Examining the Influence of Stereotype Threat on the Efficacy of First-Year African-American College Students within a Public University in Maryland

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Dedications

To Holly
my amazing wife,
whose sacrifice and infinite patience
made it possible to complete this study.

I LOVE YOU.

To my parents, William and Iris Brown, thank you
for always pushing me and supporting me in my efforts to become the best version of
myself.

I LOVE YOU.

To Tonya,
my sister and my best friend, thank you for being my confidant and listening ear.

I LOVE YOU.

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Abstract

Examining the Influence of Stereotype Threat on the Efficacy of First-Year African-American College Students within a Public University in Maryland
Marone LaDarryl Brown
Chairperson: Kenneth Mawritz

The present research utilized a mixed-methods explanatory sequential design to examine how stereotype threat influences first-year African-American student efficacy within a public university in Maryland. The study took aim at the pervasive problem of African-American student achievement and retention in postsecondary institutions across the country, due in part to the noesis of stereotype threat. In light of this challenge, the researcher dissected the relationship between first-year African-American students and the college context in which they exist to better interpret how stereotype threat influences the racial cohesion and dissonance of Black students on the campus of a public university in Maryland. The study secured the perceptions of 169 first-year African-American students within the framework of a public university in Maryland as it pertained to their teaching and learning experiences. The study employed a two-step statistical process to determine statistical significance using the F-test for two sample variances, followed by a t-test for two sample variances. The study determined through the use of the Stereotype Confirmation Concern Scale that there was a statistically significant difference between academic achievement and social interaction of first-year African-American students influenced by stereotype threat and first-year African-American students not influenced by stereotype threat. Moreover, the study also determined that student perceptions were influenced in part by stereotype threat, racialization, and lack of inclusiveness. Theoretically, the research draws upon critical race theory to impart that the academic
achievement and perceptual experiences of African-American college students are just as influenced by perceived threats of stereotypes as they are by poverty or other psychosocial stressors suggested by previous literature.
EXAMINING THE INFLUENCE OF STEREOTYPE THREAT ON THE EFFICACY OF FIRST-YEAR AFRICAN-AMERICAN COLLEGE STUDENTS WITHIN A PUBLIC UNIVERSITY IN MARYLAND
Chapter 1: Introduction

Introduction

The completion of a college degree has been explicitly linked to the success of individuals in the United States. According to Townsend (2007) and Tinto (1996), 57% of college freshmen fail to return to college before the start of their second year. In consideration of this point, the retention and graduation rate of African-American students has been a far-reaching topic of discussion throughout postsecondary institutions across the country (Swail, Redd, & Perna, 2003). Because society places a significant appraisalon the attainment of a college degree, the failure to secure this binding document of success compromises African-American’s ability to lessen the educational and economic disparities between themselves and other ethnic groups (Townsend, 2007). Per the U.S. Department of Education (2010), “African-Americans have one of the lowest retention and degree rates nationwide, falling below the national average of 57% with only 42% earning their bachelor’s degree within six years” (Table 331).

The abundance of what for literature offers a comprehensive understanding of the problem of retention and degree completion among African-American college students, yet it provides little advanced why for research into its rationale (Banks & Hughes, 2013). In light of this point, the recent authentication of the phenomenon known as “stereotype threat” has provided researchers with an alternate possibility for the academic disparity existing between African-Americans and other ethnic groups in postsecondary institutions. Psychologists Joshua Aronson, and Claude Steele (1995), first introduced the phenomenon of stereotype threat, which posits that negative stereotypes increase an individual’s salience when identified within a particular group or domain.
Specific to education, the stereotypes associated with African-Americans speculate a low level of intellectual capacity and indifferent views toward education, thus, influencing their academic performance and aptitude when measured against perceivably superior ethnic groups (i.e., Caucasians, Asians, etc.) (Johnson-Ahorlu, 2013). Consistent with this idea are the views of W.E.B. Dubois (1989) in his republication of *The Souls of Black Folk* in which he provides perspective on the complexity of being African-American in the following way:

It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, the sense of always looking at one’s self through the eyes of others, of measuring one’s soul by the tape of the world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his twoness…two souls, two thoughts, and two un-reconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keep it from being torn asunder. (p. 5)

African-Americans under the dominion of stereotype threat are forced to negotiate under the assumptions of an identity undeserving of respect and limited in its function. In light of this point, African-American college students are burdened with the pressures to substantiate their relevance through proportionate performance in the classroom (Harrison & Mottley, 2012). The burden of stereotype threat manifests itself when African-American students uphold the benchmarks (e.g., lazy, inferior, etc.) set forth by social constructionist and reinforced by social norms, legislature, and policy. Kim and Hargrove (2013) posit that a deficit-informed framework provides congruence to the portrayal of African-American students as, “incapable; unintelligent, disadvantaged, and at-risk to fail at best” (p. 300). Recent literature suggests that student perception and response to specific stressors, linked in the context of a college culture are precipitants to a determined level of success (Kim & Hargrove, 2013). The pedagogy and social construct of academic institutions often provide ordinance to its culture (Banks &
Hughes, 2013). In consideration of this point, the present study examined the culture of stereotype threats existing within the framework of a public university in Maryland, as well as whether it influenced first-year African-American students’ aptitude and campus awareness. Further, the dis-identification of first-year African-American students was explored through the lens of stereotype threat and its connection to student graduation and preservation rates.

Higher-education literature proposes a strong relationship between student connectedness to campus life and their greater enmeshment into the social and academic framework of postsecondary institutions while bolstering student retention (Townsend, 2007). The existing literature presents a cause for concern when it suggest that students most often influenced by stereotype threat are those who value education the greatest, yet they are also more likely to withdraw from school out of fear confirming existing stereotypes within their domain (Steele & Aronson, 1995).

The present study examines the influence of stereotype threat on first-year African-American college students within a public university in Maryland. The study garnered the perceptions of first-year African-American college students in part to provide a voice to the qualitative data through focus-group responses. Quantitative evidence presents itself through measures in academic achievement (e.g., first-semester grade point average) and data collected from the College Student Experience Questionnaire (CSEQ) in comparison to responses from the Stereotype Confirmation Concern Scale (SCCS), which utilizes a seven point Likert scale ranging from (1) (never) to (7) (always), to measure students’ concerns about confirming stereotypes about their
particular ethnic group through various actions or behaviors over the previous three months (Contrada et al., 2001).

Further inquiry was placed upon the institution’s role in fostering stereotype threat’s effectiveness and the processes that can be put in place to impede its influence. Their experiences were measured qualitatively through focus groups, and quantitatively through the CSEQ, which is used to evaluate college student experiences (Gonyea, Kish, Kuh, Muthiah, & Thomas, 2003). The CSEQ inquires about students’ experiences in the following areas: (1) college activities, (2) the college environment, and (3) estimate of gains (Gonyea, et al., 2003). For the purposes of this project, the researcher employed a portion of the metric to measure students’ views of the college environment and heighten the qualitative data secured during the focus groups as it pertained to their perceptions of campus and classroom experiences.

In addition, a portion of the research examined the consanguineous assumptions and heterogeneous experiences of first-year African-American students at a public university in Maryland. For the purposes of this study, “Black” students are considered an interchangeable/homogenous group. All things being equal, it was assumed that Black students would vary in their response to stereotype threat based on their cultural distinctions and not the symmetrical presumptions being placed upon them by this study. An assumption of the research was that “Black” students would not only vary in their responses to the SCCS but also in their perceptions of campus and classroom experiences.
Statement of the Problem

The study examines the influence of stereotype threat on the efficacy of first-year African-American students within a public university in Maryland by examining their perceptions about the effects of stereotype threat on their academic performance and social interactions. America currently ranks 12th in the world for college graduation rates (Johnson-Ahorlu, 2013). Therefore, African-Americans are at a much higher risk of falling further behind other ethnic groups (i.e., Caucasian, Asian) within the context of the United States since so few are obtaining college degrees. Per the Journal of Blacks in Higher Education (2014), “At publicly operated colleges and universities, 43.3 percent of Black woman earned their degree within six years compared to 34.2 percent of Black men. Similarly, at private colleges and universities, the graduation rate for Black women was 48.5 percent compared to a 39.2 graduation rate for Black men.” (3).

While there are various reasons for the aforementioned outcomes, few researchers have examined the impact of stereotype threat on first-year African-American college students. Notwithstanding, the failure of African-Americans to obtain a college degree significantly increases their likelihood of living in adverse social conditions and possessing a diminished ability to overcome barriers of poverty (Townsend, 2007). Literature substantiates stereotype threat’s influence on African-American students retention and graduation rates due to the psychological consequences. The inferiority associated with stereotype threat often results in the disengagement of capable African-American students from postsecondary institutions across the country, subsequently resulting in increased academic and socio-economic disparities between African-Americans and other ethnic groups (Stroessner & Good, n.d.).
Purpose and Significance of the Problem

The purpose of this study was to analyze the influence of stereotype threat on the efficacy of first-year African-American college students within a public university in Maryland. The distinct goal of the research was to measure stereotype threat’s influence on first-year African-American students’ perceptions of the college experience. In addition, the research looked to measure whether stereotype threat was a determining factor in the academic success of first-year African-American college students at a public university in Maryland.

The significance of this study is centered on the psychological influence of stereotype threat on first-year African-American college students. Its relevance lies in the fact that African-American students’ ability to obtain the necessary education is being impeded by psychological barriers that accompany stereotype threat. Many institutions unknowingly foster stereotype threat’s effectiveness through informal and formal codes that govern institutional culture and inhibit African-American students’ success (Bowen & Bok, 1998). Academic institutions’ failure to view Black students as a heterogeneous group is an example of an informal code that sustains stereotype threat’s effectiveness. Many postsecondary institutions’ policies and practices are founded on a monolithic view of Black students. All things considered, George Mwangi (2014) posits, “Black immigrants wrongly benefit from higher education initiatives created to redress past wrongs against Blacks who are the descendants of U.S. slaves” (p. 4).

For the purposes of this study, academic success was delimited to the first-semester grade point averages (GPAs) of first-year African-American students. Students with a 2.5 GPA (B/80%) or higher were considered successful, while students with a 2.49
or lower were considered sub-standard, based on the Princeton Review’s (2016) GPA conversion chart. Student social interactions were measured via self-reported extracurricular activities (i.e., athletics, fraternity/sorority involvement, student government, etc.) and select questions from the CSEQ. The study also controlled for high-school GPA, Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) scores; and high-school typology (i.e., rural, urban, suburban) in order to provide evidence of prior academic success under various school climates. The project also set out to re-establish African-Americans within their cultural framework while examining the influence of stereotype threat on students’ perceptions, social interactions, and academic success within a public university in Maryland. The researcher sought to emphasize the benefit of stereotype threat awareness and its relevance to first-year African-American college students’ preservation and success.

**Research Questions**

This mixed-methods study critically examined the varying experiences of first-year African-American college students influenced by stereotype threat. The researcher secured first-year African-American students’ perspectives on their experiences of racialization within the context of a public university in Maryland. The research questions were broad, with the primary intent of capturing data on first-year African-American college students, while quantifying data received from the SCCS and the CSEQ. The overarching questions to the research are as follows:

- **Central Question**: What are the experiences (i.e., academic performance, social engagement, course engagement, and awareness) of first-year African-American college students attending a public university in Maryland?
• **Quantitative Question:** How do first-year African-American college students perform academically and interact socially at a public university in Maryland?

The following hypotheses were established for the quantitative portion of the study:

- **(Null Hypothesis) H₀ = μ₁ = μ₂:** There is no statistically significant difference in academic performance between first-year African-American students influenced by stereotype threat and first-year African-American students not influenced by stereotype threat, based on the results of the Stereotype Confirmation Concern Scale.

- **(Alternative Hypothesis) H₁ = μ₁ ≠ μ₂:** There is a statistically significant difference in academic performance between first-year African-American students influenced by stereotype threat and first-year African-American students not influenced by stereotype threat, based on the results of the Stereotype Confirmation Concern Scale.

- **(Null Hypothesis) H₀ = μ₁ = μ₂:** There is no statistically significant difference in social interactions between first-year African-American students influenced by stereotype threat and first-year African-American students not influenced by stereotype threat, based on the results of the Stereotype Confirmation Concern Scale.

- **(Alternative Hypothesis) H₁ = μ₁ ≠ μ₂:** There is a statistically significant difference in social interactions between first-year African-American students influenced by stereotype threat and first-year African-American students not
influenced by stereotype threat, based on the results of the Stereotype Confirmation Concern Scale.

- **Qualitative Question:** How do first-year African-American college students perceive their teaching and learning experiences (i.e., academic achievement, social interaction, course engagement, and awareness) at a public university in Maryland?

**Conceptual Framework**

This study utilized the epistemological approach to research by assembling participants’ subjective experiences via focus groups. This approach was utilized to determine if stereotype threat influenced the efficacy (e.g., academic achievement, social interaction, course engagement, and awareness) of first-year African-American students at a public university in Maryland. The study gathered objective and subjective evidence from participants through survey distribution and focus-group engagement (Creswell, 2013). Focus groups resulted in first-person data regarding whether first-year African-Americans students were influenced by stereotype threat. The study employed a phenomenological research design that looked to understand how student perceptions and academic success were influenced by stereotype threat. A phenomenological study describes the common meanings of multiple individuals’ lived experiences of a concept or phenomenon (Creswell, 2013).

The researcher’s theoretical stance or interpretive framework is centered on critical race theory (CRT), which posits that racism is ingrained within the social construct of America and exists within every fiber of its development (Creswell, 2013). Critical analysis required examining stereotype threat through a theoretical lens
congruent to understanding its subtle influence. CRT provides that lens. Per McCoy and Rodricks (2015), Yosso (2005) defines critical race theory in education as “a theoretical and analytical framework that challenges the ways race and racism impacts educational structures, practices and discourses. It is conceived as a social justice project that works toward the liberatory [sic] potential of schooling” (p. 17). In light of this, this researcher employed CRT to examine the influence of stereotype threat on first-year African-American students at a public university in Maryland. CRT lends itself to the exploration of social institutions through the examination of social constructs and social interactions within an institution’s framework (Creswell, 2013).

CRT found its origins during the Civil Rights Movement and, as a theoretical framework, its primary purpose is to disrupt the status quo through the examination of “unequal and unjust distribution of power and resources along political, economic, racial, and gendered lines” (McCoy & Rodricks, 2015, p.5). The race-based theory is particularly effective in dissecting the social constructs and policies that serve as barriers to marginalized groups, specifically African-Americans. Specific to education, CRT makes salient how current educational structures and pedagogy preserve power structures that foster racism and racialization on college and university campuses (McCoy & Rodricks, 2015). CRT attempts to interpret the ubiquity of racism by taking exception to prior research that understates how the social construct of race effects marginalized racial groups (Trahan & Lemberger, 2013).

In summary, CRT attempts to expose the blind spots that, according to Scharmer and Senge (2009), “appear in individuals, groups, institutions, societies, and systems, and they reveal themselves in our theories and concepts in the form of deep epistemological
and ontological assumption” (p. 22). Per Martin (2015), Liu (2011) “argued that any framework exploring social class should include a component related to an individual’s consciousness around social class” (p. 474). In consideration of this, the researcher critically examined the subject’s responses through the CRT lens to determine if racial subjugation and stereotype threat were present, and to determine if the institution was functioning from a blind spot.

**Conceptual Framework**

The study framework consisted of the following three research streams: Stereotype Threat (stream #1); Teaching, Learning, and Student Achievement (stream #2); and Student Integration (stream #3). Each stream represents a component or variable that is critical to first-year African-American students’ efficacy and retention in postsecondary institutions.
Figure 1. Conceptual framework.
Definition of Terms

The following definitions are provided to minimize the project’s obscuresness and provide additional clarity for the reader.

- **African-American**: An ethnic group of citizens or residents of the United States with total or partial ancestry from any of the native populations in Africa (Darboe, 2006).
- **Aversive racism**: A form of implicit racism in which a person's unconscious negative evaluations of racial or ethnic minorities are realized by a persistent avoidance of interaction with other racial and ethnic groups (Gaertner & Dovidio, 1986).
- **Black immigrant**: Individuals of Black or Afro-Caribbean descent (i.e., persons from non-Spanish-speaking islands in the West Indies such as Jamaica and Trinidad) (George Mwangi, 2014).
- **Campus racial climate**: “The collective patterns of tacit values, beliefs, assumptions, and norms that evolve from an institution’s history and are manifest in its mission, traditions, language, interactions, artifacts, physical structures, and other symbols which differently shape the experiences of various racial and ethnic groups and can function to oppress racial minority [sic] populations within a particular institution” (Cabrera, Terenzini, Pascarella, & Hagedorn, 1999).
- **Course (academic) engagement**: “Academic engagement is measured by student reports; in others, engagement is inferred by the grades students receive” (Gallini & Moely, 2003).
• **Dis-identification:** A reconceptualization of the self and of one’s values so as to remove the domain as a self-identity or as a basis for self-evaluation (Steele, 1997).

• **Domain dis-identification:** Removing one’s sense of identity more broadly from the evaluative domain and not allowing success or failure in that domain to affect one’s self-concept (Mendoza-Denton, 2014).

• **Micro-aggressions:** Subtle forms of racism that dramatically affect the lives of people of color (Huber & Solorzano, 2014).

• **Macro-aggressions:** “Large scale, systems-related stressors that are widespread, sometimes becoming highly publicized, race-related, traumatic events” (DOI:10.1002/ache.20021 p. 93).

• **Othering:** “A process of differentiation and demarcation by which the line is drawn between ‘us’ and ‘them,’ between the more and the less powerful, and through which social distance is established and maintained” (Jensen, 2011, p. 13).

• **Racialization:** “A form of othering projected through stereotyping and results denying access to resources, labor markets, and full participation in society, projecting a ‘not-quite citizenship’ status” (George Mwangi, 2014, p. 12).

• **Stereotype threat:** Being at risk of confirming as a self-characteristic a negative stereotype about one’s group (Steele & Aronson, 1995).

• **Stereotype Confirmation Concern Scale (SCCS):** An 11-point item measure of participants’ fears that they are confirming a stereotype threat (Gamst, Liang, & Der-Karabetian, 2011).
• **Academic self-efficacy**: A person’s belief about his or her capabilities on a specific task (Bandura, 1997).

**Assumptions, Limitations, and Delimitations**

**Assumptions**

The researcher assumed that stereotype threat is a real phenomenon with real influence over the academic achievement and perceptions of first-year African-American students. The researcher also assumed that social structures foster stereotype threat’s influence through formal and informal practices that impede African-American students’ full potential. An assumption specific to the research site is that due to its rigid admission standard and its students’ high acumen, many African-American students could have potentially established a resilience that minimizes stereotype threat’s influence.

**Limitations**

Four primary limitations existed within the study. The first was that the researcher encountered a smaller-than-anticipated sample size because Black students represent a small portion of the student population at the research site. In light of this, the researcher was dependent on a large percentage of the Black student population to participate in the study. The second limitation was that for the purposes of this study, Black students were viewed as interchangeable, which could have skewed SCCS results since many non-U.S.-born Blacks are not subject to the stereotypes outlined in the scale. The third limitation was that the researcher did not foresee any financial complications due to the previously budgeted monetary incentive being offered to research participants. Last, the results of this study are confined to a single institution and not reflective of other Maryland public universities.
Delimitations

The participants were limited to first-year African-American college students at a public university in Maryland. The variables in the quantitative phase were delimited to students’ (1) GPAs, (2) ACT/SAT scores, (3) CSEQ responses, (4) and responses to the SCCS, the study’s single tool for measuring stereotype threat’s existence. The site selection was unique in that it occurred within a public university in Maryland. The study was delimited in that it was based on the perspectives and interpretations of a single researcher with inherent biases, despite efforts to account for them using both quantitative and qualitative analysis.

Summary

Chapter 1 provides the reader with an introduction to the phenomenon of stereotype threat and its influence on the efficacy of first-year African-American students in postsecondary institutions. There is a significant push for diversity and multiculturalism within postsecondary institutions across the country. However, in order to preserve diversity and multiculturalism, postsecondary institutions must first acknowledge stereotype threat’s importance in relation to African-American students’ retention in and successful completion of college. For this to occur, postsecondary institutions must align their goals and policies with the students’ needs, particularly those most influenced by stereotype threat. The study’s intent was to provide an understanding of stereotype threat’s influence while reconciling the needs of those most influenced by stereotype threat to better prepare them for postsecondary retention and completion.

The research was guided by the following research question: What influence does stereotype threat have on the efficacy (i.e., academic achievement, social interactions,
course engagement, and awareness) of first-year African-American college students at a public university in Maryland? The researcher aspired to secure the perspectives of current first-year African-American students regarding their college experience as it pertained to academic success, social interactions, learning experiences, and teaching experiences under the determining factor of stereotype threat. The chapter that follows offers a review of the literature and provides substantive evidence in support of the three research streams relevant to this study.
Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction to the Problem

The purpose of this research was to examine the influence of stereotype threat on the efficacy (e.g., academic achievement, social interactions, course engagement, and awareness) of first-year African-American college students at a public university in Maryland. The literature was examined and filtered to identify factors that influence student success within postsecondary institutions. It was necessary to examine literature related to social identity in order to fully understand the relationship that exists between African-American student success and stereotype threat. The scholarship was expansive and established interconnectedness between stereotype threat and student efficacy (George Mwangi, 2014). Although mutually exclusive, the psychological barriers that accompany stereotype threat impedes a student’s ability to establish relationships with peers and faculty, thereby restricting their ability to successfully acculturate and perform academically within postsecondary institutions (Logel, Walton, Spencer, Peach, & Mark, 2012).

The present study was intended to impart knowledge not only to first-year African-American students burdened by stereotype threat, but also to postsecondary institutions, through evidence-based remedies to address the problem of stereotype threat within the African-American student population. Existing research has offered stereotype threat as reasonableness to the problem of student efficacy and retention in postsecondary institutions across the nation. The literature was significantly reduced in scope while preserving the elements essential to the present study. Each research stream served as a snapshot of the larger bod of research and to inform the study by focusing on the
phenomenon of stereotype threat and its contribution to the problems of academic deficiency and attrition by first-year African-American college students’ in postsecondary institutions.

The chapter’s end was to reacquaint the reader with the research streams and reiterate the researcher’s purpose by providing literature that supported the directional stance of the study. The study aligned itself both with and against the current body of research as it pertained to stereotype threat’s influence on the efficacy of first-year African-American students. The conceptual framework reiterated the interconnectedness between stereotype threat; teaching, learning, and student achievement; and student integration. The literature was minced and expanded upon into themes to better display the relationship between the independent variable, stereotype threat, and the dependent variable, student efficacy, within postsecondary institutions. The findings also looked to satisfy the research questions and sub-questions that petitioned the study’s purpose through evidence-based discovery in the form of peer-reviewed literature and scholarly publishing.

Stream 1 provided the reader with an introduction to stereotype threat and its implications for African-American students in postsecondary institutions. Stream 1 also provided evidence of potential barriers, including student perceptions that influence Black student achievement and preservation in postsecondary institutions. Stream 2 imparted knowledge to the reader of the importance of African-American students’ engagement in their teaching and learning experiences in order to be successful. Considering this, literature was provided in support of experiential learning to establish relationships with instructors and administrators, which the literature supports as critical
to African-American student retention. Stream 3 reviewed the need for student integration through peer and campus connectedness, while providing an opportunity to discuss how the monolithic views of Black students provide another barrier to African-American students successfully integrating into the college community.

**Conceptual Framework**

What are the experiences (i.e. academic performance, social engagement, course engagement, and awareness) for first-year African-American college students attending a Public University in Maryland?

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**Stream # 1**  
Stereotype Threat  
Barriers to Success  
Student Perceptions  

**References:**  
Mwangi, 2014; Banks & Hughes, 2013; Massey, Mooney & Torres, 2007; Stewart, 2014; King, 2011; Psicologica, 2006; Aronson & Steele, 1995; Massey & Owens, 2014; Logel & Walton, 2012

**Stream # 2**  
Teaching, Learning and Student Achievement  
Student Engagement  
Student Retention  

**References:**  

**Stream # 3**  
Student Integration  
Peer Connectedness  
Campus Connectedness  
The Black Juxtaposition  

**References:**  
Smith, Hung & Franklin, 2011; Fischer, 2009; Winograd & Rust, 2006; Ogbu & Simons, 1998; Gilbert, 2009; Bowen & Bok, 1998; Guiffrida & Douthit, 2010; Reid, 2013; Strayhorn & Johnson, 2014; Zamudio & Lichter, 2008; Tinto, 1993

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**Figure 2. Conceptual framework.**

**Literature Review**

Racial disparities in the areas of equality, rights, and educational access became more prevalent towards the end of the 1950s, in part due to the Civil Rights Movement.
The landmark case of *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) catapulted the movement for educational equality for all United States citizens regardless of race (Davis Ganao, Silvestre, & Glenn, 2013). During that time, African-Americans engaged in regular protests to demand their equality, and White Americans became more aware of America’s oppressive treatment of minority groups. The focus of these protests included bringing awareness to the privileged access White Americans had to restaurants, transportation, and education. Specifically, America’s separate-but-equal approach to education access and funding became a point of contention (Williams & McShane, 1999). According to Bowen and Bok (1998), “By the mid-1960s, amid a rising concern over the civil rights, a number of schools began to recruit black students” (p. 5).

In spite of the educational movement initiated by *Brown v. Board of Education*, African-Americans still fail to elude the internal representation of *less than* when it pertains to intellectual tasks (Mendoza-Denton, 2014). Publications such as *The Bell Curve* (Herrnstein & Murray, 1994) have aided in such beliefs of African-American inferiority; however, the authors do put forward the notion that “Measures of intelligence have reliable statistical relationships with important social phenomena, but they are a limited tool for deciding what to make of any given individual” (p. 21). The present study implies a statistical relationship between student efficacy and the phenomenon of stereotype threat. Although this study did not utilize IQ scores to measure student achievement, it did employ alternative metrics to measure student success (e.g., GPA, student engagement, social interactions, etc.). The following section provides the reader with a synopsis of stereotype threat, since it was the nucleus of this study and further
serves to inform the reader of its implications on the micro and macro levels at postsecondary institutions.

**Stream #1: Stereotype Threat**

Claude Steele and Josh Aronson (1995) first introduced stereotype threat in “Stereotype Threat and the Intellectual Test Performance of African Americans.” The term “stereotype threat” pertains to the fear of confirming a stereotype about one’s group in a specific domain (Steele & Aronson, 1995). The term was derived from the negative social identity placed upon the Jewish community by the Germans during the Holocaust (Steele & Aronson, 1995). The theoretical assumption as it pertains to education is that in order to achieve academic success, one must identify with the domain in which one learns (Steele & Aronson, 1997). The environment must be an environment of acceptance and benevolence in order to minimize stereotype threat’s effectiveness. Schweinle and Mims (2009) posit, “Children’s academic self-efficacy is one of the strongest predictors of achievement” (p. 501). Steele and Aronson’s (1998) research has established that vulnerability does exist for African-American students due to their internalization of the negative views carried by others about them. The researchers also believe that the negatively stereotyped group procures a level of anxiety that impacts their ability to function optimally due to the awareness that they are potential targets of stereotypes.

Fischer (2010) discusses the fact that minority students at primarily White institutions feel the added pressure of stereotype threat due to the perceived affirmative action requirement that afforded them admission. Fischer (2010) identifies the stressor as “performance burden,” which stresses a fear of fulfilling the negative stereotype of intellectual servitude by the dominant group. A series of studies by Steele and Aronson
(1998) reflects that African-American students’ test scores did decline when a test was prefaced as being used for diagnostic purposes as opposed to being used for non-diagnostic purposes. The pressure of being measured diagnostically against their White counterparts triggered a stereotype threat that fostered feelings of doubt, inadequacy, retreat, and anxiety. It is notable that the Black subjects used in the studies were all strong students; despite this trait, all fell victim to stereotype threat. The pressures of stereotype threat for many African-American college students result in withdrawal or what Claude Steele (1997) terms “dis-identification,” a form of self-preservation from the negative feelings associated with stereotype threat. Dis-identification occurs when one detaches oneself from the domain creating the feelings of discomfort. The conceptual framework below (Figure 3) demonstrates how stereotype threat works to diminish the academic capacity of students under its influence.

**A Model of Stereotype Threats Cycle of Influence**

![Figure 3](image.png)

*Figure 3.* A model of stereotype threat's cycle of influence (adapted from Massey & Owens, 2013).
Stereotype threat is a micro-level theory that focuses on individuals and their interactions; however, the present study also examined the influence of stereotype threat at the macro level by examining the interrelationship and social processes of first-year African-American students at a public university in Maryland. George Herbert Mead (1863-1931) provided significant contributions to the field of sociology with his study of the human mind and self-development. Mead proposed that both the mind and self are social products that are representative of the individual’s interactions with others in social situations rather than of their genetic predispositions (Bryjak & Sorka, 1994). Stereotype threat serves as an expansion of Mead’s self-development theory because it establishes its roots in the fact that an individual’s self-development is contingent upon how one perceives he is being looked upon by others within a particular domain.

The present study examined the perceptions of 169 first-year African-American students to determine if the perceived threat existed and to further delineate if there was a relationship between first-year African-American students’ perceived threat of stereotypes and their collegiate success. Stereotype threat was also evaluated for its existence within the framework of a public university in Maryland, or what Mead coins “generalized other.” Mead considered the generalized other to be the dominion in which one currently exists and is a member. He posits, “With increased exposure to this large entity, the child comes to adopt the perspectives of the generalized other – the entire sociocultural system – as her own. Society’s interpretation of the world and of the child becomes the child’s interpretation of the world and herself” (Bryjak & Soroso, 1994, p. 112).
For the purposes of this research, the public university in Maryland served as the generalized other in which first-year African-American students were members. The researcher examined the students’ perspectives of the generalized other in which they existed to ascertain whether they felt a part of a sociocultural system that was supportive and fostered a positive view of self. Table 1 encapsulates literature and identifies circumstances in which performance is influenced by stereotype threat. The following section provides the reader with a brief overview of the research streams and a synthesis of the literature. The research streams are free-standing and provide the reader with the abstract thoughts of several researchers, theorists, and experts, all or whom are major contributors in their subject areas of social identity theory, stereotype threat, higher education, and social justice issues.

Table 1

*Situations in Which Stereotype Threat is Made Salient*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Domain-Function</th>
<th>Outcomes</th>
<th>Literature</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>African-Americans</td>
<td>Intelligence Quotient Test</td>
<td>Scored lower than their White counterparts when prefaced that the test was to measure diagnostic intelligence.</td>
<td>Steele &amp; Aronson, 1995</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African-Americans</td>
<td>Standardized Test</td>
<td>Scored lower than their White counterparts when prefaced that the test was to measure diagnostic ability.</td>
<td>Steele, 1997</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women</td>
<td>Science, Technology, Engineering, Math/Standardized Test</td>
<td>Woman scored lower than their male counterparts in the areas of math.</td>
<td>Beasley &amp; Fisher, 2012; McGlore &amp; Aronson, 2007; Spencer, Steele, &amp; Quinn, 1999</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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| Low-Income Students | Standardized Test | Scored lower than higher-income college students when preaced that the test measures diagnostic ability. | Harrison, Stevens, Monty & Coakley, 2006; |

**Barriers to success.** The juxtaposition of postsecondary institutional practices and African-American student efficacy should be evaluated more closely when monitoring for stereotype threat, student achievement, and persistence. In “Access to Knowledge: An Agenda for Our Nation's Schools,” Ogbu (1990) asserts that “American racial stratification affects black children’s schooling in two ways: through the way ‘the system’ treats blacks (i.e., societal policies, and practices, and within-school treatment of blacks) and the perceptions of and responses of blacks themselves to schooling” (p. 73). In consideration of this, Ogbu (1990) proposes two types of barriers experienced by African-American students in school: instrumental barriers and expressive barriers. Instrumental barriers are more sovereign in nature and manifest themselves structurally through economic, political, social, and educational impediments (Ogbu, 1990). Expressive barriers manifest themselves through voluntary and involuntary actions (i.e., intellectual or cultural disparagement) towards the marginalized group by the prevailing group (Goodlad & Keating, 1990). Moreover, instrumental barriers are demonstrated through admissions disparities, pedagogical practices, and disproportionate faculty representation that function as a form of glass ceiling for many African-American students at primarily White postsecondary institutions (Goodlad & Keating, 1990).

To circumvent these barriers, African-American students subscribe to what Ogbu (1990) calls “instrumental responses,” which are various forms of coping strategies utilized to feel less marginalized. Specific to education, one of the most common coping strategies practiced by African-American students is clientship or “Uncle Tomming”
(Ogbu, 1990, p. 69), which is a form self-preservation that requires African-Americans to adopt the norms and ways of the dominant culture in hopes of gaining favor and/or acceptance. In “Acting White: A Critical Review,” Kita Sohn (2010) challenges the hypothesis that African-Americans who subscribe to this form of self-preservation underperform in the classroom due to the burden of acting White. Sohn (2010) provides the following examples of acting White (present in Ogbu’s original research):

1. Speaking standard English;
2. Listening to White music and White radio stations;
3. Spending a significant amount of time in the library studying;
4. Working hard to get good grades in school;
5. Getting good grades in school;
6. Being on time; and
7. Putting on “airs” (p. 220).

Considering the aforementioned, high-achieving African-American students are at risk of underachievement because the “sell out” mentality associated with their academic success generates a fear of being judged by their peers (Sohn, 2010). Furthermore, Smith, Hung, and Franklin (2011) assert that because of the psychological strain placed upon them, African-American students develop what is called “racial battle fatigue.” The researchers also put forward that “racism and racial micro-aggressions [sic] operate as psycho-pollutants in the social environment and add to the overall race-related stress for Black men, Black woman, and other racially marginalized groups” (p. 67).
Expressive barriers most often manifest themselves through micro-aggressions that are subtle in nature. Smith, Hung, and Franklin (2011) define micro-aggressions as follows:

- Subtle verbal and nonverbal insults directed at People of Color, often automatically or unconsciously;
- Layered insults based on one’s race, race-gender, class, sexuality, language, immigration status, phenotype, accent, or surname; and
- Cumulative insults that cause unnecessary stress to People of Color (p. 67).

Consequently, African-Americans form expressive responses to the aforementioned micro-aggressions through the formation of identities that oppose the dominant group. The aforementioned identities can be both positive and negative. The positive outcomes of forming an oppositional identity are the establishment of empowerment groups such as Black student unions, multicultural programs, and civil campaigns such as Black Lives Matter. These groups renounce racial subjugation and empower marginalized groups. The negative consequence of forming oppositeness to the dominant group is the risk of domain dis-identification by African-American students, which often results in students leaving school and failing to obtain the necessary education.

**Student perceptions.** The perceptual experiences of African-American students at postsecondary institutions are considered one of the biggest predictors of student success. The vague and indistinct nature of stereotype threat influences student performance positively and negatively both inside and outside the classroom (King, 2011). Summaries of literature conclude that postsecondary institutions do not function in
a vacuum but serve as a “microcosm of the larger surrounding environment” (Kim & Hargrove, 2013, p. 302) Additionally, Senge et al. (2012) assert that “all learners construct knowledge from an inner scaffold made up of their individual and social experiences, emotions, will, aptitudes, beliefs, values, self-awareness, purpose, and more” (p. 27). In consideration of this, stereotype threat plays a critical role in shaping the inner scaffold of first-year African-American students through their subscription to negative stereotypes as it pertains to their intellectual capacity. Per King (2011), Chickering and Reisser (2005) note, “Development involves an ability to update our self-concept based on information from others. In college, students weave together the feedback from grades and test scores, coaches and directors, and friends and loved ones and form a fairly accurate picture of how others see them” (p. 28).

Borrowing from counseling psychology, Eric Erikson’s stages of psychosocial development connotes how the stages of Identity vs. Role Confusion (12-18 years old) are critical to a college student’s identity stabilization and success (King, 2011). In Identity vs. Role Confusion, children need to develop a sense of self and personal identity. Success leads to an ability to stay true to oneself, while failure leads to confusion and a weak sense of self. The U.S. Department of Health and Human Resources has since extended the age of adolescence and now divides adolescence into three stages: early adolescence (ages 11-13), middle adolescence (ages 14-18), and late adolescence (ages 19-24) (Blimling, 2013, p. 11). Considering this, adolescence now extends beyond the college years well into young adulthood. Whaley and Noel (2010) put forward, “Because identity development is a crucial phase in adolescence, how these disparities influence self-perceptions among African-Americans from middle school to
high school to college is an important consideration” (p. 150). To that end, stereotype threat has the potential to impede Black student development in part due to the attitudes and beliefs linked to African-Americans’ lack of success in the classroom. Per Smith and Hung (2008), children’s awareness of stereotype in pre-adolescence (ages 6-10) is heightened drastically, particularly among those branded intellectually deficient, who display stereotype threat consciousness at an early age. Wilkins (2014) postulates that “students who feel academically marginalized by race or class develop contextually protective identity strategies to allow them to retain dignity but also contribute to social reproduction” (p. 87).

Jane Elliot’s blue-eye/brown-eye experiment is a classic example of a case in which perceptions and prejudice can be shaped at an early age and are preserved through adulthood. The social experiment took place in Riceville, Iowa, shortly after Martin Luther King, Jr.’s assassination. The study consisted of Ms. Elliott (a teacher) inquiring of her students’ interest in judging people based on their eye color. Subsequently, the third-grade class was divided into two sections, the brown-eyed section and the blue-eyed section. The children were informed that the blue-eyed people were better and smarter than the brown-eyed people. The blue-eyed children were also granted more privileges than the brown-eyed children, including receiving an additional five minutes at recess. The brown-eyed children were not allowed to use the water fountain; instead, they were required to use paper cups. The brown-eyed children were not allowed to play with blue-eyed children, and the brown-eyed students were also required to wear collars so that their eye color could be identified from a distance. The roles were switched the following day. Soon after, at recess, a brown-eyed student hit a blue-eyed student in the stomach for
calling him “brown eyes” due to the negative connotation of brown-eyed people established by the teacher. One student pointed out that “brown eyes” was synonymous with Black people being called bad names. One brown-eyed student wore glasses on the following day in an attempt to conceal his eye color and to avoid being viewed negatively. Ms. Elliot later reported that she had seen sweet, compassionate, cooperative students turn to vicious, discriminative third-graders in a matter of minutes.

One could argue that Jane Elliot was truly the first to recognize how stereotype threat influences student performance in the classroom. Ms. Elliot tested third-graders’ performance under the aforesaid experimental circumstances using a phonics card pack to establish how societal attitudes and mistreatments could affect one’s performance. On the first day, when brown eyed-students were told they were not as good as blue-eyed students, it took brown-eyed students five-and-a-half minutes to get through the card pack. The next day, when they were assigned the blue-eyed label, it only took them two-and-a-half minutes (Boulton, 2013). King (2011) asserts, “When a particular social identity [is] made salient at an implicit level, performance [is] altered in the direction predicted by the stereotype associated with the identity” (p. 32). In light of this, the Jane Elliot experiment was an admonishment in how a weakened social identity made salient can alter one’s performance in a given task.

Stream # 2: Teaching, Learning, and Student Achievement

The failure of many postsecondary institutions to realize the nexus between how professors teach and how students learn is critical to the issue of student efficacy and retention (Tinto, 2012). Walton and Cohen (2007) assert that trust between a student and teacher promotes relationships that foster open communication and critical appraisal and
in turn a student’s willingness to learn. Per Winograd and Rust (2006), students’ failure to do well in a course could result in a diminished capacity in subsequent courses and compromise their academic self-efficacy. Furthermore, Adams (2005) stresses the importance of the need for Black students to see themselves within the curriculum; failure to do so could result in them feeling marginalized. Adams (2005) also asserts in “Establishing Intellectual Space for Black Students in Predominantly White Universities through Black Studies,” Black students “who enrolled in Black studies courses felt less pressure to focus on extraneous issues” (e.g., stereotype threat) (p. 285).

In “The Mis-Education of the Negro,” Carter G. Woodson (1933) asserts, “The emphasis is not upon the necessity for separate systems but the need for common sense schools and teachers who understand and continue in sympathy with whom they instruct” (p. 28). The interplay between stereotype threat and African-American student learning can be linked to how students perceive they are viewed by their instructors. Extensive research has been conducted to find a solution to reduce the unfavorable outcomes for students influenced by stereotype threat and prejudicial attitudes in the classroom (Harrison, Stevens, Monty, & Coakley, 2006).

In order for African-American students to perform at an optimal level, postsecondary institutions must create what is classified as a stereotype-safe environment (Logel et al., 2012). In addition, Tinto (2006) purports that the scope of practice for faculty at postsecondary institutions should extend beyond simple instruction to include forging environments that bolster student learning. Prior evaluative literature of student success and school environment has garnered mixed results (Bentley-Edwards & Chapman-Hilliard, 2015). However, the preceding literature contends that Black students
at Historically Black College and Universities (HBCUs) were more congruous in their learning environment and more apt in their studies than those Black students at Primarily White Institutions (PWIs), in part due to the supportive environment and peer camaraderie at HBCUs (Bentley-Edwards & Chapman-Hilliard, 2015).

In “Race and Racism in the Experiences of Black Male Resident Assistants at Predominantly White Universities,” Harper et al. (2015) assert, “Black male undergraduates attending historically Black colleges and universities often access support they need without having to routinely contend with the psychological effects of stereotypes” (p. 180). In summary, postsecondary institutions should provide opportunities for marginalized students to have positive in-group interactions with other members of their group (Logel et al., 2012). Taylor and Antony (2001) maintain the importance of continuity in postsecondary institutions by attending to the problem of low minority faculty within our nation’s colleges and universities. Stewart (2014) refers to postsecondary institutions’ failure to understand the identity crisis of the Black student within the framework of the college campus as the “hidden curriculum.” The hidden curriculum proposes that postsecondary institutions have an obligation to understand the experiences of Black students within the context of a college community (Stewart, 2014).

Tinto (1999) asserts that the experiential component of learning is vacant within the classrooms of first-year postsecondary students in view of the traditional mold of pedagogy. In light of this point, first-year African-American students fail to establish meaningful relationships or mentorships with instructors, peers, and faculty. George Mwangi and Fries-Britt (2015) posit, “Like all students, Black students look for indicators from faculty and staff that they matter and that there is a genuine interest in
their needs” (p. 22). Harper et Al. (2015) assert that even the most accomplished Black students at PWIs are still met with trepidation by their professors as well as by their White peer group about their intellectual ability. In “Stereotype Threat Reduction and Wise Schooling: Towards the Successful Socialization of African American Doctoral Students in Education,” Taylor and Antony (2001) posit that postsecondary institutions could benefit from what Steele (1997, p. 624) calls “wise schooling” to minimize the influence of stereotype threat on students. Wise schooling consists of a plan of action designed to improve academic performance of students influenced by stereotype threat. Instructors implement the following strategies:

(a) Demonstrate explicit confidence in students;
(b) Build student capacity through challenging course work;
(c) Emphasize expanding knowledge through education and professional practices;
(d) Affirm intellectual belongingness;
(e) Teach critical analysis; and
(f) Invite proximity to role models who have prevailed in spite of stereotype threat. (Taylor and Antony, 2001)

In a similar study, “The Stuff of Stereotypes: Toward Unpacking Identity Threats amid African American Students’ Learning Experiences,” Larnell, Boston, and Bragelman (2014) explore the influence of stereotype threat on first-year African-American undergraduate learners in the context of a math-specific setting, the caveat being that African-American students were overly represented contrary to this project’s ratio. The study assessed African-American students under three separate learning
circumstances to determine their level of susceptibility to stereotype threat. The study aimed to uncover how stereotype threat is not only situated in the classroom under circumstances of examination, but also within the context of college dormitories, hallways, student collaboratives, etc. The results were consistent with the literature outlined in this study showing that Black students’ susceptibility to stereotype threat was determined by how they perceived the environment to be situated. Also consistent with the literature in this research, the study corroborates how Black students’ lack of connection with instructors can reduce their espousal to critical appraisal and augment their willingness to engage and learn in the classroom.

**Student engagement.** A growing body of educational and psychological research identifies school engagement as a precipitant to student retention (Daily, Shin, Thakral, Selders, & Vera, 2008). Per Eryilmaz (2015) “Engagement is the most important side of learning” (p. 18). In consideration of this, Tinto (1999) posits that student success is more probable if students feel they are valued members of their academic institution’s fiber. Substantive engagement with peers, faculty, and staff forecasts student retention in any college setting (e.g., urban, public, and private) (Tinto, 1999). Per Flynn (2014), Tinto (1993) identifies two types of engagement: academic and social engagement. Social engagement is identified through student participation in recreation, club participation, and campus performance, all of which indicate a healthy camaraderie with peers and the postsecondary institution (Flynn, 2014). Academically engaged students are diligent in their classroom efforts and are active participants with their instructors and study groups (Flynn, 2014). Furthermore, Flynn (2014) asserts that the aforementioned types of engagement are neither “mutually exclusive nor mutually inclusive” (p. 469).
Flynn (2014) expands upon the varying levels of engagement when he references Coates’ (2006) “academic and social distinctions of engagement” (p. 471). Flynn (2014) goes on to mention that Coates (2006) created four quadrants of engagement, which are as follows:

1. Students with high ratings of both academic and social engagement are termed “Intense”;
2. Students with high academic achievement paired with low social engagement are considered “Independent”; 
3. Students with low academic achievement paired with high social engagement are termed “Collaborative”; and
4. Students with low ratings on both academic and social engagement are considered “Passive.” (p. 471)

In “School Engagement among Urban Adolescents of Color: Does Perception of Social Support and Neighborhood Safety Really Matter?”, Daly, Shin, Thakral, Selders, & Vera (2009) define school engagement as a “multicultural construct consisting of attitude, investment, and commitment that students make toward school” (p. 64). Similarly, Carter and Fountaine (2012) make reference to Astin’s (1984) theory of student involvement, which reiterates how active and engaged students report more positive outcomes. When postsecondary institutions fail to reciprocate those same attitudes, commitment, and investments to their students, they also fail to create a stereotype-safe environment, thus leaving students feeling marginalized and susceptible to stereotype threat’s influence (Logel et al., 2012). In accordance, Buchs, Chatard, Desrichard, & Mugny (2009) share corresponding views when they say, “Students’
evaluations and opinions are constantly being pushed and pulled by social influence dynamics. Their attitudes and performance shift in response to those around them, to the expectation of others, to the salience of cultural stereotypes in academic settings” (p. 125).

**Student retention.** Postsecondary institutions’ failure to create stereotype–safe environments results in what Steele (1997) coins “domain dis-identification,” or one’s decision to remove oneself from the specific domain where he/she is being evaluated and/or judged. Walton and Cohen (2007) note that “in academic and professional settings, members of socially stigmatized groups are more uncertain of their bonds and thus more sensitive to issues of social belonging” (p. 82). Specific to education, in the case of African-American students, dis-identification occurs in the form of forfeiture from college and universities, thus perpetuating their societal depreciation due to failure to secure the elusive college degree. Per the *Journal of Blacks in Higher Education* (Winter, 2006/2007), Department of Education data demonstrates that Black students who earn a four-year college degree have significantly higher incomes than Blacks who have some or no college experience. In research conducted by McGlynn (2014) exploring Black and Latino academic achievement in community colleges, the researcher identifies stereotypes as a contributing factor in the disparity in achievement. Considering that, focus group findings from McGlynn’s (2014) research indicate that when postsecondary institutions commit to campus diversity and engagement strategies, the influence of stereotype threat potentially lessens or disappears.

A considerable amount of literature has been established summarizing how the intermediary between Black students, faculty, within group organizations and their
families are influential to Black student success at predominately white institutions (Guiffrida & Douthit, 2010). In “The Black Student Experience at Predominantly White Colleges: Implications for School and College Counselors,” Tinto (1993) stresses the importance of Black students becoming socially integrated into college and university life to increase their chances of success. Tinto (1993) further contends that contrary to their White counterparts who seamlessly establish informal relationships with peers, Black students’ relationships manifest themselves through formal establishments (e.g., black student unions, social justice groups, etc.). Strayhorn and Johnson (2014) state, “One of the consummate goals of higher education is to prepare students for active, equitable, and full participation in a diverse democracy, which, at least in part, depends on their ability to interact across difference generally and race/ethnicity specifically” (p. 386). Considering this point, Guiffrida and Douthit (2010) assert that Black students’ failure to engage in diverse interests hinders their ability to socially integrate into the larger campus population. This is evidenced by the most recent protest by Black students at notable colleges and universities such as the University of Missouri, Yale, and Johns Hopkins over racial discrimination and lack of inclusiveness within the college culture.

**Stream Three: Student Integration**

Previous literature has measured student achievement/success by way of test scores and GPAs. In “Do Psychosocial and Study Skill Factors Predict College Outcomes?: A Meta-Analysis,” Robbins et al. (2004) posit that “The use of alternative measures to standardized achievement for postsecondary selection is under intense review because of the ongoing and controversial public policy debate on the fairness of testing” (p. 262). In light of this, the deviation from standard achievement tests in favor
of alternative measures is “in part because of the persistent test differences across racial and ethnic groups” (Robbins et al., 2004, p. 262). Daniel Pink (2009) posits that student drivers of autonomy, mastery, and purpose are in limited supply in traditional classrooms in favor of external, ineffective drivers such as grades and test scores. In “Student Success, Retention, and Graduation: Definitions, Theories, Practices, Patterns, and Trends,” Noel and Levitz (2008, p. 4) assert that student success also requires consideration in the following areas:

- Successful completion of students’ academic goals of degree attainment (Levitz, 2001).
- Students meeting clearly defined educational goals, whether in the form of course credits, career advancement, or achievement of new skills (Tinto, 1993).
- Students’ successful academic and social integration into the college community, marked by feelings that one fits at the institution and positive educational attitudes and experiences (Bean, 1980).
- The match between students’ motivation and academic ability and their academic and social characteristics (Cabrera, Castaneda, Nora, & Hengstler, 1992).
- The degree of direct involvement of students in the academic and social life of their institutions (Astin, 1984)
- The byproduct of student success and satisfaction and ultimately the indicator of institutional success (Noel, Levitz, & Saluri, 1985).
Figure 4. Model of Student Departure (adapted from Tinto, 1993).
Tinto’s (1993) Model of Student Departure (Figure 4) also provides a framework for first-year student success. The framework is broken down into five categories that influence a first-year student’s decision to remain in or depart from his/her academic domain (Tinto, 1993). The first component is a student’s pre-entry attributes, which considers a student’s propensity for success through review of prior academic achievement, family history, and skills and ability. The second component consists of a student’s goals/commitment to achievement of those goals (i.e., educational, occupational). The third component is what Tinto (1993) terms “external commitments,” which are outside obligations (e.g., family, financial, etc.) that significantly influence a student’s willingness to remain or dis-identify with the academic institution.

The aforementioned components interact to formulate informal (faculty/staff interaction) and formal (grades, etc.) institutional experiences within a college framework that subsequently lead to negative or positive college experiences for the student. In addition, Tinto (1993) asserts that student participation in extracurricular activities and informal peer associations fosters positive experiences and helps integrate students into the college fiber. In short, if a student struggles academically and socially, he/she is likely to disengage from the academic institution. However, if students successfully juggle both academic and social components of college, they will likely have positive outcomes (Tinto, 1993).

Peer connectedness. Per Kuh, Kinzie, Buckley, Bridges, and Hayek (2006), positive peer interaction has a significant influence on student exposure to diversity,
efficacy, and academic achievement. Kuh et al. (2006) identified the following peer interactions that promote student learning:

- Discussing course content with other students,
- Working on group projects for classes,
- Tutoring other students,
- Participating in intramural sports,
- Being a member of a social fraternity or sorority,
- Discussing racial and ethnic issues,
- Socializing with someone from a different racial or ethnic group,
- Being elected to a student office, and
- Spending time each week socializing or in student clubs or organizations. (p. 42)

African-American students under the influence of stereotype threat are faced with a double-edged sword when it comes to the college experience. African-American students seek out group experiences for support purposes, but in many instances, they fail to engage with outside peer groups due to the perception that they will not be welcomed. Kuh et al. (2006) asserts that “a more diverse student body is associated with greater interaction among the groups and more positive relations among students” (p. 54).

**Campus connectedness.** Per Flynn (2014), Tinto (1993) asserts that “integration, involvement, and engagement are not identical” (p. 468). Both involvement and engagement refer to observable behaviors, while integration embodies “a valued interaction such as arises when one perceives oneself as a valued member of
a community” (p. 468). Moreover, it appears that within-group experiences and participation in clubs and organizations are more beneficial to African-American students’ matriculation (Guiffrida, 2004). Reid (2013) contends that Black students actively involved in the establishment of policy through student government groups are associated with high achievement, as evidenced by GPAs of 3.0 or above. African-American students involved in civic engagement have also seen positive outcomes, as evidenced by increased retention rates, higher GPAs, and a higher average of college degree completion (Cress, Burack, Giles, Elkins, & Stevens, 2010). The opportunity to provide mentorship to K-12 students also provides African-American students with a form of camaraderie with their institution’s mission and purpose (Cress et al., 2010).

**The Black juxtaposition.** According to George Mwangi (2014), a majority of higher education literature positions native-born Blacks and Black immigrants into a uniform category. The number of Black immigrants has grown exponentially, more than doubling over the past decade, and Afro-Caribbeans (persons from non-Spanish-speaking islands in the West Indies, such as Jamaica and Trinidad) now comprise around 70 percent of the foreign-born Black population of 2.1 million, with most of the rest coming from the continent of Africa (Logan & Dean, 2003). The percentage of foreign-born Blacks over 25 years old with a bachelor’s degree is 25 percent, compared with 16 percent of native-born Blacks (U.S. Census Bureau, 2004).

The homogenous categorization of Blacks in the United States fails to consider the racist constructs endured by native-born Blacks in comparison to their Black immigrant counterparts. In light of this, many Black immigrants arriving in the United States do not subscribe to the cultural identity of African-Americans, thus leaving them
less susceptible to the influence of stereotype threat. In “Black Immigrants and Black Natives Attending Select Colleges and Universities in the United States,” Massey, Mooney, and Torres (2007) discuss how Black immigrants’ level of integration into postsecondary institutions is made easier due to their possession of soft skills often lacking among many African-American students. According to Zamudio and Lichter (2008), Moss and Tilly (1996) define soft skills as “skills, abilities, and traits that pertain to personality, attitude, and behavior rather than formal and technical knowledge” (pp. 573-74).

Zamudio and Lichter (2008) further contend that African-Americans’ lack of soft skills results in discrimination by Whites in favor of Black immigrants in the school and workplace. Massey et al. (2007) assert, “To white observers, black immigrants seem more polite [sic], less hostile, more solicitious, and ‘easier to get along with’” (p. 252). In “Black and Hispanic Immigrants’ Resilience against Negative-Ability Racial Stereotypes at Select Colleges and Universities in the United States,” Owens and Lynch (2012) test the susceptibility of three generations of immigrants to stereotype threat. The authors hypothesize that Black and Hispanic immigrants’ resilience and resistance to stereotype threat stems from the strong culture they preserve once they transition to America.

In light of this, African-Americans are not only subject to discrimination by Whites but also by other Blacks (e.g., Afro-Caribbeans, Africans) who transition to the United States with similar ideologies and perceptions towards African-Americans as their White counterparts. Black immigrants’ perception of African-American students as inferior creates what is known as a stereotype threat lift for Black immigrant
students. In “Becoming American: Stereotype Threat Effects in Afro-Caribbean Groups,” Deaux et al. (2007) claim that “a boost in performance shown by members of groups (e.g., white males) who are not negatively stereotyped themselves but are aware of the negative stereotypes associated with comparison groups” (p. 387). In these instances, Black immigrant students are provided with the stereotype threat lift due to their perceived level of intellectual superiority over African-Americans. The divergence of race and ethnic identity needs to be examined more closely when exchanging views of African-Americans and Black immigrants within the context of America. The confederacy of race and outcomes of the groups and their differences can be attributed to sociocultural and historical influences experienced by both.

**Summary**

This chapter has provided the reader with an extensive review of literature that substantiates the researcher’s function. The review of literature has shown that student perceptions, perceived barriers, and the influence of stereotype threat are critical to Black student success in postsecondary institutions. Moreover, the literature corroborates how African-American students’ failure to become engaged in college life contributes to their low levels of student efficacy and preservation rates. The evidence provided within Chapter 2 indicates that stereotype threat perpetuates domain dis-identification, as evidenced by first-year African-American students that choose to leave school and no longer pursue a formal education due to feelings of inadequacy and an inability to fit in. The literature establishes themes implying that strong student efficacy is commensurate with positive student perceptions, student engagement and connectedness, and supportive learning environments that minimize stereotype threat’s
influence. The research also authenticates the need for postsecondary institutions to view Blacks as a heterogeneous group with varying perceptions and thought processes due to the cultural contexts from which they come. Failure of postsecondary institutions to acknowledge the differences allows for one-size-fits-all policies that are often deficient in meeting African-American students’ needs.
Chapter 3: Methodology

Introduction

The socialization of African-Americans within postsecondary institutions across America serves as a small-scale representation of their positionality inside the United States (George Mwangi, 2014). Additionally, African-American students are subject to the same societal patterns and marginalized practices within the framework of postsecondary institutions as they are inside the broader framework of the country (Johnson-Ahorlu, 2013). This study employed a mixed-methods explanatory sequential design to measure the influence of stereotype threat on the academic achievement and college perceptions of first-year African-American college students at a public university in Maryland. The study presented quantitative data from the Stereotype Confirmation Concern Scale and select questions from the College Student Experiences Questionnaire to help measure the students’ level of susceptibility to stereotype threat, satisfaction with their college experiences, and satisfaction with the institution itself.

The research yielded data that would aid in improving cultural awareness within the framework of a public university in Maryland, while allowing for recommendations for addressing the current dilemma of forfeiture by African-Americans from postsecondary institutions. According to Bentley-Edwards and Chapman-Hillard (2015), “Black students who perform well academically and appear reasonably well-adjusted to the PWI (Primary White Institution) college environments note challenges in combating stereotypes and ‘othering’” (p. 45). The purpose of this study was to determine if there was a relationship between stereotype threat’s influence and first-year African-American students’ success within a public university in Maryland. The
study explored the experiential circumstances of African-American students through the use of focus-group interviews. Stereotype threat can influence the academic achievement and postsecondary experiences of African-American students (Steele & Aronson, 1995). However, Ogbu’s (1990) cultural-ecological theory asserts that “while discrimination and structural barriers in schools are important determinants of low school achievement among minorities, they are not the sole cause of low performance, as not all African-American students perform poorly in schools” (p. 120).

While socioeconomic and other social components play critical roles in African-American students’ underachievement, this study examined the influence stereotype threat had on their role as first-year collegians at a public university in Maryland. The study was based on one central question:

- What influence does stereotype threat have on the efficacy (i.e., academic achievement, social interactions, course engagement, and awareness) of first-year African-American college students at a public university in Maryland?

- **Quantitative Question:** How do first-year African-American college students perform academically and interact socially at a public university in Maryland?

The following hypotheses were established for this study:

- **(Null Hypothesis)** $H_0 = \mu_1 = \mu_2$: There is no statistically significant difference in academic performance between first-year African-American students influenced by stereotype threat and first-year African-American
students not influenced by stereotype threat, based on the results of the Stereotype Confirmation Concern Scale.

- (Alternative Hypothesis) $H_1 = \mu_1 \neq \mu_2$: There is a statistically significant difference in academic performance between first-year African-American students influenced by stereotype threat and first-year African-American students not influenced by stereotype threat, based on the results of the Stereotype Confirmation Concern Scale.

- (Null Hypothesis) $H_0 = \mu_1 = \mu_2$: There is no statistically significant difference in social interactions between first-year African-American students influenced by stereotype threat and first-year African-American students not influenced by stereotype threat, based on the results of the Stereotype Confirmation Concern Scale.

- (Alternative Hypothesis) $H_1 = \mu_1 \neq \mu_2$: There is a statistically significant difference in social interactions between first-year African-American students influenced by stereotype threat and first-year African-American students not influenced by stereotype threat, based on the results of the Stereotype Confirmation Concern Scale.

- **Qualitative Question:** How do first-year African-American college students perceive their teaching and learning experiences (i.e., orientation, course engagement, social engagement, and campus engagement) at a public university in Maryland?
Research Design and Rationale

An explanatory sequential mixed-methods design was used to determine whether first-year African-American students were influenced by stereotype threat; it was also used to further determine if the threat affects student achievement, social interactions, and perceptions. The integration of qualitative and quantitative data into the study departed from the traditional objective quantitative measure, in favor of a more dialectical approach to research through the adoption of objective and subjective realities (Creswell, 2008). The purpose of the aforementioned approach was to wed the objective results of the quantitative data to subjective participants’ experiences in the form of qualitative data to best explain the general picture of stereotype threat’s influence on student efficacy (Creswell, 2008).

The research required the merger of quantitative and qualitative methods because the research questions could not be answered sufficiently using one distinct method. According to Creswell, Plano Clark, Gutmann, and Hanson (2003), “The overall purpose of this method [explanatory sequential design] is that qualitative data helps explain or build upon initial quantitative results” (p. 71). The mixed-methods explanatory sequential design provided distinctness to the quantitative and qualitative components of the study. Thus, the quantitative survey questions were clearly specified and examined the relationship between the independent variable (stereotype threat) and the dependent variable (student efficacy). The questions were written representative of the null and alternative hypotheses (Creswell, 2012). The second phase of qualitative data collection consisted of an oversight of structured focus-group interviews to secure the qualitative data necessary to bring life to the phenomenon of stereotype threat.
The mixed-methods explanatory sequential design provided an opportunity to expand upon unexpected quantitative results (Creswell, 2008). Moreover, focus-group questions were developed in part based on responses from the SCCS and selected questions from the CSEQ. The quantitative data preceded the qualitative data with the intent of exploring quantitative data more closely using qualitative measures to determine congruency (Creswell et al., 2003).

**Site and Population**

**Site Description**

The research took place at a public university in Maryland that is home to 18,807 undergraduates and 3,478 graduate students. The 2015 freshman class consisted of 2,718 students. The 329-acre campus is located within a suburban area ten miles north of a major city in Maryland. The university is one of the nation’s best regional public universities, offering more than 100 bachelors, masters, and doctoral programs in the liberal arts and sciences and applied professional fields (*US News & World Report*).

Table 2

2015-16 School Enrollment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student Demographic</th>
<th>Undergraduate Students</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>7,457 (39.65%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>11,350 (60.35%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African-American/Black</td>
<td>3,035 (16.14%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>11,885 (63.19%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic/Latino</td>
<td>1,115 (5.93%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>932 (4.96%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Race</td>
<td>Count (Percentage)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------------</td>
<td>--------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two or more races</td>
<td>747 (3.97)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Native Hawaiian</td>
<td>21 (.11%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>712 (3.79%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>18,807</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Population Description**

Purposive sampling was employed with the intent of identifying 150 to 300 first-year African-American students. This study secured data from 169 first-year African-American college students attending the research site. The participants were all over 18 and did not require parental consent to participate in the study.

**Site Access**

On September 11, 2015, an invitation was submitted via email to the Director of Student Success Programs at the research site, including a description of the study and potential benefits to the university. On October 26, 2015, the researcher secured sponsorship and preliminary access to the university from the Director of Student Success Programs contingent upon IRB approval from Drexel University. First-year African-American students were sampled from the Students Achieve Goals through Education (SAGE) program, which is a division of the university’s cultural diversity and student retention plan. The program functions with the purpose of fostering academic achievement, personal development, and campus-wide involvement among freshman students from diverse backgrounds. Students were self-selected after receiving an email invitation that outlined the study design, requirements, and incentives. Data was collected during the Spring 2016 semester after first-year students had successfully completed one semester of coursework.
Research Methods

Description of Methods Used

A mixed-methods explanatory sequential design was utilized for this study. Quantitatively, participants were assessed using the Stereotype Confirmation Concerns Scale and the College Student Experience Questionnaire. The SCCS looked to measure students’ susceptibility to stereotype threat within a three-month period. The CSEQ looked to gauge student perceptions about their collegiate experiences through a series of questions. The study only required the use of two sections from the CSEQ, including Opinions about Your College or University and The College Environment. These portions of the CSEQ were selected to provide quantitative data.

Stereotype Confirmation Concern Scale. Dr. Richard Contrada from the Department of Psychology at Rutgers University developed the Stereotype Confirmation Concern Scale to measure individuals’ concern over confirming stereotype threat during the previous three months. The SCCS is an 11-item Likert self-report inventory. Each item is rated on a 7-point Likert scale with the following number anchors: 1 = Never to 7 = Always. The instrument was developed following a review of research literature on stereotypes and stereotype threat and was piloted with a sample of college students from diverse backgrounds who shared descriptions of their concerns about confirming stereotypes of their ethnic groups (Gamst et al., 2011). Cronbach’s alpha for the total SCCS for ethnic minorities was .91; according to Ravid (2011), “Cronbach’s coefficient alpha has good reliability estimates” (p. 196). It should be noted that the researcher secured permission from Dr. Contrada to utilize SCCS on May 31, 2015 via email (Appendix E).
**College Student Experience Questionnaire.** Robert Pace developed the College Student Experience Questionnaire in 1979 for the purpose of evaluating the college student experience. The tool has been amended many times, with the most recent addition (4th edition) surfacing in 1998. Since its establishment, the CSEQ has been used in more than 400 institutions and administered to over 300,000 students (Gonyea et al., 2003). Each section of the CSEQ has been measured for reliability and validity. For the purposes of this study, the researcher employed the portion of the CSEQ that inquired of student’s Opinions about their College or University and the College Environment. The first section consisted of two questions of categorical make-up inquiring about students’ opinions of their college or university. Students were required to select one of four qualitative responses, ranging from “I like it” to “I don’t like it.” The second section (College Environment) consisted of a nine-question survey using a 7-point rating to measure student development and quality of relationships.

According to Ravid (2011), any Cronbach’s alpha score over .70 suggests strong reliability. The College Environment section of the CSEQ possesses reliability scores in the range of .70-.75, which puts them within the acceptable range (Gonyea et al., 2003). The researcher obtained acceptance and authorization to employ the CESQ from John Zilvinskis, Program Coordinator of CSEQ Assessment Program Center for Postsecondary Research at Indiana University, on September 23, 2015. The use of the instrument required the researcher to submit a fee of $100 for 150 surveys prior to conducting research.
**Stages of Data Collection**

Data collection occurred the following order: (1) approval of the research proposal, (2) collection of survey data, and (3) student participation in focus groups. A total of 169 eligible students were sampled. The researcher collected data during the spring semester of the 2015-2016 academic school year because by that time, first-year matriculating students would have completed a full semester of college, established a GPA, and accrued college experiences. The research study employed a mixed-methods explanatory sequential design in two stages. The first included administering the SCCS survey instrument (Contrada et al., 2001) and the CESQ (Pace, 1980) to all first-year participants enrolled in the research site’s SAGE program. The survey instrument also required students to provide demographic information (e.g., age, ethnicity, gender, GPA, and SAT/ACT scores).

The second stage manifested data through student participation in focus groups. Convenience-based sampling was employed to identify 11 participants from the questionnaire sample to participate in one of two separate focus groups. The sampling was based upon the availability and willingness of first-year African-American students to participate in one of two focus groups.

There were five participants in focus group 1 and six participants in focus group 2. Participants were provided with a choice of two time slots from which to select. The focus groups were 45 and 57 minutes long, respectively. To collect necessary data, all first-year SAGE students received an e-mail inviting them to participate in the study. The e-mail content consisted of a description of the study and a link to the survey. The survey was created electronically using Survey Monkey, an online survey development
tool. All willing participants accessed the link to the survey page, which also provided the informed consent form.

Subjects were required to read the informed consent and were not eligible to continue to the survey until agreeing to its terms and conditions. Once quantitative data was analyzed, the researcher invited 11 participants to participate in the focus groups. Focus-group participants were subject to the same standards of informed consent as those who had completed the online survey. Focus-group participants were interviewed on-site at the university multicultural center and were required to complete the informed consent prior to participation in the focus group.

Table 3 is the timeline of data collection once doctoral candidacy was secured. The dates were constructed around the researcher’s desired graduation date, student spring break schedule, IRB deadlines, and reasonable time frames to collect, analyze, and interpret the quantitative and qualitative data necessary for this study.

Table 3

Data-Collection Timeline

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Month</th>
<th>Task</th>
<th>Participants Involved</th>
<th>Purpose</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>December 2015</td>
<td>Dissertation proposal defense</td>
<td>Committee members and researcher</td>
<td>Obtain initial approval for proposal defense</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>January 2016</td>
<td>IRB submission for review</td>
<td>Researcher and Dr. Mawritz (Chair)</td>
<td>Secure necessary authorizations from IRB to conduct research</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March 2016</td>
<td>Survey distribution</td>
<td>Researcher</td>
<td>Data collection</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June 2016</td>
<td>Process data</td>
<td>Researcher</td>
<td>Process quant data</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March 2016</td>
<td>Focus groups</td>
<td>Researcher</td>
<td>Data collection</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>August 2016</td>
<td>Process data</td>
<td>Researcher</td>
<td>Process qual data</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Data Analysis Procedures

The data analysis sought to determine if there was a statistically significant difference in academic achievement and student interactions by way of first-year African-American students’ results on the SCCS and the CESQ. A two-step statistical process was used to compare the significance of each response. The quantitative data was analyzed using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) and Microsoft Excel data analysis software; the significance level of each was reported at $p<.05$. In step 1, an F-test for two sample variances was employed to determine equal or unequal variance. In step 2, a $t$-test for two sample variances was employed to determine if there was a statistically significant difference between the variables.

The analysis and interpretation of focus-group data was driven by the research questions framing this study. The researcher facilitated one 45-minute focus group and one 57-minute focus group, with five participants in group 1 and six participants in group 2. Subsequently, the researcher transcribed the interviews for readability and additives by way of observable behavior; once the interviews were transcribed, the researcher initiated the data analysis process. Merriam (2009) suggests an open coding strategy to discover useful data. The researcher employed the process to be as
expansive as possible. The researcher employed an axial coding strategy in order to establish an outline of themes derived from the interview questions. Data were analyzed manually and without any specialized software to ensure all information was obtained.

Table 4

Data Collection and Analysis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Questions</th>
<th>Research Method</th>
<th>Type of Method and Data</th>
<th>How Data Are Analyzed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Research Question 1: How do first-year African-American college students perform academically and interact socially at a public university in Maryland?</td>
<td>Quantitative:</td>
<td>Method:</td>
<td>1. SPSS data analysis software/Microsoft Excel data analysis tool</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Likert-scale survey</td>
<td>Surveys distributed via email to participants</td>
<td>2. F-test two sample for variances and t-test two sample assuming equal or unequal variances</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Demographic information</td>
<td>Data:</td>
<td>3. Frequency tables</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Quantitative Ordinal</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Focus group, reflections Data: Qualitative</td>
<td>5. Coded for themes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Ethical Considerations

The first step in the data-collection process was to secure Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval from Drexel University and the research site. The IRB serves to protect the rights and secure the safety of human subjects participating in research conducted by faculty, staff, and students of Drexel University. To remain in compliance with the National Research Act, all IRB requirements were completed in conjunction with Drexel University. Informed consent was secured in writing, per IRB.
requirements, to ensure that research participants were free of coercion and that they
had been given free will to change their minds about participating in the study. Drexel’s
IRB worked seamlessly with the research institution to ensure the rights of participants
were protected and subsequently granted access to conduct research.

In consideration of student privacy as afforded by the Family Educational
Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA), the researcher offered the research site the option to
utilize the honest broker approach to secure sensitive student data. The honest broker is
an individual assigned by the research site to protect the confidentiality of the
participants’ data while ensuring honest research (Boyd et al., 2007). Furthermore,
Boyd et.al (2007) describes the honest broker as someone who can “offload the burden
of housing identifiable data” for the researcher (p. 1). Full disclosure of the research
content and purpose was provided to all subjects. Student confidentiality was
guaranteed, since a portion of the research required students to disclose their
perceptions of whether the institution’s culture is an environment that acknowledges
stereotype threat as a potential factor in African-American student success.

Research subjects were given full discretion in their willingness to participate in
the research and equal discretion in their inquiry of the researcher’s purpose, rationale,
and associated risk if there was any. For the purposes of this research, due to the
purposive selection of the subjects, it was necessary to fully disclose stereotype threat’s
existence and the potential for participants to be placed in a racially compromising
position due to the specificity of the research. The benefits and burdens of this research
were equally distributed. The research benefits far outweighed the burden. From a
social justice perspective, the confirmation of stereotype will provide institutions an
opportunity to implement safeguards against the phenomenon through awareness, policy, and mentorships.

**Summary**

Chapter 3 has provided the reader with the framework of the methodology prescribed for analyzing the perceptions of first-year African-American students influenced by stereotype threat based on the results from the Stereotype Confirmation Concern Scale. The mixed-methods approach was complementary to the type of research conducted. The research employed a two-step statistical process in conjunction with focus-group data relevant to the phenomenological spirit of the study. The purpose of this research was to shed light on the phenomenon of stereotype threat and to facilitate discussions of the need for attitude and policy changes within postsecondary institutions. The research also hoped to impart the knowledge necessary to recognize and dispel the effects of stereotype threat to first-year African-American and matriculating students.
Chapter 4: Findings, Results, and Interpretations

Introduction

The purpose of this mixed-methods phenomenological study was to determine whether the phenomenon known as stereotype threat influences the academic achievement and/or perceptual experiences and social interactions of first-year African-American students at a public university in Maryland. The central question of the study was as follows: What are the experiences (i.e., academic performance, social engagement, course engagement, and awareness) for first-year African-American college students attending a public university in Maryland? The research is guided by two sub-questions:

1. How do first-year African-American college students perform academically and interact socially at a public university in Maryland?

2. How do first-year African-American college students perceive their teaching and learning experiences (i.e., orientation, course engagement, social engagement, and campus engagement) at a public university in Maryland?

The study employed a mixed-methods explanatory sequential design to secure the data necessary to answer the preceding questions. The study was conducted in two phases, a quantitative phase and a qualitative phase. The quantitative phase (Phase I), consisted of securing data from (a) demographic information (student GPAs, SAT/ACT scores, extracurricular activities, and high-school typologies); (b) Stereotype Confirmation Concern Scale responses; and (c) College Student Experience Questionnaire responses. The study looked to determine the following null and alternative hypothesis from the quantitative data:
• *(Null Hypothesis) $H_0 = \mu_1 = \mu_2$: There is no statistically significant difference in academic performance between first-year African-American students influenced by stereotype threat and first-year African-American students not influenced by stereotype threat, based on the results of the Stereotype Confirmation Concern Scale.

• *(Alternative Hypothesis) $H_1 = \mu_1 \neq \mu_2$: There is a statistically significant difference in academic performance between first-year African-American students influenced by stereotype threat and first-year African-American students not influenced by stereotype threat, based on the results of the Stereotype Confirmation Concern Scale.

• *(Null Hypothesis) $H_0 = \mu_1 = \mu_2$: There is no statistically significant difference in social interactions between first-year African-American students influenced by stereotype threat and first-year African-American student not influenced by stereotype threat, based on the results of the Stereotype Confirmation Concern Scale.

• *(Alternative Hypothesis) $H_1 = \mu_1 \neq \mu_2$: There is a statistically significant difference in social interactions between first-year African-American students influenced by stereotype threat and first-year African-American students not influenced by stereotype threat, based on the results of the Stereotype Confirmation Concern Scale.

An online survey was distributed via Survey Monkey to 300 first-year African-American student participants in the SAGE program at the research site. Subsequently, 183 students participated in the survey. Of the 183 participants, 169 submitted complete
responses to the survey. In addition, the online questionnaire inquired if students would be willing to participate in Phase II of the study, which consisted of participation in one of two focus groups. Of the 169 participants that completed the study, 52 (31%) agreed to participate in a focus group; however, only 39 (23%) participants provided an email address for the researcher to contact them.

In Phase II, the researcher emailed each of the 39 students that agreed to participate in the focus group study based on their responses to the survey questionnaire in Phase I. The email provided two dates from which participants could choose to participate in a 45-minute focus group. Available slots were assigned based on those who responded first. Of the 39 willing participants, 25 could not accommodate the assigned dates, resulting in a total of 14 available participants. Subsequently, to better achieve proportionality within each group, this researcher selected 11 participants from the available 14 based upon which focus group and time slot they had selected. The researcher submitted a second email to each willing participant confirming dates, times, and location of their assigned focus group. The remaining three participants were emailed informing them that their participation was no longer necessary and thanking them for their willingness to participate.

Two focus groups were conducted one week apart. The focus-group participants consisted of ten females and one male. The focus groups were conducted in a designated room on campus within the multicultural building. Upon arrival, each focus-group participant was required to sign in using their email address to confirm identities. Prior to beginning each focus group, each participant was provided with a hard copy of the IRB 502 form, which is a consent form requiring participant signatures
giving their permission to take part in the study. The form also outlined the study’s purpose while informing the participant of their discretionary rights to decline participation at any time during the study. Each participant was informed that they would be assigned a pseudonym number to preserve anonymity for the purposes of the study. The researcher prefaced each focus group by informing all members that the group would be audio-recorded and requesting each participant refrain from discussing the content of the focus group once it concluded.

As previously mentioned, each focus group was audio-recorded utilizing a voice-recording device. In addition, the iPhone Voice Memo application was used as backup. Once the data was recorded, it was uploaded to rev.com, an online transcription service that transcribed the audio data, yielding a total of 39 pages for Focus Group 1 and 27 pages for Focus Group 2. As previously mentioned, in order to preserve students’ identity, each participant was assigned a number during each of the two focus groups. The number assigned to each of these students was retained throughout the focus group and the study. In Table 5, the participants’ information and demographics are organized with the following information: participant number assigned during the interview, class year, gender, and race.

Table 5
Demographics of Students in Focus Group 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym Number</th>
<th>Sex</th>
<th>Race</th>
<th>Years</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>Freshman</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>Freshman</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>Freshman</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>Freshman</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>Freshman</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 6

Demographics of Students in Focus Group 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym Number</th>
<th>Sex</th>
<th>Race</th>
<th>Years</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>Freshman</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>Freshman</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>Freshman</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>Freshman</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>Freshman</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>Freshman</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Participant Demographics

A total of 183 students participated in this mixed-methods explanatory sequential research study. However, only 169 successfully completed the quantitative survey, yielding a 92% completion rate. Table 7 delineates the demographics of the participants who participated in the study based on gender, race, age, extracurricular activities, high-school GPA, current GPA, and high-school typology.

Table 7

Demographic Frequency Table

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Frequency (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>122 (72.2%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>47 (27.8%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Race</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>1 (0.6%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic or Latino</td>
<td>1 (0.6%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black or African-American</td>
<td>139 (83.7%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Asian or Pacific Islander</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------------------------</td>
<td>---------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1 (0.6%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18-19 years’ old</td>
<td>155 (92.8%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20-22 years’ old</td>
<td>12 (7.2%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extracurricular activities</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>117 (69.2%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>52 (30.8%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Type of extracurricular activities</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fraternity/Sorority</td>
<td>15 (12.8%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Athletics</td>
<td>13 (11.1%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student government</td>
<td>7 (6.0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multi-cultural</td>
<td>45 (38.5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>37 (31.6%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High-school GPA</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.00-2.49</td>
<td>7 (4.1%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.50-2.75</td>
<td>18 (10.7%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.76-3.00</td>
<td>19 (11.2%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.00 and above</td>
<td>125 (74.0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Current GPA</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.00 and below</td>
<td>1 (0.6%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.00-2.49</td>
<td>12 (7.1%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.50-2.75</td>
<td>19 (11.2%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.76-3.00</td>
<td>36 (21.3%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.00 and above</td>
<td>101 (59.8%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Most participants were female (72.2%), Black or African-American (83.7%), and 18 to 19 years old (92.8%). Nearly 70% of the participants engaged in extracurricular activities, including the following types: multicultural (38.5%), fraternity/sorority (12.8%), athletics (11.1%), student government (6.0%), and others (31.6%). Seventy-four percent of the participants had high-school GPAs of 3.00 or higher; however, only 59.8% of the participants had achieved this GPA in college. Slightly over half (53.5%) of the participants’ high-school institutions were located in a suburban neighborhood. The SAT scores for the participants ranged from 600 to 2150, with a mean score of 1596.27 (SD = 246.01).

**Findings**

**Quantitative Data**

As previously mentioned, all quantitative data were secured in Phase I of the study by way of survey distribution to all first-year African-American/Black college students. Phase I consisted of three forms of quantitative measurement. The survey questionnaire of this study contained the following sections: (a) demographic information (gender, race, age, extracurricular activities, high-school GPA, SAT/ACT scores, current GPA, and high-school typology); (b) Stereotype Confirmation Concern Scale responses; and (c) College Student Experience Questionnaire responses.
Demographic data. Participants self-reported current and high-school GPAs.

The study controlled for high-school GPA, (SAT scores, and high-school typology (i.e., rural, urban, suburban) as evidence of prior academic success under various conditions. Tinto’s (1993) Model of Student Departure mentions the importance of a student’s pre-entry attributes, or prior academic achievements, which determine a student’s propensity for success. This researcher felt it necessary to not only control for college and high-school GPA, but also SAT/ACT scores and high-school typology. High-school GPA was a four-level categorical variable (2.00-2.49, 2.50-2.75, 2.76-3.00, and 3.00 and above). High-school SAT/ACT was a continuous variable; students who took the ACT only had their scores converted to SAT scores using the concordance tables provided by College Board. For students that took both the SAT and ACT, only the SAT scores were used in the study. High-school typology was a three-level categorical variable (urban, rural, and suburban). Data were imported from Excel to SPSS (v. 23) for data analysis. Frequency tables were used to check for any data-entry errors and missing values. Frequency tables and descriptive statistics were used to summarize the survey data.

Stereotype Confirmation Concern Scale. The second measure of quantitative data was the Stereotype Confirmation Concern Scale, which measures participants’ fears that they are confirming a stereotype. SCCS consists of 11 7-point Likert-scale items, where 1 = Never and 7 = Always. First, composite SCCS scores were computed by averaging the 11 Likert-scale items. The composite scores ranged from 1 to 7, with higher scores indicating greater concern over confirming stereotypes. Participants were then divided into two groups: high susceptibility to stereotype threat (> 4) and low
susceptibility to stereotype threat ($\leq 4$). Thus, susceptibility to stereotype threat was a two-level categorical variable. Table 8 reflects a summary of participants’ responses to the SCCS.

**Table 8**

*Summary of the SCCS Survey Responses*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Frequency counts and percentages of the responses</th>
<th>Fear of confirming a stereotype about the following…</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>71 (42.0%) 27 (16.0%) 14 (8.3%) 43 (25.4%) 8 (4.7%) 4 (2.4%) 2 (1.2%)</td>
<td>Eating certain foods</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>22 (13.0%) 12 (7.1%) 10 (5.9%) 47 (27.8%) 27 (16.0%) 35 (20.7%) 16 (9.5%)</td>
<td>Talking a certain way</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>43 (25.4%) 17 (10.1%) 13 (7.7%) 32 (18.9%) 30 (17.8%) 23 (13.6%) 11 (6.5%)</td>
<td>Dressing a certain way</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>116 (68.6%) 24 (14.2%) 10 (5.9%) 14 (8.3%) 3 (1.8%) 2 (1.2%) 0</td>
<td>Playing certain sports</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>46 (27.2%) 16 (9.5%) 12 (7.1%) 47 (27.8%) 25 (14.8%) 16 (9.5%) 7 (4.1%)</td>
<td>Attending or participating in certain social activities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>105 (62.5%) 19 (11.2%) 15 (8.9%) 16 (9.5%) 5 (3.0%) 4 (2.4%) 4 (2.4%)</td>
<td>Taking your studies too seriously</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>56 (33.1%) 28 (16.6%) 13 (7.7%) 43 (25.4%) 9 (5.3%) 12 (7.1%) 8 (4.7%)</td>
<td>Owning certain things</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>28 (16.6%) 18 (10.7%) 20 (11.8%) 29 (17.2%) 26 (15.4) 32 (18.9%) 16 (9.5%)</td>
<td>Shopping at certain stores or eating at certain restaurants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>99 (58.6%) 29 (17.2%) 18 (10.7%) 14 (8.3%) 3 (1.8%) 4 (2.4%) 2 (1.2%)</td>
<td>Concern about the way you look (Physical appearance)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>46 (27.4%) 16 (9.5%) 16 (9.5%) 31 (18.5%) 23 (13.7%) 18 (10.7%) 18 (10.7%)</td>
<td>Doing certain household tasks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>37 (29.6%) 10 (8.0%) 10 (8.0%) 43 (34.4%) 17 (13.6%) 4 (3.2%) 4 (3.2%)</td>
<td>Revealing your socioeconomic status</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
College Student Experience Questionnaire. The third and final quantitative measure, the Colleges Student Experience Questionnaire, has two parts: (a) satisfaction with the institution and (b) satisfaction with college experiences.

Satisfaction with the college institution was measured using the two items in part one of the CESQ. Item one in Part 1 of the CSEQ contained the following questions: (a) How well do you like college? and (b) If you could start over again, would you go to the same institution? The responses were measured utilizing a four-point Likert scale that measured student satisfaction as follows: (a) I don’t like it, (b) I am more or less neutral about it, (c) I like it, and (d) I am enthusiastic about it. First, composite scores of respondents’ satisfaction with the institution were computed by averaging the two four-point Likert scale items. The composite scores ranged from 1 to 4, with higher scores indicating higher satisfaction with the institution. The participants were then divided into two groups: Satisfied with the institution (>2) and not satisfied with the institution (≤2). Therefore, satisfaction with the institution was a two-level variable.

Table 9
Summary of Responses for CESQ, Part 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Frequency counts and percentages of the responses</th>
<th>Satisfaction with institution</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 (Dislike)</td>
<td>7 (4.1%) 37 (21.9%) 92 (54.4%) 33 (19.5%)</td>
<td>How well do you like college?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 (Neutral)</td>
<td>1 (Def, no) 2 (Prob, no) 3 (Prob, yes) 4 (Def, yes)</td>
<td>If you could start over again, would you attend the same institution you are now attending?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 (Like)</td>
<td>4 (Enthused)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 (Enthused)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 (5.9%)</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Satisfaction with college experiences was measured using the nine 7-point Likert scale items in Part 2 of CSEQ. Composite scores of satisfactions with college experiences were computed by averaging the responses of these items. The total scores ranged from 1 to 7, with higher scores indicating higher satisfaction with the college experience. Participants were grouped into two groups: satisfied with college experience (>4) and not satisfied with college experience (≤ 4). Table 10 provides a summary of responses for Part 2 of the CESQ.

Table 10

*Summary of Responses for CESQ, Part 2*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Frequency counts and percentages of the responses</th>
<th>Satisfaction with college experiences</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>46 (27.4%)</td>
<td>45 (26.8%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>22 (13.0%)</td>
<td>35 (20.7%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>25 (14.8%)</td>
<td>44 (26.0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>33 (19.5%)</td>
<td>34 (20.1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>23 (13.7%)</td>
<td>42 (25.0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>13 (7.7%)</td>
<td>30 (17.8%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>24 (14.2%)</td>
<td>40 (23.7%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>16 (19.5%)</td>
<td>28 (16.7%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Summary of SCCS and CSEQ survey responses. Tables 8, 9, and 10 present a summary of the survey responses for the SCCS and CSEQ. The mean response scores for the 11 SCCS items ranged from 1.64 for item four (human diversity) to 4.27 for item 2 (aesthetic, expressive, and creative qualities). The mean response scores for the items in Part 1 of the CSEQ were 2.89 for item 1 (How well do you like college?) and 2.74 for item 2 (Would you attend the same institution again?), indicating an overall moderate satisfaction with the institution. The mean response scores for the nine items in Part 2 of the CSEQ ranged from 2.39 for item 1 (Emphasis on developing academic, scholarly, and intellectual qualities) to 3.54 for item 8 (relationship with administrative personnel and offices), indicating an overall moderate satisfaction with college experiences.

Table 11 shows the frequency of responses for susceptibility to stereotype threat, satisfaction with the institution, and satisfaction with college experiences. Based on the composite scores of susceptibility to stereotype threat, satisfaction with the institution, and satisfaction with college experiences, it appeared that the majority of the participants had low susceptibility to stereotype threat (82.2%), were satisfied with the institution (76.3%), and were not satisfied with college experiences (87.0%) (Table 11).
Table 11

*Frequency Table for Susceptibility to Stereotype Threat, Satisfaction with Institution, and Satisfaction with College Experiences*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Frequency (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Susceptibility to stereotype threat</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low</td>
<td>139 (82.2%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High</td>
<td>30 (17.8%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Satisfaction with the institution</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Satisfied</td>
<td>129 (76.3%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not satisfied</td>
<td>40 (23.7%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Satisfaction with college experiences</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Satisfied</td>
<td>22 (13.0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not satisfied</td>
<td>147 (87.0%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Academic performance and stereotype threat.* The first of two hypotheses looks to determine whether there is a statistically significant difference in academic performance between first-year African-American students influenced by stereotype threat and first-year African-American students not influenced by stereotype threat, based on the results of the SCCS.

A two-step statistical process was utilized to determine whether there was a statistically significant difference in academic performance. In step one, an F-test two sample for variances was employed to determine equal or unequal variance between GPAs and scores from the SCCS. The results of the F-test yielded a p-value of less than 0.05, resulting in a rejection of the null hypothesis and a conclusion that the variances were unequal. In step two, the t-test two sample assuming unequal variances. The results of the t-test suggest that we reject the null hypothesis and accept the principle that there is a statistically significant relationship between susceptibility to stereotype threat and current GPA ($p = 2.35427E-20$). A statistical note represents the notion that
the E-20 represents a 20-decimal point shift from right to left \( (p = \) 
.0000000000000235427) (see Appendix K for full statistical analysis).

**Social interaction and stereotype threat.** The second hypothesis looks to
determine whether there is a statistically significant difference in social interaction
between first-year African-American students influenced by stereotype threat and first-
year African-American students not influenced by stereotype threat based on the results
of the Stereotype Confirmation Concern Scale. Again, a two-step statistical process was
utilized to determine whether there was a statistically significant difference in social
interactions. In step one, an F-test two sample for variances was employed to determine
equal or unequal variance between CSEQ and SCCS scores. The results of the F-test
yielded a \( p \)-value higher than 0.05, resulting in an acceptance of the null hypothesis and
a conclusion that the variances were equal. In step two, the \( t \)-test two sample assuming
equal variances was used. The results of the \( t \)-test suggested that the null hypothesis
should be rejected and the principle that there was a statistically significant relationship
between susceptibility to stereotype threat and CESQ scores should be accepted \( (p = \)
1.23319E-64). E-64 represents a 64-decimal point shift from right to left \( (p = \)
.0000000000000123319) (see Appendix L for full statistical analysis).

**Qualitative Data**

This section presents the findings of thematic analysis for the focus-group
interview data. The focus-group data serve as a supplement to the quantitative analysis
results measuring students’ level of susceptibility to stereotype threat, satisfaction with
their college experiences, and satisfaction with the institution itself using data collected
via the SCCS and the CESQ. Additionally, the purpose of the focus-group interviews
was to shed light on student awareness of the phenomenon of stereotype threat and to facilitate discussions about the need for attitude and policy changes within postsecondary institutions. Eleven first-year college student participants were interviewed about their experiences during their first year of college study at the research site. Participants were asked to describe their experiences with college stereotypes and how those experiences had influenced their college life. They were also asked to describe the college’s attitudes regarding cultural diversity and cultural barriers. Responses were analyzed using thematic analysis (Creswell, 2013). The aim of the analysis was to produce an overall description of the dataset using semantic (rather than latent) themes in an inductive (rather than theoretical) approach, as thematic analysis is defined as “a method for identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns (themes) within data” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 79). The topics and themes that emerged from the responses were the focus of this data analysis. The analysis proceeded with three separate readings of the focus-group interview responses. A list was made of all the topics of discussion that arose from the participants’ responses. Themes were then developed by grouping the topics that fit under a particular heading for example, all topics relating to racism were grouped together under the theme “experiences with racism.”

A convenience sample of 11 freshmen willing to participate in the focus-group interviews was interviewed. The participants were divided into two focus groups, with five participants (one male and four females) in Focus Group 1 and six participants (all female) in Focus Group 2. All participants were at least 18 years old. To become familiar with the data, the researcher read through all transcripts three times. No notes
were taken or codes created during the first two read-throughs. This process allowed
the researcher to understand the depth and breadth of the content. During the third read-
through, the researcher systematically noted what was significant about each response
and coded for topics being discussed. The researcher did not make any assumptions
about the topics, instead coding for as many potential themes/patterns as possible
(Braun & Clarke, 2006). Responses commonly included more than one topic; responses
with several topics were coded under multiple topic headings. For example, if one
response discussed experiences with racism and experiences with college staff, it was
coded under each topic heading.

Coding the topics allowed the researcher to subdivide the data and eventually
categorize the data into themes. The coding was done manually without any specialized
software. This process was done systematically, with the researcher reading each
response and deciphering its topic, as well as how the topics related to each other. At
the end of this phase, each response was linked to at least one topic. In this phase, the
researcher generated a list of all the topics that had emerged from the responses in step
1. Then the researcher organized the responses into meaningful groups by topic (Braun
& Clarke, 2006). For example, all comments regarding racism were collated together
under that topic heading. This process helped create meaning in the focus-group data
(Thomas, 2006). After a list of all topics and the associated responses were generated,
the researcher manually sorted the topics into potential themes. A theme is a
compilation of all the topics that fall under that specific heading (Thomas, 2006). The
researcher identified the themes by reading the topics coded and seeing what topics
were related to each other. The researcher analyzed the topics and considered how
different topics could be used for a theme (Braun & Clarke, 2006). For example, the topics of “High school experience helped the transition to college” and “Culture shocks” were grouped under the theme of “High school effects.” At this phase, a “Miscellaneous” theme was also created to include all the topics that did not fit under other themes.

After dividing the topics into themes, a diagram (Figure 5) of all the potential themes and the sub-themes was created (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Then, the researcher reread all the responses and considered the validity of the responses under each theme (Braun & Clarke, 2006). During the repeated reading process, the researcher carefully determined if any topics had been missed or misclassified in the earlier coding. For example, a topic regarding why instructors had no interaction with students was first coded as “Lack of interaction” but was changed to “Reasons for lack of interaction.” In other words, the researcher in this phase ensured that all responses were well-grouped under the appropriate themes. Topics that were under the “Miscellaneous” theme were also examined to see if they could be fit under another theme. For example, the topic of “Origin/ethnicity” was moved to the theme “Peer pressures,” as participants expressed experiencing peer pressures according to their ethnicity. Themes that seemed irrelevant were discarded. For example, “Background of parents” was discarded since it described the educational backgrounds and jobs of students’ parents, which was not relevant to stereotype threat. Large themes with many topics or separate elements were further divided to include sub-themes. For example, the theme “Experiences with college staff” was divided into two sub-themes, “Experiences with instructors” and “Experiences with administrators.” At the end of this phase, the remaining themes were those that had
emerged from the interview data and were used in the following step to produce the report. The data is discussed in Figure 5 by each emergent theme.

| Themes with racism | • Direct experience with racism  
|                    | • Indirect experience with racism  
|                    | • No experience with racism  
|                    | • Unintentional racism  

| Diversity on campus | • Diverse campus  
|                     | • White-dominated campus  
|                     | • Non-inclusive campus  
|                     | • Strong efforts at diversity  

| Campus barriers and college actions for removing barriers | • Many students do not feel barriers exist  
|                                                          | • School does not attempt to remove barriers  
|                                                          | • Campus discrimination  
|                                                          | • Students feel unsupported  

| Experience with college staff (instructors and administrators) | • Not very engaging  
|                                                               | • Few Black instructors  
|                                                               | • Little communication from college counselors  

| Perceived self-image and peer pressure | • Positive self-image  
|                                       | • Perceived positively by peers  
|                                       | • Do not feel positively viewed by instructors  
|                                       | • Not viewed positively by peers  

*Figure 5.* Themes and sub-themes that emerged from the qualitative data-collection.

In summary, data analysis of the focus-group transcripts also corresponded to the three concurrent flows of activity for qualitative data analysis illustrated in Miles and Huberman (1994): data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification, as depicted in Figure 6 (adopted from Miles and Huberman, 1994). The data-reduction process refers to the process of choosing, focusing,
simplifying, building, and transforming data (Miles & Huberman, 1994). The researcher also utilized several different display techniques, such as quotations, narrative text, and tabulating data differences and similarities (Miles & Huberman, 1994) during the data-analysis process. Narrative texts from each participant were tabulated and grouped according to their similarities. Important quotations were extracted to help derive the themes. By employing data-reduction and data-display concurrently, the researcher was able to focus on simplifying the transcripts that were relevant to the study concepts. The final stages of the data-analysis process were linked by arranging and organizing the concepts and findings discovered from the data-reduction and data-display processes. Themes and relevant data structures were drawn from the data and displayed. In addition, contradictory and identical data were clarified in order to produce the final themes.

Figure 6. Data-reduction process (adapted from Miles & Huberman, 1994).
Theme 1: Experiences with racism. The participants reported various experiences of racism during their first year of college. Nine participants confirmed direct personal experiences with racism, three participants confirmed friends who had experienced racism, one participant reported never having experienced racism, and two participants confirmed experience with unintended racism (Figure 7).

Figure 7. Experiences of racism during the freshman year.

The first major theme that emerged from the study was students’ experiences with racism. Racism was experienced both directly and indirectly, as evidenced by student reports of having undergone direct forms of racism, indirect forms of racism, no racism, and unintentional racism. Participants reported having personally experienced racial slurs on campus from the following sources, including suite-mates, friends, campus officers, international students, extracurricular activity partners, classmates, professors, and random people. “The N-word” [nigger] was the most commonly used ethnic slur, according to focus-group respondents. Four participants mentioned that
they had been called the N-word directly on different occasions. For example,

Participant 2 in Focus Group 1 commented as follows:

I'm in SG [student government]. We're actually one of the most diverse SGs in a while, um, I can't say in history, but in a while. But like, literally last week, a white girl was saying the N-word [nigger], and it was just like, the whole thing. Then a few days later, like this, a white guy was like saying the n-word [nigger] on Twitter and it was just like, a lot.

Participant 6 in Focus Group 2 added the following:

I'm like, I'm on the phone, I don't know if they're [White boys] catcalling somebody else behind me, and the car drives up, and it was a whole bunch of White boys. Cat calling me [nigger]. And I was so pissed.

Besides many of the reports of verbal ethnic slurs, some participants reported experiencing aversive forms of racism in class during their freshman year. Aversive racism is a form of implicit racism in which a person's unconscious negative evaluations of racial or ethnic minorities are realized by persistent avoidance of interaction with other racial and ethnic groups (Gaertner & Dovidio, 1986). One participant, Participant 2 in Focus Group 1, verbalized an unpleasant experience, as she stated the following:

The only thing I would say is, that I've noticed in classes, where like, at [university] our classes are mostly White. Like, let's say you write an essay and the teacher's like “Everybody pair up in peer review,” like, since I'd be like the only Black person, I feel like nobody wants to, like, trade papers with me and review my essay. Like, I would just, be "Okay," like, you know, be the person who ends up in a three-person group or who, like, the teacher will read my essay if none of the students, like, volunteer.

Another participant, Participant 3 in Focus Group 2, had received similar negative evaluations from her classmates due to her race. She recalled her experience in one of her classes as follows:

I took Psych last semester, and we took our midterms, and like, most of the class did really bad, and everybody was telling each other their grades, and I did
really good on the midterm. All the kids in my class were just shocked that I could actually do good on my test, yeah. They were like, “Wow, you got an 80% on your thing” And I was just like, “Wow, you guys couldn’t think that I could do good on this test.” I got mad, cause it’s like, y’all think I'm ... It made me feel like everybody in the class thought I was stupid. And they didn't think I'd be able to accomplish getting a good grade on my test. That I was going to fail, like everybody else.

The subtle racial behaviors of aversion to a particular group by appeal to rules or stereotypes were seen not only in participants’ peers, but also in their professors.

Participant 2 in Focus Group 2 referenced a White professor’s implicit bias on display when she recalled the following comment made by the professor during a class discussion on the Baltimore riots: “But you came to college, so I can see you wanted better for yourself.” The professor’s comment made the participant feel “as though she was talking to me, and not like everyone in the class.” Participant 2 further elaborated her feelings regarding the professor’s comment:

It just made me feel like she was saying, like without college I would've just fell into, like, the regular normal, just, Black person on the street, like I would've been a Baltimore rioter. […] So she made me feel like she looked down on Black people, like we're the people that just need to be saved and she's the one to save us and bring us to education.

Participant 4 in Focus Group 2 also felt discriminated against by her professor due to her name, as she communicated the following:

There was one time last semester where I was the only, I guess, I was the only Black person in my class, and my professor, she, I love her dearly but she always called me by my middle name, which is Tashaun. And I was like, “I put [participant’s name] on all my papers, I email everything to you with [participant’s name] on it.” I was like, “Are you assuming that my name is Tashaun because I'm Black, or”....

In addition to personal experiences of racism, participants also recounted stories of racism from their friends. For example, Participant 4 in Focus Group 1 had a female friend “where she had been out like in the liberal arts building, getting lunch, and a man
had come up, a guy came up behind her and was just saying, mumbling things under his
breath to her. Uh, calling her the n-word [nigger], calling her the b-word [bitch].”
Participant 5 in Focus Group 2 also mentioned an instance where someone “sent a
picture like I think in a guy's bathroom, like the n-word and like something about Black
people” during a group chatting session.

Unconscious bias and unintentional racism rooted in stereotypes and prejudices
were also mentioned during the focus group discussion. As Participant 4 in Focus
Group 1 put it, “A lot of people ask me like genuine questions about like being Black.
Like about my hair or something.” Although she understood that “they're trying to, like,
learn and trying to appropriate it, sometimes they take it to a new level,” thus making
her feel discriminated against. People who display unintentional racism often do not
realize that their behavior is aggressive and may cause someone to feel deeply hurt or
upset. Participant 4 in Focus Group 1 concluded this situation with a nice example:

Um, my roommates, they're White, so I guess maybe not racist, but they don't
understand, like, some of the things I might go through that's different from
them. And, uh, so they don't even, they just don't get it. Trying to explain it to
them, they still don't see, like, how some of the things that they say, or how they
come across is, like, might be offensive.

Finally, Participant 1 in Focus Group 2 commented about the racism on campus:
“There's not anything you can do about the fact this person's [a White peer] already
racist. […] You have to think about the institutional racism in this country, before you,
like, change anything.”

**Theme 2: Diversity on campus.** Overall, participants in both focus groups felt
that their university strived to promote an environment of diversity but lacked in their
efforts to include African-American/Black students. A few participants failed to
understand the contrast between diversity and inclusiveness and required further clarification from the researcher. Verna Myers, Esq., a diversity and inclusion expert, provides the clearest explanation of the distinction between diversity and inclusiveness when she states, “Diversity is being invited to the party; inclusion is being asked to dance” (Myers, 2015). Participant 1 in Focus Group 2 made an effort to clarify for her peers the distinction between diversity and inclusion when she communicated the following:

Diversity, so you can put a bunch of Black people and a bunch of White people and a bunch of Hispanic people in a school and whatever, but it's just like, if everyone is still like, if the minorities are still feeling marginalized for whatever reason and then, like, everyone is still very separate and you have, like, like, institutional racism is still continuing. Like, then it's not inclusive. So, like, it's the difference between, like, just existing here and, like, being comfortable here.

In *Microaggression across the Great Divide* (2011), Mark Pierce references an example previously used by author Tim Wise as it pertains to diversity and inclusiveness, stating,

Whites tend to see things in quantitative, rather than qualitative slant. One example he gives is when recent town officials in Cedar Rapids, Iowa thought it would be a good thing to have African Americans represented in the town fabric. Welcoming ads were bought in newspapers where Black populations centers are established, places like Chicago, Milwaukee, and St. Louis. And not surprisingly, few takers were found, even though jobs, housing and good schools were promised. Those African Americans that did relocate were treated to a rude awakening, however. The city fathers in all their configuring had not disseminated to citizens, police, or businesses that emigrant Blacks were coming to town and that they were supposed to be welcomed. The vision therefore failed, rather quickly and miserably, and the naysayers had ready blame to place on the Blacks who came to town instead of the planning failures of the inept, well-meaning Liberals. The townspeople attracted the subjects they wanted, but had no idea as to what supports would be needed to help sustain a viable quality of life for the newcomers. (p.5)

Much like the “well-meaning Liberals” of Cedar Rapids, Iowa, it appears that the university has fallen short in its effort to provide African-American students with
the supports necessary to make them feel more a part of the university’s fabric.

Participants in both focus groups believed that the research site has tried to foster a culture of diversity by utilizing “quantitative” strategies described by Participant 1 in Focus Group 2: by “hosting, like, different [activity] nights, accepting Black students and White students,” and “[having] a lot of, like, [campus] tours going around, showing new [Black] freshmen coming in.” However, the participant concluded by stating, “[the university] is diverse, and they try to promote diversity,” but more specifically, it is “a non-inclusive campus.” Per Tinto (2012), “Incongruence refers in general to the mismatch or lack of fit between the needs, interest, and preferences of the individual and those of the institution” (p. 50). Many of the students that participated in the focus group were subject to this incongruence as evidenced by a lack of satisfaction with the institution or being “substantially at odds” with the institution (p. 50).

Participant 1 in Focus Group 2 provided an excellent example of the mismatch or lack of fit between the needs of the student and those of the institution when she stated the following:

I don’t really interact with my professors on any extra level. I just sit in class, because for me it’s like, how am I supposed to learn about Blacks in America from you [a White professor] …. I am a Women’s Studies major and many of the classes are taught by White women […] so the intersectionality perspective is completely eliminated.

**Theme 3: Campus barriers and college actions for removing barriers.**

Despite experiences with racism and having a diverse yet non-inclusive campus, a majority of the participants reported that they “wouldn't say there are really any barriers” that would stop them from graduating on time (Figure 8).
Figure 8. Campus barriers and college actions for removing barriers.

However, Participant 1 in Focus Group 2 mentioned that she had felt that there are barriers that may delay college completion: “Differences in my education [sic]. So, like, for instance, Whites, you can see teachers and some students [that] look like them every day. Like, have mentors who look like them. That's, like, easier to them, and for me that's, like, really difficult.”

The need for Black students to see themselves reflected in the curriculum and the institution’s fiber by way of more diverse instruction and instructors are reflected in comments by Participant 1 in Focus Group 2. In Acting Black: College, Identity and the Performance of Race, Willie (2003) states, “For Black students, frequent faculty contact outside the classroom, non-conservative teaching styles, and faculty with high degree of satisfaction contribute to higher grade-point averages” (p. 61).

In general, regarding the institution’s attitudes towards removing barriers, Participant 2 in Focus Group 2 stated the following: “[University], they try to break down barriers, but I feel like it's almost counterproductive, like they just make it more awkward […] They're saying the things you would want them to say, but it's not working at all because it seems so staged, and so unreal.”
Participants provided several examples regarding the lack for the research site’s effort to remove barriers on campus. Participant 4 in Focus Group 1 provided the following example:

This guy, he keeps harassing African-American, like, um, servers, in the CFA [Center for the Arts], calling them the n-word [nigger] and like all this stuff, and for some reason the school won't put that on…we get like text alerts about what's happening on your road, but, like, when people are being harassed in the CFA, no one's saying anything.

A day after completing the focus-group interviews, Participant 2 in Focus Group 1 provided the researcher with screen shots from social media (Twitter) posts that legitimizes some of respondents’ claims and concerns verbalized (see Appendix H). The second Twitter screenshot further displays students’ concerns as it pertains to the racial barriers and microaggressions that exist at the university. The screenshots of Twitter conversations also substantiates students’ concerns about the lack of support from the university and feeling that Black students are only “tokens” in the university’s desire to promote multiculturalism and diversity. The aforementioned aligns with the stance of Participant 2 in Focus Group 2 that the university has not “really tried their hardest [to remove barriers] [as] no action was taking place. So I feel like they try to really tell us what we want to hear, but no action's really being taking when things really do happen.”

**Theme 4: Experiences with college staff (instructors and administrators).** The researcher asked participants to describe their experiences with college staff, including instructors and administrators. Figure 9 summarizes the frequency counts of positive/negative/no interaction experiences with college staff from study participants.
Instructors. As previously stated in Chapter 2 of this study, trust between students and teachers promotes a relationship that fosters open communication and critical appraisal and in turn a student’s willingness to learn (Walton & Cohen, 2007). Considering this, participants in each of the two focus groups provided varying experiences as it pertained to their instructors. Students reported both positive and negative experiences with their instructors, overall feeling their instructors either viewed them in a negative light or had little assessment about them at all. Participant 5 in Focus Group 1 reflected on an office visit with her professor:

I went to her [the instructor] office hours and while I was talking to her and she [the instructor] was helping me, she [the instructor] just seemed so unmotivated and like unenthusiastic. Like, if I would have asked her a question, she [the instructor] would just give me a direct answer and like no explanation, no nothing.”

Moreover, the participant did not “think it’s because I was Black, because it’s who she [the instructor] was.”

Participant 4 in Focus Group 1 provided a more buoyant experience with her professor when she stated the following:

Figure 9. Experiences with college staff (instructors and administrators).
I went into her [the instructor] office hours and I sat in there for almost two and a half hours, because she [the instructor] was so willing to, like, explain to me and go through it [the questions]. So, like, she [the instructor] definitely, like, helped me through it [the questions] and everything. And, like, that's what I've seen from most of the teachers here [University], that they were willing to take the time to help you, as long as you take the effort to ask them.

Participants did mention that interaction with the instructors might depend on the size of the classes, as evidenced by Participant 2 in Focus Group 1, who communicated the following: “I mean, in college you ... if you have a big class, like, you may never even talk to them [instructors]. But in my smaller classes, I've always loved my teachers. I've always had a really good relationship with them.”

Although huge classes may provide students fewer opportunities for personal interaction with instructors, it did not mean students could not interact with their instructors. For example, Participant 5 in Focus Group 1 was once in a large class and she described her class experience as follows:

It’s a big classroom, yet she [the instructor] tries to be interactive. And you know how, uh, a teacher will actually question expecting a response and they already know they're not going to get a response, but she will literally sit there for a good minute or two, waiting for somebody [to answer the questions]. Okay. Go. Somebody go give me a response before I start, kind of thing.

The bottom line is that interactive teachers could make classes more interesting and provide more motivation for students to learn the subjects, as Participant 5 in Focus Group 1 further explained:

I think when a teacher is interactive, and like just more talkative with the class, it makes the student more willing to want to learn it. It doesn't seem like it’s a classroom environment. It seems like something that you may not ... it just seems like a very chill environment, where okay, you're just learning it for the fun of it, even though you know you're going to get tested on it eventually.

The same participant further summarized her statement as, “Like, for a teacher to make something that's meant to be Oxford into urban, like, it’s just more understanding.”
Administrators. Like instructors, focus group participants had both negative and positive experiences with administrators at the university. Four participants mentioned that they had some kind of negative experiences with their academic advisers.

Experiences with academic advisers were often described as “rushed.” Participant 5 in Focus Group 1 stated the following:

Uh, for my academic advisor, I feel like our sessions have been rushed. I had one today with her at 5 [pm], and she [the adviser] was 10 minutes late. And then I was in and out of there in 5 minutes. And I was trying to plan my schedule for next semester. So, like, I had a million and one questions to ask her, but I didn't even get to ask one, because I was in and out of there in 5 minutes.

Participant 4 in Focus Group 2 further contended, “There was just too much going on and she [the academic adviser] was trying to focus. It’s probably like she’s busy, so, like, it’s probably more of like a time constraint that she [the academic adviser] has.”

The consequence of rushed sessions with academic advisers is that students may become, per Participant 3 in Focus Group 1 “a little perturbed,” but they often manage to find their own “support system,” like Participant 4 in Focus Group 1, who communicated the following: “People who are closer to me, who are like more understanding and actually have more time for me […] so, like, when it comes to, like, dealing with an academic advisor, I don’t really go to her unless it’s like a major concern. I rely on, like, my friends, my parents, my, like, other people in school.”

Students also reported having negative experiences with administrators other than their academic advisers. For example, Participant 1 in Focus Group 2 communicated the following: “Um, I really don't think they [administrators] have a good perception of us, just like, dealing with different administrators, administration for SGA [student government association], like, they just view us as problematic and troubled.”
“Helpful” was the word participants used when they had positive experiences with administrators. For example, Participant 5 in Focus Group 1 described her academic adviser as “chill”: “There was even somebody waiting to talk to him and he was taking his time with me and everything. He was actually really good. He was helpful.” Participant 5 in Focus Group 2 praised the staff in the Career Center with the following sentiments: “I guess I met, like, some people from, like, the career center and, um ... like, someone from the civic engagement and leadership office. Like, a little bit here and there, um ... like, they were very helpful to me for what I needed to talk to them for.”

**Theme 5: Perceived self-image and peer pressure.** A majority of the participants believed that they were perceived in “positive manner” by their peers and also viewed by many as “a fun person”, “a chill person,” or “a really relaxed person.”

![Figure 10. Perceived self-image and peer pressure.](image)

**Perceived self-image.** Participant 2 in Focus Group 2 explained negative perceived image in the following way:

I feel like they (peers) think like, Black people, I guess, just aren't as smart, because like most of the White kids here come from a community where it was all White kids, so like, what they knew of Black people is, like, what they saw on TV, like rappers and drug dealers or whatever they saw in a movie.
The discussion of the issue of stereotypes of Black people was further extended. Participants in general agreed that because of the stereotype of Black people, they sometimes had to “go the extra mile to prove something.” Four out of five participants in Focus Group 1 indicated that they had made extra efforts in order to prove themselves. Participant 6 in Focus Group 2 provided an excellent example of this situation in the following example:

So, I think just having proved myself, they accept me more. I'm on a dance team. I was never a competition dancer, I was always a professional dancer, I come from a professional company. So they're [peers] like, well how can a Black girl give us a good piece that's not hip-hop? I'm like, I'm capable of that, so let me show you.

Participant 6 from Focus Group 2 further elaborated, “I’ve had to prove myself a couple times. Um, to not necessarily gain their approval per se, but, like, they'll say something and then I'm like, okay I guess I have to be better. Just so they can put down that culture barrier.”

Peer pressure. Figure 11 shows participants’ ethnicity. Among the 11 participants, three were Nigerian, one was Ethiopian, one was Kenyan, and the remaining were African-American.

![Figure 11. Participants' ethnicity.](image-url)
Participants discussed their experiences about peer pressures, and the experiences seemed to vary according to their ethnicities. African-Americans may encounter peer pressures from other African-Americans, such as peers questioning “authenticity” by their actions and how they talk (proper English). Participant 2 in Focus Group 1 provided the following example:

When I was young and naïve, I was like, oh, why do I sound like this [White/proper] … I guess I have to, like, talk like differently [Black/slang]. So I started, I [started] trying to sound like them [Black/slang]. But, like, I've gotten, like, much wiser since then. I figured out, like, I don’t need to speak like in slang or any type of way that they speak and it’s ... it's no point in that. I would rather sound intelligent than to sound how they do [Black/slang].

Africans may encounter peer pressures to acculturate into African-Americans when arriving to this country. Participant 6 in Focus Group 2 shared her own experience:

My friend and I was talking about this [peer pressure], and she told me, because you're Black doesn't mean you have to, like, join a sorority or a fraternity. And I feel that pressure, because, you know, I want to do something, like, I want to be involved in the African-American community here, but I feel like they gravitate towards each other a lot, and I come from a very diverse place [Montgomery County].

Participant 6 in Focus Group 2 provided further reasons for her difficulty acculturating:

I can't really relate to a lot of the struggles they're [African-Americans] going through, and then on top of it, I have a high socio, I'm from a high socioeconomic class, so it’s like, I can't really relate. I just find it difficult to succeed socially within the African-American community.

Participant 5 in Focus Group 1 provided some excellent suggestions, including self-motivation and family support, to help deal with peer pressures:

I know that acting the way they do and speaking the way they do is not going to get me anywhere. So me being who I am and being motivated to educate myself, is where I need to be. And with the, um, support of my parents and they are like intellect, like that has really helped me to not be like a fool.
Summary of the themes. Five themes emerged from the interpretive analysis of the interview data collected via focus-group discussions. The first two themes, which include participants’ experiences with racism and diversity on campus, provided a detailed description of the racism participants had experienced during their first year of college and the institution’s perceived diversity. Most participants reported having either experienced direct or indirect racism during their freshman year. The most common ethnic slur was being called a nigger. Besides verbal slurs on ethnicity, some participants experienced aversive racism in class during their freshman year from either classmates or instructors. Participants have also experienced unconscious bias and unintentional racism often rooted in stereotypes and prejudices. According to the focus-group interview data, participants believed the university fostered a culture of diversity, but that they were lacking in their efforts of including minority students, particularly African-American students.

The third theme, campus barriers and college actions, includes the barriers on campus that may prohibit students from finishing college and what actions the institution had taken to remove the barriers. Although the majority of the participants said they did not think there were any barriers that would prohibit them from graduating on time, they believed a difference in their education would persist. Students attributed the variance in education to a lack of diversity in the faculty, specifically professors. Participants provided several examples regarding the institution’s lack of effort in removing the barriers.

Theme four provides a detailed discussion of students’ experiences with college staff, including instructors and administrators. They reported both positive and negative
experiences with administrators and instructors. As mentioned in Chapter 2 of the study, student-teacher trust promotes relationships that fosters open communication, critical appraisal, and a student willingness to learn (Walton & Cohen, 2007). Participants suggested that instructors should be more interactive with students to provide them with the necessary motivation to learn. In turn, students would likely reciprocate that interaction and become more amenable to learning.

The last two themes, which include perceived self-image and peer pressures, discuss how students feel they are perceived not only by their peers, but also by administrative staff and faculty within the institution. The discussion then segued into how the aforementioned perceptions manifested through peer pressure and the need to live up to others’ expectations, thus creating an interpersonal conflict. A majority of the focus-group participants had a positive perception of themselves and felt they were similarly viewed by their peers. However, participants discussed the added pressure to “prove themselves” to their White counterparts and faculty due to experiencing feelings of less than as it pertained to their academic capacity.

**Results and Interpretations**

The central question of this study was to examine the influence of stereotype threat on the efficacy of first-year African-American students at a public university in Maryland. Three ancillary questions accompany the central research question to better guide the study and clarify the central research question. Thereafter, secondary questions are presented to accompany the null hypothesis, denoted by $H_0$, and an alternate hypothesis, denoted by $H_1$, where applicable. In addition, the researcher
provides results based on analysis and interpretation of the quantitative and qualitative data presented to support the argument.

**Research Question 1 (Quantitative)**

How do first-year African-American college students perform academically and interact socially at a public university in Maryland?

**H₀**: There is no statistically significant difference in academic performance between first-year African-American students influenced by stereotype threat and first-year African-American students not influenced by stereotype threat, based on the results of the Stereotype Confirmation Concern Scale.

**H₁**: There is a statistically significant difference in academic performance between first-year African-American students influenced by stereotype threat and first-year African-American students not influenced by stereotype threat, based on the results of the Stereotype Confirmation Concern Scale.

This question had a singular focus but required the analysis of two sets of data. First, the researcher analyzed the data from the SCCS to determine which students were susceptible to stereotype threat and which students were not. Participants were then divided into two groups: high susceptibility to stereotype threat (> 4) and low susceptibility to stereotype threat (≤ 4). Out of the 169 survey participants, 139 (82%) presented with a low susceptibility to stereotype threat, while 30 (17.8%) displayed a high susceptibility to stereotype threat based on the results of the SCCS. Next, the researcher cross-tabulated the self-reported GPAs for all 169 respondents with the results of the SCCS to determine if stereotype threat influenced their academic achievement.
The results of the two-test statistical analysis comparing SCCS data \((N = 169)\) with student GPAs \((N = 169)\) suggested that there was a statistically significant relationship between students’ susceptibility to stereotype threat and self-reported GPAs \((p = 2.35427E-20)\). E-20 represents a 20-decimal point shift from right to left \((p = .00000000000000235427)\) (see Appendix K for full statistical analysis).

Figure 12. First-year African-American students influenced by stereotype threat.

Therefore, it was determined that there was a significant statistical difference in academic achievement between first-year African-American students influenced by stereotype threat and first-year African-American students not influenced by stereotype threat, based on the results of the SCCS. In particular, students not influenced by stereotype threat reported an overall higher GPA (10%) than those students influenced by stereotype threat. Figures 12 and 13 show the percentages of GPAs for those students influenced by stereotype threat and those not influenced by stereotype threat. Considering the findings, the null hypothesis can be rejected in favor of the alternative hypotheses.
**Figure 11.** First-year African-American students not influenced by stereotype threat.

**Research Question 1 (Quantitative)**

$H_0$: There is no statistically significant difference in social interactions between first-year African-American students influenced by stereotype threat and first-year African-American students not influenced by stereotype threat, based on the results of the Stereotype Confirmation Concern Scale.

$H_1$: There is a statistically significant difference in social interactions between first-year African-American students influenced by stereotype threat and first-year African-American students not influenced by stereotype threat, based on the results of the Stereotype Confirmation Concern Scale.

The second quantitative question looks to determine if stereotype threat influenced students’ social interactions. This question possessed a singular focus but required the analysis of three sets of data. This question also required the researcher to analyze data from the SCCS, which was undifferentiated from the process described for Research Question 1. Social interactions created high variance over space and time, so in consideration of this, the study utilized data from students’ self-reported...
extracurricular activities and data from the CSEQ to measure social interactions. One hundred and seventeen (69.2%) of the 169 respondents reported participating in extracurricular activities. The researcher was also required to analyze the data from the CSEQ \((N = 169)\) to determine students’ levels of social interaction and satisfaction with their college experience.

The results of the two-test statistical process comparing data from the SCCS \((N = 169)\) and the CSEQ \((N = 169)\) suggested that there was a statistically significant relationship between student responses from the CSEQ and student susceptibility to stereotype threat \((p = 1.23319E-64)\). E-64 represents a 64-decimal point shift from right to left \((p = .0000000000000123319)\) (see Appendix L for full statistical analysis).

It appears that students with lower susceptibility to stereotype threat yielded higher scores on the CSEQ, indicating appropriate social interactions for first-year African-American students. Additionally, there was also a statistically significant relationship between susceptibility to stereotype threat and student participation in extracurricular activities. It appears that students who engaged in extracurricular activities were less susceptible to stereotype threat than students with no extracurricular activities. The results of the two-test statistical analysis comparing data from the SCCS \((N = 169)\) and students’ self-reported participation in extracurricular activities \((N = 117)\) suggested that there was a statistically significant relationship between student participation in extracurricular activities and scores from the SCCS \((p = 3.71934E-38)\). E-38 represents a 38-decimal point shift from right to left \((p = .0000000000000371934)\) (see Appendix M for full statistical analysis).
Based on the findings, the null hypothesis can be rejected and the alternate hypothesis is accepted. Therefore, there was a significant statistical difference in social interactions between first-year African-American students influenced by stereotype threat and first-year African-American students not influenced by stereotype threat based on the results of the SCCS.

**Research Question 2 (Qualitative)**

How do first-year African-American college students perceive their teaching and learning experiences (i.e., academic performance, social engagement, course engagement, and awareness) at a public university in Maryland?

Qualitatively, data was secured through student responses to seven carefully selected questions (Appendix E) to better strengthen the quantitative portion of the study. The purpose of the focus groups was to afford first-year African-American students the opportunity to “to tell the complicated story of their [sic] data in a way which convinces the reader of the merit and validity of your analysis” (Braun, 2006, p. 35). Focus-group participants shared how racism had influenced their college experience and how its permeability fostered their need to be better. Based on responses to the online surveys and focus-group questions, it was concluded that stereotype threat did influence the overall efficacy of first-year African-American students. In addition, focus-group participants shared their feelings that the university encourages a climate of diversity but fails in its efforts to include Black students in its fiber. Consequently, African-American students formulated expressive responses to this exclusion through retreat to safe spaces by way of membership in multicultural groups,
black student unions, and other civil campaigns to establish camaraderie within their peer groups (Ogbu, 1990).

The quantitative data results indicated that although a small sample of Black students reported high susceptibility to stereotype threat (17.8%), students with high susceptibility to stereotype threat were less likely to be satisfied with their college experience. Chapter 2 of this study mentions African-Americans’ experience with racial battle fatigue resulting from the “racism and racial micro-aggressions [sic] operating as psycho-pollutants in the social environment and add to the overall race-related stress for Black men, Black women, and other racially marginalized groups” (Smith et al., 2011, p. 67). This stress was evidenced through data collected in the CSEQ, in which an overwhelming number of respondents (87%) reported dissatisfaction with their college experience (Table 11). Although this high level of dissatisfaction with the college experience could be attributed to many factors, the results were confirmed with focus-group participants’ stance that the university is non-supportive on issues of race and discrimination.

Participants in both focus groups displayed resilience as it pertained to their education, identifying few, if any, barriers (Figure 8) that would prohibit them from graduating. However, one focus-group participant mentioned she felt barriers existed that could cause “differences in [her] education.” Her statement reflected a university culture void of diversity within its faculty, which could also be a contributing factor to the high percentage of Black students who reported unsatisfactory experiences at the university. This dissatisfaction was illustrated through focus-group students’ expressions of frustration with their academic advisors and professors appearing
culturally insensitive to and unaware of the needs of African-American students. In addition, students discussed their inability to see a semblance of themselves within the fiber of the university, whether through the course curriculum or the instructors. Adams (2005) stresses the importance of Black students’ need to see themselves within the curriculum; failure to do so could result in them feeling marginalized.

Student satisfaction with the college experience and with the university were not mutually exclusive or inclusive concepts, as evidenced by students reporting a 76.3% satisfaction rate with the university (Table 11). In addition, there was no statistical relationship between susceptibility to stereotype threat and satisfaction with the institution ($p = 0.065$). The aforementioned result closely aligned with focus-group participants’ responses pertaining to their university’s efforts to support diversity. Despite student reports of being subjected to racial and discriminatory acts by their peers, students still believed the institution has good intentions and provides opportunities through diversity groups and other supports to help Black students acculturate into the university’s fiber. Tinto’s (1993) model of integration exhibits the importance of an established commitment by the college or university for first-year African-American students to gain full membership in the campus community.

Summary

This chapter has discussed the study findings, results, and interpretations. Both qualitative and quantitative data collected and analyzed suggest that stereotype threat does influence the overall efficacy of first-year African-American students at a public university in Maryland. In Phase I, the researcher secured demographic data by way of high-school GPAs, high-school typology, SAT/ACT scores, and current college GPAs.
Survey data was secured by way of the Stereotype Confirmation Concern Scale and the College Student Experience Questionnaire. Evidence was provided that the GPAs of first-year African-American students influenced by stereotype threat were slightly lower than those first-year African-American students not influenced by stereotype threat, based on the results of the SCCS.

In addition, there was also a significant relationship between student susceptibility to stereotype threat and social interactions at a public university in Maryland. The results demonstrate that first-year African-American students involved in extracurricular activities are less susceptible to stereotype threat than those students not involved in extracurricular activities. Moreover, first-year African-American students influenced by stereotype threat reported an increased dissatisfaction with their college experience versus those first-year African-American students not influenced by stereotype threat. So, what are the primary concerns of students involved in this study?

All 11 focus-group participants chronicled at least one experience with racism and/or racial marginalization, either with themselves or someone close to them, during their first year of college. The narrative and quotes from participants in both focus groups posit that although the university’s aim at diversity is commendable, it is void of sincerity. Focus-group participants identified a systemic crisis occurring within the university, much like those crises occurring at other colleges and universities across the nation. The subtle but certain racism serves as a reminder of the shame of servitude that has plagued African-Americans for generations. The inconsistency in the university’s beliefs and practices has created a psychological discomfort among African-American students, which is evidenced by the university’s failure to address student concerns of
racial discord within its classrooms, suites, dining halls, and other locations throughout the university. Failure to address African-American students’ concerns about race and racism only perpetuates the cognitive distortion and dissonance fostered by stereotype threat. The failure of the university to intervene in combatting racial injustice are reflective of Desmond Tutu’s statement that “If you are neutral in situations of injustice, you have chosen the side of the oppressor.” (organizingchange.org, 2013, p.1). Chapter 5 will afford the researcher the opportunity to further interpret these results and formulate recommendations.
Chapter 5: Conclusions and Recommendations

Introduction

The purpose of this phenomenological research was to determine if stereotype threat influenced the efficacy of first-year African-American students at a public university in Maryland. In this study, the researcher utilized a mixed-methods explanatory sequential design to collect data in two phases. In Phase I, quantitative data was secured by way of student responses to the SCCS and CSEQ. Additional quantitative data were collected in the form of students’ current GPAs, high-school typology, high-school GPAs, extracurricular activities, and SAT/ACT scores. The data were collected from 169 first-year African-American students. The quantitative data collected in Phase I was analyzed utilizing SPSS and the data analysis tool in Excel.

In Phase II of the study, the researcher collected qualitative data by conducting two separate focus groups one week apart. A total of 11 first-year African-American students participated in the focus groups, five in Focus Group 1 and six in Focus Group 2. Participants were solicited through the online questionnaire utilized in Phase I of the study. The researcher manually analyzed the data from each focus group and strategically reduced and placed the data into themes to accommodate the study’s purpose.

The primary question for the study was as follows: What are the experiences (i.e., academic performance, social engagement, course engagement, and awareness) of first-year African-American college students attending a public university in Maryland?

The secondary research questions that guided this study are as follows:
1. How do first-year African-American college students perform academically and interact socially at a public university in Maryland?

2. How do first-year African-American college students perceive their teaching and learning experiences (i.e., academic achievement, social interactions, course engagement, and awareness) at a public university in Maryland?

Following is a conclusion of the study findings, results, and interpretations presented in Chapter 4. The researcher’s responses to the study’s inquiry are presented, in addition to solutions in response to the study’s problem statement.

**Conclusions**

The purpose of this phenomenological research was to understand the impact of stereotype threat on the academic achievement, social interactions, and perceptions of first-year African-American college students at a public university in Maryland. The study was constructed to examine the impact of stereotype threat on first-year African-American students’ efficacy by way of student GPAs, social interactions, course engagement, and awareness. The study measured academic achievement by comparing the GPAs of first-year African-American students influenced by stereotype threat to GPAs of first-year African-American students not influenced by stereotype threat. Next, social interactions were measured quantitatively by way of data from the CSEQ and student participation in extracurricular activities. Data from the aforementioned quantitative strategies were measured against student responses to the SCCS to determine statistical significance. Finally, the researcher looked to assess the influence of stereotype threat on the perceptions and awareness of first-year African-American students through qualitative data gathered in focus groups. Hereafter is a review of
each question and its hypothesis, preferred methods and data gathered to answer the questions, and practical solutions to the research questions.

**Academic Performance and Stereotype Treat**

The first sub-question of this study required the researcher to examine the current GPAs of first-year African-American students influenced by stereotype threat and those first-year African-American students not influenced by stereotype threat. The researcher hypothesized that those first-year African-American students susceptible to stereotype threat would possess slightly lower GPAs than those first-year African-American students not influenced by stereotype threat. Prior research has established that African-American students influenced by stereotype threat show a decrease in aptitude and other academic performances when measured against perceivably superior ethnic groups (Steele & Aronson, 1998).

Proper response to Research Question 1 required the collection of GPAs of first-year African-American students and data from the SCCS. Students were then placed into two separate categories, those students susceptible to stereotype threat and those students not susceptible to stereotype threat. Student self-reported GPAs were then cross-tabulated with data from the SCCS to determine if there was a statistical significant difference between the two groups. The researcher conducted a two-step statistical test requiring the utilization of an F-test two sample for variances followed by a t-test two sample assuming equal or unequal variances to compare the two sets of data. The results indicated that there was a statistically significant difference in the two sets of GPAs. The students with no susceptibility to stereotype threat possessed an overall 10% higher GPA than those students susceptible to stereotype threat. The
results required the researcher to reject the null hypothesis in favor of the alternative hypothesis.

As mentioned in the previous chapters, numerous variables impede African-Americans’ academic success. However, stereotype threat’s psychological obscurity is unique in that its dubious influence obstructs African-Americans from performing optimally in a context where they are perceived or perceive themselves as inferior. The quantitative data suggested that first-year African-American students possessed a strong degree of academic resiliency, as evidenced by relatively high first-semester GPAs. In addition, many of the African-American students entered college with preliminary success, as evidenced by competitive high-school GPAs and SAT/ACT scores. Focus-group participants possessed a “prove-them-wrong” attitude, which according to Kim and Hargrove (2013) is a “psychological response to a majoritarian view of Black intellectual inferiority” (p. 302). Much like the participants in Kim and Hargrove’s (2013) study, participants within this study “countered negative perceptions through the pursuit of academic excellence, and intentional campus involvement as leaders” (p. 302).

**Social Interactions and Stereotype Threat**

The second part of Sub-Question 1 required the researcher to examine stereotype threat’s influence on the social interactions of first-year African-American students. The researcher examined student responses from the CSEQ and self-reported participation in extracurricular activities. The preceding data were used to measure students’ levels of social interaction in conjunction with data from the SCCS. The researcher hypothesized that those first-year African-American students with increased
scores on the CSEQ would be less susceptible to stereotype threat. An additional measure of social interaction required the researcher to explore students’ susceptibility to stereotype threat in conjunction with their participation in extracurricular activities, the theory being that first-year African-American students engaged in extracurricular activities would reveal less susceptibility to stereotype threat than those first-year African-American students not engaged in extracurricular activities. Once again, the process was undifferentiated from the process used to measure academic performance, with the exception that the researcher cross-tabulated data from the CSEQ and self-reported participation in extracurricular activities with data from the SCCS. The researcher conducted a two-step statistical test requiring the utilization of an F-test two sample for variances followed by a t-test for variances to compare data from the CSEQ and data from the SCCS. The results indicated a statistically significant difference in the two sets of data ($p = .00000000000000123319$), thus requiring the researcher to reject the null in favor of the alternative hypothesis (see Appendix L).

Participants within Kim and Hargrove’s (2013) study of Black men at PWIs attributed their college success to an “ability to effectively navigate racially charged campus environments, becoming engaged on campus through leadership opportunities, the development of meaningful relationships with peers and mentors and receiving ample familial and spiritual support” (p. 301). The success factors identified in Kim and Hargrove’s (2013) study can all be acquired through engagement in extracurricular activities. One-hundred-seventeen of the 169 first-year African-American students reported participating in extracurricular activities. First-year African-American students engaged in extracurricular activities represented 12% of the respondents susceptible to
stereotype threat, while first-year African-American students that did not participate in extracurricular activities represented 33% of the respondents with susceptibility to stereotype threat. The result of the two-step statistical test utilizing an F-test two sample for variances followed by a t-test two sample assuming unequal or equal variances comparing data from student participation in extracurricular activities and data from the SCCS indicated a statistically significant difference between the data sets ($p = .0000000000000371934$) (see Appendix M). Thus, the researcher’s notion that a relationship exists between student participation in extracurricular activities and susceptibility to stereotype threat was substantiated.

**Student Perceptions Regarding Teaching and Learning Experiences**

The second sub-question of this study required the researcher to examine first-year African-American students’ perceptions of teaching and learning experiences. The researcher examined quantitative and qualitative data by way of student responses on the CSEQ and feedback from focus-group participants. The focus groups were guided by seven carefully constructed questions pertaining to students’ teaching and learning experiences.

**Teaching experiences.** First-year African-American students varied in their responses regarding their professors’ ability to provide effective instruction. Students reported that they felt their instructors were more sovereign in their approach and lacked in their ability to be interactive or experiential with their methods of instruction and with the students, particularly African-American students. Students reported they rarely asked for support from their instructors, instead learning on their peers and/or family members for support when necessary.
Focus-groups participants expressed a failure to establish a relationship with their instructors, which dulled their learning experiences and, for some, diminished their passion to learn. The researcher mentioned this point in Chapter 2 when referencing Tinto’s (1999) belief that the experiential component of learning is vacant within the classroom that favors a more traditional mode of pedagogy. African-American students’ failure to see a semblance of themselves in the instructors or within the curriculum was of major concern also, particularly when referencing classes such as Women’s and African-American Studies. In consideration of this, Sixty-one percent of student responses to questions on the CSEQ specific to their relationships with faculty members indicated weak to low-moderate relationships. Thus, data offers a potential indicator that instructors possessed little genuine interest in their students’ needs outside the required instruction.

**Learning experiences.** Students’ teaching and learning experiences are mutually exclusive concepts but greatly depend upon one another. Despite students’ failures to establish relationships with their instructors, they varied in their responses regarding whether they received quality instruction in their classes. Data from student responses to focus-group questions and the CSEQ reflect this point. Specific to their learning experiences, student responses on the CSEQ pertaining to the university’s emphasis on developing academic, scholarly, and intellectual qualities yielded a 98.3% low to median score.

This data is concerning because it suggests the university engages in pedagogical practices that are not conducive to effective learning by first-year African-American students. Per Reason (2009), “Pedagogical approaches that encourage active,
collaborative, and cooperative learning provide advantages, in relation to academic and cognitive gains, over more passive instructional approaches” (p. 673). This research confirms focus-group participants’ views that very little outside-of-class communication exists between students and their instructors.

**Awareness.** Focus-group and survey participants alike were conscious of race and discrimination on campus. Focus-group participants were made more cognizant of how pervasive racism was on campus through shared narratives during focus-group participation. Students’ responses on the CSEQ pertaining to Satisfaction with College Experience reflected their consciousness on the issue of race. An overwhelming 87% of first-year African-American students reported dissatisfaction with their college experience. Forty-two percent of first-year African-American students reported that they would definitely not or probably not attend the same institution if given a choice. The results were characterized by deep thought from African-American students who were psychologically burdened by subtle but salient traces of racism. Focus-group participants confirmed that daily micro-aggressions in the form of inappropriate gestures, comments, and distancing by White counterparts created daily stressors that at times disrupted their progress.

Students credited their ability to navigate the subtlety of campus racism to a strong connection with various affiliates, such as multicultural groups, student government, and Black student unions that served as safe spaces. Per Guiffrida (2004), Fleming (1984) argues that “involvement in African-American student organizations can divert African-American students from academics” (p. 89). The preceding citation is inconsistent with this study’s data, which demonstrated that 59.8% of respondents
possessed a GPA of 3.0 and above, while 32.5% possessed GPAs of 2.5 to 3.00. It is notable that first-year African-American participants within this study were not isolated by choice, but by necessity due to a lack of inclusiveness within the campus community and strenuous camaraderie with their ethnic counterparts.

**Recommendations**

**Recommendations for Practice**

The following recommendations are based upon this study’s findings, conclusions, and interpretations:

1. All faculty, staff, and administrators employed by the university should be required to complete training on stereotype threat, implicit bias, and the importance of relinquishing old mental models inhibiting teacher effectiveness.

2. The university must prioritize hiring more tenured and clinical African-American professors.

3. The university must vigilantly enforce its non-discrimination policies.

4. The university must establish a culturally competent curriculum for African-American students.

5. The university must create safe spaces for African-Americans to include racially homogenous mental health clinicians trained in the concept of emotional emancipation to safely discuss issues of race, including anger about police harassment, personal stories of racial discrimination, and hard-to-process feelings of racial inferiority.
6. The university must provide racially homogenous mentors that can offer support and empathetic dialogue as it pertains to navigating daily micro-aggressions.

**Recommendations for Further Research**

Results from this study provide the opportunity for further research to examine the influence of stereotype on first-year African-American students. The following opportunities exist for further research on this topic:

1. Complete a longitudinal study on first-year African-American students from their freshman year through matriculation to capture day-to-day experiences.
2. Conduct alternative exploration of data from African-American students and Caucasian students to juxtapose outcomes and better examine university/college culture.
3. Examine university policies and practices that influence campus culture and foster stereotype threat’s effectiveness.
4. Interview students identified as low achievers to determine how much race and stereotype threat influence their academic achievement.

**Summary**

Across the country, within the confines of our nation’s colleges and universities African-American students are trying to free themselves from the emotional servitude that enslaved our ancestors for over 400 years. The inauspicious influence of stereotype threat depletes their self-esteem and builds upon the emotional fragility that lay dormant from years of trauma and degradation. The pressure to reverse the effects of
stereotype threat creates a burden by way of somatic stress that “depletes mental resources and undermines intellectual performance” (Johnson-Ahorlu, 2013, p. 390).

This study expands upon prior research claiming that stereotype threat affects the efficacy of first-year African-American students. Through the study, it was discovered that the GPAs and social interactions of first-year African-American students influenced by stereotype threat were slightly altered compared to those not influenced by stereotype threat. The qualitative data within the study provided sustenance by way of first-person deposition of experiences with racialization and stereotyping on the campus of a public university in Maryland. Through focus-group participation, it was discovered that many first-year African-American students struggle with daily micro-aggressions associated with on-campus racism. Despite these struggles, first-year African-American students displayed a resilience that can be attributed to strong emotional support, a pattern of prior successes, and reinforcement of values contradictory of those fostered by social constructionists.
References


Creswell, J. W. (2013). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among the...*


Myers, V. (2015, Dec. 3). *Diversity is being invited to the party: Inclusion is being asked to dance.* Presentation at the AppNexus Women’s Leadership Forum, New York, NY.


**APPENDIX A: DEMOGRAPHICS**
Sex:  ☐ Male ☐ Female

Race:

☐ White

☐ Hispanic or Latino

☐ Black or African-American

☐ Native American or American Indian

☐ Asian / Pacific Islander

☐ Other

What is your age? (Participants must be 18 years or older.)

☐ 18-19 years old

☐ 20-22 years old

☐ 23-25 years old

Do you participate in any extracurricular activities?

☐ Yes ☐ No

If yes what?

☐ Fraternity/Sorority ☐ Athletics ☐ Student Government ☐ Multi-Cultural ☐

Other___________

What was your high school G.P.A (Grade Point Average?)
What was your High School ACT or SAT score? Score_________

What is your current G.P.A (Grade Point Average?)

Typology of High School

Stereotype Confirmation Concern Scale (SCCS)

Often times, members of an ethnic group are concerned that their behaviors or the things they do appear to confirm stereotypes about their ethnic group. Think back over the past three months and tell us how often you have been concerned about appearing to confirm a stereotype about your ethnic group. Select a response from the choices below.

1. ___ How often have you been concerned that by eating certain foods you might appear to be confirming a stereotype about your ethnic group?

2. ___ How often have you been concerned that by talking a certain way you might appear to be confirming a stereotype about your ethnic group?

3. ___ How often have you been concerned that by dressing a certain way you might appear to be confirming a stereotype about your ethnic group?
4. ___ How often have you been concerned that by playing certain sports you might appear to be confirming a stereotype about your ethnic group?

5. ___ How often have you been concerned that by attending or participating in certain social activities you might appear to be confirming a stereotype about your ethnic group?

6. ___ How often have you been concerned that by taking your studies too seriously you might appear to be confirming a stereotype about your ethnic group?

7. ___ How often have you been concerned that by owning certain things you might appear to be confirming a stereotype about your ethnic group?

8. ___ How often have you been concerned that by shopping in certain stores or eating at certain restaurants you might appear to be confirming a stereotype about your ethnic group?

9. ___ How often have you been concerned that the way you look (your physical appearance) might appear to confirm a stereotype about your ethnic group?

10. ___ How often have you been concerned that by doing certain household tasks you might appear to be confirming a stereotype about your ethnic group?

11. ___ How often have you been concerned that by revealing your socioeconomic status you might appear to confirm a stereotype about your ethnic group?
APPENDIX B: College Student Experience Questionnaire

OPINIONS ABOUT YOUR COLLEGE OR UNIVERSITY

How well do you like college?

- I am enthusiastic about it
- I like it.
- I am more or less neutral about it.
- I don’t like it.

If you could start over again, would you go to the same institution you are now attending?

- Yes, definitely
- Probably yes
- Probably no
- No, definitely

THE COLLEGE ENVIRONMENT

Emphasis on developing academic, scholarly, and intellectual qualities

Strong Emphasis  7  6  5  4  3  2  1  Weak Emphasis

Emphasis on developing aesthetic, expressive, and creative qualities

Strong Emphasis  7  6  5  4  3  2  1  Weak Emphasis
Emphasis on developing critical, evaluative, and analytical qualities

Strong Emphasis  7  6  5  4  3  2  1  Weak Emphasis

Emphasis on developing an understanding and appreciation of human diversity

Strong Emphasis  7  6  5  4  3  2  1  Weak Emphasis

Emphasis on developing information literacy skills (using computers, other information resources)

Strong Emphasis  7  6  5  4  3  2  1  Weak Emphasis

Emphasis on developing vocational and occupational competence

Strong Emphasis  7  6  5  4  3  2  1  Weak Emphasis

Relationship with other students

Friendly, Supportive, Sense of belonging  7  6  5  4  3  2  1  Competitive, Uninvolved, Sense of alienation

Relationship with administrative personnel and offices

Helpful, Considerate, Flexible  7  6  5  4  3  2  1  Rigid, Impersonal, Bound by regulations

Relationship with faculty members

Approachable, Helpful, Understanding, Encouraging  7  6  5  4  3  2  1  Remote, Discouraging, Unsympathetic

Would you be consent to be a volunteer participant in Phase Two of the study which consist of a focus group that would last approximately 45 minutes?

Yes ☐  No
APPENDIX C: Invitation to Participate

Invitation to Participate

Dear Towson University Student,

Greetings! My name is Marone Brown and I am a Doctoral candidate for Drexel University. My research topic for my dissertation is the Influence of Stereotype Threat on the Efficacy of First-year African-American Students at a public university in Maryland. Through this study, I am conducting research on the impact stereotype threat has had on your success as a first-year African-American student specifically, on your GPA, and social interactions at the university.

As part of this study, data will be collected in two phases. In Phase I, I will compare GPAs of a group of Towson students who are influenced by stereotype threat based on the results of the stereotype confirmation concern scale. I will also compare the GPA’s of a group to Towson students who are not influenced by stereotype threat based on the results of the stereotype confirmation concern scale. No names will be associated with any of the self-reported GPAs collected. Also in Phase I, all first-year African-American students will be sent two questionnaires with a total of 23 questions inquiring about your experience as a college student and your experiences with various stereotypes for the first three months as a college student. The online questionnaire will
also ask if you would be willing to participate in voluntary focus groups. If you choose to participate in the focus groups, the following guidelines will be included:

- The coordinator of the program will randomly select ten volunteers to participate in the focus groups and each student will be assigned a number to be used as identification in the focus group.
- The focus groups will be scheduled by the coordinator on a specific date and time.
- The focus groups will take place on the campus of Towson University at a designated room in the multicultural center.
- Seven guiding questions have been developed for the focus groups.
- Each focus group should last 45 minutes, but we ask that you schedule an hour in case the discussion last longer.
- The interview will be recorded through an audio recording device.
- At no time will the researcher ask your name.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding your decision to participate, please feel free to contact Dr. Ken Mawritz or myself.

Dr. Ken Mawritz          Marone L. Brown
Drexel University        Researcher
267-671-2267             443-691-4237

kjm97@drexel.edu         mlb356@drexel.edu

This study has been reviewed and approved by Drexel University’s Institutional Review Board (IRB). The IRB has determined that this study meets the ethical obligations required by federal law and University polices.

Thank you for your consideration to participate in this study.

Respectfully yours,
October 26, 2015

Mr. Marone Brown
145 S. Beaver Street
York, Pa. 17401

Dear Mr. Brown:

Thank you for your interest in conducting your dissertation research around the Influence of Stereotype Threat on First Year African American Students. We are pleased to provide the support needed to conduct research at Towson University. Pending IRB approval, you have my permission to conduct your study between February 1, 2016 and March 1, 2016. This will insure your research survey questionnaire and focus group does not interfere with our spring break scheduled for March 13, 2016 through March 20, 2016.

Sincerely,

Raft N. Woodie, L.G.S.W.
Director, Student Success Programs
APPENDIX E: Focus Group Questions

1. What are the perceived barriers to student success?

2. What are the student’s perceptions of the school’s efforts to remove these barriers?

3. Do students feel like their school fosters a culture of diversity?

4. Have student ever experienced racism or perceived racism at their school?

5. Do students feel like their instructors perceive them positively?

6. Do students feel like they are perceived positively by the administration?

7. Do students feel like their peers perceive them positively?
Re: Stereotype Confirmation Scale

From: "Richard Contrada" <contrada@rci.rutgers.edu>
To: "Marone Brown" <mm358@tntrel.edu>

1 Files 46 KB  Download AI
Message < EJC conversion
Save

Hi, the attached should provide everything you need. Please let me know if you have any questions. Good luck with the project.

Best,

Richard

On 9/30/2016 10:16 PM, Marone Brown wrote:

> Hi Dr. Contrada
> 
> My name is Ron Brown and I am a doctoral student at Drexel University
> > In Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. I am currently exploring measurement
> > tools to accommodate my dissertation interest. I am currently looking
> > to explore the influence of stereotype threat on African American and
> > Black Immigrant college students. Throughout my research, I had an
> > opportunity to review the Handbook of Multicultural Measure and
> > reviewed your instrument for the measurement of stereotype threat.
> > I used the Stereotype Concern Confirmation Scale. The aforementioned
> > tool could be beneficial to my research because of my interest of how
> > stereotype threat influences the academic achievement and perceptions
> > of the African American and Black Immigrant students. The population
> > used to test the instruments reliability is similar to the population
> > I intend to use in my own research. In light of the aforementioned, I
> > respectfully request the use of your instrument in my research; I am
> > comfortable with the review I have read and feel it would help
> > enhance my research. I hope you strongly consider my request and I
> > hope to hear from you soon.
> >
> > Best,
> >
> > Ron Brown

---

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APPENDIX G: Instrument Approval (College Student Experience Questionnaire)

APPENDIX G: Instrument Approval (College Student Experience Questionnaire)

CSEQ
College Student Experiences Questionnaire
Assessment Program

Item Usage Agreement
College Student Experiences Questionnaire
Assessment Program

The College Student Experiences Questionnaire Assessment Program is part of the Indiana University Center for Postsecondary Research. The CSEQ Assessment Program is home to the College Student Experience Questionnaire (College Student Experiences Questionnaire—CSEQ) and the College Student Expectations Questionnaire (College Student Expectations Questionnaire—CSEQ). These are copyrighted survey instruments, and the copyrights are owned by The Trustees of Indiana University. Any use of survey items contained within the CSEQ or CSEQ is prohibited without prior written permission from Indiana University. When fully executed, this Agreement constitutes written permission from the University, on behalf of the CSEQ Assessment Program, for the party named below to use as items or items from the College Student Experiences Questionnaire or College Student Expectations Questionnaire in accordance with the terms of this Agreement.

In consideration of the mutual promises below, the parties hereby agree as follows:

1) The University hereby grants Marissa Brown ("Licensee") a nonexclusive, worldwide, irrevocable license to use, reproduce, distribute, publicly display and perform, and create derivatives from, in all media now known or hereinafter developed, the item(s) listed in the proposal attached as Exhibit A, solely for the purpose of including such item(s) in the survey activity described in Exhibit A, which is incorporated by reference into this Agreement. This license does not include any right to sublicense others. This license only covers the survey instrument, items, and data described in Exhibit A. Any different or repeated use of the item(s) shall require an additional license.

2) In exchange for the license granted in section 1, Licensee agrees:
   a) to pay to Indiana University the sum of $100.00, by check upon execution of this Agreement;
   b) to provide to the CSEQ Assessment Program frequency distributions and means on the licensed item(s);
   c) in all publications or presentations of data obtained through the licensed item(s), to include the following citation: "Item(s) as used with permission from the CSEQ Assessment Program, Indiana University, Copyright 1998, The Trustees of Indiana University;
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Indiana University Center for Postsecondary Research
1900 East Seventh Street • Eugene Field Hall 311 • Bloomington, IN 47405-7112
Phone: (812) 855-8920 • Fax: (812) 855-8121
E-mail: cmarissa@indiana.edu • Web: www.indiana.edu/cseq
Last edited January 2009
APPENDIX H: Twitter Screen Shots

Top Tweets

1. The guy that’s been harassing the LA staff apparently pushed a girl in cook library down the stairs. TU police is there now #TheTowsoniKnow
   - 3.51 23

2. KayyMarie @MusicLife
   #TheTowsoniKnow needs to stop using black students as trophies to be seen as "Diverse" and actually stand up and protect us as students
   - 3.18 9

3. Nëris Côle Retweeted
   Le Málnke @CashIsDaMotive
   "Police alert: Black male. Wearing a hoodie. About 5’3 to 6’3 & 120 to 200 lbs. Age 18-25" MAKING EVERY BLACK MAN A TARGET #TheTowsoniKnow
   - 3.14 14

4. You follow each other
   Le Málnke @CashIsDaMotive
   - 3.11 5

5. Hakuna Matafa, follows
   Susie Carmichael @MsLa_Magnif
   Yik yak called me a monkey during SGA elections last year and #TheTowsoniKnow told me they couldn’t do anything
   - 3.10 2

6. Bilphena @GoldWomyn
   #TheTowsoniKnow remember when white students were making racist jokes via yik yak about black students in Susq? pic.twitter.com/RFIxFtr6qr
   - 3.10 7

7. Tigist @passion_proper
   #TheTowsoniKnow contains students that will shame BSU for taking a stance and say the conflicts were magnified
   - 3.10 7
APPENDIX I: Drexel University IRB Approval Letter

January 28, 2016

Kenneth Mawritz, Ph.D
School of Education
Mailstop: Drexel University

Dear Dr. Mawritz:

On January 28, 2016, the IRB reviewed the following protocol:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Review</th>
<th>Initial</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Title</td>
<td>The Influence of Stereotype Threat on the Efficacy of First Year African-American Students at a Public University in Maryland</td>
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<tr>
<td>Investigator</td>
<td>Kenneth Mawritz, Ph.D</td>
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<tr>
<td>IRB ID</td>
<td>1601004167</td>
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<tr>
<td>Funding</td>
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<tr>
<td>Grant Title</td>
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<td>Grant ID</td>
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<tr>
<td>INSD, IDE or HDE</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Documents Reviewed</td>
<td>HRP 211 Application Form, HRP 201 Contact Form, Conflict of Interest Forms, HRP 503 Template Protocol, Consent document handout, Invitation to Participate, Interview Protocol, Recruitment Sites Permission Letter, Surveys, Focus Group Questions, and Proposal Chapters 1 - 3</td>
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According to 45 CFR 46, 101(b) (2), the IRB approved the protocol on January 28, 2016. The protocol is approved Exempt Category 2, this study will enroll 300 subjects to complete survey, 50 of the 300 subjects to participate in focus groups recruited from Towson University in Maryland.

In conducting this protocol you are required to follow the requirements listed in the INVESTIGATOR MANUAL (HRP-103).

Sincerely,

Teresa C Hinton

Teresa C Hinton
Member, Social and Behavioral IRB #3
EXEMPTION NUMBER: 16-X067

To:  Maureen Brown
From:  Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects Deb Garland-Chair
Date:  Wednesday, February 03, 2016
RE:  Application for Approval of Research Involving the Use of Human Participants

Thank you for submitting an application for approval of the research titled, “The Influence of Stereotype Threat on the Efficacy of First Year African-American Students Within a Public University in Maryland” to the Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Participants (IRB) at Towson University.

Your research is exempt from general Human Participants requirements according to 45 CFR 46.101(b)(2). No further review of this project is required from year to year provided it does not deviate from the submitted research design.

If you substantially change your research project or your survey instrument, please notify the Board immediately.

We wish you every success in your research project.

CC:  Kenneth File
APPENDIX K: Stereotype Threat and GPA

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APPENDIX L: Stereotype Threat & CSEQ

\[ t \text{-test two sample assuming equal variances} \]

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<tr>
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<th>College Student Experience Questionnaire Part 2</th>
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APPENDIX M: Stereotype Threat & Extracurricular Activities

$t$-test two sample assuming unequal variances

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