sluggish economy, as well as the fiscal impact of correctional spending, states are being forced to do more with less. Total state spending on corrections is now about $52 billion, the bulk of which is spent on prisons (State Expenditure Report, 2010). State spending on corrections quadrupled during the past two decades, making it the second fastest growing area of state budgets, exceeded only by Medicaid (State Expenditure Report, 2010). In the case of California, spending in 2011-2012 to house, feed, and provide 24 hour supervision of incarcerated persons is $7.8 billion. In contrast, California spent only a fraction as much—$784 million—on early education programs (Peterson, 2012). (e.g., Figure 1).

Figure 1. California Department of Education



The relationship between education and crime has been addressed by a few empirical studies. Tauchen and Witte (1994) find that young people who are in paid employment or go to school are less likely to engage in criminal behavior. Lochner and Moretti (2001) calculate that for white people in the United States, a secondary education reduces the probability of a jail sentence by 0.76 percentage points. For black people, the effect of a secondary education is even higher: 3.4 percentage points. They calculate that the externalities of education through its reduced effect on crime are 14 to 26 percent of the private return to education. This suggests that a reduction in criminal behavior contributes largely to the social rate of return to education in the United States.

First, education increases wages and, therefore, increases the opportunity costs of committing a crime. Second, as highlighted by Lochner and Moretti (2004) and Lochner (2010), young people may learn to be more patient through schooling and place more weight on their potential future earnings. Becker's (1968) economic model of crime implies that the increased opportunity costs and patience associated with higher education would decrease criminal activity. Third, "those with more education may be more attached to legitimate society." Thus, "higher-educated people tend to have higher-educated peers, which can lead to a social multiplier or peer effect that further decreases criminal activity" (Locher, 2004).

The Coalition for Juvenile Justice found that "dropouts are three and a half times more likely than high school graduates to be arrested" (Lochner & Moretti, 2001), while a more recent survey of dropouts concludes that they are "more than eight times as likely to be in jail or prison" (Bridgeland, DiIulio & Morison, 2006). Consequently, raising wage rates and schooling makes any time spent out of the labor market more costly (Lochner & Moretti, 2004; Hjalmarsson, 2008). Machin and Meghir's (2004) research also looked at cross-area changes in crime and the low wage labor market in England and Wales.

They found that crime fell in areas where wage growth in the bottom 25th percentile of the distribution was faster and concluded that "improvements in human capital accumulation through the education system or other means… enhancing individual labor market productivity… would be important ingredients in reducing crime" (Machin & Meghir, 2004).

In sum, there is a positive causal link between education and criminal behavior. That being said, apart from the increases in marginal returns of earnings from legal activities, schooling also reduces the time available to commit crimes and positively affects patience levels.

Context and Rationale

The persistent disadvantage of lowly educated African Americans is, however, usually linked not to the penal system, but to large-scale social forces like urban deindustrialization, residential segregation, or wealth inequality (Wilson, 1987; Massey & Denton, 1993; Oliver & Shapiro, 1997). However, evidence shows that incarceration is closely associated with low wages, unemployment, family instability, recidivism, and restrictions on political and social rights (Western, Kling & Weiman, 2000; Hagan & Dinovitzer, 1999; Sampson & Laub, 1993; Uggen & Manza, 2002; Hirsch et al. 2002).

Researchers Becky Pettit and Bruce Western (2004) in their article, "Mass Imprisonment and the Life Course," examined changes in the inequality of imprisonment for African Americans and White men at different levels of education. By combing administrative, survey, and census data, they estimated that African American men born between 1965 and 1969 had a 20 percent chance of having at least one episode of incarceration by the time they reached age 35. Among non-college African American men, the odds increased to 30 percent, and among high school drop-outs, 59 percent. That being said, twice as many young African American men would have been in prison than will have graduated from college; 30 percent more will have been in prison than in the military. Longitudinal perspectives on crime and earnings also share the argument that individual outcomes at a point in time represent just one piece of a longer trajectory of employment or criminal behavior (Bernhardt, Morris, Hancock & Scott, 1998; Sampson & Laub, 1993).

First, "incarceration is stigmatizing; it may also undermine the acquisition of human and social capital" (Western & Kling, 2000). Research suggests that the stigma of a conviction correlates to a negative relationship in employment opportunities for ex-offenders. More importantly, civil disabilities can exist and in most cases can be a permanent disbarment from public sector employment and licensed or

professional occupations. A large proportion of jobs are found through personal connections that match workers to employers (Granovetter, 1995). Subsequently, incarceration weakens social contact and diminishes connections to stable employment.

Several scholars have documented the prevalence of stigmas surrounding people who have had contact with the criminal justice system (Mauer, 2006; Page, 2004; Pager, 2003; Petersilia, 2003; Pettit & Western, 2004; Ubah & Robinson, 2003; Waldfogel, 1994). According to Erving Goffman (1963), social symbols play a notable role in the development of stigma. Goffman (1963) posits that, on one hand, stigmatizing (i.e., negative) symbols "draw attention to a debasing identity with a consequent reduction in our valuation of the individual" (pp. 43-4). On the other, positive symbols "established a special claim to prestige, honor, or desirable class position—a claim that might not otherwise be presented or automatically granted" (Goffman, 1963, p. 43).

Thus, symbols are relevant because they are jointly linked to social outcomes, especially in the case of credentials. According to sociologist Devah Pager, negative credentials are "those official markers that restrict access and opportunity" while positive credentials (like college degrees) "facilitate access to restricted social positions" (2007, p. 32). Moreover, positive credentials "offer informal rewards of social status and generalized assumptions of competence," while negative credentials confer "social stigma and generalized assumptions of untrustworthiness or undesirability" (Pager, 2007, p. 33).

The racial disparities of the criminal justice system over the past three decades have seen a huge increase in incarceration rates. Several factors have contributed to this increase. One factor involves major changes in penal policy over the last thirty years. In the mid-1990's, changing attitudes and policies toward crime led to the elimination of Pell Grant eligibility for prisoners through a provision in the Violent Crime Control Act of 1994 (Ubah, 2004; Zook, 1994). Consequently, policies akin to technical violations and three strikes legislation, also provided presumptive evidence towards increasing incarceration and admissions rates.

Researchers Sorensen and Stemen (2002) tested hypotheses concerning the impact of sentencing guidelines on incarceration and commitment

rates, as well as average sentence length, in data from 1997. The substantive findings from the authors' cross-sectional design suggest that guidelines are associated with punitive justice outcomes. The authors also found similar evidence regarding the relationships of sentencing policies and state incarceration rates, prison admission rate, and average sentencing. They found that sentencing guidelines did have a negative correlation to incarceration and admission rates, while the three strikes laws, in fact, increased the rate of admissions to prison among those arrested for drug offenses. Furthermore, determinate sentencing, mandatory sentencing, and truth-in-sentencing laws also had negative effects on rates of incarceration and admissions. From their research, two assertions can be drawn about crime rates. First, increased rates of incarceration were higher among the population that was African Americans. Also, citizen ideology had a substantial influence on the rates of incarceration.

Following almost four decades of rising incarceration rates, the social (Alexander, 2010; Mauer, 2006; Western, Pattillo & Weiman, 2004; Western, 2006), economic (Kirchhoff, 2010; Schmitt, Warner & Gupta, 2010), and political (Gottschalk, 2008; Manza & Uggen, 2004; Manza & Uggen, 2006; Nicholson-Crotty & Meier, 2003; Uggen, Manza & Thompson, 2006; Weaver, 2009; Yates & Fording, 2005) implications of mass incarceration are becoming increasingly evident. A separate analysis of midyear 2006 data from the U.S. Department of Justice shows that for Hispanic and African American men, for instance, imprisonment are far more prevalent. Further analysis of these numbers revealed that incarceration is heavily concentrated among men, racial, and ethnic minorities, and 20 and 30-year olds.

Among men, the highest rate of incarceration is among African American men between the ages 20-34. Among women, incarceration is highest among African American women aged 35-39 (Prison and Jail Inmates, 2006). Albeit, the national incarceration trend remains on the rise, lawmakers are learning that the gradual increase of incarceration cannot be attributed to actual crimes only, or increased population, but to policy choices that are sending more lawbreakers to prison. In sum, policy choices drive growth, therefore, legislation analogous to "three strikes" measures as well as other sentencing enhancements, i.e., technical violations, are sending more people to prison, while at the same

time keeping them there for longer periods.

Findings from the National Survey of Screening and Use of Criminal History in the College Admissions Process

The information in this section is used with the permission of the Center for Community Alternatives. The Center for Community Alternatives, in partnership with the American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admission Officers (AACRAO), developed a survey instrument to explore the use of criminal records in college applications and admissions. The 59-question survey was administered electronically from September 30 to October 29, 2009, through AACRAO's network of 3,248 member institutions in the United States. In all, 273 institutions responded. Additionally, follow-up interviews with six college admissions officers were conducted to learn more about the reasons underlying decisions of whether or not to require the disclosure of criminal justice information as part of the application process.

At the start of the survey, respondents were asked to enter their educational institution identification number for the purpose of cross-tabulating survey responses with demographics and other relevant data from U.S. government databases. To ensure confidentiality, respondents were informed that AACRAO would not share institutional identities with CCA researchers who received only coded demographic data for respondents in the data set.

The survey questions focused on several key issues:

1. How widespread is the collection of criminal justice information in the college application process, and how do colleges collect this information?

2. Does the institution have special procedures to evaluate the admissions of prospective students with criminal records?

3. In what ways does an applicant's criminal history affect his or her admission to a college or university?

4. What post-enrollment conditions or services are required of or offered to students with criminal records?

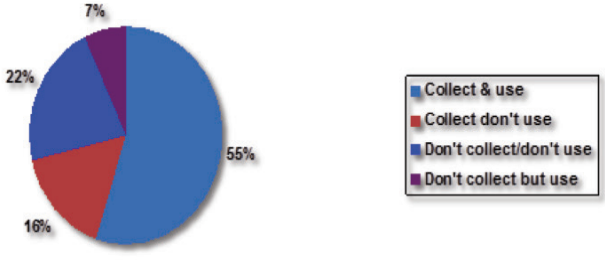
A majority of the responding colleges collect criminal justice information, although not all of them consider it in their admissions process (see Figure 2). Sixty-six percent collect it from all applicants, but 16 percent of respondents indicated that although they collect the information, they do not use it in the admissions process. Five percent collect criminal justice information only for applicants who are applying to specific programs. Another twenty-nine percent do not collect it at all, but a small subset of those colleges use criminal justice information in their admissions process if the information comes to them through a source other than self-disclosure (e.g., Figure 2).

Figure 2. Collection of Criminal Justice Information

As you can see in Figure 2, 22 percent of the schools that responded do not collect and do not use criminal justice information (self-disclosure) at all. Interestingly, 16 percent collect the information but do not use it. Many of them use the common application which requires self-disclosure of a criminal justice information (felony, misdemeanor or other crimes). More than half collect information and use it, and 38 percent (22 percent plus 16 percent) do not use it – no report or indication that their campuses are less safe. Also, 7 percent collect this information and do not use it. Lastly, 55 percent collect and use the criminal justice information in admission decisions. If the admissions process includes collection and consideration of criminal history information, it is incumbent upon

the institution to ensure it has the expertise to effectively undertake this task—including knowledge of how the criminal justice system operates, an understanding of what it means to have a criminal history record (e.g., Figure 3).

Figure 3. Use of Criminal Justice Information (CJI)



There are several troubling aspects of the special requirements that colleges impose on applicants with criminal history records. Some colleges are asking for documents that they are not entitled to review. Some colleges ask for information that is simply not obtainable – and then the application is incomplete. For instance, one state school in New York requires the student to sign a release so that the "Warden" of the institution where the applicant had previously served time could give his or her personal recommendation as to whether the applicant "could take a responsible role on a college campus," etc. Particularly troubling was the policy at some of the schools; 39 percent would not accept a student who was still on either parole or probation. Moreover, 53 percent of colleges that collect and use criminal history record information have no written policies guiding use of criminal records. Furthermore, 60 percent of colleges that collect and use criminal history record information have no staff training on interpreting criminal records.

College Campuses and Public Safety Concerns

The Crime Awareness and Campus Security Act (Clery Act) requires colleges and universities to track and report campus crime and statistics and post security policies. This Act was named after Jeanne Clery, a 19-

year old college freshman who was murdered in her dormitory at Lehigh University. This Act applies to all public and private institutions of postsecondary education participating in federal student aid programs. Moreover, applicants are required to disclose their criminal history records, and in some cases, secondary school disciplinary history. The Common Application, used by more than 390 universities and colleges, added questions about both criminal convictions and school disciplinary records in 2006 (Jaschik, 2007). As indicated in the report by the Center for Community Alternatives (CCA), "The use of Criminal History Records in College Admissions," many colleges that do not use the Common Application have also started to include such questions on their applications. Also, "violent crime on campus is very uncommon, and the few college students who are victims of violent crimes are mostly victimized off-campus by strangers" (CCA, p. 5).

According to the U.S. Department of Education (2001), the overall rate of criminal homicide at colleges and universities was .07 per 100,000 students, compared to a rate of 14.1 per 100,000 young adults in society-at-large. Rape and sexual assault are the only crimes showing no statistical differences between college students and non-students (Hart, 2003; Baum & Klaus, 2005). Accordingly, a U.S. Department of Education (2001) study concluded that "students on the campuses of post-secondary institutions [are] significantly safer than the nation as a whole" (p. 5). Furthermore, there is no evidence to support these particular assumptions. Research conducted by Margaret Olszewska, in 2007, is the only such study that has investigated the correlation between criminal history screening and improved public safety. This study was administered to undergraduate admissions directors, which inquired about past disciplinary histories during the admissions process.

Olszewska (2007) found that there is no statistically significant difference in the rate of campus crime between institutions of higher education that explore undergraduate applicants' disciplinary background and those that do not. Sealing, expungement, pardons, deferred prosecution, nolleprosequi, and Youthful Offender status pose challenges for both the prospective student and the admissions officer trying to assess the student's response on the application for admission. Also, "records that are sealed or expunged, as well as convictions that are

covered by 'youthful offender' status are not supposed to be reported by the individual who has such a conviction. Sealed and expunged records are required to be removed from criminal history information" (CCA, p. 28). A federal Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS) study revealed that many states still do not have the capacity to record dispositions (BJS, 2009). The Bureau of Justice also found considerable variation in state procedures for auditing the quality of their criminal justice data.

This report revealed that 22 states reported that they had not done an audit in the five years preceding, leading the BJS to conclude: "The issue of the accuracy and completeness of criminal history records was identified as an important concern during the earliest stages of the development of a national criminal history record program." More recently, the data quality issue has emerged as one of the most important and timely issues confronting the criminal justice community. In the view of most experts, "inadequacies in the accuracy and completeness of criminal history records is the single most serious deficiency affecting the Nation's criminal history record information systems" (BJS, 2001, p. 38).

Closing Doors to Higher Education: The Impact on the U.S. Criminal Justice System

As indicated by the report, the explosive growth of misdemeanor arrests, prosecutions and convictions is a major reason for the fact that more than 100 million Americans have criminal history records. Misdemeanor cases have more than doubled since the 1970's and now account for 10.5 million cases per year (NACDL, 2009). These offenses are relatively petty—a very common misdemeanor charge in many jurisdictions is underage drinking, a not infrequent occurrence on college campuses. Because of the tremendous volume of these cases, there is pressure on everyone, including defendants, to enter a guilty plea at the first court appearance, whether or not they committed the crime (NACDL, 2009). In addition to the 100 million people with criminal history records on file in the state repositories at of the end of 2008, another 14 million arrests are made each year (FBI, 2009). More than 3 million arrests in 2008 were for felonies (SEARCH, 2009).

The largest category of arrests in 2008 was for drug offenses, which accounted for 1.7 million arrests (FBI, 2009). According to this report,

people of college age (under 25 years old) represented 44.3 percent of the total arrests. According to the Bureau of Justice Statistics, in 2006 alone, more than 1.1 million people were convicted of felony-level offenses in state courts, a 37 percent increase from 1990 (Durose et al., 2009). Uggen et al. (2006) estimated more than 16 million people in the United States – 7.5 percent of the adult population – had a felony conviction. Because of the racial disparities that exist, young people of color are disproportionately represented in the criminal justice system.

Increasingly, schools' implementation of exclusionary discipline polices, such as out-of school suspension and expulsion, continually promotes the degree to which minority youth are disproportionately represented in the juvenile justice system. Individual characteristics such as gender and socioeconomic status, coupled with communal characteristics, like poverty, urbanization, and income inequality, are key stressors and predictors that increase the likelihood of African American youths' contact with the criminal justice system. In the United States, over 60 percent of minority youth are detained in the juvenile justice system (Hsia, Bridges, & McHale, 2004). They are more than eight times as likely as their White peers to be housed in juvenile detention facilities (Wordes & Jones, 1998). There is significant evidence that while they are in school, these same children are subject to exclusionary discipline, such as out-of-school suspension and expulsion, at much higher rates than are White students (Skiba, Nardo, & Peterson, 2002).

This overrepresentation of minorities relative to their White counterparts is consistent with the literature on racial disproportion in the education system. Most notably, the Children's Defense Fund was one of the first organizations to offer evidence that African Americans were suspended at higher rates than their White counterparts and, since that time, racial disproportion in school exclusionary discipline has been a consistent finding (Skiba, Nardo, & Peterson, 2002; Streitmatter, 1986; Taylor & Foster, 1986; Thornton & Trent, 1988; Wu et al., 1982). Research also suggests that African-American students are less likely than Whites to receive less punitive alternative sanctions once they are referred for disciplinary action (McFadden et al., 1992) and more likely to be the recipients of corporal punishment.

High levels of police deployment in communities of color

combined with racial profiling and "stop and frisk" practices also bring disproportionate numbers of young people of color into the criminal justice system (Markowitz & Jones-Brown, 2000; New York Attorney General, 1999). As a result, an estimated one in three adult Black men has a felony conviction, twelve percent of Black men between the ages of sixteen and thirty-four are incarcerated, and more than twice that number are on probation or parole (Uggen et al., 2006; Harrison & Beck, 2005; Glaze & Bonczar, 2008). So pervasive is the criminal justice system in the lives of Black men that more Black men have done prison time than have earned college degrees (Western et al., 2003).

The overrepresentation of African Americans and Latinos in the criminal justice system is also attributed to the disparate enforcement of drug laws. It is well documented that illegal drug use does not differ significantly for Whites, Blacks or Hispanics (SAMHSA, 2007), yet 62 percent of people incarcerated for drug crimes are Black (Human Rights Watch, 2000). A study conducted by the Government Accountability Office (GOA) in 2005 revealed that thousands of persons were denied postsecondary benefits, federally assisted housing, or selected licenses and contracts as a result of federal laws that provide for denying benefits to drug offenders. This report also showed that during academic years 2003-2004, about 41,000 applicants were disqualified from receiving postsecondary education loans and grants because of drug convictions.

At the time of GAO's review, 32 states had laws exempting some or all convicted drug felons from the ban on Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) Program, and 35 states had laws modifying the federal ban on food stamps. Because of the eligibility requirements associated with receiving these benefits, only those convicted drug felons who, but for their conviction, would have been eligible to receive the benefits could be affected by the federal ban (GAO, 2005). Wheelock and Uggen (2006) concluded, "Relative to Whites, racial and ethnic minorities are significantly more likely to be convicted of disqualifying drug offenses . . . and significantly more likely to require a Pell Grant to attend college… It is therefore plausible that tens of thousands have been denied college funding solely on the basis of their conviction status" (p. 23).

Policy Implementations

Many studies have documented the myriad of benefits of post-secondary correctional education (PSCE), from this research; one can see a direct correlation in the improvement of post release outcomes. According to the U.S. Bureau of Justice, recidivism occurs when a former inmate commits a criminal act that results in rearrests, reconviction, or return to prison within three years of release. Estimates may vary, but research suggests that nearly seven in 10 formerly incarcerated persons will commit a new crime, and half will end up back in prison within three years (BJS, 2009; Langan & Levin, 2002).

Given, the anti-inmate ethos, as well as the challenging political environment created by Congress and society at large, federal legisltation on inmate education will likely remain on the federal policy agenda. Congress has revisited this issue of federal support for postsecondary education in prisons by enacting the Workforce and Community Transition Training for Incarcerated Youth Program (IYO). Since their inception, IYO grants and successor programs have become the most commonly used source of revenue to support PSCE programing (Erisman & Contardo, 2005). Although amendments were made to the IYO grant, most notable policy action was the 2008 adoption of the Second Chance Act, which was designed to improve reentry prospects for incarcerated persons through the authorization of federal grants through government agencies and nonprofit organizations.

The Three State Recidivism Study, conducted by the Correctional Education Association, a longitudinal study that involved over 3,600 inmates, who were released more than three years ago in Maryland, Minnesota, and Ohio, which used educational participation while incarcerated as the major variable, shows that simply attending school behind bars reduces the likelihood of re-incarceration by 29%. While it is difficult to generalize the results of these studies from one state to another, the fact that the recidivism results were lower is very encouraging. Moreover, these studies tell us that education is imperative and can also act as a mechanism of rehabilitation as well as crime reduction for persons who are or have been incarcerated.

Researchers (Lanier, Philliber & Philliber, 1994; Owens, 2009; Schirmer, 2008) addressed the meaningful effects of former prisoners, beyond

quantifiable measures and income. Specifically, in the study "Social Symbols, Stigma, and the Labor Market Experiences," Carl Owens (2009) showed that college increases former prisoners' access to mainstream opportunities and holds particular implications in the labor market. Through the use of thematic content analysis of data gathered through interviews with seventeen formerly incarcerated college students, this study suggests that the credentials and skills acquired through college participation did help formerly incarcerated individuals successfully face the challenges of reentry.

Discussion

Given the lack of consistency toward policies in states, tertiary educational attainment is highly problematic. Though individual change theorists suggest that psychological transformation, in and of itself, can lead to recidivism (Maruna, 2001); it is also plausible that, through newfound orientation towards themselves and others, former prisoners with college experience may access other kinds of mechanisms that encourage recidivism. Alternatively, motivation theorists Tyler and Kling (2007) argue that there is a self-selection bias in college participation, and that low rates or recidivism witnessed among former prisoners with college experiences reflect their unusually high levels of motivation to stay out of prison, rather than the effects of educational credentials or skills development. The societal climate towards incarceration is still one of anti-inmate education, also prevalence of stigmas surrounding individuals who have had contact with the criminal justice system.

"The College and Community Fellowship, one of a few organizations that works directly with formerly incarcerated individuals who are in college in New York City, has tracked success rates. The program, housed at the City University of New York Graduate Center, has enrolled more than 200 formerly incarcerated people in its first seven years and reports a recidivism rate of less than one percent" (CCA, p. 29). None of the students were re-incarcerated (Haberman, 2006; College and Community Fellowship, 2007). Research conducted by the Center for Labor Market Studies at Nonwestern found a clear relationship between employment rates and level of education for African Americans. Higher education significantly increases employment rates among African Americans with

86 percent of college educated African Americans employed compared to 57 percent high school graduates and a mere 33 percent of high school dropouts (Sum et al., 2007).

According to the U.S. Department of Education, at least eight out of ten of the fastest growing jobs in the U.S. require some postsecondary education (U.S. Department of Education, 2003). A college graduate is expected to earn more than twice as much as a high school dropout, and even one year of college is estimated to increase lifetime earnings by 5 to 15 percent (National Governor's Association, 2003). Researchers address the types of post-secondary programs that will lead to academic success, and the appropriate structure for educational programs (Batchelder, & Pippert, 2002; O'Neill, MacKenzie, & Bierie, 2007; Vacca, 2004). From their research, designing a successful program must incorporate intensive integration with participants before and after they reintegrate back into their communities.

At best, the research is not clear as to what approaches to implement for successful programs in higher education. However, the following recommendations as provided by the Center for Community Alternatives would provide meaningful solutions to the use of criminal history screening in college admissions. First, colleges and universities should remove Criminal Justice Information (CJI) disclosure from the initial application. Second, they would limit disclosure to specific convictions. Moreover, they would allow the people that are on community supervision to enroll. Fourth, the would establish fair and evidence-based admissions criteria and use unbiased and well-informed assessments. Also, they would establish clear and transparent procedures. Lastly, they would offer support and advocacy and periodically evaluate admission policies.

Next Steps

Although a criminal history is a risk factor for committing future violence (Chaiken et al, 1994), there is lack of evidence as to whether students with criminal records are more likely to engage in violence on college campuses. Even if naturally applied, screening could disproportionately affect African-Americans and Hispanics, who are already less likely to attend college than non-Hispanic whites (U.S. Census Bureau, 2003). More research is required to understand the costs and benefits associated

with criminal history screening among colleges.

The questions to address in this type of study would include (1) Are students with criminal history records more likely to engage in violence on campus? (2) How much violence is attributable to these students? (3) Are colleges conducting criminal screening and can successfully identify and exclude the most dangerous applicants? (4) How many colleges are engaging in criminal history screening (increase response rate from that of CCA's previous study), how many students are being excluded from colleges as a result of these policies, and have minorities been disproportionately affected? (5) What are the recidivism rates among those with criminal history records who have attended colleges?

The methodology section of this potential research project would include the following:

Variables (Independent):

- Type of disciplinary information requested
- Ratio of students living on-campus
- Location of the institution
- Undergraduate student population gender distribution

Variables (Dependent):

- Rate of campus on crime
- Population:
  - Four-year public and private not-for-profit
  - Majority undergraduate enrollment
  - Large Institutions (over 10,000 FTE)

Instrumentation:

- Collect Data from the following:
  - Administer a survey through American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers (currently, AACRO network consists of 3,248 member institutions in the U.S.). The purpose of this survey would be attempting to get data for

students who were admitted that have criminal records, also attempting to track these students through matriculation and post-employment.
- United States Department of Education (would be helpful for identifying status and trends of racial and ethnic minoritie's college attendance rates)

• National Center for Education Statistics (would be helpful for gathering data about low-income students; I think it would also strengthen the argument concerning racial dimensions of incarceration and life-course trends among this population of students).

• United State Census Bureau (would be helpful for providing historical data of educational attainment among African-Americans and Hispanics compared to their counterparts).

• Administer on-line survey using Perseus or any other web-based survey tool.

• Crime Awareness and Campus Security Act: (Clery Act) requires colleges and universities to track and report campus crime and statistics and post security policies. This information could also provide secondary data about "who" is committing crimes on campus.

Due to increased pressure to provide safe learning environments, colleges and universities are using criminal history screenings as positive mechanisms for reducing crime on campus. The purpose of the research design mentioned above is to investigate whether there is a difference in the rate of crime between a person with a criminal history compared to other college students. This research design would use a cross-sectional approach as well as gather data from secondary sources. It would also generate descriptive statistics to examine demographic characteristics of subject institutions for the purposes of examining spatial differences of

crime between institutions that screen applicants' backgrounds and those institutions that do not.

The implications of this study would be to determine the effectiveness of the criminal history screening process as a campus crime mitigation measure. More importantly, this study would also address an applicant's state of preparedness for the college experience. Some of the limitations of this study would include the following:

- The extent of the criminal history check (e.g., years and types of crime)
- Sealed criminal records of a minor
- Examining self-reported data
- Increase in legal liability
- Lack of consideration for rehabilitive measures (e.g,. aging-out, employment, participation in treatment or counseling, participation in a reentry program, intervening events, or other factors contributing to desistance).

Lastly, one the major problems that the Center for Community Alternatives is having is finding test sites for this type of study. From our discussions with college administrators, the disclosure of this type of information would require the consent of matriculated students for access to criminal history records. Other factors included publicity, safety, culture, and institutional branding. In other words, this type of study might diminish the perceived quality of the institution. In addition to creating fear among faculty, staff, and students, this would likely cause fear among parents of prospective and current students. I would argue that non-empirical questions must also be considered when considering admission to students with criminal history records. First, is it appropriate to deny admissions to individuals who have already been punished through the criminal justice system? Second, are colleges and universities considering how their policies will affect the wider community? Lastly, to what extent is criminal history screening making college campuses any safer?

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AN EXAMINATION OF THE DIFFERENCES OF SOCIAL WORK STUDENTS' ATTITUDES TOWARD GAY AND LESBIAN ADOPTION WITH REGARD TO STUDENTS' AGE AND GENDER

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Abstract

The Council on Social Work Education requires all social work programs to include diversity content surrounding cultural competence. There has been a marked increase in the visibility of gays and lesbians, therefore, it is extremely important for social work majors to receive adequate training in diversity, in order to prepare them for practice in the community. Recent research examines homophobia among social work majors, however, there is limited research devoted to social work students enrolled in a Historically Black College and University (HBCU). This research explored whether there were any differences in the attitudes of undergraduate social work students enrolled in a HBCU in the South toward gay and lesbian adoption in relation to the students' gender and age. This quantitative study used a nonrandom convenience sample of 94 students using the Attitudes Toward Lesbians and Gay Men Scale and the Attitudes Toward Homosexuality Scale. The data were analyzed utilizing one-way and two-way chi-square procedures.

Keywords: Gay and lesbian adoption, Gay and lesbian parenting, Heterosexism, Homophobia.

Introduction to the Problem

Key components of the social work profession include alleviating poverty and other forms of social injustice as well as being committed to enhancing human well-being (Hepworth, Rooney, Rooney, Strom-Gottfried, & Larsen, 2006). Social work students are taught to respect diversity and to have an awareness of cultural competence, which includes the age, gender, sexual orientation, social class, and ability of

the client (Bergh & Crisp, 2004). Social workers can hold the same biases toward gay men and lesbians that are held by the population at large. Heterosexism is one biases held by mainstream society (Brownlee, Sprakes, Saini, O'Hare, Kortes-Miller, & Graham, 2005). It refers to the belief that heterosexuality is inherently normal and is superior to homosexuality, and heterosexuals often assume that everyone is, or should be, heterosexual (Fish, 2008).

While preparing to be a social worker, students may possess personal attitudes about gay men and lesbians that were developed from learned experiences. Social learning theory assumes that behaviors are learned through modeling, imitation, and observation (Hepworth et al., 2006). On the other hand, systems theory involves human beings and their interactions with one another and their environment (Schriver, 2004). The various social systems individuals interact with each and every day can modify and shape their thoughts and actions (Swank & Raiz, 2007).

Gay bias is a problem not only in mainstream society but also within numerous helping professions (Chonody, Rutledge, & Siebert, 2009). Gay men and lesbians are subjected to discrimination and stereotypes. Mainstream society has viewed gay men and lesbians as being different but also as having less value than heterosexuals (Berkman & Zinberg, 1997). Negative feelings held by mainstream society have resulted in homosexuals being denied privileges that are given freely to heterosexuals, namely child placement (Matthews & Cramer, 2006).

Adoption is the answer for children who are unable to reside with their biological parents, because it provides children with a permanent home environment of their own (DellaCava, Phillips, & Engel, 2004). It is important for social workers who are responsible for child placement to investigate the scope of the prospective parents' parenting skills, as well as determining if the home is suitable for the child (Lipscombe, Moyers, & Farmer, 2004). The adoptions social worker must also consider the prospective parents' support system, their personalities, and the quality of their intimate relationship, if the parent is romantically involved (Lipscombe et al., 2004).

The practice of gay and lesbian adoption started receiving attention in the media in the past 10 years (Matthews & Cramer, 2006); this led social workers to question the effects that gay and lesbian adoption would

have on children (Ryan, Pearlmutter, & Groza, 2004). Social workers can continue to harbor negative attitudes toward gay and lesbian adoption in spite of them receiving diversity training (Brownlee et al., 2005).

Social workers work to enhance individuals' well-being and to abate all forms of social injustice (National Association of Social Workers [NASW], 2008). The NASW (2008) states that social workers are not to practice, condone, facilitate, or collaborate with any form of discrimination based on one's sexual orientation. The NASW also recognizes that homophobia can negatively affect the quality of services provided by social workers and stresses that a client's sexual orientation should not interfere with the quality or type of services rendered. The Council on Social Work Education's (CSWE) curriculum policy statement requires social work education programs to educate students on the forms and mechanisms of oppression and discrimination.

Social work programs are required by the CSWE to train students to respect and embrace diversity as well as assisting individuals in meeting their needs (Brownlee et al., 2005; Hepworth et al., 2006). According to Brownlee et al. (2005), the attitudes held by social workers regarding gay men and lesbians are a contributing factor to discriminatory practices. According to Dugmore and Cocker (2008), little attention has been given to heterosexism within the social work profession and in universities' academic departments. Excluding gays and lesbians as adoptive parents has been the practice of many social workers in regards to gay and lesbian adoption (Dugmore & Cocker, 2008).

Heterosexism within the social work profession is a result of teaching deficits in social work education (Brownlee et al., 2005). More research is needed on challenging the attitudes of social workers and bringing about an awareness of how their attitudes affect gay and lesbian adoption (Dugmore & Cocker, 2008). In a study of 240 social work students, 37% displayed heterosexist attitudes, and the male social work students were more homophobic than the female students (Brownlee et al., 2005). According to Fish (2008), another study found that social work students held negative attitudes toward gay and lesbian couples who were interested in becoming parents. The students believed homosexuals were not capable of being good parents, were emotionally unstable, and were incapable of providing a loving home for a child. These students were not

likely to place a child in the custody of a gay or lesbian individual (Fish, 2008).

With the increased visibility of gay men and lesbians, they are choosing to adopt more now than in the past (McCann & Delmonte, 2005). Chonody et al. (2009) found over 8 million gay men and lesbians reside in the United States, and more than 150,000 same-sex couples are rearing children. However, based solely on their sexual orientation, gay men and lesbians are often denied the opportunity to adopt children who are available for adoption (Brooks & Goldberg, 2001).

The profession of social work is a value-based profession; therefore, social work majors need to be aware of the challenges gay men and lesbians face (Hepworth et al., 2006). Camilleri and Ryan (2006) found social work majors also need to be aware of their own attitudes toward gay men and lesbians. This awareness will help in providing adequate services to this client population. Non-accepting attitudes of social workers can lead to providing less-than-quality services to gays and lesbians and actually support individual and systemic discrimination in the workplace (Brownlee et al., 2005).

According to Brownlee et al. (2005), heterosexist attitudes are common place among college students. The researchers found that 55% of 300 college students displayed heterosexist attitudes. They also found that 29% of college students thought their university would be better off if all of the students enrolled were heterosexual. Half of the students believed that homosexuality was inappropriate and absolutely wrong, and they had no desire to broaden their knowledge base surrounding gay and lesbian issues (Brownlee et al., 2005).

Social workers often place the most difficult-to-place children with gay men and lesbians (McCann & Delmonte, 2005). Social workers are not able to display the discriminatory values and attitudes in the workplace that can ultimately influence decisions regarding placement of a child in a gay or lesbian home. The social worker's decision is to be based on what is in the best interest of the child and which family is the best match for the child.

The purpose of this study was to explore differences in the attitudes of undergraduate social work students enrolled in a historically Black college and university (HBCU) toward gay and lesbian adoption. It examined the

differences between the dependent variable (students' attitudes toward gay and lesbian adoption) and the select independent variables, which include gender and age (traditional vs. nontraditional). According to Brownlee et al. (2005), results from this study may provide assistance to social work faculty in evaluating their effectiveness in educating students in the areas of cultural competence and diversity.

Research Question

Based on the literature, the following research question was developed for this study: How do the attitudes of social work students toward gay and lesbian adoption differ in the areas of gender and age (traditional vs. nontraditional) at a historically Black college and university? The research question examined the level of homophobic attitudes of social work students toward adoption privileges of gay men and lesbians.

H1: There is no significant difference between the attitudes of male and female social work students toward gay and lesbian adoption.

H2: There is no significant difference between the attitudes of traditional-aged and nontraditional-aged college students toward gay and lesbian adoption.

Significance of the Study

There is a need to determine if the ideals and values of the social work profession are reflected in the students who choose social work as a major. Gay men and lesbians continue to face challenges based on their sexual orientation due to negative attitudes of mainstream society (Cluse-Tolar, Lambert, Ventura, & Pasupuleti, 2004). Limited research has been devoted to African American undergraduate social work students and homophobia in relation to gay and lesbian adoption. Due to the limited research on African American undergraduate social work students, there is a need to determine if African American students majoring in social work possess negative attitudes toward homosexuals. At some point, these future social workers will be directly responsible for placing children who are currently in the child welfare system and will be

working with a gay man or lesbian in the work place.

Social work students' attitudes toward gay and lesbian adoption are influenced by a number of systems with which they come into contact on a daily basis. Systems theory involves interactions individuals have with one another and the environment (Schriver, 2004). Individuals can make decisions based on the systems that involve one's upbringing, religious affiliation or participation, political affiliation, or agency policy (Lambert, Ventura, Hall, & Cluse-Tolar, 2006). These various systems can have an impact on one's behavior directly or indirectly throughout life. Bandura's social learning theory assumes that all behaviors are learned (Lesser & Pope, 2007). Lack of exposure to this population can lead to social workers having limited knowledge of gay men's and lesbians' parenting skills. Children awaiting adoption might experience a successful adoptive home placement and be prepared to adjust to a gay and lesbian home environment if they are included in the adoption or foster home placement procedure.

A theoretical framework that integrates social learning theory and systems theory characterizes this study. Social learning theory assumes that behaviors are learned through modeling, imitation, and observation. An event will take place that will produce a behavior, and as a result of the behavior, there are consequences that arise (Lesser & Pope, 2007). Therefore, social work students may possess personal attitudes about this population that developed from a learned experience (Lesser & Pope, 2007).

The experiences that gays and lesbians encounter everyday are influenced by family members, intimate relationships, and the work environment. When the decision is made to foster or adopt a child, other factors, like adoption agencies and social workers, seriously impact one's experiences (Goldberg, Downing, & Sauck, 2007). Social systems modify and shape a person's thoughts and actions (Swank & Raiz, 2007). Social work students need to understand these various systems and subsystems that affect individuals, as well as themselves and how these systems can positively or negatively impact one's beliefs, values, and decisions (Kirst-Ashman & Hull, 2002).

Literature Review

The United States is in a crisis regarding adoption due to so many children being available for adoption and not enough families willing to adopt children. The number of children available for adoption has increased since the enactment of the Adoption and Safe Families Act of 1977 which requires agencies to terminate parental rights expeditiously (Ryan, Pearlmutter, & Groza, 2004). Gay and lesbian adoption is a topic of conversation in mainstream society, and the main debate is whether placing a child in a gay or lesbian home is right for the child. Mainstream society is skeptical about gay and lesbian parenting due to the uncertainty and stigma associated with homosexuality (Brooks & Goldberg, 2001). Rowlands and Lee (2006) identified changing attitudes of society in regard to gays and lesbians; however, research indicates many still view homosexuality as morally unacceptable.

Heterosexual men historically have displayed more negative attitudes than heterosexual females toward homosexuals (Herek, 1988). Research suggests heterosexuals are upset that AIDS, which many identify with homosexuals, now affects their sex lives by having to use condoms during sexual intercourse. Still others actually resent their tax dollars being earmarked for what they consider to be a gay disease (Swank & Raiz, 2007). Heterosexual women and individuals with more education are more accepting of gay men and lesbians than heterosexual men and individuals with less education (Brownlee et al., 2005). The correlation between one's gender and negative attitudes toward gay men and lesbians is not clear. Public opinion surveys found African Americans and Latinos are more homophobic than Whites. One study found African American graduate level social work students were more likely than undergraduate social work students to possess heterosexist attitudes (Swank & Raiz, 2007).

Methodology

This study utilized a quantitative, nonparametric statistical research design. Data were analyzed using one-way and two-way chi-square procedures. The groups in this study consisted of male and female and traditional-aged and nontraditional-aged social work students. This study examined the association between the dependent variable

(students' attitudes toward gay and lesbian adoption) and the select independent variables (gender and traditional age vs. nontraditional age). This research design provided a means for examining the variables as obstacles to providing adequate services to gay men and lesbians with a focus on child adoption. The findings may provide intervention strategies for educators focusing on diversity as well as homosexuality. The data obtained for this quantitative study were collected on a single occasion via distribution of a self-administered questionnaire.

Measures

The instrument used in this research study was a two-part, self-reporting questionnaire designed to measure the attitudes of social work students regarding gay men and lesbians seeking to adopt. The Attitudes Toward Lesbians and Gay Men (ATLG) Scale was combined with select questions from the Attitudes Toward Homosexuality Scale; both are existing instruments with a high degree of reliability and validity based on previous research (Herek & Glunt, 1993; LaMar & Kite, 1998). Permission to utilize the ATLG with modification was obtained from the author via written correspondence. The sections of the ATLG remain the same, but to make the ATLG applicable for this research study, demographic questions and selected questions were added to determine attitudes regarding working or associating with homosexuals. The first section of the questionnaire was designed to collect demographic data, which included age (traditional vs. nontraditional), gender and marital status.

The second part of the self-reporting questionnaire measures the attitudes of participants toward gay men and lesbians. The statements measure one's affective responses to homosexuality and to gay men and lesbians. The participants were asked to indicate their level of agreement with each statement using a 5-point Likert scale: 1 = strongly agree, 2 = agree, 3 = neither agree nor disagree, 4 = disagree, and 5 = strongly disagree. The questionnaire explored whether individuals consider homosexuality wrong or disgusting, or if gay men or lesbians should be allowed to adopt children (Lambert et al., 2006).

Data Collection Procedures

Permission was obtained from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at the HBCU to conduct research on human subjects. The chair and faculty of the social work department were contacted regarding the study and were responsible for dissemination of the instrument. Freshmen and sophomores enrolled in introductory courses, practice and field seminars with juniors and seniors participated in the study. The survey package consisted of the questionnaire, a letter of informed consent, and information that assisted the prospective participants in deciding whether to participate in the study.

Data Analysis

Data analysis involved an exploration of descriptive information on the sample's statistics, plus the use of one-way and two-way chi-square statistical analyses to address hypotheses established for the study. The levels in chi-square analysis were collapsed in order to facilitate data interpretation. Participants in the study included 94 undergraduate social work students. Of the 94 social work students, 15% (n = 14) were male and 83% (n = 78) were female (two individuals did not report their gender). Ninety percent (n = 85) of the participants were African American, 6% (n = 5) were White, 1% (n = 1) was Native American, 1% (n = 1) was Mulatto, 1% (n = 1) identified as other Hispanic, and 1% (n = 1) identified as other. Eighty percent (n = 75) were between the ages of 18 and 25 (traditional-aged students), while 20% (n = 19) were between the ages of 26 and 65 (nontraditional-aged students). A large number of participants (92%, n = 86) were single, 5% (n = 5) were married, and 3% (n = 3) were either divorced or separated.

Expected Findings

The expected findings from this research study would support the hypotheses. The researcher anticipated that social workers' reluctance to place children in a gay or lesbian home environment is related to gender and age. Individuals are exposed to numerous systems that influence their beliefs and values, and it is believed that males are more likely to possess attitudes associated with homophobia and heterosexism (Berkman & Zinberg, 1997).

Results

A focal point of the study involved discerning whether the attitudes of social work students toward gay and lesbians were consistent with the professional NASW (2008) Code of Ethics governing the practice of social work. The researcher first selected items from both the ATLG Scale and the Attitudes Toward Homosexuality Scale and determined where an agree or disagree response would be consistent with the NASW Code of Ethics. Based on previous research, both instruments have a high degree of reliability and validity in measuring heterosexuals' attitudes toward gay men and lesbians (Herek & Glunt, 1993; LaMar & Kite, 1998). The researcher specified whether an agree or disagree response in each item would be consistent with the NASW Code of Ethics (see Tables 1 and 2).

Chi-Square Analysis

The tests of significance applied in this study included the nonparametric statistic of chi-square one-sample (goodness-of-fit) test and the two-sample chi-square test of independence. Both tests were used to measure nominal-level data. The one-sample chi-square statistic was used to compare observed frequency of responses to expected frequency of responses (Glicken, 2003). The two-sample chi-square statistic was used to determine if responses on dependent variables were related to the independent (grouping) variables (Salahu-Din, 2003).

Nineteen items were selected from the ATLG to compare the consistency of participants' attitudes toward gay men and lesbians to the professional code of social work practice (see Table 1). Results from the one-way chi square indicated attitudes of the students were consistent with the professional code on 11 of the 19 items, $\chi 2$ ranged from 6.33 to 79.05, ps $< .05$ (see Table 3). Significant inconsistencies of student attitudes with the professional Code of Ethics were found for items 5 and 12, $\chi 2 = 31.18$ and 4.45, respectively (ps $< .05$). The one-way chi-square results were not significant for items 4, 8, 10, 13, 14, and 19, $p > .05$ (see Table 3).

Eleven items were selected from the Attitudes Toward Homosexuality Scale to examine consistency of attitudes of social work students toward homosexuals compared to the professional code of social work practice. Students' responses were consistent with the professional code of social work practice on nine of the 11 items (Items 2, 3, 4, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, and 11),

$\chi 2$ ranged from 8.00 to 66.78, ps < .05 (see Table 4). One-way chi-square results were not significant for Items 1 and 5.

Hypothesis Testing

To test the two formal hypotheses, one-way and two-way chi-square statistical analyses were utilized to address the dependent variable, social work students' attitudes toward gay and lesbian adoption. The select independent variables included gender and age (traditional vs. nontraditional).

> **Hypothesis 1.** H1 stated, There is no significant difference between the attitudes of male and female social work students toward gay and lesbian adoption.

The null hypothesis was rejected, indicating there is a significant difference between the attitudes of male and female social work students toward gay and lesbian adoption. Female participants were more likely than male participants to agree that male homosexual couples should be allowed to adopt children, $\chi 2(1, N = 76) = 7.17$, $p < .05$. Furthermore, female participants were more likely than male participants to agree that lesbian couples should be allowed to adopt children, $\chi 2(1, N = 74) = 6.10$, $p < .05$.

> **Hypothesis 2.** H3 stated, There is no significant difference between the attitudes of traditional-aged and nontraditional-aged college students toward gay and lesbian adoption.

The null hypothesis was not rejected, indicating there is no significant difference between the attitudes of traditional-aged and nontraditional-aged college students toward gay and lesbian adoption. A majority of the participants believed that male homosexual couples should be allowed to adopt children the same as heterosexual couples, with no significant difference between traditional-aged and nontraditional-aged respondents, $\chi 2(1, N = 78) = 1.01$, ns. There was also no significant difference between traditional-aged and nontraditional-aged

respondents' attitudes regarding lesbian couples being allowed to adopt children, $\chi 2(1, N = 76) = 0.00$, ns.

Discussion

Overall, previous research on the homophobic attitudes toward gay men and lesbians in relation to child adoption has been consistent in the areas of age (Berkman & Zinberg, 1997; Brownlee et al., 2005) and gender (Lambert et al., 2006). Age does not appear to be associated with more accepting attitudes toward gay men or lesbians, nor does age appear to be associated with more negative attitudes toward gay men or lesbians (Crisp, 2006). One study found younger college students possessed more negative attitudes than older college students toward gay men and lesbians (Lambert et al., 2006). Upper-level college students tend to have had more exposure to gays and lesbians than lower-level or younger college students; therefore, they tend to be more tolerant with homosexuals (Lambert et al., 2006). However, another study found that age was not a factor due to the fact that the majority of the students in the study were approximately the same age (Cluse-Tolar et al., 2004). The findings in this study also revealed that age (traditional vs. nontraditional) did not negatively or positively impact students' attitudes toward surrounding gay and lesbian adoption.

The link between gender and homophobic attitudes has been identified in numerous studies in that men possess more negative attitudes toward gay men than toward lesbians. Men consistently hold negative attitudes toward gay and lesbian issues and child adoption (Herek, 1988; Newman, Dannenfelser, & Benishek, 2002). Women are more supportive than men of gay men and lesbians (Brownlee et al., 2005; Herek, 1988). Limited studies have found no differences in gender in regard to negative attitudes toward gay men and lesbians (Lambert et al., 2006). Previous research found that homophobic attitudes are more prevalent among heterosexual men (Swank & Raiz, 2007). Based on the findings of this study and previous research, it can be concluded that gender plays an important role in regard to homophobic attitudes toward gay men and lesbians.

Limitations

Limitations associated with this study include the use of a nonrandom sample, and the small number of students that were present on the day the study was conducted. There are a number of possible factors that can contribute to negative attitudes of individuals toward homosexuals; however, only select variables were utilized in this study. Also, this study only included students enrolled in the undergraduate social work program; other majors were not selected to participate. This study focused on students enrolled in an HBCU, to ensure that the majority of the participants were African American as limited research exists on the attitudes of African American social work students toward gay and lesbian issues and child adoption.

Recommendations for Future Research

The findings of this study revealed that a significant difference exists between the attitudes of male and female students toward gay and lesbian adoption. The findings also suggested no significant difference exists between traditional-aged and nontraditional-aged students, in relation to homophobic attitudes toward gay and lesbian adoption. It would be interesting for research to be conducted with undergraduate and graduate social work majors at HBCUs in the South, to inquire about their sexual orientation, which could lead to a better understanding of the analysis. Conducting a pretest during the first social work class and a posttest during students' senior year would provide knowledge regarding changes in the attitudes of social work students, as well as possible growth as a result of exposure to diverse populations. Continued research should be conducted in order for social work faculty to better understand how their present curriculum may contribute to homophobic attitudes.

Conclusion

This study investigated the attitudes of undergraduate social work students enrolled in an HBCU toward gay men and lesbians. A quantitative, nonparametric statistical research design was utilized. This study sought to determine whether a significant difference exists between gender and age (traditional vs. nontraditional) and the attitudes of social work students toward gay and lesbian adoption. No significant

difference was found in regard to the age of the students, however, a significant difference was found in regard to gender, with men possessing more negative attitudes than women toward gay and lesbian adoption. This finding supports previous studies regarding women being more accepting, tolerant, and supportive of gay and lesbian adoption than men (Brownlee et al., 2005).

Social work students will work with a variety of client systems which will include gay men and lesbians who are interested in child adoption. The quality of care provided by social workers will depend on the knowledge, skills, and diversity training received while enrolled in a social work program (Newman et al., 2002). Negative attitudes toward gay men and lesbians can lead to social workers providing less-than-quality services (Berkman & Zinberg, 1997). Educating individuals and exposure to gay men and lesbians have been found to alter homophobic attitudes (Cluse-Tolar et al., 2004). More education leads to being more open-minded and tolerant of individual differences (Lambert et al., 2006). This study provides social work programs a basis for evaluating their current curriculum and implementing, if necessary, steps to modify their curriculum.

Table 1
Professional Opinions Regarding Items from the Attitudes Toward Lesbians and Gay Men Scale

Item	Professional opinions within social work agree/disagree with Code of Ethics
1. Lesbians just can't fit into our society.	Disagree
2. A woman's homosexuality should not be a cause for job discrimination in any situation.	Agree
3. Female homosexuality is bad for society because it breaks down the natural divisions between the sexes.	Disagree
4. State laws against private sexual behavior between consenting adult women should be abolished.	Agree

5. Female homosexuality is a sin.	Disagree
6. The growing number of lesbians indicates a decline in American morals.	Disagree
7. Female homosexuality is a threat to many of our basic social institutions.	Disagree
8. Male homosexual couples should be allowed to adopt children the same as heterosexual couples.	Agree
9. Female homosexual couples should be allowed to adopt children the same as heterosexual couples.	Agree
10. I think male homosexuals are disgusting.	Disagree
11. Male homosexuality is a perversion.	Disagree
12. Male homosexuality is a natural expression of sexuality in men.	Agree
13. Sex between two men is just plain wrong.	Disagree
14. The idea of male homosexual marriages seems ridiculous to me.	Disagree
15. Female homosexuality is an inferior form of sexuality.	Disagree
16. Male homosexuals are sick.	Disagree
17. Male homosexuals should not be allowed to teach school.	Disagree
18. Lesbians are sick.	Disagree
19. I would not be too upset if I learned my son was a homosexual.	Agree

Note. Items from Lesbian and Gay Psychology: Theory, Research, and Clinical Applications (pp. 206–208), by B. Greene and G. M. Herek, 1994, Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage. Copyright 1994 by Sage. Reprinted with permission.

Table 2
Professional Opinions Regarding Items from the Attitudes Toward Homosexuality Scale

Item	Professional opinions within social work agree/disagree with Code of Ethics
1. I would not be too upset if I learned my daughter was a lesbian.	Agree
2. Lesbians are a danger to young people.	Disagree
3. Lesbians are more likely to commit deviant acts such as child molestation, rape, voyeurism (peeping Toms) than are heterosexuals.	Disagree
4. Lesbians endanger the institution of the family.	Disagree
5. Gay male couples should be able to adopt children the same as heterosexual couples.	Agree
6. I think lesbians are disgusting.	Disagree
7. Lesbians should not be allowed to work with children.	Disagree
8. Gay couples are very moral and ethical people.	Agree
9. Lesbian couples are very moral and ethical people.	Agree
10. Job discrimination against lesbians is wrong.	Agree
11. Job discrimination against gay men is just wrong.	Agree

Note. Items from "Sex Differences in Attitudes Toward Gay Men and Lesbians: A Multi-Dimensional Perspective," by L. A. LaMar and M. E. Kite, 1998, Journal of Sex Research, 35, p. 192. Copyright 2001. Reprinted with permission.

Table 3

Participant Responses to Items from the Attitudes Toward Lesbians and Gay Men Scale: Consistency With the Practice of Professional Social Work

Item	χ^2	Directionality[a]	*n*	*df*
1. Lesbians just can't fit into our society.	79.05**	Consistent	83	1
2. A woman's homosexuality should not be a cause for job discrimination in any situation.	35.70**	Consistent	91	1
3. Female homosexuality is bad for society because it breaks down the natural divisions between the sexes.	43.13**	Consistent	78	1
4. State laws against private sexual behavior between consenting adult women should be abolished.	2.88	*ns*	68	1
5. Female homosexuality is a sin.	31.18**	Inconsistent	77	1
6. The growing number of lesbians indicates a decline in American morals.	12.25**	Consistent	64	1
7. Female homosexuality is a threat to many of our basic social institutions.	41.44**	Consistent	73	1
8. Male homosexual couples should be allowed to adopt children the same as heterosexual couples.	1.85	*ns*	78	1
9. Female homosexual couples should be allowed to adopt children the same as heterosexual couples.	10.32**	Consistent	76	1
10. I think male homosexuals are disgusting.	1.95	*ns*	74	1
11. Male homosexuality is a perversion.	6.33**	Consistent	57	1
12. Male homosexuality is a natural expression of sexuality in men.	4.45*	Inconsistent	65	1
13. Sex between two men is just plain wrong.	3.76	*ns*	77	1
14. The idea of male homosexual marriages seems ridiculous to me.	2.06	*ns*	70	1
15. Female homosexuality is an inferior form of sexuality.	13.07**	Consistent	60	1

16. Male homosexuals are sick.	14.82**	Consistent	78	1
17. Male homosexuals should not be allowed to teach school.	64.80**	Consistent	80	1
18. Lesbians are sick.	31.14**	Consistent	74	1
19. I would not be too upset if I learned my son was a homosexual.	2.32	*ns*	73	1

Note. Items from Lesbian and Gay Psychology: Theory, Research, and Clinical Applications (pp. 206–208), by B. Greene and G. M. Herek, 1994, Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage. Copyright 1994 by Sage. Reprinted with permission.

*Directionality refers to the tendency of the attitudes of respondents to be consistent or inconsistent with the professional practice of social work. Consistent = tendency toward professional opinion within social work; inconsistent = tendency away from professional opinion within social work.
*$p < .05$. **$p < .01$.

Table 4
Participant Responses to Items from the Attitudes Toward Homosexuality Scale: Consistency With the Practice of Professional Social Work

Item	χ^2	Directionality[a]	*n*	*df*
1. I would not be too upset if I learned my daughter was a lesbian.	3.17	*ns*	71	1
2. Lesbians are a danger to young people.	61.83**	Consistent	77	1
3. Lesbians are more likely to commit deviant acts such as child molestation, rape, voyeurism (peeping Toms) than are heterosexuals.	66.78**	Consistent	82	1
4. Lesbians endanger the institution of the family.	49.03**	Consistent	71	1
5. Gay male couples should be able to adopt children the same as heterosexual couples.	2.65	*ns*	74	1
6. I think lesbians are disgusting.	32.90**	Consistent	76	1

7. Lesbians should not be allowed to work with children.	54.72**	Consistent	87	1
8. Gay couples are very moral and ethical people.	8.00**	Consistent	50	1
9. Lesbian couples are very moral and ethical people.	13.30*	Consistent	47	1
10. Job discrimination against lesbians is wrong.	42.71**	Consistent	90	1
11. Job discrimination against gay men is just wrong.	42.71**	Consistent	90	1

Note. Items from "Sex Differences in Attitudes Toward Gay Men and Lesbians: A Multi-Dimensional Perspective," by L. A. LaMar and M. E. Kite, 1998, Journal of Sex Research, 35, p. 192. Copyright 2001. Reprinted with permission.

*Directionality refers to the tendency of the attitudes of respondents to be consistent or inconsistent with the professional practice of social work. Consistent = tendency toward professional opinion within social work; inconsistent = tendency away from professional opinion within social work.

*$^{*}p < .05$. $^{**}p < .01$.

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FACTORS INFLUENCING THE SELECTION OF COURSE DELIVERY METHODS BY NONTRADITIONAL STUDENTS

by
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Abstact

This study consisted of students enrolled at a four-year institution in a degree program which was largely made up of nontraditional and adult students. The study looked at the characteristics that influenced the aforementioned students' decisions to take courses using one delivery method over another. The instrument utilized for this research study was based on the 2007 National Study on Nontraditional Students used by the Lumina Foundation of Education and the Curry School of Education at the University of Virginia (2007) to identify the factors related to the progress of non-traditional students' degree attainment.

More than half of all of the students in each of the examined age groups preferred distance learning (online or interactive video) as their choice compared to on campus classes (face-to-face). Participants living within 10 miles of the institution and from 51-100 miles from the institution preferred on-campus courses. All other participants selected distance learning courses most often. No statistically significant relationship was found between the distance the participant lived from the institution, gender, age, race/ethnicity current employment status, marital status, nor income and the selected course delivery method.

Introduction

The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) (2009) shows that 38% of the 18 million college students enrolled in 2007 were 25 years of age or older (NCES, 2009). Prior to 2000, the student population at postsecondary institutions had consisted of single, residential, full-time, and 18-24 year-old individuals (American Council on Education, 2006; McCraw & O'Malley, 1999). The traditional image of the college student is being confronted by a different reality. In the information-driven U.S. economy, a college degree has become a progressively significant

qualification in the market, both for new and currently employed persons in the work force.

Many employed adults who are searching for success in the current financial climate are pursuing a postsecondary education in growing numbers, and they are facilitating a shift of a new majority amid undergraduate students at colleges throughout the United States. Adult students are acknowledged as part of a larger population characterized as nontraditional (Council for Adult and Experiential Learning (CAEL), 1999). Since the number of nontraditional students in higher education is rising, institutions will need to provide flexible instructional delivery systems to meet the demanding schedules of the working student (Chu & Hinton, 2001). According to Merriam (2008), adult learning theory is in a much different place than in 2001. Researchers such as Merriam began to recognize that there is more than just cognitive processing involved in adult learning. The idea that adult learning is a multidimensional phenomenon that takes place in various contexts has provided a deeper understanding of not only how adults learn, but has extended the philosophy as to which instructional strategies might be best to promote adult learning (Merriam, 2008).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to examine key factors that influence the course delivery methods selected by nontraditional students. The instructional delivery methods that were examined are on-campus (face-to-face) or distance learning (interactive video and online). The study also examined the influence of employment status, income, family circumstances, challenges, and the demographic factors of age, gender, and race/ethnicity.

Significance of the Study

The National Center for Education Statistics forecasts of postsecondary enrollment from 2007–2018 suggest that the population of students 25 years of age and older will remain steady or increase throughout the coming decade (Hussar & Bailey, 2009). In a publication by the Council for the Advancement of Adult Literacy (CAAL) (2005), authors noted the lack of information on adult students by writing, "There are not adequate

statistics on the number of adult learning students who make transitions to postsecondary education" (p. 18). Also, the American Council on Education (ACE) (2006) published a report that stated, "The bottom line is that few national sources exist from which to draw data regarding adult learners" (p. 5). This study was significant because it added to the current research regarding instructional delivery methods and the needs of nontraditional students. The demographics of today's classrooms are changing. McCraw and O'Malley's (1999) study stated:

> The undergraduate student population three decades ago was basically single, residential, full-time, and 18-23 years old. As we enter the telecommunication age, with its vastly expanded employment skill sets, the undergraduate student population has changed to include older, married, employed, and non-residential students. (p. 2)

There is an obvious cultural divide, because the expectations for completion of undergraduate programs differ between traditional and nontraditional students. A common perception would be that nontraditional and traditional students attend classes together and possess like learning styles; however, traditional students normally function in high capacity in lecture or instructor-led classrooms. Nontraditional students prefer facilitation of learning with the instructor acting as a mediator for classroom discussion where they are able to apply their own life, work, and educational experiences to the classroom topic (Newbold et al., 2010). The frequency of attendance and scheduling preferences are also different between the two cultures. Traditional students enter their degree programs with the goal of graduating in four to five years with an undergraduate baccalaureate degree. Since many have short term goals attached to career changes, promotions, or need for self improvement, nontraditional students seldom maintain continuous enrollment (Lumina, 2007). Therefore, students may sit-out a period of time then re-enroll.

The data and findings provide universities with information that can be used to develop programs that are highly marketable to the nontraditional

and adult student populations. Institutions of higher learning may be able to use this information to evaluate current programs and adjust the instructional delivery methods to meet the needs of their students. Chu and Hinton (2001) stated that distance education can meet the needs of adult and nontraditional students, eliminating the constraints of distance and time. However, many students continue to enroll in face-to-face courses rather than interactive video and online. This study may help to give insight into which method is preferred by nontraditional students and why.

Bressler and Bressler (2007) identified various factors believed to influence students' enrollment in distance learning courses. Some of these factors are thought to be career development, finances, distance, and time. However, the study did not conclude that these were the factors that influenced students' decisions nor how these factors may have influenced decisions. Also stated in the study was that male students preferred the online classroom environment, while females were drawn more to the traditional face-to-face environment (Bressler & Bressler, 2007).

Studies from Taiwan and Australia have offered a global perspective on the significance of course delivery methods. In "The Effects of Different Modes of Delivery: Student Outcomes and Evaluations" and "Factors that Influence Students' Decision to Take Distance Learning Courses," Josie Misko and Shaio-Chuan Kung assessed the reasons students chose to explore the various modes of delivery of instruction. Such quantitative analyses give credence to the importance of this research topic and validate the need to give more thorough attention to American institutions of higher education (Kung, 2002; Misko, 2000). Although there is an abundance of evidence that supports the importance of learning preferences in traditional college students, there is a lack of research on nontraditional undergraduate students and how their backgrounds influence their learning preferences. This study added yet another dimension to the discourse on distance learning by examining the types of factors that influence the nontraditional students' choice of course delivery modes.

Overview of Methodology

This study was a quantitative and descriptive study that used a survey instrument as the method of collecting data. The study included nontraditional students enrolled at a four-year institution in a degree program which is largely made up of nontraditional and adult students. Internet-based surveys are an efficient method for administrators to collect viable data. This method has shown to be advantageous for research conducted on college student populations (Wells, Cavanaugh, Bouffard & Nobles, 2012). All respondents completed an electronic survey through Qualtrics, an online survey facilitation tool. The quantitative methodologies of frequency distribution, crosstabulation, and Chi-Square analysis were used to analyze the data that were collected. The following research questions will serve as a guide for this discussion:

1. Is there a relationship between the participants' demographic characteristics and the selection of a course delivery method?

2. Is there a relationship between current employment status and the selection of a course delivery method?

3. Is there a relationship between family circumstances and the selection of a course delivery method?

4. What challenges do nontraditional students face when they decide to return to school?

5. What are reasons given by the nontraditional student population for continuing their education?

Description of Site and Population

The institution used in this study is located in the capital city, the cultural, political and geographical center of a southern state. The metropolitan area consists of a growing population presently estimated at 568,000. This institution is a large celebrated Historically Black College/University (HBCU) with a student enrollment of approximately 9,000 traditional and nontraditional students of diverse backgrounds. Nearly one-half of

the students at the institutions come from within a 50-mile radius of the institution; however, the population includes students from nearly every county in the state. A significant number of students also come from outside the state and from more than 50 foreign countries. The majority of the student population is African American.

Description of Sample Participants

This study consisted of 92 students enrolled at a four-year institution in a degree program which is largely made up of nontraditional and adult students. The common characteristic of this population was that they are nontraditional students enrolled in a continuing education and lifelong learning unit at a historically African-American, four-year urban university located in the southeast region of the United States. All nontraditional students enrolled in classes offered by the continuing education and lifelong learning unit at an urban university had an opportunity to be included in the study. Students possessing one characteristic are considered "minimally nontraditional." Those students having two to three characteristics are "moderately nontraditional," and students having more than three characteristics are classified as "highly nontraditional" (U.S. Department of Education, 2002). This study measured characteristics across the spectrum from "moderately nontraditional" to "highly nontraditional." Students must have possessed at least two of the nontraditional characteristics to be included in the study. The students at this institution were enrolled in classes offered by the continuing education and lifelong learning unit from January through August of 2012.

Description of Instrument

The instrument that was utilized for this research study was the 2007 National Study on Nontraditional Students used by the Lumina Foundation of Education and the Curry School of Education at the University of Virginia (2007) to identify the factors related to the progress of nontraditional students' degree attainment. The survey included several questions about students' characteristics such as enrollment, goals, support, financing, institutional services, and demographics.

Statistical Analysis

The survey instrument was administered through Qualtrics, an online survey facilitation tool available to faculty and students at Jackson State University. The researcher was able to download responses into a data file for the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) for the evaluation of descriptive statistics and for Chi-Square analysis. For comparative purposes, the delivery methods of online and interactive video were combined under distance learning in Tables 1 through 12. Face-to-face is captured in the on-campus responses. Crosstabulation tables do not include the participants who did not respond to the corresponding questions. The number of valid cases is shown in the tables containing the results of the Chi-Square tests.

Research Question One

What is the relationship between the participants' demographic characteristics and the selection of course delivery method? A crosstabulation was computed to examine the responses of the participants in regard to the relationship between gender and course delivery method. The data in Table 1 presents the responses of the students to this question. As seen in the table, more females than males selected distance learning as their choice, while more males than females selected on-campus classes.

Table 1

Gender by Course Delivery Method Selected – Crosstabulation

	Course Delivery Method		
Gender	**Distance Learning**	**On-campus**	**Total**
Male	10 (47.6%)	11 (52.4%)	21 (100.0%)
Female	36 (62.1%)	22 (37.9%)	58 (100.0%)
Total	46 (58.2%)	33 (41.8%)	79 (100.0%)

The Chi Square test was conducted to examine the relationship between gender and course delivery method. As seen in Table 2, no significant

relationship was found between gender and method for taking courses ($p > .05$).

Table 2

Gender by Course Delivery Method Selected – Chi-Square Tests

Statistical Test	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (1-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	1.324	1	.250		
Continuity Correction(a)	.796	1	.372		
Likelihood Ratio	1.312	1	.252		
Fisher's Exact Test				.306	.186
Linear-by-Linear Association	1.307	1	.253		
N of Valid Cases	79				

Next, a crosstabulation was used to examine the relationship between age of participants and course delivery method chosen. Participants' responses are presented in Table 3. As seen in the table, more than half of all of the students in each age group preferred distance learning as their choice compared to on-campus classes.

Table 3

Age Status by Course Delivery Method Selected – Crosstabulation

	Course Delivery Method		
Age	Distance Learning	On-campus	Total
18-25	10 (55.6%)	8 (44.4%)	18 (100.0%)
26-35	14 (63.6%)	8 (36.4%)	22 (100.0%)
36-45	10 (55.6%)	8 (44.4%)	18 (100.0%)
46-54	13 (59.1%)	9 (40.9%)	22 (100.0%)
Total	47 (58.8%)	33 (41.3%)	80 (100.0%)

In order to check for a significant relationship between age and course delivery method, the Chi Square test was conducted. No significant relationship was found between age and method for taking courses ($p > .05$), as shown in Table 4.

Table 4

Age Status by Course Delivery Method Selected – Chi Square

Statistical Tests	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	.369	3	.946
Continuity Correction			
Likelihood Ratio	.517	3	.916
Linear-by-Linear Association	.003	1	.956
N of Valid Cases	80		

To examine the relationship between race/ethnicity and selection of course delivery method, a crosstabulation was performed. The data in Table 5 present the responses of the participants to this question. As seen in the table, more African Americans preferred distance learning as their choice, while more non African Americans selected on-campus classes.

Table 5

Race/Ethnicity by Course Delivery Method Selected – Crosstabulation

	Course Delivery Method		
Race/Ethnicity	**Distance Learning**	**On-campus**	**Total**
Non-African-American/Other	1 (25.0%)	3 (75.0%)	4 (100.0%)
African-American/Black	46 (60.5%)	30 (39.5%)	76 (100.0%)
Total	47 (58.8%)	33 (41.3%)	80 (100.0%)

The Chi Square test was conducted to examine the relationship between race/ethnicity and course delivery method. As seen in Table 6, no significant relationship was found between race/ethnicity and course delivery method selected ($p > .05$).

Table 6

Race/Ethnicity by Course Delivery Method Selected – Chi-Square Tests

Statistical Tests	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (1-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	1.979	1	.159		
Continuity Correction(a)	.785	1	.376		
Likelihood Ratio	1.978	1	.160		
Fisher's Exact Test				.301	.188
Linear-by-Linear Association	1.954	1	.162		
N of Valid Cases	80				

A crosstabulation was computed to examine the responses of the participants in regard to the relationship between the distance they live from the institution and course delivery method selected. As seen in Table 7, participants living within 10 miles of the institution and from 51 to 100 miles from the institution preferred on-campus courses. All other participants selected distance learning courses most often.

Table 7

Distance Participant Lives from Institution by Course Delivery Method Selected- Crosstabulation

	Course Delivery Method		
Distance From Institution	**Distance Learning**	**On Campus**	**Total**
10 miles or less	10 (41.7%)	14 (58.3%)	24 (100%)
11-20 miles	20 (69.0%)	9 (31.0%)	29 (100%)
21-50 miles	12 (66.7%)	6 (33.3%)	18 (100.0%)
51-100 miles	2 (25.0%)	6 (75.0%)	8 (100.0%)
over 100 miles	4 (80.0%)	1 (20.0%)	5 (100.0%)
Total	48 (57.1%)	36 (42.9%)	84 (100.0%)

The Chi Square test was conducted to examine the relationship between the distance participants live from the institution and course delivery method selected. As seen in Table 8, no significant relationship was found between the distance participants live from the institution and course delivery method selected ($p > .05$).

Table 8

Distance Participant Lives from Institution by Course Delivery Method Selected- Chi Square

Statistical Tests	**Value**	**df**	**Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)**
Pearson Chi-Square	9.111(a)	4	.058
Likelihood Ratio	9.288	4	.054
Linear-by-Linear Association	.499	1	.480
N of Valid Cases	84		

Research Question Two

Is there a relationship between current employment status and the selection of course delivery method? The data in Table 9 show the results of a crosstabulation performed to examine the responses of the participants to this question. As seen in the table, most participants, regardless of their employment status, selected distance learning as their choice. Ninety percent of the participants enrolled in distance learning programs were part-time students. About 51% of the participants enrolled in on-campus classes were full time students.

Table 9

Current Employment Status by Course Delivery Method Selected – Crosstabulations

	Course Delivery Method		
Employment Status	**Distance Learning**	**On-campus**	**Total**
Full time (40 hours or more per week)	23 (48.9%)	24 (51.1%)	47 (100.0%)
Part time (between 20 to 39 hours per week)	9 (90.0%)	1 (10.0%)	10 (100.0%)
Less than part time (less than 20 hours per week	5 (71.4%)	2 (28.6%)	7 (100.0%)
Not employed	9 (60.0%)	6 (40.0%)	15 (100.0%)
Total	46 (58.2%)	33 (41.8%)	79 (100.0%)

The relationship between current employment and course delivery method was examined by performing the Chi-Square test. Table 10 shows that no significant relationship was found between current employment and method for taking courses ($p > .05$).

Table 10

Current Employment Status by Course Delivery Method Selected – Chi-Square Tests

Statistical Tests	Value	Df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	6.339(a)	3	.096
Continuity Correction			
Likelihood Ratio	7.166	3	.067
Linear-by-Linear Association	1.221	1	.269
N of Valid Cases	79		

Research Question Three

Is there a relationship between family circumstances and the selection of course delivery method? A crosstabulation was performed to examine the relationship between marital status and selection of course delivery method. The data in Table 11 present the responses of the participants to this question. As seen in the table, most of the participants in all marital status groups selected distance learning as their choice.

Table 11

Marital Status by Course Delivery Method Selected – Crosstabulation

	Course Delivery Method		
Marital Status	Distance Learning	On-campus	Total
Single, never married	22 (55.0%)	18 (45.0%)	40 (100.0%)
Married	11 (45.8%)	13 (54.2%)	24 (100.0%)
Separated	2 (100.0%)	0 (.0%)	2 (100.0%)
Divorced	10 (83.3%)	2 (16.7%)	12 (100.0%)
Widowed	2 (100.0%)	0 (.0%)	2 (100.0%)
Total	47 (58.8%)	33 (41.3%)	80 (100.0%)

The Chi-Square test was conducted to examine the relationship between marital status and course delivery method. As seen in Table 12, no significant relationship was found between marital status and method for taking courses ($p > .05$).

Table 12

Marital Status by Course Delivery Method Selected – Chi-Square Tests

Statistical Tests	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	7.685	4	.104
Continuity Correction			
Likelihood Ratio	9.472	4	.050
Linear-by-Linear Association	4.352	1	.037
N of Valid Cases	80		

Next, the responses of participants with regard to the relationship between income and the selection of course delivery method were examined by performing a crosstabulation. Table 13 shows the data collected in response to this question. As seen in the table below, most of the participants, regardless of income, selected distance learning as their choice, while a few within these income categories selected on-campus classes.

Table 13

Annual Household Income by Course Delivery Method Selected–Crosstabulation

	Course Delivery Method		
Annual Household Income	**Distance Learning**	**On-campus**	**Total**
Less than $9,000	10 (62.5%)	6 (37.5%)	16 (100.0%)
$9,000 - $19,999	12 (80.0%)	3 (20.0%)	15 (100.0%)
$20,000 - $29,999	11 (61.1%)	7 (38.9%)	18 (100.0%)
$30,000 - $39,999	6 (60.0%)	4 (40.0%)	10 (100.0%)
$40,000 - $49,999	2 (33.3%)	4 (66.7%)	6 (100.0%)
$50,000 - $59,999	0 (.0%)	1 (100.0%)	1 (100.0%)
$60,000 - $69,999	1 (50.0%)	1 (50.0%)	2 (100.0%)
$70,000 - $79,999	1 (33.3%)	2 (66.7%)	3 (100.0%)
$80,000 - $89,999	1 (100.0%)	0 (.0%)	1 (100.0%)
$90,000 - $99,999	1 100.0%)	0 (.0%)	1 (100.0%)
More than $100,000	0 (.0%)	2 (100.0%)	2 (100.0%)
Total	45 (60.0%)	30 (40.0%)	75 (100.0%)

The Chi Square test was used to observe the relationship between annual income and course delivery method. In Table 14, the data show that no significant relationship was found between income and method for taking courses ($p > .05$).

Table 14
Annual Household Income by Course Delivery Method Selected– Chi-Square Tests

Statistical Tests	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	11.134	10	.347
Continuity Correction			
Likelihood Ratio	13.023	10	.222
Linear-by-Linear Association	3.098	1	.078
N of Valid Cases	75		

Research Question Four

What challenges do nontraditional students face when they decide to return to school? The following data are related to challenges faced by nontraditional students when returning to school such as problems, stressors and fears. In Table 15, a breakdown of the challenges faced when returning to school is presented. The table shows that cost of books/material, course scheduling, educational financing, establishing priorities, and family financial obligations were the top five factors

Table 15
Challenges Participants Faced upon Returning to School

Challenges	Frequency	Percent
Cost of books/materials	40	43.5
Course scheduling	39	42.4
Educational financing	25	27.2
Establishing priorities	25	27.2
Family financial obligations	22	23.9
Needing assistance with study skills	21	22.8
Transportation worries	20	21.7
Difficulty in academic subjects	18	19.6
Maintaining employment	16	17.4
Availability of childcare	11	12.0
Cost of childcare/dependent care	11	12.0
Application process	5	5.4
Lack of peer support	5	5.4
Lack of student services	4	4.3

The next variable to be examined was the problems that make it difficult for nontraditional students to stay in school. The data in Table 16 present the responses of the students concerning this variable. As seen in the table, classes not available, conflict between work and school, other financial issues, conflict with family life, and tuition and fees being too high were the top five problems that make it difficult for nontraditional students to stay in school.

Table 16
Problems that Make it Difficult for Participants to Stay in School

Problems	Frequencies	Percent
Classes not available	36	39.1
Conflict between work and school	23	25.0
Other financial issues	21	22.8
Conflict with family life	20	20.7
Tuition and fees too high	20	20.7
Scheduling problems	16	17.4
Access to academic counselors	15	16.3
Personal/family crisis	14	15.2
Time/time management	14	15.2
Poor institutional support	13	14.1
Parking	13	14.1
Crime and safety on-campus	7	7.6
Travel arrangements	7	7.6
Faculty	4	4.3
Inadequate campus facilities	4	4.3
Living arrangements	4	4.3

As seen in Table 17, participants also shared stressors that they have faced since returning to school. The top stressors cited since returning to school are managing course load (33.7%), inability to give 100% to school when job requirements intervene (28.3%), and time away from the family, missed children's activities (26.1%). Other significant stressors were loss of leisure time, perhaps recreational activities with friends (25.0%), inability to give 100% to school when family requirements intervene (23.9%), and less time spent with significant other, often leading to more stress (20.7%).

Table 17
Stressors Participants Faced Since Returning to School

Stressors	Frequencies	Percent
Managing course load	31	33.7
Inability to give 100% to school when job requirements intervene	26	28.3
Time away from the family, missed children's activities	24	26.1
Loss of leisure time, perhaps recreational activities with friends	23	25.0
Inability to give 100% to school when family requirements intervene	22	23.9
Less time spent with significant other, often leading to more stress	19	20.7
Conflicts with job commitments including travel and emergencies	12	13.0
Inability to make or participate in family commitments	12	13.0

The data in Table 18 present a view of the participants' responses concerning fears nontraditional students have faced about returning to school. As seen in the table, the top fears cited by nontraditional students about returning to school were finances (47.8%), difficulty balancing priorities (44.6%), family demands (30.4%), employment responsibilities (30.4%), being older than other students (28.3%), and ability to obtain satisfactory grades (22.8%).

Table 18

Fears Participants Have About Becoming a Student

Fears	Frequency	Percent
Finances	44	47.8
Difficulty balancing priorities	41	44.6
Family demands	28	30.4
Employment responsibilities	28	30.4
Being older than other students	26	28.3
Ability to obtain satisfactory grades	21	22.8
Difficulty retaining information	18	19.6
Understanding course material	14	15.2
Course Load	12	13.0

Research Question Five

What are reasons given by the nontraditional student population for continuing their education? The next four tables outline participant responses to reasons for returning to school, factors influencing the decision to return to school, factors influencing the participants' choice to attend an institution/program, and factors influencing the decision to attend the current institution. The data in Table 19 present a ranking of the responses of the participants with regard to their reasons for returning to school. As seen in the table, 41.3% of the students enrolled in order to enhance their employment. Another 21.7% of them were interested in acquisition of new knowledge, and 21.7% were interested in skill acquisition. About 16.3% of them were interested in personal enrichment.

Table 19
Reasons for Continuing Education by Rank

Reasons	Number	Percent
Enhancement of employability (promotion)	38	41.3
Acquisition of new knowledge	20	21.7
Skill acquisition	20	21.7
Personal enrichment	15	16.3
Citizen Training	5	5.4
Development of critical thinking skills	2	2.2

The study next examined the factors that have influenced the decision of nontraditional students to return to school. A breakdown of participant responses is presented by the data in Table 20. The top factors that have influenced the decision of nontraditional students to return to school are marketability (35.9%), to support family (35.9%), single parenthood (25.0%), change in family status (23.9%), need for mid-life career change (19.6%), and availability of state and federal financial aid (19.6%).

Table 20
Factors Influencing Decision of Participants to Return to School

Influencing Factors	Frequency	Percent
Marketability	33	35.9
To support family	33	35.9
Single parenthood	23	25.0
Change in family status	22	23.9
Need for mid-life career change	18	19.6
Availability of state and federal financial aid	18	19.6
Urged by employer	13	14.1
Being laid off	12	13.0
No job prospects	10	10.9
Desire to re-enter job market	7	7.6
Financial assistance from employer	1	1.1

Next the study examined the factors that influenced a student's choice of an institution. As seen in Table 21, the top factors were personal interest/ enrichment (16.3%), schedule and availability of course offerings (14.1%), earn degree/ certificate (13.0%), and affordable financial reasons (10.9%).

Table 21

Factors Influencing the Choice to Attend an Institution/Program

Influencing Factors	Frequency	Percent
Personal interest/ enrichment	15	16.3
Schedule and availability of course offerings	13	14.1
Earn degree/ certificate	12	13.0
Affordable/ financial reasons	10	10.9
Offered desired program/ coursework	7	7.6
Increase income potential	4	4.3
Prepare for new career/ degree	4	4.3
Admissions procedures	3	3.3
Logistics and location, housing	3	3.3
Reputation of program/ faculty/ school	3	3.3
Return to prior school	3	3.3
Variety of course formats	3	3.3
Employer assistance	2	2.2
Total Responses	82	89.1
Missing	10	10.9
Total	92	100.0

Table 22 presents the factors influencing the decision to attend the current institution. As seen in the table, affordability (33.7), convenient to home or work (10.9%), and variety of options for completing program (8.7%) were the top factors. The availability of childcare and high quality reputation were the bottom factors accounting for 2.2% of the participant responses each.

Table 22
Factors Influencing Decision to Attend the Current Institution

Influencing Factors	Frequency	Percent
Affordability	31	33.7
Convenient to home or work	10	10.9
Variety of options for completing program	8	8.7
Online courses	7	7.6
Work related customized programs	5	5.4
Employer financial support	3	3.3
Availability of childcare	2	2.2
High quality reputation	2	2.2

Discussion and Analysis of Findings

Research question one asked "What is the relationship between the participants' demographic characteristics and the selection of course delivery method?" The study first examined if there was a relationship between gender and the selection of course delivery method. More females than males selected distance learning as their choice, while more males than females selected on-campus classes. However, no significant relationship was found between gender and method for taking courses. Next, the study examined the relationship between age and the selection of course delivery method. More than half of all of the students in each age group preferred distance learning as their choice compared to on-campus classes. No significant relationship was found between age and method for taking courses. The study also examined the relationship between race/ethnicity and the selection of course delivery method. More African Americans preferred distance learning as their choice, while more non African Americans selected on-campus classes. No significant relationship was found between race/ethnicity and method for taking courses. Another variable examined in this study was the relationship

between the distance participants live from the institution and course delivery method selected. The majority of all students in each mileage group preferred distance learning courses. Only the students living within 10 miles of the institution and 51 to 100 miles from the institution preferred on-campus courses. After performing a Chi-Square analysis, no significant relationship was found between the distance participants live from the institution and course delivery method selected.

Research question two asked "Is there a relationship between current employment status and the selection of course delivery method?" About 90% of the students enrolled in distance learning programs were part time employees. About 51% of the students enrolled in on-campus classes were full time employees. No significant relationship was found between current employment and method for taking courses. Most students, regardless of their employment status, selected distance learning as their choice.

Research question three asked "Is there a relationship between family circumstances and the selection of course delivery method?" For this research question, there were two factors examined: marital status and annual household income. Most of the participants in all marital status groups selected distance learning as their choice. No significant relationship was found between marital status and method for taking courses. Most of the students, regardless of income, selected distance learning as their choice, while a few within these income categories selected on-campus classes. No significant relationship was found between income and method for taking courses.

Research question four asked "What challenges do nontraditional students face when they decide to return to school?" The cost of books/material, course scheduling, educational financing, establishing priorities, and family financial obligations were the top five factors. Participants next responded to problems that make it difficult for nontraditional students to stay in school. Classes not available, conflict between work and school, other financial issues, conflict with family life, and tuition and fees being too high were the top five problems that make it difficult for nontraditional students to stay in school. The participants responded next to factors that may increase stress for nontraditional students. The stressors cited since returning to school are managing course load (33.7%), inability to

give 100% to school when job requirements intervene (28.3%), time away from the family, missed children's activities (26.1%), loss of leisure time, perhaps recreational activities with friends (25.0%), inability to give 100% to school when family requirements intervene (23.9%), and less time spent with significant other (20.7%), often leading to more stress. The top fears cited by nontraditional students about returning to school were finances (47.8%), difficulty balancing priorities (44.6%), family demands (30.4%), employment responsibilities (30.4%), being older than other students (28.3%), and the ability to obtain satisfactory grades (22.8%).

Research question five asked "What are reasons given by the nontraditional student population for continuing their education?" When asked to rank factors in terms of importance as a reason for continuing their education, about 41.3% of the participants ranked to enhance their employment as the top reason. Another 21.7% of them raked acquisition of new knowledge as their top reason, and 21.7% ranked skill acquisition as most important. About 16.3% of the participants ranked personal enrichment as the most important factor influencing them to return to school. Participants were also asked which factors influenced their decision as a nontraditional student to return to school. The top factors that have influenced the decision of nontraditional students to return to school are marketability (35.9%), to support family (35.9%), single parenthood (25.0%), change in family status (23.9%), need for mid-life career change (19.6%), availability of state and federal financial aid (19.6%). When asked about the factors that influence the participants' decision to attend an institution, the top factors were personal interest/ enrichment (16.3%), schedule and availability of course offerings (14.1%), earn degree/ certificate (13.0%), and affordable financial reasons (10.9%). The top factors influencing the decision to attend current school were affordability (33.7%), convenient to home or work (10.9%), and variety of options for completing program (8.7%).

Recommendations for Policy and Practice

The purpose of this study was to determine the influence of selected factors on nontraditional students' selection process of course delivery methods: distance learning (online or interactive video) or on-campus (face-to-face). In this time of economic hardship, large numbers of

nontraditional students have been returning to college to earn a degree and to improve their job security status. As the labor market continues to change, employees are more motivated by the desire to earn promotions and the need for better paying jobs. The institutions of higher learning that have traditionally been built to serve a traditional clientele are now faced with the pressure of addressing the academic needs of the nontraditional students. As seen from the results of this study, many of the participants examined have indicated that they work, are heads of households, have children, and have responsibilities outside of their commitment to a degree-seeking program, and they differ from those of a traditional student. The nontraditional students indicated that they are faced with pressing life issues and stresses that could potentially limit their college experience and continuing matriculation.

This study revealed that the population of potential nontraditional students has begun to take advantage of opportunities that are available to expand their educational opportunities. Nearly 54 million of the nation's adults lack a college degree with 34 million having never attended college (Lumina, 2007). So, universities are presented with the option to modify the demographics of institutions of higher education. This study has revealed that these students, most of whom often attend school part-time, are a part of an increasing changing demographic in American education, and those numbers are expected to increase. In order to serve this population, the necessary support services must be in place. Supporting a nontraditional student leads to his or her successful matriculation in a higher level degree-seeking program. The success of these nontraditional students is important for their communities, families, and even to the health of the nation (Lumina, 2007).

As Bressler and Bressler (2007) indicated, various factors are believed to influence students to enroll in distance learning courses. This study has provided the factors that influence participation in education by nontraditional students. Some of these factors are career development, finances, distance, and time. Contrary to Bressler and Bressler (2007), this study also indicated that more female students preferred to enroll in distance learning compared to male students, and male students were more aligned with the traditional face-to-face environment.

This study also has revealed that the undergraduate student population has

evolved from the single, residential, full-time, and 18-23 year-old students from twenty to thirty years ago. These changes have been precipitated by the advances in the modern technology, the telecommunication age, where the need for expanded employment skill sets is evident.

Conclusions

The purpose of this study was to examine key factors that influence the course delivery methods selected by nontraditional students. Although several of the factors examined showed no significant difference in their influence on the selected course delivery method, a majority of the participants were enrolled in distance learning courses. As there is a current push for increased distance learning offerings, some significance in the key factors leading to the selection process may become visible.

Many institutions of higher learning, especially those that are located in urban areas, are expected to provide adequate services to a variety of individuals in the community. With the recent economic crisis worldwide and its connection to the shrinking middle class in the United States, the entire society has to be transformed, and there is a great need for institutions located in urban areas to position themselves to better serve the nontraditional populations. As the participants have begun to invest in themselves, marketability and ability to provide for family were top among the reasons for returning to school. Lumina (2007) had proposed that institutions need to intensify the efforts to provide convenient, affordable academic services that can guarantee the creation of a productive workforce. Since affordability was top in the reasons participants chose their current institution, what better way to attract more students than to provide affordable flexible learning options?

All institutions are faced with the decisions about whether to spend much limited funds to implement programs that are designed to address the nation's increasing population of nontraditional students. Some of the top problems participants faced in this study were classes not being available and conflict between work and school. This provides invaluable insight into some of the issues that will need to be addressed as institutions do look to recruit from the nontraditional student population. Since this study helps to make the institution aware of the major concerns of nontraditional students, steps can be taken to boost the development of

appropriate programs and actions, thus improving recruitment, retention and graduation rates.

Recommendations for Future Research

The following recommendations for future research are intended to expand current knowledge and advance insight into this research theme:

1. Examine and compare the offering of nontraditional and distance education programs among several institutions of higher learning in Mississippi.

2. Investigate the strengths and weaknesses of distance learning and nontraditional education programs across institutions in Mississippi.

3. Conduct a study on the factors that influence the selection of course delivery methods by traditional students.

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The National Association of Student Affairs Professions (NASAP) *Journal* invites articles concerning critical issues impacting student affairs and higher education research and development. Qualitative and quantitative manuscripts relating to current original research, best practices and models should be submitted for review. In addition, replicated studies, research reviews, and theoretical pieces are also considered. The *NASAP Journal* follows the guidelines highlighted in the *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association* (5th Edition) as to the style, quality of the work (how well the article is written), and reference list/citations, except when noted otherwise below. Please follow these guidelines in preparing your contribution. The *NASAP Journal* reserves the right to return manuscripts that do not conform to the following requirements.

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Include a cover page that lists the title of the manuscript and contact information for all of the contributors (professional title, university affiliation, mailing address, telephone, and e-mail address). The title of the manuscript should appear at the top to the first page in Times New Roman font (12 point size); the title of the manuscript should be as brief as possible. Author(s)' name(s) and contact information should appear only on the cover sheet. Names should be typed as you wish them to appear in print. If you wish to provide us any relevant information or a brief statement (two or three sentences) about the author(s), pleases include it on a separate sheet.

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