MAKING SENSE OF BELONGING FOR BLACK UNDERGRADUATE MEN ON A
PREDOMINANTLY WHITE CAMPUS

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My journey toward earning my doctorate was long and arduous. This dissertation is dedicated to my family, friends, cohort, dissertation committee, colleagues, and students—past, present, and future. Thank you for your sustaining support and inspiration. I hope my research pays homage to the strong, wise, and courageous Black men who have attended colleges and universities in pursuit of enlightenment, opportunity, and hope. You belong.
ABSTRACT

A SENSE OF BELONGING FOR BLACK UNDERGRADUATE MEN ON A PREDOMINANTLY WHITE CAMPUS

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The 6-year graduation rate for Black undergraduate men is the lowest of all students attending all postsecondary institutions in the United States. Only 35% of Black undergraduate men graduate in 6 years, compared to 60% of all students. The literature suggests that developing a sense of belonging may be particularly difficult for minoritized students who attend predominantly White institutions (PWIs). Sense of belonging is a student’s perceived social support on campus or feeling of connectedness and mattering. Additional research is needed to inform practices that foster higher levels of belonging for Black undergraduate men who attend PWIs to reduce the gap in college completion rates between Black undergraduate men and their peers. This study used a one-phase concurrent triangulation mixed-methods design. The mixed-methods approach involved analyses of quantitative data from the Student Experience in the Research University Undergraduate (ugSERU) Survey and analyses of qualitative data from in-depth student interviews to understand how sense of belonging varies among students of different race/ethnicities and gender and how Black undergraduate men experience sense of belonging at PWIs. The findings reveal that sense of belonging is higher for women compared to men. African Americans and Asians have comparable sense of belonging scores, but they are lower than White and Hispanic students. African American, Asian,
Nonresident, and Multiracial men and women have significantly lower sense of belonging scores than Hispanic and White men and women. Two overarching themes emerged from the in-depth interviews, including forces that worked against students’ sense of belonging and forces that supported students’ sense of belonging. The in-depth interviews also revealed the divergent role that one force could play for different students by promoting sense of belonging for some students and working against sense of belonging for others. The findings from this study have several implications for higher education administrators serving at PWIs who wish to improve the retention and graduation of Black undergraduate men.
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CHAPTER 1 – INTRODUCTION

Twenty-thee years ago, I was a young Black man from Cleveland, Ohio attending a predominantly White college in a small town in Pennsylvania. When I arrived on campus, I was holding on to beliefs and thoughts I had learned throughout my young unexamined life. College was my opportunity to interrogate my personal beliefs (which were mostly benevolent), broaden my perspectives (which were mostly reasonable), and challenge my prejudices (which were mostly ill-informed). I am not quite sure I would have had a better opportunity to evolve in my thinking and beliefs than during my time in college. For that, I am eternally grateful.

I commend my alma mater for increasing the number of Black students on campus when I was a student. I was one of approximately 1,200 students, 30 of whom were African American. Thirty students may not seem like a lot compared to many larger colleges and universities. However, the overall impact of more Black students on our small campus was palpable and allowed Black students to develop and sustain a relative sense of community. Still, there were few Asian, Latinx, international, and low-income students on my campus.

Despite the incredibly nurturing and supportive Black community we developed as students at this predominantly White institution (PWI), I still felt lonely, isolated, frustrated, and invisible more often than I care to recall. My experience was incredibly difficult and sometimes depressing. Looking back on my time in college, I was an open-minded student who made friends across races, ethnicities, socioeconomic status, nationality, and gender. I socialized with a diverse array of peers in a multitude of
situations. I could navigate wealthy environments, suburban cul-de-sacs, and inner-city corners. Yet, it was only when I parlayed in “Black Spaces” that I felt relaxed and authentic. Those Black Spaces included the residence hall rooms of other Black students, the student union TV lounge that my roommate and I co-opted to watch *Martin* and *Def Comedy Jam*, Black parties, and Black Student Union meetings and events. My time in “White Spaces,” which I defined as everything except Black Spaces, often felt like work. I was always thinking about how I was presenting myself. Am I smiling enough? Do I look angry? Do I look or sound “smart” in class? Will my professor notice that I am not in class? Will I be asked a question about Black people as if I can speak for every Black person? What will be the next ignorant statement made in class that will force me to choose the high or low road? Whether in class, studying, eating in the dining halls, or hanging out in my residence hall, I put on the metaphoric uniform that came equipped with a reassuring and semi-docile voice, a “handsome” and disarming smile, muted body language, and tempered passion. My uniform also included body armor to fend off the incessant barrage of arrows shot by my White peers and several unobservant faculty members. During my 4 years in college, I felt like I was surrounded by White “archers” who were oblivious to the meandering Black folk walking aimlessly in search of belonging underneath the arc of their falling arrows. Today we call these arrows microaggressions.

One of the reasons I believe I was successful in college is because I persevered by connecting to people and organizations where I felt like I mattered. I was a member of the men’s basketball team. I served as the inaugural president of the school’s first Black
Student Union, elected by my Black peers to serve their needs and interests. Many faculty members treated me like I was a scholar and athlete. Most importantly, I developed friendships across races without losing sight of the spaces that allowed me to “let my hair down.”

Despite earning my bachelor’s degree at this institution in 4 years, I almost dropped out after my freshman year. The environment on my campus was not always positive. Sometimes it felt hostile. During my freshman year, I vacillated between feeling invisible and feeling like an “other.” I sometimes felt like I was an exhibit in an aquarium. In the midst of it all, I felt stranded and disconnected. Often, people would acknowledge my athleticism and membership on the basketball team, completely discounting the fact that I was a college student. This affected me so much that I tried to hide that I was a student-athlete when I talked to alumni, my friends’ parents, or someone in town. Basketball was a double-edged sword. I loved it and enjoyed representing our school on the basketball court, but it also reinforced the negative stereotypes that were chasing me with torches and rifles in the dark side of my mind. In my social life, I was often bored, angry, lonely, and frustrated. I tried to attend parties, but the DJ never played music I liked. I tried to attend White fraternity parties and mostly felt unwelcomed. In my academic life, there were no Black faculty and very few courses that spoke to me as a Black person, or more specifically, as a Black man. I did not feel like I belonged for quite some time when I was in college. It got better each year, but not by much.

My work in higher education has always been influenced by my experience in college. We lose too many young promising Black men in college who have
extraordinary talent. The focus of my research is informed by my curiosity about the root cause of high dropout rates for Black undergraduate men and how they experience sense of belonging in college. The continued low rates of persistence and degree completion for Black undergraduate men relative to their peers underscore the importance of focusing on sense of belonging in this dissertation.

The 6-year bachelor’s degree graduation rate\textsuperscript{1} is lower for Black men than for all other groups that are regularly monitored by the U.S. Department of Education (2018b). Only 34\% of Black men and 43\% of Black women who were first-time, full-time enrolled students in a 4-year institution in Fall 2009 graduated with a bachelor’s degree in 6 years, compared to 59\% of all students (U.S. Department of Education, 2018b). Among first-time, full-time students who enrolled in a 4-year institution in Fall 2009, Asian undergraduate women and men had the highest 6-year graduation rates, at 76\% and 70\%, respectively. The graduation gap between Black undergraduate students and White undergraduate students is growing, as graduation rate increases for White students have outpaced increases for Black students over time. In a study of 232 institutions, Nichols, Eberle-Sudre, and Welch (2016) found that the difference between 2003 and 2013 graduation rates for Black undergraduate students attending 4-year public institutions increased 2.1 percentage points compared to 5.3 percentage points for White undergraduate students (Nichols et al., 2016). In addition to differences in graduation

\textsuperscript{1} Graduation rate is defined by the U.S. Department of Education (2018) as the percentage of an institution’s first-time, first-year undergraduate students who earn a degree within 6 years or within 150\% of the published time for the program.
rates across race and gender, graduation rates vary by the selectivity of institutions (Yeado, 2013).

Six-year graduation rates among institutions of the same selectivity are lower for Black men than for students of other groups. The 6-year graduation rate for students who first enrolled in the most selective 4-year institutions (e.g., acceptance rates of 25% or less) in Fall 2009 was 68% for Black men, compared to 79% for Black women, 78% for Hispanic men, 83% for Hispanic women, 88% for White men, 90% for White women, 92% for Asian men, and 94% for Asian women (U.S. Department of Education, 2018b).

Graduation rates are considerably lower at the least selective 4-year institutions (e.g., open admissions). Six-year graduation rates for students first enrolling in 4-year institutions with open admissions policies (i.e., all applicants accepted) in Fall 2009 were 31% for men and 33% for women. The 6-year graduation rate for Black undergraduate men attending the least selective 4-year institutions was a staggering 18%, the lowest 6-year graduation rate of all reported groups of students (U.S. Department of Education, 2018b).

Graduation rates are also lower for Black men who participate in intercollegiate sports—a population of students who are often financially and academically supported by colleges and universities (Harper, 2016). In a study of 65 institutional members of five NCAA athletic conferences referred to as the “Power Five” conferences, using data from the NCAA and the U.S. Department of Education, Harper (2016) found that “53.6% of Black male student-athletes graduated within six years compared to 68.5% of student-athletes overall, 58.4% of Black undergraduate men overall, and 75.4% of undergraduate
students overall” (p. 1). Harper (2016) also found that, for two thirds of the institutions in his study, 6-year graduation rates were lower for Black male student-athletes than for non-student-athletes.

No matter how the data are sliced, Black undergraduate men complete college at a lower rate than students from other groups, even taking into account institutional selectivity. Improving graduation outcomes for Black undergraduate men requires understanding the factors that contribute to college student attrition. Harper and Kuykendall (2012) and Morrow and Ackerman (2012) noted that disengagement from or lack of connection to an institution is often identified as a factor that helps explain high college dropout rates. Sense of belonging—the opposite of disengagement—is associated with positive and productive outcomes in college, such as academic achievement and student persistence (Hausmann, Schofield, & Woods, 2007; Strayhorn, 2012).

In this study, I used Strayhorn’s (2012) definition of sense of belonging with regard to college students. This definition states that sense of belonging is

a student’s perceived social support on campus, a feeling or sensation of connectedness, the experience of mattering or feeling cared about, accepted, respected, valued by, and important to the group (e.g., campus community) or others on campus (e.g., faculty, peers). (Strayhorn, 2012, p. 17)

Sense of belonging is affected by the extent to which students engage or become involved with their unfamiliar college environment. Low sense of belonging can indicate and/or lead to feelings of isolation and loneliness, both of which are forms of psychological stress (Stebleton, Soria, & Huesman, 2014) and can increase the likelihood of dropping out (Good, Rattan, & Dweck, 2012). A growing body of research has demonstrated that perceptions of campus climate (Hurtado & Carter, 1997) affect sense
of belonging. Students’ exposure to negative stereotypes decreases sense of belonging (Newman, Wood, & Harris, 2015; Steele & Aronson, 1995), while faculty-student engagement (Newman et al., 2015) and diverse interactions with peers increases students’ sense of belonging (Strayhorn, 2009).

The literature suggests that developing a sense of belonging may be particularly difficult for minoritized students attending PWIs. Research shows that minoritized students experience sense of belonging differently than other students (Bettez, 2010; Harper, 2013; Hausmann et al., 2007; Hausmann, Ye, Schofield, & Woods, 2009; Hurtado & Carter, 1997; D. R. Johnson et al., 2007; L. A. Johnson, 2014; Strayhorn, 2008, 2009, 2012; Vaccaro & Newman, 2016). Minoritized students at PWIs are frequently reminded of their perceived inferiority and experience an array of other problematic assumptions (Harper, 2015).

The effects of underrepresentation within an often antagonistic environment can lead to feelings of not belonging and disengagement from social and academic activities, which can then lead to underperformance and attrition (Hurtado & Carter, 1997; D. R. Johnson et al., 2007; Strayhorn, 2012). To reduce the gap in college completion rates between Black undergraduate men and their peers, higher education leaders must understand how Black undergraduate men experience college. This mixed-methods study seeks to understand how sense of belonging varies among students of different

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2 Minoritized is used instead of “minority” to signify the social construction of underrepresentation and subordination in colleges and universities (Harper, 2013).
3 A predominantly White institution (PWI) is a college or university in which Whites account for 50% or more of the undergraduate student enrollment.
races/ethnicities and genders and how Black undergraduate men experience sense of belonging at a PWI. The following research questions were addressed:

1. How does sense of belonging vary among students of different racial/ethnic and gender groups attending a national sample of predominantly White institutions?
2. How do Black undergraduate men experience sense of belonging at a selected predominantly White institution?

Significance of the Study

Improving college completion for Black undergraduate men is important for many reasons. Students who enter college but fail to complete a degree are less likely to obtain employment that provides sufficient income to cover the costs of investing in college attendance and are unlikely to realize the many economic and noneconomic benefits that accrue to those with a college degree (Baum, Ma, & Payea, 2013). In 2011, median earnings for individuals with a bachelor’s degree and no advanced degree working full-time were $56,500 compared to $35,400 for high school graduates without a postsecondary degree (Baum et al., 2013). Those with some college but no degree earned $40,400 compared to $35,400 for high school graduates working full-time (Baum et al., 2013). Median lifetime earnings for workers with a bachelor’s degree are $2.3 million compared to $1.5 million for workers with some college but no degree (Carnevale, Rose, & Cheah, 2011). Students who fail to complete a degree and who borrow to pay for college are more likely to default on their loans. In 2011-2012, the default rate for federal student loan borrowers who left college without a degree was 24% compared to 9% for those who earned a degree (Baum et al., 2013). Society also loses when students fail to
complete a degree, as students who earn a college degree are more likely to volunteer, engage in civic matters, vote, and live healthy lifestyles (Baum et al., 2013).

Colleges and universities are also negatively affected when a student drops out prior to degree completion. High student drop-out rates negatively impact colleges and universities’ performance on accountability measures such as retention, graduation, and federal loan default rates. Although federal accountability measures (e.g., the College Scorecard) have not been enforced, rankings and state appropriations for public institutions may also be adversely affected by high drop-out rates. Low graduation rates also increase student recruitment costs for colleges and universities. The median cost of recruiting a new student is $578 for 4-year public institutions and $2,232 for 4-year private institutions (Ruffalo Noel Levitz, 2016).

College completion is also an equity and social justice issue. The racial demographics of the United States are changing (Frey, 2015), and these changes have implications for higher education and the economy. If higher education attempts to produce a more educated workforce, it must simultaneously prepare to educate a more diverse population. Between 1990 and 2010, the African American population in the United States grew at a rate of 29% (Frey, 2015). During the same time period, the Hispanic and Asian populations grew 126% and 108%, respectively (Frey, 2015).

Higher education institutions should not function as engines of inequality (The Education Trust, 2017) for the nation’s most historically disadvantaged populations. In addition to the cultural implications of rapidly changing population demographics in the United States, there are economic implications that disproportionately affect minorities.
Isaacs, Sawhill, and Haskins (2008) refers to a meritocratic society as a society in which people are rewarded for individual effort and talent irrespective of class, gender, race, or other less germane characteristics. The data suggest that the notion of the United States as “the land of opportunity” is not aligned with the data. In a study that used de-identified data of 20 million children and their parents to analyze how racial gaps in economic mobility change across generations, Chetty, Hendren, Jones, and Porter (2018) found that Black boys earn less in adulthood than White boys who grow up in families with comparable income, family structure, education levels, and accumulated wealth.

When students go to college and graduate, they produce spillover benefits, or externalities, for the public at large (Baum et al., 2013). When more students graduate from postsecondary institutions, there is an increased benefit to the student and a greater benefit to society. College education is associated with healthier lifestyles, lower incarceration rates, increased civic engagement, and less reliance on public assistance (Ma, Pender, & Welch, 2016). To ensure equitable distribution of these benefits, graduation rates for underrepresented students should be comparable to their White peers. Ideally, graduation rates would be reflective of a true meritocracy.

Further investigation of the experiences of Black undergraduate men may help higher education administrators at PWIs identify effective ways to support Black undergraduate men’s sense of belonging and thus increase their probability of graduating. To develop effective retention and graduation strategies that address the unique experiences of Black undergraduate men, colleges and universities must enhance their understanding of how Black men experience academic and social environments at PWIs
and the extent to which their experiences help or hinder their sense of belonging. This dissertation addresses this knowledge need.
CHAPTER 2 – LITERATURE REVIEW

I begin discussion of the academic literature about belonging with an overview of belonging in its most basic level, followed by critiques of early notions of belonging. The chapter then contextualizes belonging in higher education in light of student development theories related to involvement, persistence, mattering, and campus racial climate. The literature review concludes with a discussion of research on sense of belonging and notes the absence of sufficient research-based understanding of sense of belonging for Black undergraduate men.

**Overview of Belonging**

The importance of sense of belonging to positive outcomes for Black undergraduate men who attend predominantly White institutions (PWIs) is supported by a substantial body of social science literature and a growing body of higher education literature (Harper, 2013; Hurtado & Carter, 1997; L. A. Johnson, 2014; Strayhorn, 2012; Vaccaro & Newman, 2016). Belonging is widely understood by psychologists and other social scientists as a basic human need (Maslow, 1962) and motivation (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). According to Baumeister and Leary (1995), Sigmund Freud posited that a person’s need to belong is rooted in familial and physiological needs. One such drive, according to Baumeister and Leary, is the attachment to one’s mother. In its most basic form, attachment theory suggests that humans seek comfort and safety through closeness to a reliable caregiver, typically the mother (Gold, 2011). The relationship between child and caregiver serves as the foundation for social and emotional development. Attachment theory relates to how human beings respond within relationships when they are hurt,
separated, or threatened. These parental relationships are important to an individual’s social and emotional development (Freud, 1930; Maslow, 1962).

Maslow’s (1943) theory of human motivation suggested that people are ill-equipped and in many ways unable to successfully meet higher order needs unless they have sufficiently met basic or foundational needs (Taormina & Gao, 2013). Maslow (1943) contended that physiological and safety needs, such as food, clothing, shelter, and personal and economic security, were prerequisites to such higher order needs as love and belonging. Early criticisms suggested that Maslow’s and Freud’s theories lacked rigorous scientific data (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). But, Noltemeyer, Bush, Patton, and Bergen (2012) found support for Maslow’s theory of human motivation in a study of 389 U.S. children in Grades K through 6. Their study showed that academic progress is positively related to improvements in safety and belonging needs.

Baumeister and Leary (1995) used a metatheoretical approach to critically evaluate the belongingness hypothesis in empirical social and personality psychology research. Baumeister and Leary (1995) posited that a fundamental human behavior and motivation must:

(a) produce effects readily under all but adverse conditions, (b) have affective (emotional) consequences, (c) direct cognitive processing, (d) lead to ill effects (such as on health or adjustment) when thwarted, (e) elicit goal-oriented behavior designed to satisfy it (subject to motivational patterns such as object substitutability and satiation), (f) be universal in the sense of applying to all people, (g) not be derivative of other motives, (h) affect a broad variety of behaviors, and (i) have implications that go beyond immediate psychological functioning. (p. 498)

Based on a review of empirical literature, Baumeister and Leary (1995) concluded that belonging satisfied the criteria for a fundamental motivation. Baumeister and Leary
also found insufficient evidence to support the notion that people can thrive or live happily in social isolation. Rather, they concluded that the need to belong is inherently coded in all human beings and therefore is a fundamental human need (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). If belonging is a basic human need and motivation, then one’s sense of belonging and relationship to others and the world may be essential to meaning-making (Crotty, 1998; Vaccaro & Newman, 2016) and well-being (Goldman & Kernis, 2002).

### The Role of Belonging in Higher Education

Working from the premise that belonging is a basic human need and motivation, it is important to explore factors that may facilitate belongingness, and in the context of higher education, sense of belonging in college. If belonging is a fundamental psychological motivation, then a lack of belonging or low sense of belonging may prompt students to abandon their institution or postsecondary education entirely. Bean (1985) described dropout syndrome as a students’ “conscious, openly discussed intention to leave an institution coupled with actual attrition” (p. 36). In a study of 1,500 students attending a Midwestern research institution, Bean found that a high sense of belonging or perceived institutional fit significantly reduced dropout syndrome, especially for first-year students.

A considerable share of research on sense of belonging in higher education (e.g., Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Strayhorn, 2008) is based on Tinto’s (1987) model of student retention and Astin’s (1984) theory of involvement. Both Tinto and Astin proposed that students who do not connect to the social and academic life of college are more likely to leave or drop out. Tinto emphasized the importance of academic and social integration,
while Astin (1984) and Kuh (2009) emphasized involvement and engagement, respectively. Although related, involvement and engagement are not the same. Involvement is the amount of physical and psychological energy that college students devote to the academic and social experience in college (Astin, 1984). Engagement is the amount of time and effort students put into academic and social activities (Kuh, 2009). Engagement is also what colleges and universities do to encourage students to participate in social and academic activities (Kuh, 2009).

Using data from the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) administered by 18 baccalaureate-granting institutions between 2000 and 2003, including 11 PWIs, four historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs), and three minority-serving institutions (MSIs), Kuh, Cruce, Shoup, Kinzie, and Gonyea (2008) found that student engagement in educationally purposeful activities improved academic performance and freshman-to-sophomore-year retention, with even greater benefit to students of color compared to White students.

**Sense of Belonging and Social Identities**

Early theories of integration (Tinto, 1987), involvement (Astin, 1984), and engagement (Kuh, Gonyea, & Palmer, 2001) placed a strong onus on students to seek, identify, and sustain involvement and engagement activities. But, in a study of community college students using data from the Fall 2013 administration of the Community College Survey of Men (CCSM), Newman et al. (2015) found that Black men’s perception of sense of belonging increased when they received validating messages from faculty. This finding suggested that increasing student engagement inside
and outside the classroom required investment by both the student and institution (e.g., faculty and staff).

For students who are not members of the dominant campus culture, which is the situation for Black men attending PWIs, integration, involvement, and engagement are more challenging. In other words, for students to feel a sense of belonging, they must also be involved and engaged with peers (Hausmann et al., 2007), faculty (Newman et al., 2015), student organizations (Harper & Quaye, 2007), and have access to effective educational programs and services (Kuh et al., 2001). Putting the onus for integration, involvement, and engagement on students means that, at PWIs, minoritized students must actively seek out people, resources, and activities within an environment they may perceive as not welcoming or accommodating to their identity.

Tinto’s (1987) integration model is not without criticism. Metz (2002) and Bean (1985) criticized Tinto’s model for its lack of consideration for students’ diverse backgrounds, including students’ socioeconomic and educational backgrounds (Xu & Webber, 2016), which affect students’ experience in nuanced ways (Hurtado & Carter, 1997). Tinto’s emphasis on academic and social integration suggested that minoritized students must abandon their identities and assimilate to the dominant culture of the institution. In contrast, a focus on sense of belonging is more inclusive of students’ identities and respects the harmony between students’ identities, personal values and background, and the group’s values (Hagerty & Patusky, 1995; Strayhorn, Bie, Dorime-Williams, & Williams, 2016; Vaccaro, Daly-Cano, & Newman, 2015; Vaccaro & Newman, 2016; Xu & Webber, 2016). An expectation that students assimilate is not
student-centered. Discordance between personal characteristics that are socially stigmatized may “disrupt an individual’s feeling of fit within a group and may result in a heightened feeling of alienation, discrimination or loneliness” (Mahar, Cobigo, & Stuart, 2013, p. 1,031).

**Marginality and Mattering**

Schlossberg (1989) explained the feeling of fit in her construct of marginality and mattering. Schlossberg defined marginality as a sense of not fitting in or being out, particularly during a period of transition. For college students, transition occurs at various points, particularly the initial transition from high school or transfer from another institution. According to Schlossberg (1989), when people do not feel like they fit in, they often conclude they do not matter, feel important, or cared about: “Mattering refers to our belief, whether right or wrong, that we matter to someone else” (p. 9). Marginality is often the status quo for members of marginalized groups, such as racially minoritized students who feel trapped between multiple identities and worlds (Schlossberg, 1989). Schlossberg found that adult learners who felt they mattered remained engaged in their educational pursuits and concluded that institutions that create and nurture environments that convey to all students that they matter will motivate students to higher levels of involvement, which thereby increases students’ sense of belonging.

**Definition of Sense of Belonging**

Sense of belonging is defined and conceptualized in many ways, but all definitions and concepts coalesce into Strayhorn’s (2012) model for college students. Strayhorn (2012) drew from existing literature and theory (Baumeister & Leary, 1995;
Maslow, 1943; Schlossberg, 1989) to construct a sense of belonging model that consists of seven core elements:

1) Sense of belonging is a basic human need, 2) sense of belonging is a fundamental motive, sufficient to drive human behavior, 3) sense of belonging takes on heightened importance in certain contexts, at certain times, and among certain populations, 4) sense of belonging is related to, and seemingly a consequence of, mattering, 5) social identities intersect and affect college students’ sense of belonging, 6) sense of belonging engenders other positive outcomes, and 7) sense of belonging must be satisfied on a continual basis and likely changes as circumstances, conditions, and contexts change. (pp. 17-23)

Mahar et al. (2013) conducted a review of peer-reviewed literature published between 1990 and July 2011 to develop a transdisciplinary conceptualization of social belonging. They defined sense of belonging as a “subjective feeling of value and respect derived from a reciprocal relationship to an external referent that is built on a foundation of shared experiences, beliefs or personal characteristics” (Mahar et al., 2013, p. 1,031). The five elements of sense of belonging proposed by Mahar et al. (2013) include: (a) subjectivity, (b) groundedness, (c) reciprocity, (d) dynamism, and (e) self-determination.

The first element—subjectivity—suggests that sense of belonging is distinctively individualized and centers on feeling valued, respected, and comfortable in and with the environment (Mahar et al., 2013). The second element—groundedness—is the assertion that an individual must decide to want to belong to something and that something grounds the person’s subjective perceptions (Mahar et al., 2013). The third element—reciprocity—requires a sense of connectedness between a person and the entity in which they wish to belong (Mahar et al., 2013; Strayhorn, 2012). Vaquera and Kao (2008) found that middle and high school students who perceive their friendships as supportive are more likely to be involved in school, demonstrate social competence, and perform
better on achievement tests than their peers who have less supportive or reciprocal friendships. In a study of students with disabilities enrolled in a midsize public research university, Vaccaro and Newman (2016) found that sense of belonging was tied to students’ ability to self-advocate, their need to master the student role, and the importance of supportive relationships.

The fourth element—dynamism—is the extent to which physical and social environments contribute to or diminish sense of belonging (Maher et al., 2013). The interaction between social barriers (e.g., prejudice, discrimination, and political climate) and physical barriers (e.g., disability that restricts access or interaction and geography) suggests that sense of belonging is dynamic and involves both people and the environment. The fifth element—self-determination—is the belief that one has a choice to belong to or interact with a desired person or group.

As noted by Mahar et al. (2013), “Systemic power differentials resulting from historical discrimination, social roles, norms or institutionalized discrimination are, therefore, important barriers to the feeling of self-determination and choice” (p. 1,031). In short, available research suggests that members of historically marginalized groups, including students from low-income families, students with disabilities, and students for whom English is not their native language, may struggle to achieve a sense of belonging due to systemic or overt barriers (Harper, 2013; Hausmann et al., 2009; Vaccaro et al., 2015).
The Importance of Social Identities

The concept of race is underdeveloped and not widely understood (Omi & Winant, 2015). A common notion of race is that people can be clustered based on biological, cultural, and physical characteristics. According to Omi and Winant (2015), race is a “social construction and not a fixed, static category rooted in some notion of innate biological differences” (p. 12). The stratification of humans based on skin color predates colonialism, which, for all intents and purposes, served as the impetus for the modern concept of race. In the 1700s, European colonists linked race to White superiority to advance the slave trade enterprise and to justify social and political structures of oppression and injustice (Crenshaw, 1988; Golash-Boza, 2016). Notwithstanding its limitations, race is relevant as a social category in the context of U.S. higher education. Race as a social identity is important through the lens of critical race theory, which posits that racism is normal and not an aberration. White superiority benefits the dominant group, which creates interest convergence or a disincentive to eradicate racism due to the deleterious effect on the majority of the dominant group (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017).

Race is a pervasive variable in U.S. culture and matters with regard to sense of belonging at PWIs because Black students are more likely to receive contradictory messages with respect to their belonging on predominantly White campuses (Gray, Hope, & Matthews, 2018). In a study of 51 first-year college students, Vaccaro and Newman (2016) constructed a model of belonging for minoritized and privileged students based on differences in the ways students from privileged groups (e.g., White, Christian, middle/upper class, or heterosexual) and minoritized groups defined belonging and made
meaning. Using Harper’s (2013) definition of minoritized students, Vaccaro and Newman grouped students who self-identified as a minority and who experienced marginalization as a result of membership in at least one historically underrepresented group but did not look specifically at Black men. Vaccaro and Newman found that, irrespective of student’s social identity group (e.g., privileged or minoritized), belonging for all students consisted of environmental perceptions, involvement, and relationships. All participants defined sense of belonging as fitting in and feeling comfortable in the environment, both of which are among Strayhorn’s (2012) core elements of sense of belonging and Hagerty and Patusky’s (1995) definition of belonging.

Vaccaro and Newman (2016) also found that minoritized students identified two additional themes—safety and respect. Although Strayhorn (2012) assumed that Maslow’s hierarchy of needs (which includes safety) is an antecedent to belonging, his model of belonging does not include safety as a core element. Vaccaro and Newman (2016) found that belonging for minoritized students was more complex than for privileged students and required an environment where students could be their “authentic selves” (p. 933). Privileged students used more positive descriptors for the environment (e.g., fun and friendly) than minoritized students (Vaccaro & Newman, 2016). Minoritized students often felt like the “only one” and criticized the environment and its lack of diversity (Vaccaro & Newman, 2016). Social relationships had a profound impact on students’ sense of belonging for both privileged and minoritized students. Vaccaro and Newman (2016) explained the differences with regard to social relationships as follows:

For privileged students, being familiar to others, having fun, and gleaining task-related support were essential features of relationships that evoked belonging.
Minoritized students, on the other hand, desired deeper, authentic relationships rooted in self-awareness. (p. 932)

Vaccaro and Newman (2016) posited that sense of belonging is influenced by social identity, which includes race/ethnicity. According to Vaccaro and Newman (2016), prior studies on belonging lacked consideration for differences among students and “defined belonging as if it were the same for all students” (p. 937). As such, to understand Black male’s sense of belonging, there is a need to develop a more nuanced and inclusive definition of belonging that is informed by minoritized student experiences (Vaccaro & Newman, 2016). Vaccaro and Newman’s study suggests that PWIs that foster environments where Black undergraduate men feel safe, where they do not frequently feel judged or treated differently, and where they feel comfortable being “real” or authentic may improve Black undergraduate men’s sense of belonging.

Strayhorn (2012) suggested that understanding students’ belonging experiences requires attention to the intersection of social identities, including race and gender. In other words, while the need to belong is a basic human need, it does not apply to all people equally (Strayhorn, 2012). Using self-reports from 311 undergraduates from ethnic minority backgrounds, Gummadam, Pittman, and Loffe (2015) found that a strong feeling of belonging to one’s own ethnic group mitigated feelings of disconnectedness for college students who attended a public PWI. Similarly, in a study of Latino students who participated in the longitudinal National Survey of Hispanic Students (NSHS), Hurtado and Carter (1997) found that Latino students enrolled in PWIs felt more connected to the campus community when they maintained interactions with external communities with which they were familiar before college. These findings and others suggest that more
attention should be given to the experiences of minoritized students (Hurtado & Carter, 1997).

The intersectionality of race/ethnicity and gender is integral to understanding sense of belonging (Bettez, 2010; D. R. Johnson et al., 2007; Strayhorn, 2012). Intersectionality suggests that identity is influenced by students’ many roles, expectations, and beliefs. Dill and Zambrana (2009) described intersectionality as “an innovative and emerging field of study that provides a critical analytic lens to interrogate racial, ethnic, class, physical ability, age, sexuality, and gender disparities and to contest existing ways of looking at these structures of inequality” (p. 1). The complex negotiation of social identity and environment influences how different students react to certain environments. Competing social identities create unique experiences for college students, particularly students who do not conform to the status quo or belong to majority groups. Through a series of individual and focus group conversations with six women in college, Bettez (2010) examined how the intersection of gender and race impact knowledge and understanding of belonging. Identity for the six mixed-race women who participated in the study was not constant. Sometimes the women identified with all of their heritage and, at other times, with only one heritage. Bettez noted that, for the women in this study, affiliation with an identity was perfunctory or strategic. This study illustrated the complexities of identity for members of minoritized groups and the adverse effect of these complexities on their sense of belonging. The participating mixed-race women indicated it was difficult to feel a sense of belonging to any particular group due to shifting identities based on circumstances or the lack of a direct connection to any
identity (Bettez, 2010). The results also imply that belonging is not a simple affiliation with or similarity to a specific group; even if the group is complicatedly related, identity is not based on sameness (Bettez, 2010).

Bettez (2010) notwithstanding, early studies of sense of belonging did not consider the complexity of social identities such as race/ethnicity and gender. Masculinity is integral to Black men’s interpersonal relationships and uniquely connected to positive social relationships with same-gender peers (Harris, 1995). Harris (1995) further explained:

In an effort to compensate for feelings of powerlessness and shame from not meeting traditional masculine roles, some African American male youth redefine masculinity to mean sexual promiscuity, toughness, thrill-seeking, and the use of violence in interpersonal interactions. (p. 280)

Contrary to traditional definitions of masculinity, one study found that African American male high-achievers’ motives were selfless; they believed their efforts and roles in campus leadership positions helped other African American students (Harper, 2004). In a study of 32 high-achieving African American undergraduate men attending six predominantly White research institutions, Harper (2004) found that African American male high-achievers held beliefs “consistent with traditional, mainstream White definitions of masculinity (i.e., provider, family man, and executive)” (p. 102).

Campus Racial Climate

Campus racial climate is defined as students’ attitudes and perceptions of issues of race and diversity within their campus environment (Hurtado, Milem, Clayton-Pedersen, & Allen, 1999). Minoritized students who attend PWIs report more encounters
with racism than their White peers, a finding that coincides with minoritized students’ perceptions of more hostile campus racial climates (Hurtado & Ruiz, 2012).

Several studies (e.g., Gonzalez, 2002; Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Hurtado & Ruiz, 2012) have explored the characteristics of campus culture, including campus racial climates that promote sense of belonging and other outcomes for students of different racial/ethnic groups. In a study of Chicano students enrolled in a PWI, Gonzalez (2002) found that Chicano students’ sense of belonging was affected by campus culture, which Gonzalez categorized into three worlds: social, physical, and epistemological. Within these three worlds, Gonzalez discovered that White cultural representations dominated the campus culture. Consequently, Chicano students perceived their presence as not valued or important (Gonzalez, 2002).

D. R. Johnson et al. (2007) used a national sample of 2,967 first-year students from institutions with predominantly White enrollments to explore the relationship between the college environment and sense of belonging. D. R. Johnson et al. found that positive perceptions of the residence hall environment had a positive influence on sense of belonging for students of all racial/ethnic backgrounds except multiracial students. This finding may imply that sociohistorical factors, including the historic exclusion and alienation of minoritized students at PWIs, might affect campus environments and the social, academic, and psychological outcomes for Black students, as suggested by Harper (2013).

Another factor that uniquely affects minoritized students is racial stereotypes. Minoritized students are challenged by the debilitating and degrading effects of
stereotype threat and racial microaggressions. Racial microaggressions are defined as the brief and commonplace intentional or unintentional indignities that communicate racial hostility toward people of color (Steele & Aronson, 1995; Sue et al., 2007). Racial stereotypes are prevalent on predominantly White campuses (Harper, 2015) and can create a psychosocial dilemma for minoritized students. Steele and Aronson (1995) refer to this psychosocial dilemma as stereotype threat. According to Steele and Aronson, stereotype threat describes how concern with affirming a negative stereotype about one’s group impacts an individual’s performance. Steele and Aronson found that African American students’ standardized test scores were lower than their White peers when the African American students were reminded about negative stereotypes associated with achievement of African Americans. Easing vulnerabilities to negative stereotypes mitigated the effects of stereotype threat (Steele & Aronson, 1995).

**Sense of Belonging for Minoritized Students**

The academic literature provides empirical support for the notion that Blacks, Hispanics, and other minoritized students who attend PWIs experience sense of belonging differently than White students (Harper, 2013; Hurtado & Carter, 1997; L. A. Johnson, 2014; Strayhorn, 2008; Vaccaro & Newman, 2016). Minoritized students experience a sense of belonging at PWIs in the context of their social identities, and their sense of belonging is affected by their ability to be authentic, connect with other minoritized students, and engage in cross-racial interactions, as well as their perceptions of campus racial climate.
Previous studies (Harper & Quaye, 2007; Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Strayhorn, 2009; Vaccaro et al., 2015; Vaccaro & Newman, 2016) demonstrate that sense of belonging varies among college students from different racial/ethnic backgrounds. Hurtado and Carter (1997) found that maintaining family relationship was essential to Latino students’ transition to college. Latino students in their study were challenged to find ways to balance independence and interdependence. Hurtado and Carter also found that students from different races and ethnicities benefit from developing cross-racial relationships in college. Strayhorn’s (2009) study of Black men attending PWIs also identified cross-racial relationships as significant predictors of sense of belonging. Vaccaro and Newman (2016) also found differences in sense of belonging between privileged or White students and minoritized students. Vaccaro and Newman noted minoritized students’ emphasis on safety, authenticity, and respect as unique factors in their sense of belonging. Strayhorn (2008) found that minoritized students who interacted and engaged with students from different racial/ethnic backgrounds managed to navigate college successfully and reported a strong sense of belonging. Using data from the 2004-2005 administration of the College Student Experiences Questionnaire (CSEQ), Strayhorn (2008) studied the relationship between college experiences and sense of belonging for 589 White and Latino students attending PWIs. Although Latino students reported lower sense of belonging than their White peers, both White and Latino students who interacted with students from diverse backgrounds experienced a higher sense of belonging. The positive effect was greater for Latino students (Strayhorn, 2008).
Sense of Belonging for Black Men in College

While the academic literature illustrates how minoritized students cope with predominantly White campus environments, little is known about how Black men specifically cope in these environments. Using data from the National Black Male College Achievement Study, Harper (2015) examined how Black male college achievers (e.g., academically high-performing and actively engaged student leaders) experience racial stereotypes and how they respond to negative stereotypes at predominantly White campuses. Despite constant reminders from peers, faculty, and staff about their perceived intellectual inferiority, Black male students learned how to resist the threat of stereotypes by engaging in activities and organizations that supported important issues and positive images and perceptions of Black students (Harper, 2015). Harper’s (2015) and Harper and Quaye’s (2007) studies are two of the few studies focused exclusively on Black undergraduate men in college. Harper and Quaye (2007) examined Black men attending six large public predominantly White research universities and identified the importance of engagement outside the classroom and in student organizations as platforms to facilitate racial uplift for minoritized students.

Encouraging Black men to engage with peers from different races on predominantly White campus may enhance their sense of belonging, but predominantly White campuses are fraught with racial tension and other factors that make college more challenging for minoritized students (Sue et al., 2007). The number of racial incidents at colleges and universities is staggering. In the 10 days after the 2016 presidential election, the Southern Poverty Law Center (2016) received over 900 reports of harassment and
intimidation, most of which occurred on college campuses. Invitations from conservative student organizations to alt-right and White nationalist speakers to visit PWIs have sparked protests, campus violence, and a national free speech debate in the United States. Campus racial climate at PWIs continues to deteriorate, reaching a peak when one person was murdered and dozens were injured following a torch-bearing rally by White supremacists on the grounds of the University of Virginia in August 2017.

As suggested by Hurtado and Carter (1997), minoritized students attending PWIs experience college different than their White peers due to their perceptions of campus racial climate. The research on how Black undergraduate men experience college at PWIs is limited; therefore, more research is needed to understand how Black undergraduate men experience college as a possible explanation for their markedly lower graduation outcomes. Better understanding of sense of belonging, specifically for Black undergraduate men who attend PWIs, may help PWIs facilitate campus environments that foster Black undergraduate men’s sense of belonging and consequently improve graduation rates.

**Conclusion**

Prior research has established that belonging is a basic human need and a motivation that influences human behavior (Strayhorn, 2012). In addition to the roles that involvement and engagement play in college students’ sense of belonging, the literature supports the notion that other factors, such as campus culture (Nuñez, 2009; Strayhorn, 2009; Vaccaro & Newman, 2016) and social relationships (Hausmann et al., 2007;

A more complete understanding of Black undergraduate men’s sense of belonging is necessary to help colleges and universities develop and implement effective strategies that improve belonging and, consequently, improve persistence and degree completion outcomes for Black undergraduate men. Minoritized students define and experience sense of belonging differently than their nonminoritized peers (Vaccaro & Newman, 2016). These differences are not surprising, as race/ethnicity, gender, and other social identities influence students’ understanding and perception of belonging (Bettez, 2010; Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Strayhorn, 2008, 2012; Vaccaro & Newman, 2016). Research supports the assertion that Black undergraduate men are less likely than their peers to engage, develop healthy social relationships, or fit in well enough to feel comfortable enough to express their authentic selves (Harper, 2013; Vaccaro & Newman, 2016). But, research does not probe Black men’s definition and understanding of sense of belonging specifically.

Because of the complexity of the intersection of social identities, such as race/ethnicity and gender, additional research is needed to understand how Black undergraduate men experience sense of belonging at PWIs. The low enrollment, retention, academic performance, and graduation rates for Black undergraduate men compared with other groups underscore the need for a deeper and more substantive understanding of their experiences and sense of belonging in college.
CHAPTER 3 – METHODOLOGY

This study employed a one-phase concurrent triangulation mixed-methods design. The combination of qualitative and quantitative methods offered more comprehensive understanding of the research questions than either approach alone (Creswell, 2014). The mixed-methods approach involved analyses of quantitative data from the Student Experience in the Research University Undergraduate (ugSERU) Survey (University of California, Berkeley, 2018) to examine the first research question and analyses of qualitative data from in-depth student interviews to explore the second research question.

The following research questions were examined:

1. How does sense of belonging vary among students of different racial/ethnic and gender groups attending a national sample of predominantly White institutions?
2. How do Black undergraduate men experience sense of belonging at a selected predominantly White institution?

Research Question 1: Quantitative Analyses

I used descriptive analyses of data from the 2015 administration of the ugSERU dataset to first address the first research question: What are race and gender group differences in sense of belonging among sophomore, junior, and senior undergraduate students attending nine research-intensive public institutions that participated in the 2015 administration of the ugSERU?

Population, Sample, and Data for Quantitative Analyses

The quantitative study used data collected from the ugSERU Survey. The ugSERU Survey is administered by the SERU Consortium, which is comprised of 17 institutions that are also members of the Association of American Universities (AAU,
2018), a binational organization of 62 leading research institutions in the United States and Canada. Membership in the Consortium is by invitation only and based on institutional commitment and alignment with the mission and goals of the Consortium. The SERU Consortium member institutions are the University of California system institutions, Rutgers University, University of Florida, University of Kansas, University of Michigan, University of Minnesota, University of Oregon, University of Pittsburgh, University of Texas, University of North Carolina, University of Virginia, Texas A&M University, University of Iowa, Purdue University, University of Washington, Michigan State University, University of Toronto, and University of Delaware.

The colleges and universities in the analytic sample for this study are the nine institutions that chose to participate in the 2015 administration of the ugSERU Survey. These institutions were University of Florida, Texas A&M University, University of Minnesota, University of Washington, University of Pittsburgh, University of Michigan, University of Virginia, University of North Carolina, and University of Southern California.

Survey Instrument

The ugSERU Survey research center is housed at the University of California, Berkeley. The survey is administered annually (January through July) by the University of Minnesota’s Office of Institutional Research. The ugSERU is administered to the census of undergraduate students at each participating institution. The University of Minnesota cumulates and returns student responses to participating institutions and
maintains the central database for longitudinal and cross-institution comparisons (University of Minnesota, 2018).

The ugSERU is designed to provide an environmental scan of the student experience at major research-intensive universities (University of California, Berkeley, 2018). The purpose of the ugSERU Survey is to inform institutional self-improvement and assess institutional effectiveness by gathering information about student experiences and engagement activities linked to positive postsecondary education outcomes (University of California, Berkeley, 2018). The survey also provides comparison and longitudinal data.

The complete ugSERU 2015 questionnaire has several parts. The basic questionnaire (Core Questions) was administered to all students at all participating institutions and included 62 questions grouped in the following categories: (a) Academic Engagement, (b) Time Allocation, (c) Academic and Personal Development, (d) Institutional Climate for Diversity, (e) Plans and Aspirations, (f) Overall Satisfaction, (g) Evaluation of the Major, and (h) Background (demographics). The ugSERU is revised, at least slightly, annually. A committee of members from the SERU Consortium reviews items, considers comments from survey administrators and students taking the survey, and weighs recommendations from member campuses (B. Utke, personal communication, March 15, 2018). The committee makes recommendations to the four principal researchers who confirm the final set of items each year (B. Utke, personal communication, March 15, 2018). The frequency of survey administration is determined by each institution.
Institutions could choose to include seven questions exclusive to international students (nonresidents) and three questions for students who participated in study abroad. Institutions can also elect to include additional items created by the SERU Consortium on the following four topics: (a) academic experience and globalization, (b) community and civic engagement, (c) student life, and (d) student development. Institutions are also able to create institution-specific questions. For example, during the 2015 administration of the survey, the University of Washington, Seattle elected to include questions prepared by their institution on paid employment, advising, and withdrawal (University of Washington, Seattle, 2018). The ugSERU Survey items are designed to allow institutions to analyze data at multiple levels of the institution, including but not limited to school-level, department-level, and academic major. After the conclusion of the survey data collection period, survey results and student demographic information are provided to each participating institution.

In Spring 2015, the ugSERU Survey was administered by the University of Minnesota’s Office of Institutional Research to 57,199 students across nine participating universities. Response rates ranged from 10% (low) to 41% (high). The average response rate for the 2015 administration of the ugSERU was 24%. The dataset included 57,199 respondents of which 12.4% were freshman, 20.6% were sophomores, 25.5% juniors, 41.3% were seniors, and 0.1% were other. Sixty-one percent were female compared to 39% male. The race/ethnic composition was 0.3% American Indian, 4.3% African American, 10.3% Hispanic, 11.3% Asian, 60.9% White, 0.2% Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander, 5.2% Nonresident, and 3.4% Multiracial. Students who were freshmen in the
2015ugSERU dataset would have been midway through their second semester of college at the time of the survey administration. To avoid skewing the data with students who had not successfully completed 1 year of college, I excluded these respondents from the analytic sample.

I excluded first-year students to eliminate students who had less than two semesters of experience in college or insufficient institutional experience. I could not identify an objective means of determining high achievement for students who had only 6 weeks of experience in college.

To address the first research question, the quantitative part of this study used data for all nine institutions. I obtained access to 2015 ugSERU data in accordance with Section B of the SERU Data Preparation, Access, and Usage Guidelines, which allow access to specific ugSERU Survey data elements for scholarly research. The survey data elements can be found in Appendix A. The SERU staff de-identified all student data to protect the privacy and confidentiality of respondents.

**Variables**

I created a sense of belonging composite score by computing the average of six ugSERU Survey questions. I selected the six questions based on an independent factor analysis of the 2008 and 2011 ugSERU Survey. The independent factor analysis was conducted by the Center for Higher Education Studies at the University of California, Berkeley (2018). At least four factor analyses of ugSERU Survey have been conducted since 2006 with input from a panel of experts who identified six upSERU questions correlated with sense of belonging and satisfaction (Chatman, 2009). In a subsequent
factor analysis, Chatman’s (2011) results included Subfactor 1c, Sense of Belonging and Satisfaction, with Cronbach’s alpha of 0.85. A detailed description of the six questions that comprise Subfactor 1c can be found in Table 1.

Factor 1 structure and reliability of the 2011 ugSERU Questionnaire Core is provided in Table 2. I used the six questions from Chatman’s (2011) Subfactor 1c to calculate the sense of belonging composite score in this dissertation. This measure is the dependent variable examined in the first research question.

I conducted a reliability analysis on the six items included in Subfactor 1c and listed in Table 1 to confirm reliability for the analytic sample in this dissertation. All six items were based on a Likert-type scale that measured satisfaction or agreeableness. The scores ranged from 1 (low) to 6 (high). I used the z-scored versions of the composite measures. Cronbach’s alpha for the six items used in my reliability analysis was 0.84.

Table 3 shows the independent variables used in the analyses to address the first research question with respect to race/ethnicity and gender. The categories for race/ethnicity included Asian, African American, Hispanic, White, Nonresident, Multiracial, and All Other Groups (e.g., Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander and American Indian) can be found in Table 4. The categories for gender were male and female. I excluded “other” gender due to the low number of responses (n = 5).

Data Analyses

I used a nonparametric analysis of variance (ANOVA) to determine if the mean sense of belonging composite score varied by race/ethnicity, gender, and race and gender. This approach made no assumption about the shape of the distribution. Cases that were
Table 1

*Subfactor 1c Survey Questions of the 2015 ugSERU*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Questions</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. I feel that I belong at this campus. (RUCAGREEBELONG)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Knowing what I know now, I would still choose to enroll at this campus. (RUCAGREEREENRLL)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Satisfaction with grade point average (RUCSATGPA)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Overall social experience (RUCSATSOCIAL)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Overall academic experience (RUCSATACADEMIC)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Value of your education experience for the price you are paying (RUCSATVALUE)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* Adapted from “2015 Student Experience in the Research University Undergraduate Survey,” by the Center for Studies in Higher Education, 2017. Retrieved from the University of Minnesota website: http://z.unm.edu/serudata

Table 2

*Factor 1 Structure and Reliability of the 2011 ugSERU Questionnaire Core*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factors/Subfactors</th>
<th>Cronbach’s Alpha</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Factor 1: Satisfaction with Educational Experience</td>
<td>0.92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subfactor 1a: Quality of Instruction and Courses in Major</td>
<td>0.76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subfactor 1b: Satisfaction with Access &amp; Availability of Courses in Major</td>
<td>0.82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subfactor 1c: Sense of Belonging and Satisfaction</td>
<td>0.85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Satisfaction with grade point average</td>
<td>0.51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Value of education for price</td>
<td>0.70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Overall academic experience</td>
<td>0.80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Overall social experience</td>
<td>0.78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Choose to enroll again</td>
<td>0.83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. I feel that I belong</td>
<td>0.85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subfactor 1d: Satisfaction with Advising and Out of Class Contact</td>
<td>0.80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subfactor 1e: Clarity of Program Requirements, Policies, and Practices</td>
<td>0.66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subfactor 1f: Satisfaction with Library Support</td>
<td>0.77</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note:* Internal consistency of factors are measured by Cronbach’s alpha. Only loadings > 0.3 are displayed. Adapted from “Factor Structure and Reliability of the 2011 ugSERU/UCUES Questionnaire Core,” by S. Chatman, 2011, p. 10.
Table 3

Distribution of Students in the Analytic Sample by Gender

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>n</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>22,291</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>34,903</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note. Adapted from “2015 Student Experience in the Research University Undergraduate Survey,” by the Center for Studies in Higher Education, 2017. Retrieved from the University of Minnesota website: http://z.unm.edu/serudata*

Table 4

Distribution of Students in the Analytic Sample by Race/Ethnicity

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Race/Ethnicity</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>African American</td>
<td>2461</td>
<td>4.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>5889</td>
<td>10.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>6455</td>
<td>11.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>34810</td>
<td>60.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nonresident</td>
<td>2992</td>
<td>5.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multiracial</td>
<td>1954</td>
<td>3.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All Other Groups</td>
<td>272</td>
<td>0.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>50085</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note. Adapted from “2015 Student Experience in the Research University Undergraduate Survey,” by the Center for Studies in Higher Education, 2017. Retrieved from the University of Minnesota website: http://z.unm.edu/serudata*

missing data (n = 2,366) for the dependent sense of belonging measure were dropped using pairwise deletion. The results describe differences in reported sense of belonging by race and gender among students in their sophomore through senior years of study who are attending nine large public predominantly White research universities.

Population, Sample, and Data for Qualitative Analyses

To address the second research question in this mixed-methods study, I used a phenomenological approach to probe in-depth the sense of belonging among purposively selected Black undergraduate men attending one of the public predominantly White
research universities included in the quantitative portion of this study. According to Creswell (2013), a phenomenological study “describes the common meaning for several individuals of their lived experiences of a concept or a phenomenon” (p. 76). In this study, the phenomenon is sense of belonging.

**Research Site**

The research site was a purposively selected large public research university in the Northeast and one of the nine institutions that participated in the 2015 administration of the ugSERU Survey. For the purpose of this study, I gave the research site the pseudonym Northeast University (NU). Northeast University is a predominantly White institution (PWI) with a total enrollment of approximately 19,000 undergraduate students. Northeast University is a member of the SERU Consortium that administers the ugSERU Survey. The SERU Consortium is a group of AAU research-intensive universities, scholars, and policy researchers who collaborate on research, share institutional data on student experiences in research universities, and provide a global network of similar institutions (University of California, Berkeley, 2018).

Northeast University has a lower representation of women and Blacks among undergraduates than colleges and universities nationwide. Table 5 shows the percentage distributions of undergraduate students enrolled in Fall 2016 and retention and graduation rates for Fall 2015 and 2010 cohorts by race/ethnicity. At the selected institution, 52% of undergraduates are female compared to 57% female undergraduates enrolled in all degree-granting postsecondary institutions in the United States in Fall 2014 (U.S. Department of Education, 2018a). About 5% of undergraduates at the research site are
Table 5

Percentage Distribution of U.S. Resident Undergraduate Enrollment in 4-Year Public Degree-Granting Postsecondary Institutions, by Institutional Level and Control and Student Race/Ethnicity: Fall 2016

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Enrollment, Retention, and Graduation</th>
<th>Northeast University</th>
<th>All 4-Year Publics</th>
<th>Rutgers</th>
<th>Florida</th>
<th>Kansas</th>
<th>Michigan</th>
<th>UVA</th>
<th>UNC</th>
<th>USC</th>
<th>Texas A&amp;M</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fall 2016, Fall 2015, Fall 2010</td>
<td>19,123</td>
<td>13,492,900</td>
<td>36,168</td>
<td>34,554</td>
<td>19,262</td>
<td>28,983</td>
<td>16,331</td>
<td>18,522</td>
<td>18,784</td>
<td>50,735</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Undergraduate (UG) Enrollment</td>
<td>48%</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td>49%</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>48%</td>
<td>52%</td>
<td>52%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total UG Enrollment (Male)</td>
<td>48%</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td>49%</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>48%</td>
<td>52%</td>
<td>52%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total UG Enrollment (Female)</td>
<td>52%</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>55%</td>
<td>51%</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>55%</td>
<td>58%</td>
<td>52%</td>
<td>48%</td>
<td>48%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American Indian or Alaskan Native</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>0.2%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black or African American</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>73%</td>
<td>62%</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>55%</td>
<td>71%</td>
<td>61%</td>
<td>59%</td>
<td>63%</td>
<td>39%</td>
<td>63%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two or More Races</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retention (Fall 2016 cohort)</td>
<td>92%</td>
<td>81%</td>
<td>92%</td>
<td>97%</td>
<td>81%</td>
<td>97%</td>
<td>96%</td>
<td>96%</td>
<td>96%</td>
<td>91%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6-year Graduation Rate (Fall 2010 cohort)</td>
<td>81%</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>80%</td>
<td>87%</td>
<td>63%</td>
<td>91%</td>
<td>94%</td>
<td>91%</td>
<td>92%</td>
<td>80%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6-year Graduation (Male)</td>
<td>78%</td>
<td>63%</td>
<td>80%</td>
<td>87%</td>
<td>63%</td>
<td>91%</td>
<td>94%</td>
<td>91%</td>
<td>92%</td>
<td>80%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6-year Graduation (Female)</td>
<td>85%</td>
<td>63%</td>
<td>84%</td>
<td>89%</td>
<td>66%</td>
<td>92%</td>
<td>95%</td>
<td>93%</td>
<td>93%</td>
<td>84%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American Indian or Alaskan Native</td>
<td>86%</td>
<td>85%</td>
<td>85%</td>
<td>85%</td>
<td>57%</td>
<td>91%</td>
<td>95%</td>
<td>94%</td>
<td>94%</td>
<td>81%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>71%</td>
<td>93%</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>67%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black or African American</td>
<td>69%</td>
<td>74%</td>
<td>79%</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>80%</td>
<td>91%</td>
<td>85%</td>
<td>89%</td>
<td>72%</td>
<td>72%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>70%</td>
<td>70%</td>
<td>86%</td>
<td>62%</td>
<td>89%</td>
<td>93%</td>
<td>88%</td>
<td>90%</td>
<td>73%</td>
<td>73%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>82%</td>
<td>81%</td>
<td>89%</td>
<td>65%</td>
<td>92%</td>
<td>95%</td>
<td>92%</td>
<td>93%</td>
<td>83%</td>
<td>83%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two or More Races</td>
<td>81%</td>
<td>79%</td>
<td>88%</td>
<td>57%</td>
<td>86%</td>
<td>91%</td>
<td>82%</td>
<td>85%</td>
<td>77%</td>
<td>77%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nonresident Alien</td>
<td>79%</td>
<td>79%</td>
<td>86%</td>
<td>63%</td>
<td>93%</td>
<td>91%</td>
<td>86%</td>
<td>93%</td>
<td>84%</td>
<td>84%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Race/ethnicity Unknown</td>
<td>82%</td>
<td>73%</td>
<td>87%</td>
<td>71%</td>
<td>91%</td>
<td>93%</td>
<td>93%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>68%</td>
<td>68%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. Data from the U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS), Fall 2016, Fall Enrollment Component.
Black/African American (and 73% were White), while 12% of undergraduates attending institutions nationwide in Fall 2016 were Black (and 62% were White; U.S. Department of Education, 2018a). The 6-year graduation rate for the research site was 81% for the Fall 2010 cohort (U.S. Department of Education, 2018b), which is substantially higher than the national average for all 4-year public institutions (60%).

Six-year graduation rates at the research site for the Fall 2010 cohort were 55% for Black males, compared with 79% for White males, 77% for males of Two or More Races, 84% for Asian males, and 66% for Hispanic males (U.S. Department of Education, 2018c). Six-year graduation rates for Fall 2010 cohort were 82% for Black females compared to 85% for White females, 88% for Asian females, 86% for Hispanic females, and 76% for females of Two or More Races (U.S. Department of Education, 2018c).

**Participant Selection**

The sample in the qualitative analysis included 20 purposefully selected high-achieving Black undergraduate men. High-achieving was defined as students who had earned a 3.0 or better cumulative grade point average (GPA) and 31 or more undergraduate credit hours at the time of the interviews. The research site requires all undergraduate scholarship recipients to maintain a 3.00 cumulative GPA to remain scholarship eligible. I used the scholarship eligibility as an objective proxy for high academic achievement. Participants were all full-time undergraduate students who were between the ages of 18 to 24. First-year students were excluded from this study to avoid overrepresentation of students who have had little opportunity to build confidence in their
ability to transition to college and develop a sense of belonging (Strayhorn, Lo, Travers, & Tillman-Kelly, 2015). I limited the sample to students between the ages of 18 and 24 as sense of belonging and other college experiences are likely to be different for traditional-age college students than for nontraditional-age students.

I made efforts to recruit and select students who reflected the diversity of the undergraduate schools at the research site (i.e., nursing, general studies, business, arts, sciences, engineering), year in school, and residency (in-state and out-of-state students). To recruit study participants, I requested assistance from staff members who coordinated programs at NU whose students included substantial numbers of high-achieving Black undergraduate men. These programs included the engineering program for underrepresented students, the School of Arts and Sciences Peer Mentoring Program for underrepresented scholarship recipients, the Honors College Scholars Program for underrepresented students, and advisors to minority-serving undergraduate student organizations.

I asked program directors to assist with the recruitment of high-achieving Black undergraduate men who were participants in their respective programs. I asked the program directors to send my initial recruitment email to program participants, which invited students to participate in a research study about sense of belonging at NU. I was identified as a doctoral student enrolled at the University of Pennsylvania, Graduate School of Education. Students who indicated they wanted to participate in the study were informed about eligibility criteria. The eligibility requirements included identity as a Black or African American male, a 3.0 or above GPA, status as an undergraduate student,
and sophomore, junior, or senior status. The students were asked to contact me directly if they met the eligibility criteria. Twenty-one students contacted me to participate in the study. I selected all students who expressed a willingness to share their stories with me, with the exception of one student who responded after the conclusion of the data collection period. I was unable to include one student’s interview data in the study due to technical issues with transcription, resulting in a total sample of 20 students.

I informed selected participants of the purpose of the study and the method of data collection. I assured the students that I would mask their identities by using pseudonyms. No incentives were offered to participants.

All 20 of the participants were high-achieving undergraduate students who identified as Black or African American and male. Eight of the students were juniors, five were sophomores, and seven were seniors. Eight were enrolled in arts and sciences, four in business, four in engineering, one in health and rehabilitation sciences, and one in computing and information sciences. In addition to identifying as Black and male, four of the participants reported other identities. One student identified as Black, male, and Haitian \( (n = 1) \), one student identified as Black, male, Hispanic, and Christian \( (n = 1) \), one student identified as Black, male, and gay \( (n = 1) \), and one student identified as Black, male, straight, cisgender, and Nigerian \( (n = 1) \). The participants were all full-time students born in the United States. The students attended high schools in the following states: New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Virginia, Maryland, Illinois, Michigan, Ohio, and North Carolina.
Data Collection

Each participant participated in an individual face-to-face interview and was encouraged to speak freely about their experiences. I conducted one-on-one interviews with each selected participant in a private room located in the NU student union at a mutually convenient time and location between October and November 2017.

I used an interview protocol that consisted of reading a script (see Appendix B) to each participant followed by semi-structured interview questions (see Appendix C). I used Strayhorn’s (2012) definition of sense of belonging to design the interview protocol and questions. I asked participants questions about the nature of their college experiences, how they defined and understood belonging, and their thoughts about feeling connected and mattering, as well as their perceived social support. I wanted to create a textural and structural description of each participant’s experiences (Creswell, 2013). Consistent with an antideficit achievement framework (Harper, 2013), I developed interview questions that did not focus solely on forces that may negatively influence sense of belonging, but also asked questions about enablers of achievement. Interviews ranged from 37 to 89 minutes in duration. After obtaining verbal and written consent (see Appendix D) of participants, I audio-recorded each interview. All of the participants agreed to be recorded. I protected the privacy of participants by masking their identity in all presentations and reporting and by using their individually chosen aliases.

Data Analyses

I had all interviews professionally transcribed. I read, listened to, and re-read each interview transcript (Creswell, 2013). I wrote memos on my observations and insights
and developed general categories and relationships to create a textural description of participants’ experiences. Creswell (2013) indicated that phenomenological studies include a philosophical discussion of the lived experiences of individuals and how they have both subjective experiences of the phenomenon and objective experiences that are in common with other people. I first tried to understand each student’s unique experience at NU. I then looked across the students’ experiences to identify common themes.

I analyzed the data using a combination of precoding, coding, and categorizing strategies (Maxwell, 2013). I used an inductive method of analysis working from the ground up to identify emerging themes from the data (Creswell, 2014). I precoded the data by reading and familiarizing myself with the transcripts using themes identified in the academic literature related to Black men in college, sense of belonging, and campus racial climate. I coded and analyzed transcripts to identify patterns, similarities, differences, and relationships among participating students’ experiences. I compared coded transcripts and consolidated codes into common themes. My initial common themes included involvement, friends, engagement, racial tension, Black NU, and self-determination, belonging, and family. The common themes were grouped into overarching themes that described participants’ experiences. The overarching themes included: (a) underrepresentation, (b) belonging, (c) Black community, (d) mindset, engagement, (e) friends, (f) faculty, (g) student organizations, (h) family, (i) cross-racial relationships, (j) authenticity, (k) empathy, and (l) racial tension.
Trustworthiness

According to Milner (2007), researchers are “challenged to work through dangers and to reconsider their own and others’ racialized and cultural positionality in conducting research” (p. 397). First, I reflected on racially grounded questions about myself (Milner, 2007). I was mindful of the ways that my racial and gender identity and personal experiences in a racialized society could influence my collection and interpretation of the interview data. Most significant to the study is that I am a Black male who struggled with sense of belonging throughout my experience attending predominantly White undergraduate and graduate schools. As an undergraduate, I often felt like I did not matter or belong on a predominantly White campus. Second, I reflected on my relationship to the students I interviewed by acknowledging my role as a Black man, researcher, doctoral student, and higher education administrator (Milner, 2007). Sense of belonging for Black men in college is both deeply personal and relevant to my role as a higher education administrator and researcher. Because of my experience and awareness of my positionality, I empathized with and related to participants’ perception of isolation, racial tension, stereotype threat, and marginalization, among other issues. I believe that my experiences in college as a Black man connected me to the study and grounded me.

During the interviews, I remained mindful of my own thoughts and experiences whenever the students mentioned an experience similar to one of mine. I was conscious of my verbal and nonverbal reactions to the participants’ comments and strove to create a judgment-free environment that encouraged free expression by participants. I tried to limit my nonverbal and verbal expressions to facilitate students’ elaboration of their
thoughts. I asked clarifying questions and refrained from inserting my own personal experiences into the interviews. After the student left the interview, I would reflect on the student’s responses and make notes of concepts or themes that stood out.

Throughout my analysis of the qualitative data, I discussed my thoughts and perspectives with friends and colleagues to listen for alternative interpretations or perspectives that may not have been initially evident to me because of my own personal experiences and biases. Conversations with friends and colleagues helped me challenge my initial interpretations, forced me to consider alternative interpretations, and inspired additional reading about sense of belonging and Black male experiences in college.

Because of my personal experience and the personal nature of my topic, I thought it was important to validate my interpretation of the student interviews and engage in reflection and representation (Milner, 2007). I employed member checking to reconcile my interpretations of participants’ experiences with the participants’ understanding (Creswell, 2013). I shared drafts with participants of the major themes that emerged from my analyses of their interview and requested they provide feedback on my interpretations and the language used to describe their experiences. Nine participants replied to my request for feedback. All nine of the students indicated that my interpretation and use of quotes were accurate and consistent with their statements and understanding. One of the students pointed out that I had not used the pseudonym for the research site in his summary. One of the participants provided further elaboration on one of the responses I had recorded, noting that he had not disclosed the added information during our interview but thought the additional information might be helpful to the study.
Limitations

This study is a mixed-methods concurrent triangulation design. A primary benefit of a mixed methods study is to mitigate the limitations of the quantitative and qualitative portions alone. The combined methods provide a more complete understanding of Black male undergraduates’ sense of belonging. Nonetheless, there are several limitations to this study. The qualitative study involved students attending one university. Twenty participants is a small number compared to the population of Black undergraduate men at NU and other 4-year PWIs in the United States. The findings from the qualitative study may not be generalizable to the experiences of all Black undergraduate men at the selected institution or to the experiences of Black men attending other institutions.

The quantitative study used a composite measure of sense of belonging specific to the ugSERU Survey. I selected the variables for the composite sense of belonging score based on factor analyses conducted by the SERU Consortium (Chatman, 2009, 2011). The variables do not include ugSERU questions related specifically to race/ethnicity and other identities associated with sense of belonging for minoritized students. The quantitative analyses are also limited to data collected from the nine public research-intensive institutions that participated in the 2015 survey. At these nine institutions, African American students represented just 3% of respondents in the 2015 ugSERU Survey compared to 12% for all 4-year public institutions in Fall 2016 (U.S. Department of Education, 2018a).

I limited the quantitative and qualitative analyses to students who persisted to at least the sophomore year. Students who do not persist to the second year likely have a
lower sense of belonging than the students included in this study. As such, the results may provide a more positive description of sense of belonging for Black men in their first-year in college. The results may also be overly positive if individuals who chose not to participate in the survey or interviews had a lower sense of belonging than individuals who agreed to participate. I also limited the qualitative analyses to high-achieving students. High-achieving students may have inherent qualities that make their experiences distinct from Black men with lower academic performance as measured by GPA.

My role as Dean of Students may have affected the comfort level of students by either encouraging or discouraging criticism by the participants. Notwithstanding this limitation, these data indicate a willingness of the participants to provide critical feedback about the university. It was not possible for me to eliminate my power and privilege from the interview process. Due to my position and experience speaking with all students about their experience in college, I do not believe students were inhibited from sharing their genuine lived experiences, both positive and negative. Students openly shared concerns about the campus racial climate and the NU administration. I do not recall a student hesitating or mincing words during their interview. Students also openly shared positive feedback and praise. I did not have a professional stake in portraying participants’ experiences in a positive or negative light.

This study examined the experiences of selected Black male undergraduates with the goal of identifying ways to improve their success in college. I am genuinely interested in understanding their experiences regardless of whether they are positive or negative and
regardless of whether participants are critical of the institution. Through memo writing and reflection, I believe I remained cognizant of the potential influence I might have on the interpretations of the data. As a result, even with the limitations, the findings inform an understanding of Black undergraduate men’s sense of belonging at a PWI and the role of race/ethnicity and gender in perceptions of belonging.
CHAPTER 4 – FINDINGS FROM THE QUANTITATIVE ANALYSES

To address the first research question, I used quantitative analyses to examine differences in mean sense of belonging among students of different racial/ethnic and gender groups attending nine public predominantly White research universities. I limited the analytic sample to students who had persisted to at least the second year of college and who participated in the 2015 administration of the ugSERU Survey administered by nine research-intensive universities. I used a nonparametric one-way ANOVA to identify differences in the mean sense of belonging composite score by gender and race/ethnicity and then by race/ethnicity and gender together.

Differences in Mean Sense of Belonging by Gender

I used a nonparametric test (Kruskal-Wallis test) to determine if sense of belonging composite score (z score) was different for two groups: women (n = 30,372) and men (n = 19,708). I excluded the small number (n = 5) of individuals indicating “other” gender.

Table 6 shows that the average mean sense of belonging score is 22% of a standard deviation lower for men than for women, a small but potentially meaningful difference. The Kruskal-Wallis H test showed that this difference was statistically significant, \( \chi^2 (1) = 21.37, p = 0.001 \).

Differences in Mean Sense of Belonging by Race/Ethnicity

I used a nonparametric Test (Kruskal-Wallis test) to determine if sense of belonging composite score (z score) was different for seven groups: African American (n = 2,461); Hispanic (n = 5889); Asian (n = 6455); White (n = 34,810); Non-Resident (n =
Table 6

*Mean Sense of Belonging Composite Score (Z-Score) Among Students Attending One Public Research Universities by Gender*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Mean (Z Score)</th>
<th>Mean (Raw)</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>% Distribution</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Women</td>
<td>0.19</td>
<td>4.57</td>
<td>34,903</td>
<td>61.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Men</td>
<td>-0.03</td>
<td>4.53</td>
<td>22,291</td>
<td>39.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>4.55</td>
<td>50,085</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* Kruskal-Wallis test used to test difference in mean scores. Mean difference is statistically significant at $p < 0.001$.

2,992); Multiracial ($n = 1,954$); and All Other Groups (e.g., Native Hawaiian and American Indian) ($n = 272$). A Kruskal-Wallis H test showed that there was a statistically significant difference between race/ethnic groups, $\chi^2 (6) = 2,174.78$, $p = 0.001$. A follow-up test was conducted to evaluate pairwise differences among the seven groups. Significance values were adjusted by the Bonferroni correction for multiple tests.

Table 7 shows that the mean sense of belonging score is comparable for African Americans ($z$ score = -.37) and Asians ($z$ score = -.39) and is about 50% of a standard deviation lower for African Americans and Asians than for White students. The mean sense of belonging score is also lower for African Americans (and Asians) than for multiracial students ($z$ score = -0.14), other groups ($z$ score = 0.10), and Hispanics ($z$ score = 0.01).

**Differences in Mean Sense of Belonging by Gender and Race/Ethnicity**

To simultaneously consider differences in mean sense of belonging by race/ethnicity and gender, I constructed a new composite variable. The categories in the composite included African American Men, African American Women, Hispanic Men, Hispanic Women, Asian Men, Asian Women, White Men, White Women, Nonresident
Table 7

**Mean Sense of Belonging Composite Score (Z Score) Among Students Attending Nine Public Research Universities by Race/Ethnicity**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group (Ranked lowest to highest average mean)</th>
<th>M (Z Score)</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>M (Raw Score)</th>
<th>Summary of Statistically Different Group Means</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>-0.39</td>
<td>5639</td>
<td>11.8</td>
<td>4.20</td>
<td>White, Hispanic, All Other Groups, Multiracial, Nonresident</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African American</td>
<td>-0.37</td>
<td>2046</td>
<td>4.3</td>
<td>4.22</td>
<td>White, Hispanic, Multiracial, All Other Groups</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nonresident</td>
<td>-0.30</td>
<td>2459</td>
<td>5.2</td>
<td>4.28</td>
<td>White, Hispanic, All Other Groups</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multiracial All Other Groups</td>
<td>-0.14</td>
<td>1695</td>
<td>3.6</td>
<td>4.43</td>
<td>White, Hispanic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>0.01</td>
<td>5044</td>
<td>10.4</td>
<td>4.56</td>
<td>White (.12)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>0.13</td>
<td>30838</td>
<td>64.1</td>
<td>4.67</td>
<td>Asian (-0.52), African American, Nonresident, Multiracial, All Other Groups, Hispanic</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* Kruskal-Wallis test used to test difference in mean scores. Mean difference is statistically significant at $p < 0.001$. Differences in group means that are statistically significant are listed in the last column.

I used a nonparametric test (Kruskal-Wallis test) to examine differences in mean sense of belonging composite score (z score) for the remaining 12 groups. The Kruskal-Wallis H test showed that there was a statistically significant difference in mean scores between groups, $\chi^2 (13) = 2,267.88, p = 0.001$. I then evaluated pairwise differences among the 12 groups. Significance values were adjusted by the Bonferroni correction for multiple tests.

The mean sense of belonging scores fell into two groups representing low and high average sense of belonging scores. Table 8 shows that African American men did not have the lowest sense of belonging scores, but are among the students in Group A,
Table 8

Mean Sense of Belonging Composite Scores (Z Scores) by Race and Gender Group

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>$M$ (z score)</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Statistically Significant Group Means</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Group A: Individuals with the lowest average sense of belonging scores</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African American W</td>
<td>-0.42</td>
<td>1,734</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>White W, White M, Hispanic W, Hispanic M, Multiracial M, Multiracial W</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian W</td>
<td>-0.41</td>
<td>3,979</td>
<td>7.0</td>
<td>White W, White M, Hispanic W, Hispanic M, Multiracial M, Multiracial W</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian M</td>
<td>-0.35</td>
<td>2,476</td>
<td>4.3</td>
<td>White W, White M, Hispanic W, Hispanic M, Multiracial M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nonresident M</td>
<td>-0.32</td>
<td>1,384</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>White W, White M, Hispanic M, Hispanic M, Multiracial M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nonresident W</td>
<td>-0.28</td>
<td>1,607</td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>White W, White M, Hispanic W, Hispanic M, Multiracial M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African American M</td>
<td>-0.28</td>
<td>727</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>White W, White M, Hispanic W, Hispanic M, Multiracial M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multiracial W</td>
<td>-0.15</td>
<td>698</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>White W, White M, Hispanic W, Hispanic M, Multiracial M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multiracial M</td>
<td>-0.12</td>
<td>3701</td>
<td>6.5</td>
<td>White W, White M, Hispanic W, Hispanic M, Multiracial M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Group B: Individuals with the highest average sense of belonging scores</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic W</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>13,793</td>
<td>24.1</td>
<td>African American W, Asian W, Asian M, Nonresident M, Nonresident W, African American M, Multiracial W</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White M$^4$</td>
<td>0.07</td>
<td>1,734</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>African American W, Asian W, African American M, Multiracial W, Hispanic W, Hispanic M, White W</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White W$^5$</td>
<td>0.17</td>
<td>3,979</td>
<td>7.0</td>
<td>African American W, Asian W, African American M, Multiracial W, Hispanic W, Hispanic M, White W</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. Mean difference is statistically significant at $p < 0.001$. Differences in group means that are statistically significant are listed in the last column.

$^4$ Second highest average sense of belonging score

$^5$ Highest average sense of belonging score
which included individuals with the lowest average sense of belonging scores; Group A includes African American Men (z score = -0.28), African American Women (z score = -0.42), Asian Men (z score = -0.35), Asian Women (z score = -0.41), Nonresident Women (z score = -0.28), Nonresident Men (z score = -0.32), Multiracial Women (z score = -0.15), and Multiracial Men (z score = -0.12). Average sense of belonging scores for African American Men were not statistically different than African American Women, Asian Men and Women, and Nonresident Men and Women.

White and Hispanic students comprised Group B, which included individuals with the highest average sense of belonging scores. Hispanic Women and Hispanic Men averaged the next highest scores (z score = 0) and lower than for White Men (z score = 0.07) and White Women (z score = 0.17). White Women averaged higher sense of belonging scores than all other groups.

Mean sense of belonging was 45% of a standard deviation lower for African American Men than for White Women and 35% of a standard deviation lower for African American Men than for White Men. The differences between average sense of belonging scores for Black Men and White Women and Men were moderately large and substantial.
CHAPTER 5 – FINDINGS FROM THE QUALITATIVE RESEARCH COMPONENT

The qualitative portion of this study attempted to answer the second research question: How do Black undergraduate men experience sense of belonging at a selected predominantly White institution?

This research question focused on how Black undergraduate men experience sense of belonging at a selected predominantly White institution (PWI). To address this question, I collected and analyzed the stories of purposively selected high-achieving Black undergraduate men attending Northeast University (NU), a PWI. Interview questions focused on learning students’ perspectives and lived experiences at NU, including their social, academic, and engagement activities on campus.

In all aspects, the Black undergraduate men in this study are success stories. These men exemplify the potential and capabilities of Black undergraduate men. The Black men in this study defy stereotypes and all-too-common assumptions about Black male achievement. They offer a counternarrative to the often deficit-focused perceptions of Black undergraduate men attending PWIs. Their stories are dynamic and intriguing. Their voices are powerful, important, necessary, and relevant to understanding how, as Black undergraduate men, they make sense of their college experience at a PWI. To protect the identity of the participants in this study, I use the pseudonym selected by each participant in the reporting of results from this study.

All 20 participating Black undergraduate men were enrolled as full-time students at NU and had persisted beyond their freshman year with a GPA of at least 3.0. Of the 20 students I interviewed, seven were seniors. The seven men who were seniors were
excited about the next phase of their lives. Some of the seniors were interviewing for jobs, while others were making arrangements to apply to graduate or professional schools. I asked all of the students why they chose to attend NU. Ten of the students indicated that financial aid or their academic scholarship was an important consideration in their decision to attend NU. Of the 20 students, seven had attended a predominantly White high school before attending this PWI. Most of the other students attended what they referred to as diverse high schools with between 40% students of color to predominantly Black. All of the students in this study may be characterized as involved, as all indicated participating in one or more NU student organizations, including academic, fraternal, cultural, or sports clubs.

**Participant Profiles**

Before presenting the themes that emerged from the stories shared across the 20 participants, I first honor the perceptions and experiences of each participant by presenting 20 individual profiles. The participant profiles provide information about each student’s hometown, high school, and reason for choosing to attend NU, and I describe the organizations at NU in which each student is involved. Read collectively, the profiles demonstrate the differences between the students and highlight aspects that emerged as key aspects of their background and experiences for cross-student comparisons. The profiles are also designed to emphasize the uniqueness of each student and their varied interests and academic pursuits. Table 9 summarizes the demographic characteristics of the 20 participants.
Table 9

*Participant Information and Demographics*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>State</th>
<th>Class Level</th>
<th>School</th>
<th>Self-Reported Identities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Archer</td>
<td>New York</td>
<td>Senior</td>
<td>Business</td>
<td>Black, Male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>David</td>
<td>Pennsylvania</td>
<td>Senior</td>
<td>Business</td>
<td>Black, Male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jay</td>
<td>Pennsylvania</td>
<td>Senior</td>
<td>Engineering</td>
<td>Black, Male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JC</td>
<td>New Jersey</td>
<td>Senior</td>
<td>Arts &amp; Sciences</td>
<td>Black, Male, Straight</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jimmy</td>
<td>Maryland</td>
<td>Senior</td>
<td>Arts &amp; Sciences</td>
<td>Black, Male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roger</td>
<td>Maryland</td>
<td>Senior</td>
<td>Health &amp; Rehab</td>
<td>Black, Male, Gay</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Smokey</td>
<td>Illinois</td>
<td>Senior</td>
<td>Business</td>
<td>Black, Male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chaz</td>
<td>New York</td>
<td>Junior</td>
<td>Computing &amp; Information</td>
<td>Black, Male, Hispanic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harold</td>
<td>Ohio</td>
<td>Junior</td>
<td>Arts &amp; Sciences</td>
<td>Black, Male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Huey</td>
<td>North Carolina</td>
<td>Junior</td>
<td>Arts &amp; Sciences</td>
<td>Black, Male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jason</td>
<td>Pennsylvania</td>
<td>Junior</td>
<td>Engineering</td>
<td>Black, Male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jerry</td>
<td>Pennsylvania</td>
<td>Junior</td>
<td>Arts &amp; Sciences</td>
<td>Black, Male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kevin</td>
<td>New York</td>
<td>Junior</td>
<td>Arts &amp; Sciences</td>
<td>Black, Male, Haitian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Matthew</td>
<td>Pennsylvania</td>
<td>Junior</td>
<td>Engineering</td>
<td>Black, Male, Nigerian, Straight</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rick</td>
<td>Pennsylvania</td>
<td>Junior</td>
<td>Engineering</td>
<td>Black, Male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ben</td>
<td>Pennsylvania</td>
<td>Sophomore</td>
<td>Arts &amp; Sciences</td>
<td>Black, Male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jesse</td>
<td>Virginia</td>
<td>Sophomore</td>
<td>Computing &amp; Information</td>
<td>Black, Male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MJ</td>
<td>New Jersey</td>
<td>Sophomore</td>
<td>Arts &amp; Sciences</td>
<td>Black, Male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Malik</td>
<td>Michigan</td>
<td>Sophomore</td>
<td>Arts &amp; Sciences</td>
<td>Black, Male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perry</td>
<td>Pennsylvania</td>
<td>Sophomore</td>
<td>Business</td>
<td>Black, Male</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Archer is a senior from upstate New York enrolled in the business school. Archer chose NU after he received a special invitation to apply. Archer stated that NU “felt right” when he visited. He currently serves as a resident assistant, is a member of the Spanish club, and plays intramural soccer.

David is a senior finance, economics, and statistics major. He is from Eastern Pennsylvania where he attended a predominantly White Catholic high school. David is enrolled in the School of Business and selected NU because he and his parents liked the campus during their visit and because he received more financial aid from NU than any
other school. David is a member of a business fraternity and was employed as a student worker in an academic department at NU.

Jay is a senior from Pennsylvania enrolled in the engineering school. Jay attended a predominantly White public high school and chose to attend NU because of its focus on diversity and its programs for engineers. He is a member of several student organizations, including the National Society of Black Engineers, the Society of Hispanic Professional Engineers, and the undergraduate engineering program for minority students. Jay is also a member of a Christian student organization.

JC is a senior from New Jersey enrolled in the School of Arts and Sciences. JC grew up in an affluent and predominately White neighborhood and attended the same private school from K-12. He chose NU because he was impressed by a diversity program hosted by the Office of Admissions and appreciated NU’s incorporation of all underrepresented students in its diversity program. JC also liked NU’s urban setting. JC is involved in the Black Student Union, the Pre-Law Society, and a student-run late night talk show. He also served as an executive board member of one of NU’s fraternity councils.

Jimmy is a senior from Maryland, where he attended a private high school before transferring to a STEM-focused magnet high school. Jimmy is enrolled in the School of Arts and Sciences. Jimmy chose NU because of the school’s health sciences programs and scholarship. Jimmy participated in undergraduate research and served as an undergraduate teaching assistant. He is also a member of a pre-med fraternity.
Roger is a senior from Maryland enrolled in the School of Rehabilitation Sciences. Roger chose NU after selecting it from a list of prospective colleges provided to him by his high school college counselor. Roger and his best friend were both offered academic scholarships from NU. He and his best friend decided to attend NU together. Roger is involved in the American Red Cross Club, the African dance team, and the National Society of Black Engineers.

Smokey is a senior from Illinois where he attended a predominantly White private high school. Smokey is enrolled in the business school and selected NU because of his academic scholarship and the opportunity to play football. Smokey is a member of several student organizations, including the Roberto Clemente Minority Business Association (RCMBA), the Black Student Union, Big Brothers, a student-led fundraising group that works with the advancement office, and a student nonprofit consulting club. After graduation, Smokey plans to work for a consulting firm before applying to graduate school to pursue an MBA.

Chaz is a junior studying computer science. He is from the Rochester, New York area where he attended a predominately White high school. Chaz is enrolled in the School of Arts and Sciences and selected NU because he liked the urban setting and enjoyed his campus visit. Chaz is highly involved in student organizations, including a campus Christian group, student radio station, and a peer mentoring program for underrepresented students. He has also served as an undergraduate teaching assistant.

Harold is a junior from Northeast Ohio where he attended a public high school that he described as “clicky,” because students engaged primarily with students of their
own race. Harold chose to attend NU because it was out of his home state, he received a scholarship, and he loved the campus vibe during his visit. Harold also appreciated the diversity question on the NU admissions application because he believed it showed a recognition that diversity is broad and encompasses more than race. Harold is highly involved on campus and holds leadership positions in the fraternity and sorority community, serves as a peer facilitator in a leadership development program, and is a member of the debate team and theatre program.

Huey is a junior majoring in africana studies and pre-law from North Carolina. Huey described his high school as “really diverse” and comprised of mostly White and Black students. Huey indicated that there was a lot of racial tension within his high school and described the tension as typical for the South. Huey chose to attend NU because of the scholarship he received from NU and because he received insufficient financial aid from the historically Black institution that also admitted him. Huey is a member of the student government board and served as a resident assistant.

Jason is a junior from Pennsylvania where he attended a predominantly White Catholic high school. Jason chose to attend NU because of his participation in NU’s pre-college engineering program. Jason noted that he enjoyed the family atmosphere and wanted to continue his involvement with the program into college. Jason is a member of several student organizations, including the National Society of Black Engineers, the Society of Hispanic Professional Engineers, the Society of Asian Scientists and Engineers, a poetry club, and the engineering program for underrepresented students.
Jerry is a junior from Pennsylvania where he attended a predominately White public high school located in a Philadelphia suburb. Jerry is enrolled in the School of Arts and Sciences. He chose NU because his parents insisted that he apply after he received numerous mailings from the NU admissions office. Also, Jerry’s father is an NU alum and speaks fondly of his time at NU. Jerry also believed that there were many research and other academic opportunities available on campus, and he enjoyed his campus visit. Jerry is a member of a peer mentoring program for underrepresented scholarship recipients. He also participated in undergraduate research, a leadership development program, and he studied abroad in South America.

Kevin is a junior from New York where he attended a public high school and was top in his class. Kevin is enrolled in the School of Arts and Sciences. He chose NU because of the free application, scholarship, and his overall impressions of NU during his campus visit. Kevin played football and ran track in high school, and at NU, he is involved in the Black Student Union, Caribbean and Latin American student organizations, and is a member of a first-year peer mentoring program for underrepresented scholarship recipients.

Matthew is a junior from Pennsylvania. Matthew is enrolled in the engineering school. Matthew attended a public high school where he participated in the high school’s robotics club. In high school, Matthew met a senior from NU who, along with his scholarship, influenced his decision to apply and attend. Matthew enjoyed his campus visit and liked the urban environment. Matthew is highly involved on campus in National Society of Black Engineers—a historically Black fraternity, the Student Government
Board, and the Student Ambassador Program. Matthew served as a resident advisor for 1 year.

Rick is a junior from Pennsylvania currently enrolled in the engineering school. Rick attended a public high school and chose NU because it allowed him to use several scholarships with in-state criteria. Rick is a member of a National Pan-Hellenic Council fraternity, the National Society for Black Engineers, and the International Society of Industrial Engineers.

Ben is a sophomore from Pennsylvania. He is enrolled in the School of Arts and Sciences. Ben chose NU because of its location relative to his home and resources for students interested in the health sciences. Ben is a member of a mentoring program that has the purpose to increase the number of Black men in the medical field. He is also a member of the American Chemical Society.

Jesse is a sophomore from Northern Virginia where he attended a predominantly Hispanic and Black high school. Jesse is enrolled in the School of Computing and Information. He chose NU because of his scholarship. Jesse is involved in mentoring local high school kids. He is also a member of several student organizations, including a gardening club, the National Society of Black Engineers, and the data analytics club.

MJ is a sophomore from New Jersey where he attended a predominately Black private high school. MJ is enrolled in the School of Arts and Sciences. He decided to attend NU because of his research interest in medicine. He was also familiar with the campus because his cousin and mentor are both alumni. MJ is involved in Colleges Against Cancer and a health sciences organization for Black men.
Malik is a sophomore from Michigan enrolled in the engineering school. Malik characterized his high school as “pretty diverse” with majority Black and White students. Malik chose NU because he was interested in premed and because Malik’s cousin attended NU. Malik is a member of several student organizations, including the Black Student Union, the gospel choir, and a student organization for Black men interested in health sciences.

Perry is a sophomore accounting major from a small town in Eastern Pennsylvania. Perry attended a predominantly White high school and is now enrolled in NU’s business school. Perry’s primary reasons for choosing NU was its academic reputation, urban setting, and distance from his hometown. Perry is a member of a Christian step team at NU.

Sense of Belonging as Experienced by Black Men at Northeast University

Analysis of the data collected from interviews revealed key themes related to the experiences of the 20 high-achieving Black men attending NU. Although the students’ perceptions of belonging were unique based on their identities and distinct experiences, their “belonging experiences” (Strayhorn, 2012) were centered around their common identity as Black undergraduate men attending the same predominantly White university. The following section begins with a brief exploration of sense of belonging for the Black men at this PWI starting with how the Black men defined belonging and the extent to which they experienced belonging at NU. I will then describe two overarching themes that emerged from the interviews, which include forces that worked against students’ sense of belonging and forces that supported students’ sense of belonging. The first
theme will describe how underrepresentation, tokenism, microaggressions, and racially charged events were perceived by students and the effect these experiences had on their sense of belonging. The second theme will describe how involvement in student organizations and supportive relationships with others, including Black peers, cross-racial peers, faculty/staff, and parents, affected the students’ sense of belonging.

The presentation of findings also reveals the divergent role that one force could play for different students, promoting sense of belonging for some students and working against sense of belonging for others. The divergent forces identified in this study were positive and negative perceptions of underrepresentation of Black men and students’ success or inability to establish supportive relationships with Black peers. In the following sections, I elaborate on the two overarching themes drawing on data collected from my semi-structured interviews. The two themes include forces that are described using emic accounts of students’ experiences and perspectives I believe are most representative of each theme.

**How Black Men Experienced Sense of Belonging**

Although the Black men in this study all attended the same university and identified as Black and male, they defined and experienced sense of belonging differently. All of the men who participated in this study had persisted beyond their first year, and all performed well academically (as indicated by the 3.0 GPA participation requirement for this study) and sustained active involvement in multiple on-campus student organizations. All of the students had managed to form meaningful bonds with
other people (e.g., students, faculty, and staff) and were involved in student organizations, as indicated in the profiles provided earlier in this chapter.

On average, the 20 men in this study felt like they belonged at NU. However, of the men who explicitly stated they felt like they belonged, not all of them described sense of belonging the same. Ben indicated that sense of belonging meant that he felt “connected.” Chaz stated that he felt a sense of belonging during new student orientation because the programming made him feel like he “mattered.” David indicated “people talked to me” when he was looking to join a student organization, which made him feel “important.” Kevin described feeling like he belonged when he did activities that gave him a “purpose.” MJ described feeling like he belonged in an “inviting atmosphere” where people want you to succeed. Jesse described his sense of belonging as something he was unable to put his finger on, but he said, “I just feel like this is a good place for me. It’s my speed. The culture is good. Everybody’s down to earth.”

The students’ sense of belonging did not preclude them from considering dropping out. Nine of the students indicated that they considered dropping out at some point in time during their enrollment at NU. For the students who considered dropping out, three indicated they did not feel like they belonged or felt unsafe at the time. When the desire to belong was satisfied, students often described feeling valued, connected, and like they mattered. When their desire to belong was not satisfied, students described feeling not valued, unsafe, or uncomfortable. Even with these feelings, none of the men left NU. One reason for their persistence, despite sometimes feeling a lack of belonging, is what I label as a determination to succeed.
A Determination to Succeed

*Maybe it was in the way I was raised, but I also think it’s just part of my temperament.*

*That I was never gonna not succeed. I was never gonna fall through the cracks.*

(JC, personal communication, November 1, 2017)

JC’s statement exemplifies a level of determination expressed by many of the men in this study. Several of the men in this study reported that they had contemplated transferring out of NU because they felt they did not belong. For some of these students, forming social connections was not easy. Poor academic performance led others to doubt their ability to succeed in the classroom or resulted in a temporary loss of their academic scholarship as their GPA fell below the minimum requirement to maintain an academic scholarship at NU. For others, the lack of supportive friends and microaggressions diminished their sense of belonging.

In spite of these challenges and disruptions, the students did not drop out or transfer. Several of the students described a mentality or way of coping within a predominantly White environment that helped them resist episodic or persistent frustration, discouragement, or discontent. The students framed their experiences in ways that helped them stay motivated despite not always feeling like they belonged at NU. Archer described his determination to succeed and overcome obstacles, stating, “So I think really it’s just my mindset. I think I do have a strong mindset in the sense that small things that are really annoying. I can really just try to overcome them without too much hardship.” Reflecting a similar sentiment, Ben explained how discipline and motivation allowed him to persist at Northeast University:
I think motivation and discipline definitely have a big role in that. Motivation is, I don’t know, for me, motivation is something that comes and goes. So, you could wake up one day and be really motivated, wake up another day have not so much motivation but I try to be really disciplined so even . . . if you’re not disciplined even on a day you’re not motivated, you’ll still be able to sit down and just do your work just out of habit. That’s kind of what I tried to do.

Other students chose to focus on his commitment to achieving academic goals.

Rather than focus his energy on the nice feeling of fitting in socially, David stayed focused on graduating. As he explained:

I came here for the academic side of it. I mean, of course, it’s nice to be able to fit in and everything, but at the end of the day, I’m here to get my degree. I really don’t care what other people think about me. It won’t affect how I perform in the classroom. It won’t affect how I am outside of class. I’m more of the type of person who has that mindset of, come here, get your degree, get out, get a job, and be okay with everything. It’s nice that I feel accepted here, but I wouldn’t say it’s one of the requirements for me to attend here.

Jerry also expressed a determination to succeed. Rather than drop out of NU to attend another school where he might have felt a stronger sense of belonging, Jerry decided to focus on making the best of his experience at NU. I asked Jerry if he ever considered withdrawing from NU. He responded:

At the moment, this is my job. I’m going to get out of this college experience everything I can. I might as well stay here and integrate myself into the community and seek what I feel like I’m missing as opposed to running somewhere else to try to find it.

Harold attributed his persistence to his ability to adapt to a predominantly White campus, especially as a student who attended a predominantly Black high school. He framed his determination to adapting as preparation for the “real world,” stating:

I want to say what’s been easy for me as a NU student is kind of adapting. I think NU does a really good job of getting people to adapt freshman year. As long as people make that conscious effort. I don’t know. I may have been well disciplined my freshman year—because talking to other friends. But I think it’s that transition
of understanding that this is a whole different environment. This is a whole
different zoo you’re now about to be in. Especially since I’m from a
predominantly African American high school, it was a change for me, but I think I
adapted well to that. I think that went really well for me. It didn’t come as like a
culture shock for me. It came to me as this is how the real world will be. And so, I
kind of just adapted to that.

JC also noted the pressure to adapt but stressed that it was important for him to
not succumb to the pressure of conforming or trying too hard to fit into the status quo. JC
expressed a determination to maintain his identity as a Black person within a
predominantly White environment:

I always tell my Black friends don’t acquiesce. Don’t feel like you need to stop
speaking in slang. Don’t feel like you need to . . . if you like the gold earrings that
you’re wearing, wear the gold earrings that you’re wearing. Because no one . . .
especially in something like engineering or sales, they can say whatever they want
about you, but they can’t just beat the stats. And, if you’re number one, then
there’s nothing that they can do about it.

Of the 20 participants, 13 students stressed their determination to succeed and
persevere despite difficulties. Some students responded to feeling like they did not belong
by striving to improve some aspect of NU. Jerry thought about transferring to an HBCU
because he did not feel like he belonged at NU. However, rather than transfer, Jerry
decided to “make NU better”:

Instead of running from NU to find [belonging] somewhere else, why not bring it
to NU and make NU better. You know? I used to always want to think, “Is this
where I should be, I don’t really like it. My friends are having great experiences at
other places. Do I actually love NU?” It’s like, “I’m just gonna make NU better
instead of running somewhere else.” So yeah. I used to think that, but now it’s
like, “No, I’m gonna finish it out.”

Rick, Jay, and Harold considered leaving after they performed poorly
academically. All three were concerned about losing their scholarships but persisted until
they were able to raise their GPA. I asked Jay if he ever felt like dropping out of NU, and he replied:

Yeah. Oh, my gosh. That was such a great trial. Oh, man! Yeah, it was a very disappointing feeling. I felt I was letting a lot of people in my life down. It wasn’t like I wasn’t working hard, I always felt that . . . it was . . . I felt like I worked hard but just didn’t do well enough. And so, like I said, going through that whole process and having to take out more loans to pay for that semester that I had to pay for. Yeah, it was demoralizing, but it was a blessing that I was able to still remain at NU. All the different opportunities I had available to me to raise my GPA. I took advantage of them.

In summary, many participating students expressed a determination to succeed and an ability to persevere through difficulty, as JC expressed in the introductory quote. Some students expressed feelings consistent with a sense of belonging. In response to feelings of not belonging, participating students prioritized graduating. The determination to succeed emerged as important to the high-achievement and persistence of the participating students.

**Forces That Work Against Sense of Belonging**

The participants described a number of antagonistic forces that worked against their sense of belonging at NU. Several of these forces, including underrepresentation of Black men and other people of color, microaggressions, and racially charged incidents on and off campus, cut across many of the students’ experiences.

**Underrepresentation of People of Color**

The term *underrepresentation* typically refers to the structural diversity or the numerical representation of Black students, faculty, staff, and other racial minorities (Griffin, Cunningham, & George Mwangi, 2015). All of the students in this study were aware of the underrepresentation of Black men and other students of color at NU. The
participants in this study defined underrepresentation as not seeing enough students of color, not seeing enough Black men, not seeing enough Black men in prominent student leadership positions, and not seeing enough people of color in faculty and staff positions within the university community.

Fourteen of the 20 students suggested that NU would improve the experiences of Black men on campus by increasing the representation of Black men. Some students felt undervalued or tokenized because Black men were underrepresented throughout all areas of the university, including the faculty, staff, and student body. For most of the participating Black men, underrepresentation of Black men was a constant reminder that they were a minoritized group, and, in the minds of some students, underappreciated. Harold perceived the low number of Black men on campus as a signal from the NU administration that the university was not interested in the perspectives or voices of Black men:

I feel like I’m underappreciated. Even African-American women have been talking like we need to find more African American men who are [actively engaged in campus life], apparently, and make them more visible on campus. I don’t know. I guess in the whole community’s eyes; there is a lack of Black men in leadership and a Black man’s voice. I completely feel undervalued, because y’all are not even asking for that voice yet at all.

Participants also described the underrepresentation of Black men relative to the higher representation of Black women. Kevin described how Black men were underrepresented and outnumbered by Black women in student organization leadership positions:

So, a lot of the majority of the leadership in the different orgs on campus are all predominately female driven. I don’t know. I can’t think of whether that’s
because there’s a lack of males in general or just lack of males who are willing to be involved in the different organizations.

Observations about the underrepresentation of African Americans and other people of color were not limited to the student body. Jerry expressed concern that there were too few African Americans on campus and noted the importance of seeing African American faculty and staff as people students can look up to and aspire to become. He said:

It’s just that, I’m in a classroom, and my professor is not a minority, at least not African American, so it’s like, “Who am I looking up to?” There’s no figures who I can look up to and say, “I want to be where they are someday.” There’s no motivation. Well, there’s motivation for myself because I have a self-motivation, but for some people, it’s like, “Where am I gonna end up? Why am I doing this? Why am I here? There’s nobody to look up to.”

Archer also noted the lack of diversity in the faculty, stating, “I guess I would like to see more diversity there with my professors because they’re always predominantly male and predominantly White.” Archer explained that, notwithstanding the frustration and discomfort associated with being underrepresented, he “always noticed” but “got used to” feeling distinguished from White students. Archer suggested that increasing the number of minorities on campus would help him “feel more comfortable.” Jay described the low number of Black students at NU as “mind boggling.”

The underrepresentation of Black students appeared to have different implications for sense of belonging among different students. David acknowledged the underrepresentation of Black men on campus but did not think the lack of diversity affected his sense of belonging. However, like Archer and Chaz, he stated that the number of African American men on campus “should be a little bit higher” than 5%.
Some students suggested that increasing diversity would help them feel more comfortable, implying that the lack of diversity or underrepresentation of Black men affected their sense of belonging. Chaz stated that he would like to see NU actually make the student body more diverse rather than “throw a lot of buzzwords around.” Harold noted that Black men needed to be “more prevalent” on campus.

Underrepresentation of Black men appeared to be most noticeable or influential to the experiences of these students in classroom settings. Archer and Matthew both noted the absence of Black students in their classes. Archer expressed how the underrepresentation of Black men and other students of color in the classroom made him feel “distinguished from other people sometimes.” But, although he described how the classroom environment magnified the disproportion of Black men at NU, he did not believe this reality reduced his sense of belonging:

“I guess I could say I still see struggle, but that’s just because the numbers. It’s obviously not necessarily equal in terms of representation, so I feel like that always is going to cause some type of conflict. Even not necessarily direct, maybe indirect, but it’s again, walking into a classroom and not feeling like you see reasonably equitable ratio of your own race in the classroom.

Matthew described how being the only one or one of the few Black students in class made his college experience different than that of his White peers. Matthew stated that because there were so few Black students on campus and in classrooms, Black students were always being watched by professors and students, and therefore, Black students must always make the “best impression.” With respect to the classroom environment, Matthew described how White students were able to blend in, whereas he could not go to class without being noticed by his professors.
If you’re a White student, you blend in. If you’re a Black student, you really stand out, and everyone always knows when a Black student doesn’t do anything because you don’t see them. If I don’t show up to class for a week, my professor will always ask me, “Where are you at?” Why? Because I look different than everyone else.

Smokey also described recognizing the underrepresentation of Black students in his classes. He stated, “I’d go to class, and I’d be like well, ‘I don’t see any Black people here.”’ Jimmy framed his frustration within the academic setting as not being able to ask Black students for help with school work, which forced him to either work alone or ask non-Black students for help. He shared:

I study by myself essentially. And then I’ll reach out for help, but it’s annoying because I’m never reaching out for help to people who look like me. It’s always, a White person or just another race. That’s been frustrating.

**Tokenization**

Some students reacted to perceived underrepresentation by feeling tokenized on campus. The perception of tokenization was described by four students explicitly and several other students implicitly. Huey, Jerry, Archer, and Harold expressed feeling tokenized at NU due to being easily distinguishable from White students. For Huey, the underrepresentation of Black men lowered his sense of belonging, even though he had been elected to a prominent student government leadership position—a seemingly objective indicator that he belonged. Instead, Huey believed his election was reflective of being a “token.”

Jerry also expressed that he sometimes felt tokenized but perceived his tokenization more positively. Jerry felt valued in certain circumstances, particularly when he was asked by NU to help recruit high school students and promote NU’s minority
Jerry stated that he was often asked to speak with prospective minority students, an activity he said he enjoyed. However, Jerry expressed that, even though he felt “valued in certain circumstances,” including being asked to help promote NU’s minority culture, he also believed he might be viewed as a “token.” Jerry shared:

Yeah, I feel I’m valued in certain circumstances where either you need to promote NU’s minority culture, that we support minority students, of course, you do. Or that there’s more minority students in leadership positions. I feel like I’m valued in that sense, and I don’t know if it’s because we’re actually going toward that way, or if it’s that I’m seen as a token, and it boosts NU’s reputation as bringing in more diversity.

Like Jerry, Archer interpreted NU’s efforts to reach out to Black men—regardless of purpose—as an indication that NU appreciated Black men. Archer noted that, although he can “feel slightly like the token,” he feels valued and appreciated by NU when he is asked to be a “diversity voice,” most often when he is asked to talk about diversity during resident assistant in-services and diversity programs. Archer felt like NU really wanted to hear his voice.

Reflecting a more cynical view, Harold expressed his concerns about the high-visibility of “certain types” of Black men and believed that the NU administration used a small cadre of Black men in NU brochures, marketing videos, and high-profile events. Harold was concerned that NU was not representing the voices of Black students whom he believed were more representative of the general Black student population on campus. Harold suggested that NU was selecting only Black men who were members of traditionally White organizations, rather than Black men from predominantly Black student organizations to represent the university. He used the Student Ambassadors Society, a highly-selective NU Alumni Association-affiliated group composed of students
who serve as the governing body of the NU Student Alumni Club, as an example of a nonrepresentative organization. The Student Ambassadors Society is often asked to represent the perspectives of NU students or serve as representatives of the entire NU student body. According to Harold, a few of the Ambassadors are Black men. Harold implied that these men were a “certain type” of Black man:

Either there’s not enough of us or either we’re not meeting the standards to some people’s idea of what the ideal Black man they want to be speaking for them, or we’re just not speaking. And I don’t think it’s either of those. I kind of more think of it as this idea of there are certain Black men [the NU administration] reaches out to, but not every Black man is heard. They choose and pick, which Black men they want to be the token. The Black/African American man who’s in the Student Ambassadors who will speak on behalf of African American men. Not like the President of the African Student Association or whoever. Or the President of NPHC. It’s the other organizations of prestige, not African American organizations.

He concluded that students like him were not valued by the NU administration and stated, “If you’re not the model Obama for the University, you don’t think you matter.”

**Attempts to Increase Engagement of Black Men**

In response to a lack of representation, several of the Black men in this study expressed a commitment and desire to uplift other Black students or Black men, specifically. These students attempted to mitigate the negative effects of underrepresentation on their sense of belonging by increasing the engagement of Black men.

Nine of the Black men in this study expressed that they either desired or believed they had a responsibility to help the Black community on and off campus. Some of the men made efforts to do this through the recruitment of other Black men into student
organizations. Others described efforts to support young Black youth in the local community who had aspirations of attending college.

Some participants described encouraging other Black men to get involved and pursue opportunities they found meaningful to increase the representation of Black men in particular roles on campus. Kevin is a program chair for a predominantly Black student organization on campus. He was optimistic that more Black men would get involved despite their low representation on campus. Kevin shared:

As program chair, I’m trying to find different events to get Black men to become interested in, but whatever I do, I feel like no one responds to anything really. I feel like the first week—I think that’s where we’ve garnered a lot of stuff towards freshmen. So, right now we have four Black male interns that are coming in, and from last semester, there’s only two. So, I feel like slowly they’re getting it, but at that point, I just hope that they continue to show interest and to get more people to come, to become interested, to become more evened out, and hopefully, it’ll work out.

In response to the perceived underrepresentation of Black men among teaching assistant (TA) positions, Jimmy tried to promote TA positions to other Black men:

When I was a TA, you look around like, literally I think I was the only Black male TA. The next semester, after me being a Black male TA, Zenobi joined on becoming a TA and everything like that. I had to talk to him multiple times about, hey, you know it’s a good opportunity.

Jimmy also attempted to engage other Black men in his health sciences fraternity but indicated that he was not successful.

Matthew also reported that he had tried to encourage other Black men to become more involved on campus but became frustrated with the lack of engagement of Black men. Matthew shared:
I know so many people that just go to school, don’t go to classes no more, come back, play video games, play 2K, watch basketball, go to sleep, study. They’ll study in between and go to sleep. That’s all they do.

One of the challenges some students experienced when trying to recruit Black men into student organizations was the perceived lack of relevant programming that appealed to Black men at NU. Matthew suggested that at least some Black men were not engaged because there was a lack of content or meaningful activities that resonated with Black men. Matthew described his unsuccessful attempt to convince his Black male friend to attend a student organization meeting. Matthew’s friend believed that Black women were going to bash Black men at the meeting. Subsequently, Matthew was unable to convince his friend to attend the meeting. Matthew explained why he believes engaging Black men has been challenging:

There aren’t enough things catered toward Black males, and when all the orgs are Black women, it might not feel like the best space for Black males passionate about what you’re talking about with Black males. So I can understand why Black males aren’t that engaged on campus, except for like, the fraternities, really.

The underrepresentation of students of color, particularly Black men, influenced all of the students’ experiences. In addition to low numerical representation of Black men, participants also perceived a lack of substantial engagement of Black men. Some students responded to this perceived lack of engagement by attempting to increase the involvement of Black men in campus life. For these students, efforts to “do something” about their underrepresentation made them feel like they mattered or belonged. Some students also tried to increase engagement of other Black men to improve the perception that Black men were not around, apathetic and disengaged, which was a source of frustration for many of the students when they were unable to increase engagement.
In summary, underrepresentation had a divergent impact on sense of belonging for participants in this study. For some students, being underrepresented resulted in feeling uncomfortable or tokenized or perceiving that Black men’s voices were not valued because they were either not asked for or not well-represented on campus. One student suggested that the institution did not care about Black men because NU was not asking for Black men’s opinions and had not increased the number of Black male students. In contrast, for other students, underrepresentation enhanced sense of belonging, as they believed that, by being asked to represent Black students or help recruit other Black students, they were valued. Although participants expressed frustration about the lack of involvement in or underrepresentation of Black men in student organizations and leadership positions, the men who were involved believed their involvement meant they mattered.

**Microaggressions**

Another force that emerged as influencing participating students’ sense of belonging was racial microaggressions. Racial microaggressions based on their interactions with faculty, staff, and students were experienced by several of the men in this study. Huey described his first year as “rough” and gave an example of an experience where he believed White students did not want to be near him because he was Black:

My first year was very rough. People weren’t getting on the elevator with me. I’m the only person here, even on the same floor. Someone said they didn’t want to sit next to me and my friends. It happened going there and coming back, it was bad. That was all within the first 2 months of me being here, so it set how I felt about NU. I try not to let that skew my entire perspective but then, even afterward . . . the climate on campus with politics has not been the best.
JC explained that microaggressions were a problem at NU. He provided an example of one of his friends who made a disparaging statement about Hispanic men. JC was reluctant to rate the campus racial climate or student-to-student cross-racial relationships a score of 10 out of 10 because of microaggressions he had observed as a student. JC explained:

I actually just walked out of class and mentioned I was gonna get some tacos from a Mexican restaurant, and my friend, who is sweet as she can be, but she’s from her privileged White Buffalo family, said, “Oh, I wouldn’t trust men like that cooking my taco.” And I was like, “Well maybe you’re just missing out on a good taco.” So, it’s microaggressions, like, that start to chip away at that 10 score.

JC described another situation that occurred while he was attending an off-campus party hosted by White students: “Some of the more overt things that I’ve heard—someone at a party yelled, ‘I hate all the niggers here,’ to a Black girl. That didn’t fly over very well.”

Jesse explained that he does not socialize with his White friends as a way to cope with racial microaggressions. Jesse stated that he preferred to hang out with a more diverse group of friends instead:

I feel like I’m, I guess, attracted to them because of their diverse qualities because I feel like, no offense to White people, but if I was just with White people all the time, I feel like I would just be uncomfortable a lot of the time. Especially because a lot of them say ignorant things without realizing that they’re very ignorant and these people are really conscious. They just kind of make slip statements like I can totally see why they would not think that that’s wrong to say. It’s just when you realize it’s wrong to say, you think, “Oh yeah.” That’s a microaggression.

As another example, Jerry described a time his Black male friend was stopped by the police after he left the McDonald’s near the NU campus:

Then, another instance from my friend: He was up late at night, I guess 2:00 am. He was walking to McDonald’s to get something to eat. He was leaving McDonald’s, and all of a sudden these six cop cars come up and stopped him.
Saying like, “What are you doing? Who are you?” Because they thought he was another man they were looking for. He had to get on the ground and stuff like that.

Some of the students described awkward situations in which White students seemed to fetishize their Blackness or objectify their Black-maleness. This made the men feel uncomfortable. Malik told a story about a White student who gave him a compliment on his braided hair. Malik considered the comment disingenuous, sharing:

I was talking to them one time, and this guy was like, “You know what Malik, you’re pretty cool.” I got my hair braided. He’s like, “You know your hair is pretty.” . . . I don’t know how I felt about it at first. “It looks pretty fly, overall I see you’re a pretty fly guy.” I remember thinking like, “Bro, I know myself, I’m not that blind. I’m just Black, but thanks though.” That’s what I was thinking. It’s just very interesting.

Huey shared an experience during his freshman year when he was with a group of friends, and a student who was a White woman walked by and said, “Hey, I’ve got jungle fever.” Huey stated that he and his Black male friends were puzzled by the statement.

Some of the students described a boldness expressed by White students who appeared to be oblivious to racially insensitive statements. With the exception ofJC’s experience when a White student used the “N-word,” the students did not perceive racially insensitive comments made by White students to be intentionally offensive. Nonetheless, the comments were troubling to the men, as explained by Rick: “I literally have people say to me, ‘Oh, well you’re not like them,’ or ‘Oh, you’re not like one of those type of people.’ What does that even mean?”

MJ described what he categorized as a “weird” experience with a Black faculty member whom he believed did not like Black men. According to MJ, the professor, who was a Black woman, disparaged Black men during her lectures.
I can’t say I’ve had any problems per se or even seen any issues or anything that would make me think that that’s an issue. Except for one. And this is, like, weird. When I was a freshman, I took an Africana Studies class with an African professor, who, after maybe three or four classes, I realized did not like Black men. Like it wasn’t even, like, she didn’t like Black people, or she didn’t like men, it was like she didn’t like Black men. By Black men, I mean people who are descendants of slaves. So, she would speak about Blackness like they’re essentially prone to go to prison, prone to violence and things of that nature. Like the stereotypes. She would talk about Black women as basically not there fully, like mentally speaking. Because they would allow themselves to get impregnated by Black men and other stuff. That did not sit well with me.

Roger described an experience his best friend had in the nursing program at NU in which a professor told his friend, who is a Black woman, that her hair was not professional.

I have heard from Mary and Jasmine about racism in nursing from some of the faculty members. This one lady who was teaching Jasmine’s clinical tried to tell her about how her hair was unprofessional or something. She had braids in. She tried to tell her about that one time, and even though some of the White girls had their hair braided, and it was fine. She tried to touch it. And I think she did. And Jasmine didn’t really want to say anything. She just told me and Mary.

In summary, the Black men in this study had personally experienced or knew that their Black friends had experienced racial microaggressions. These verbal and nonverbal insults, whether intentional or unintentional, communicated negative messages to Black students about Black students. Personal experiences and reports of other students’ experiences with microaggressions worked against sense of belonging for the men in this study.

The Influence of Racially Charged Events on Sense of Belonging

Data for this study were collected between October and December 2017. From information shared in the interviews, it was clear the 2016 election of Donald Trump and 2016 appearance of controversial speaker Milo Yiannopolous on the NU campus were
events that influenced the experiences of some of these NU students. Donald Trump’s election as President has led to a deterioration in race relations in the United States, particularly with respect to Black and Hispanic Americans. Blacks and Hispanics believe race relations in the United States have worsened since Donald Trump’s election as President (Pew Research Center, 2017). For some of the Black men in this study, Donald Trump’s election exacerbated their feelings of alienation, discomfort, and marginalization and reduced their sense of belonging. Matthew described the day after the 2016 presidential election:

I remember it was a gray day, gray; the skies were gray. I feel like if you weren’t there, it almost sounds like I’m overreacting. So I’d definitely say it’s Milo and Trump election, two things I didn’t feel good about on campus.

According to some of the students, the election and Yiannopulous influenced the extent to which they felt comfortable and safe on the NU campus. I asked Harold if there were any locations on campus where he felt more or less comfortable. After mentioning the multicultural floor located in the Student Union as a place where he felt most comfortable, Harold mentioned Milo Yiannopulous’ visit to campus as a time of discomfort:

Let me see. I’m trying to find the words to describe it. It’s uncomfortable when it gets to the extreme. For example, I can only think of one discomfort that happened. Back 2 years ago, we had a person Milo, I forget his last name.

Matthew described feeling pretty safe on campus, and “then Milo happened.” Rick also mentioned Milo Yiannopoulos but described his appearance as more than a microaggression. According to Rick, events like Milo transcended the definition of microaggression. He perceived the invitation of bigoted speakers as more overt or bold:
The stuff with the microaggressions, it’s like not even microaggressions anymore. People are like mad bold, even with like the speakers that we have come here. I understand like it’s freedom of speech, you can have whoever you want, but the fact that people want to have like certain speakers, like Milo whatever-his-face coming here. That was ridiculous. Just the stuff that dude says. The fact that people even want him here. Yeah, you can have whoever you want. That’s how it works, freedom of speech. The fact that they want him here, I don’t know. Milo was definitely the peak of when I thought that I did not matter. Just the fact I didn’t feel safe on this campus and wanted to go home. I’m telling you, if spring break wasn’t that next week, I would have asked my mom, “I need to be at home for a week.”

Another influential event for Matthew, Jimmy, JC, Jerry, and Huey was the
election of Donald Trump. Some students articulated how the election revealed to them the otherwise undisclosed sentiments their White friends and peers held. Jerry offered insight into how White NU students campaigning for Donald Trump affected him:

I like going to events like Bhangra in the City where there’s this mash of different cultures. I love that. I feel very comfortable in that, in learning about different cultures. I feel uncomfortable when I’m walking past the library, and I see a table all about Trump, and then a group of students right there who are all for Trump, pushing Trump. It’s like, “Okay. A few of you I know, and I know you are very racist.”

The realization that some of their White peers supported Donald Trump became a point of contention for many of the students. Harold framed this “awakening” in a representative manner: “I mean, it changed around election season, because that’s when the African-American community felt like NU had tensions that we didn’t know. We kinda knew, but we didn’t know how big it was until then.” Reflecting a similar sentiment, Rick stated, “I think that would be the big thing. It wasn’t so much that like the election changed anything other than like the community’s awareness to what they’re actually up against because we were able to be naïve.”
Malik described how he was perplexed by a White student who supported Donald Trump, even while acknowledging why Malik would not vote for him:

I was on my floor, and I think someone asked, “Are you voting for Trump?” I was like, “Nah.” And he was like, “Yeah, I get why you would say that but.” I thought to myself, “If you can say, I get why you understand. I get why you don’t want this person in office. I don’t get why there’s a “but” on that.” Because, if it really affects people, you should really care and you should really value their experience.

JC also shared a frustrating conversation he had with White students in the days following Election Day: “There was a group of people who are able to sit back and say, ‘We won! We don’t care how you feel.’ And giving those people a voice made me feel unwelcome. And unheard.”

In summary, the presidential election and the appearance of a divisive guest speaker on the NU campus were two events that influenced some participating students’ sense of belonging, mattering, and safety. For some Black men in this study, these events exposed them to attitudes and behaviors on campus they viewed as hostile to them. The students did not describe overt or persistent racial tension at NU. Microaggressions were viewed as unintentional mishaps made by White students who should, but do not, know better. In contrast, speakers like Yiannopoulos and his divisive rhetoric about minorities instigate racial hostility and validate racist sentiment that emboldens those who share similar ideologies while further marginalizing racial minorities.

**Forces That Supported Sense of Belonging**

The second major theme includes forces that supported students’ sense of belonging. Influential forces that emerged from the data were supportive relationships with Black students, supportive cross-racial relationships, supportive relationships with
faculty and staff, and supportive relationships with parents. Supportive relationships encouraged a sense of belonging, whereas students who were unable to establish supportive friendships felt a lack of belonging.

**Supportive Relationships With Others**

Supportive relationships were ways in which the students established a sense of belonging. The participants highly recommended that other Black men seek and develop close supportive friendships, irrespective of their race. Supportive relationships, support groups, and close friends all were identified by participants as helpful in feeling a sense of belonging at NU. These supportive relationships were important to all of the participants and overwhelmingly depicted one of the main reasons students felt like they belonged at NU. Jay typified the view expressed by other students when he said, “Having a good foundation, a good circle of people around you, I think is the biggest thing for getting through here.”

Archer described the importance of close friendships or a support system to help manage the pressure of college:

So, I think a support system is by far the biggest thing. And that doesn’t necessarily always have to come from family, even though it’s a huge part. It can also come from orientations, friends, faculty members. Anyone, you really feel close with. So if you don’t have that connection where you can essentially vent to someone, or confide in someone, then it’s really hard to just handle all that mental pressure by yourself.

Ben advised other Black students to find a group of friends they could trust: “I would tell him or her to definitely make a good group of friends that they trust. It’s always good to have someone to fall back on.” Jason explained that he looked to become
friends with students who were willing to hold him and the rest of the group accountable in a caring and genuine manner.

I was looking for that, people who were real, who were honest, who didn’t necessarily have to sugarcoat things, because I feel if you’re going to be, any type of relationship there needs to be that level of honestly, level of openness, and that level of vulnerability, too, to be like . . . if you’re messing up, I can tell you’re messing up and I know you’re not gonna get your feelings hurt and you’re not going to take it to heart, you’re just going to take it for what it is.

Malik indicated that his sense of belonging is connected to his friendships at NU. Malik felt like he mattered when he hung out with his friends because, with friends, he could be himself. He shared:

I would say hanging out with my close friends I realized that I could be myself around everybody. I feel like in my previous experiences, previous years, I definitely spent a lot of time trying to fit into a group. Really trying to fit the mold of what they were. With my friends at NU I feel secure being myself, and our personalities constitute the group. Knowing that moving forward, being able to meet people, I can just be me, do my thing. It works, or it doesn’t.

Chaz shared that Black men have to make their way, network, and know their worth. He further explained how this approach would lead to a “brotherhood”:

Be strong in yourself, and if not, you’ll have people that kind of like in brotherhood, you’ll have people lifting you up in making it here at NU. Because I feel like if you don’t have a core group of people, and you yourself are not a strong man on campus, you’re going to be left in the dust. That’s one thing that’s happened over time.

Being comfortable enough to be authentic or genuine is a dimension of sense of belonging and was mentioned by several students as a benefit of having supportive friends. Roger echoed Malik’s thoughts about finding close friends, particularly friends who allowed students to be themselves and who were supportive. Roger shared:

Okay, so I would say, find people. You don’t have to do this immediately. Just go about your daily life, but find people that you can really be yourself with, that you
relate to, that you can talk to. And don’t let them go. Don’t be super clingy, but don’t . . . just establish a friend group and have someone that you can talk to about if you’re feeling anxious, or if you have other kinds of issues that you’re going through.

Finding and establishing supportive relationships was not without difficulty for a few students. Jimmy and Harold struggled to make friends as they felt the need to prioritize meeting academic demands. Jimmy and Harold indicated they did not establish close friends in the beginning of their college experience due to their initial focus on academics. Their intense concentration on academics contributed to their initial lack of social life which resulted in not having a supportive group of friends, and consequently not feeling connected to NU. As Harold explained:

Freshman year I didn’t really establish a crew. I didn’t have a clique. Well, I had my theater friends, but I didn’t have a close circle freshman year. I didn’t have a close circle because I was mostly focused on academics. I was in the library most of freshman year getting stuff done.

Jimmy also admitted that he did not spend a lot of time getting closer to other students because schoolwork took up most of his time during his first year. Reflecting back on his first-year experience, Jimmy stated that he would do things differently. He would spend more time connecting to others: “If I had to do it again, I would process academics really early on. Just worry about connecting with people and everything like that. On the same level. On a networking level. Just connections. Really focus on connections.”

Smokey also experienced a pull on his time but from his involvement in athletics. Smokey described how he was mostly disengaged from the social scene at NU during his first year because of his involvement on the NU football team. Smokey’s time was
consumed by football practices, games, travel, and academics and, therefore, he was unable to establish friendships with non-football players. Smokey’s challenges connecting with other students were exacerbated after he quit the football team. He shared:

I stayed in Northwood Hall with all the other athletes. It was weird because all my friends were just athletes and I would go to class; I would go to practice, I would come home. I didn’t really do anything else afterward because I’d be too tired or I had to do schoolwork because I didn’t have time to do it like other students did. When I stopped playing, it was like I didn’t have anyone to really hang out. It was just me.

**Supportive Relationships With Black Peers**

A general recommendation from all of the students was to find a group of supportive friends, irrespective of their race. However, several students specifically sought to connect with Black students at NU. Relationships with Black peers helped many students feel more comfortable and behave authentically. The relationships also helped Black men engage in activities that uplifted Black men and the larger Black community at NU.

Identification with and engagement in the Black community at NU was important to many students’ sense of belonging. Underrepresentation set the foundation for understanding why being around other Black students was important. Said another way, the relatively small numbers of Black students enrolled at NU and students’ perception that they were underrepresented appeared to place a premium on being around and accepted by other Black students to form a sense of belonging to the Black community. Establishing relationships with Black students was part and parcel to escaping the majority community in which Black men and other students of color were
underrepresented. Black students who had close relationships with other Black students felt part of a close-knit community where Black was no longer underrepresented or minoritized.

The men in this study all expressed the desire to associate with students who looked like them and who had similar interests, experiences, and backgrounds. Connecting with Black students provided opportunities to detach from the White spaces they found themselves in every day. Moreover, the relatively small size of the Black student population at NU facilitated Black students connecting with each other to form a network of Black people, spaces, and student organizations that supported, celebrated, and served students of color at NU. Seven students referred to the NU Black community as “Black NU.” Black NU was mostly referred to affectionately, but not always.

For students who spoke positively about Black NU, Black NU represented a sense of comradery and collaboration across and within predominantly Black student organizations. Some students, like MJ, described Black NU as a “subcommunity”:

> It’s basically its own thing. I’m pretty sure other cultures do it, but Black people are really good at making something their own. That’s kind of what Black NU was where we as Black students created something of our own to make us feel comfortable and make us have something to which we can build special.

Rick described Black NU as a social space that was part of the greater NU community but allowed Black students to feel like they belonged to a social space occupied primarily by Black students. Rick explained, “It’s within NU, but just like academic groups like the National Society of Black Engineers or Minority Business Association, things like that.” Smokey stated that hanging out with Black kids made him feel at home and relaxed.
Some students explained that Black NU had professional spaces and social spaces inside and outside the Black Greek community. Black NU also empowered some Black students to gain a sense of self, on their own terms and outside the dominant (White) culture on campus. Rick shared how Black NU was a space where he could discover himself similar to how his mother described her experience attending an HBCU:

I feel like Black NU is like its own little sort of bubble. I’m living and navigating within that space. I’m sort of gaining a lot of that like that she (my mother) was talking about, the space to really be able to discover who I am as opposed to who I am through other people’s views, like through other people’s lens. I’m able to sort of examine myself.

Black NU was often associated with several NU student organizations, including, but not limited to, the Black Student Association, historically Black fraternities and sororities, the African Student Association, and the National Society of Black Engineers. In addition to student organizations, Black NU was also described as the physical spaces where Black students socialized and studied. These physical spaces primarily consisted of the Student Union, Black student organization offices, the multicultural floor in the Student Union, the engineering student lounge, and NU’s main campus dining hall.

Archer discussed the perceived importance of NU student organizations, explaining:

I like that different organizations on campus obviously do foster a specific community for Black people to come together and just have their own support system. Just to share their experiences. So I definitely value that a lot. I think it’s really important on predominantly White campuses.

Smokey articulated the perceived value of physical spaces: “I like going to the BSA office, which is on the seventh floor of the union. I really like going there. The Black people there inspire me, and I love hanging out with the Black kids there.”
Several students spoke positively about the Black community at NU. In particular, MJ described Black NU meeting his expectations as a Black student:

It’s a subcommunity. It’s basically its own thing. I’m pretty sure other cultures do it, but Black people are really good at making something their own. That’s kind of what Black NU was where we as Black students created some of our own to make us feel comfortable and make us have something to which we can build something especially. It’s a social network physically speaking of people you can talk to as well as actual online. Where kids are talking about, “We’re studying here.” Or, “There’s a party here. There’s this here.” Everybody’s connected trying to keep other people connected and just up to date.

For students like Rick, Black NU was a support network. Rick offered the following advice to other Black men at NU: “Build your support network. Get involved in as much stuff as you can, but particularly engage yourself in Black NU because, for me, that’s become my support network.”

Harold noted the Black NU helped Black students get recognized when they arrive on NU’s predominantly White campus. Harold described the role Black NU played in his experience, stating:

And that’s sort of the Black NU community is almost like every time someone else has shown up and we’re like, “Where were you?” I know this person, and you know this person and it all links together. That’s how our community feels so small knit and type. It plays a huge part, because the minute I showed up to campus in my skin color, I was taken note of by the rest of the African-American community.

Matthew mentioned the importance of care expressed by some Black men toward him. According to Matthew, he persisted at NU because of the people who were invested in him. But, he also noted that he did not believe that all of his Black male peers were invested in him. Matthew stated, “That’s what I think kept me, is people that were
invested in me. I feel some of the Black males just aren’t there sometimes. Black men don’t care.”

Most men in this study described a small community comprised of Black students that, in effect, mitigated some of the challenges associated with numerical underrepresentation and perceived isolation and disconnection from other Black students at NU.

Although most perceived benefits of Black NU, not all students viewed Black NU favorably. For some participants, Black NU was a source of supportive friendships, and for others, it provided no support. A few of the students noted their frustration with Black NU and cautioned other students not to get too consumed by its negative aspects. Several of the students described experiences that made them feel like they did not belong. These experiences involved situations in which they did not feel accepted or felt ostracized by their Black peers in social settings, including activities hosted by predominantly Black student organizations. Four of the students referred to Black NU as a “toxic” environment. Harold, Chaz, Matthew, and Rick shared stories about negativity, discouragement, pessimism, and ostracism within Black NU. Harold described the pressure he felt from students who thought he should be more involved in the Black community at NU, stating:

Everyone in the Black NU community, it’s a little toxic, it’s a little pushing away. But it’s the idea of because we know everybody, we feel like everybody should be involved. Like you have this burden to help in our community.

In reference to Black NU, Huey stated, “I criticize [Black NU] a lot. Black NU is a very interesting place. I’ve been trying to escape Black NU this year actually.” Matthew
expressed frustration with the pessimism and negatively exhibited by some of his Black peers. He shared:

Black NU is a toxic place. Black people don’t want to see you going anywhere out here. People do not want to see anyone in the Black community. Like it would be things like my freshman year, like people would, for example, I would never want to be pre-med here and a Black student, because it’s competitive being a White premed student here. But Black premed students, Black people look at you the first day like, “I don’t think you can do premed.” It’s like they don’t think you can do premed, and I’m with you. How do you think I’m not about to be premed? And I feel like there’s so many more people would get to places if Black people actually worked together and felt like they actually had to spend the time to work together, but no.

Smokey, Chaz, and Matthew expressed that they experienced pressure or tension connecting to the Black community and/or feeling pressured to balance their time between their White and Black friends or student groups. Smokey shared that, during his first 2 years on campus, he did not feel accepted by the Black community but made a decision to stick it out and ignore the perceived rejection:

I felt like I had to prove that I was Black enough for [Black students] then. Early on, I really didn’t want to fit in because I was like I don’t want to have to constantly have that pressure, like people checking me being like oh, you’re not this, you’re not that, blah, blah, blah. I really didn’t want that pressure, so I was just like whatever, I’m not even going to worry about it. Then I got more comfortable with myself; I was like I really don’t care what anyone else thinks of me. I know that I’m Black. I know that I’m special and that other people’s opinions, they’re really not going to faze me anymore. They’re not going to intimidate me.

Chaz also shared that he struggled to connect with Black students. On two occasions, Chaz attended meetings hosted by one of the Black student organizations and attempted to engage in conversations with his Black peers.

I just like go to a couple of meetings and I would like share input. I guess because my name is not like super African or something, and my family is not from Jamaica or whatever, they just kind of rip me off. Maybe they saw my skin, “Oh
he’s not dark, so whatever and stuff.” Some of the people I see them on campus. It’s like, “Hey.” And they just give you the cold shoulder.

Some students also described Black NU as a way to disengage from the rest of the campus—something these students considered unhealthy. Malik focused on the role that he believed Black students played in what he described as a lack of engagement with non-Black students on campus. Malik referred to Black students as “repellant” of White people:

I feel like Black students are very repellant, some Black students, are very repellant of White people. I guess that kind of makes sense because I feel inherently the more oppressed group is going to be more apprehensive of the majority. Whereas an oppressor can’t hear that they’re an oppressor, they’re not going to feel some type of way necessarily about a Black person on campus, because that doesn’t bring about issues for them.

Kevin is involved in Black student organizations but expressed discontent with hanging around the same people all the time. He described how he sometimes felt “caged in” the BSU office:

What I do not like specifically is the fact that you almost feel like you’re caged in a little bit, like you’re just experiencing that one little—like, the BSU room in the Union. Just that one little room that you’re in for the majority of your time. You never really experience other interactions with different groups of people. So, that’s the one thing I think I kind of dislike a little bit.

Some of the students expressed feeling pressured to be involved, active, or more present in the Black community at NU. This perceived pressure was a source of tension or stress for students like Jimmy and Matthew. Jimmy explained:

I mean, people. Not with animosity, but people are just like, hey, Jimmy, are you kind of in the Black community? You don’t even really be coming to visit like that. . . . It’s not like, I’m not met with anger, like, you’re not part . . . it’s just like, hey, man. Where are you and everything like that? It’s kind of like a subtle pressure and everything like that.
Matthew described feeling pressured by his friends to be around other Black students after a lot of his time was consumed by his student ambassador and resident assistant responsibilities. These positions required a lot of Matthew’s time and, by nature of both groups, resulted in Matthew spending a lot of time with White students. Matthew shared a conversation he had during that time with one of his Black friends:

And, it got to a point where, my sophomore year, people were saying about me, “Yo, Matthew has like left the Black community.” Because I was spending so much time with RAs and Student Ambassadors, that people felt like Matthew doesn’t come to X and Y. He’s left us behind. He’s with the White people and stuff. So, I would say I do spend a lot of time with a lot of White people in White spaces because my business is there…

Thirteen of the 20 men in this study indicated that their core group of friends were Black. Three of the men in the study indicated that they had diverse friend groups comprised of White, Black, Indian, and Asian students. Four students described their core friend group as predominantly White.

**The Role of Supportive Cross-Racial Peer Relationships**

By the nature of attending a PWI, all of the students in this study engaged with White students indirectly or directly through their involvement in student organizations, classes, roommates, or friendships. Sense of belonging for the Black men in this study was also influenced by the frequency and quality of cross-racial interactions or relationships with White and other non-Black student. Cross-racial relationships refer to the extent to which peers of diverse racial/ethnic groups engaged with each other at NU and the quality of their engagement. Students’ perceptions of cross-racial relations at NU varied. Some students perceived cross-racial relations to be good, while others perceived cross-racial relations to be nonexistent due to self-segregation.
Eight students’ perceived cross-racial relationships as generally good or supportive of their sense of belonging. These students described seeing diverse groups of students hanging out with each other with minimal conflict. Four students indicated that cross-racial relationships at NU were “not the greatest” or “not good.” Eight students indicated that cross-racial relationships were challenging due to the fact that students usually associated with students within their own race/ethnicity.

Ben, David, Harold, JC, Jesse, Chaz, Jimmy, and Perry were complimentary of cross-racial relationships and used adjectives such as “good” and “pretty good” to describe how students engaged with each other across races at NU. Ben noted that, wherever he is on campus, he sees diverse groups of students interacting well with each other. JC stated that he believed cross-racial relationships were “fine,” explaining:

I think as a whole NU students get along with each other and that doesn’t mean that they don’t harbor. . . . Everyone will harbor some type of opinions about other races and ethnicities and groups and whatever. But if you’re able to coexist, I think that that’s the biggest step, and I think that NU students do a good job of coexisting together, respecting each other as a whole.

Articulating a similar viewpoint, David note that things were going well and there were no major issues related to cross-racial relationships:

I don’t think that’s an issue at all. I think that it’s going pretty well, in terms of interactions between students and other students. No one is, I don’t know what the word is for it. No one is, I guess . . . no one really shows they have privilege, or anything like that, among other people who may be different from them. I think everyone is being treated equally.

Roger described his close friends as primarily Black, yet stated that he also has White friends: “I’m going to make friends with everyone. I have plenty of White friends. Most of them aren’t like my super close friends.”
Rick, Huey, and Malik did not view student-to-student cross-racial relationships as positive. These three men described interactions with White students that signaled to Rick, Huey, and Malik they did not belong. Huey stated that cross-racial relationships were “not that great,” particularly related to his personal experiences with a few White students who were not accustomed to being around Black people and/or avoided conversations about race. According to Huey, several White students told him they had never met Black people before attending NU. Huey stated that he was also bothered by White students who did not engage in discussions with him about race. Huey gave an example of how he attempted to generate conversations about race on social media.

I’m very active on social media regarding race topics and stuff like that. I’m known for that. The thing is, I’ll end up hearing it’s being discussed among . . . people will screenshot what I’m saying and send it to other people. Marc, the student government board president, told me most people will screenshot my Facebook and then try to send it to him to try to get me in trouble. First of all, I didn’t say anything bad. I didn’t say like, I hate all White people, I just talk about institutional racism, like a real thing. It’s stuff like that that bothers me the most. Instead of one just commenting on the post, by saying what you feel. I do say, if you have a problem, go ahead and put it, I’m here for discussion. But trying to screenshot it to get me in trouble about what I said about race is the common thing I see the most.

Matthew shared his experiences engaging in conversations with White students about race. Matthew stated that, when he was a freshman, White students on his floor would look to him on matters of race. Some of these conversations, according to Matthew, caused him to question his White peers. He explained:

I remember my freshman year. It was the Sunday before MLK Day, so obviously being college freshman, if you have a day off on a Monday, you’re drinking on a Sunday. And I remember this kid, like, we were just having a good time, whatever, and this kid was like, “Why do we have tomorrow off?” knowing that tomorrow’s MLK Day. I’m looking at him like, “Brother, did you really just say that to me? Do you not understand the significance of that man in some people’s
history?” And, it’s like you’ll hear off-the-wall comments like that a lot, where it’s like damn, they just really don’t understand.

None of the men indicated that they personally experienced overt racism.

However, the students who had issues with White roommates believed their roommates were uncomfortable living with a Black person. Chaz indicated that his White roommates made disturbing racial remarks during his freshman year. He shared a story about his freshman year White roommate whom Chaz believed was not “down with minorities.” Chaz’s roommate’s girlfriend visited campus 10 times during his freshman year and never spoke to Chaz, yet she spoke to one of the White students who lived next door.

She was cool with all of the other guys on my floor, except for me, for some reason. It’s not just me. There was definitely something there. She didn’t say a single word to me. She slept in the same room I slept in on 10 separate occasions.

Matthew told a story about his freshman year White roommate who took a shower one evening and began to recite the lyrics to a popular song performed by the Black hip-hop artist J. Cole. Matthew knew that the lyrics to the song his roommate was rapping included the “N-word.” Out of curiosity, Matthew patiently waited outside the bathroom door listening to his roommate recite the lyrics to the song. Matthew’s roommate recited the N-word. Matthew described how he reacted when he overheard his roommate in the shower: “I heard the word. I was like, ‘Wow, that’s crazy.’ I never confronted him about it, because I didn’t want any problems because I’m a very nonconfrontational person when it comes to that. But I was like, ‘Wow, okay.’”

MJ observed that student-to-student cross-racial relationships were relatively infrequent:
I don’t know if it’s subconscious or consciously, but everybody is with their own group. They have friends of other races, but everybody finds that their people . . . especially like the minorities like Blacks, the Indians, and the Chinese find their people and a large portion stay with them for 90% of the time.

Archer, Jerry, and Matthew indicated that relationships with non-Black students were sometimes challenging. Jerry discussed the challenges to interracial relationships by providing an example of a White female student who told others that she would not date one of Jerry’s Black friends because of his race. Jerry noted that he was aware of other issues with interracial dating and questioned where the apprehension originates:

What I found out is that the reason she didn’t want to talk to student A was because she said that she doesn’t talk to Black guys like that. She doesn’t date Black guys. I have a question: Where does that idea come from? Because back when I was in high school, it was perfectly acceptable. It was fine. Or at least as far as I knew. Perhaps I wasn’t mature enough to understand that. But here it seems like these ideas of, “Okay I can’t date this certain person.” Perhaps they come from the household like your parents won’t accept you if you dated a certain person. Perhaps that’s more of an issue within the household that needs to be fixed or needs to be questioned, wondering why that happens. I would say that’s not just secluded to that one incident. I’ve certainly seen that across the campus in general, dating between different ethnicities.

Despite most of the students having predominantly Black friends at NU, several of the students, including Jerry, Jesse, Kevin, Jason, Malik, and Roger, stressed the importance of having friends who are supportive, irrespective of their race. Malik and Jason were specific about broadening friendships to students who may not be Black. Jason’s advice for Black men at NU was to have confidence in oneself, speak up/out, and step outside comfort zones. Jason noted that Black men should be open to people who do not look like them. His advice was as follows:

Don’t be afraid to be yourself, and explore the things you like, even if it means you’re not going to be with the people who look like you, who act like you. Don’t be afraid to explore, don’t be afraid to get uncomfortable. And then two, don’t be
afraid to shake things up wherever you’re at. If you see a need for something, don’t be afraid to bring it up to the right powers and make it happen.

Malik was more pointed with his advice and advised Black men to “find genuine people, who may not be Black, but understand you” and urged students to seek friends who are genuine and understand you irrespective of their race. As he stated:

Find yourself, genuine people. Genuinely understand you. Doesn’t necessarily have to be Black, just find someone that understands you. And someone who really wants to be successful because I just don’t feel like you can do this thing alone. I just don’t think so.

Jerry described why having a diverse group of friends was important to him:

I love having very diverse friends because since the world’s so large, I can’t really make it around to meet every single person, I can talk to people and hear about their background, and that’s a way of myself learning about diversity, getting diversity in my life. Also, I find people to be very interesting, and their backgrounds and like that. I like having a very diverse group of friends.

**The Role of Supportive Relationships With Faculty & Staff**

Supportive relationships with faculty and staff also influenced students’ sense of belonging. Several of the students mentioned NU faculty and staff members whom they believed played a significant role helping them engage at NU. For some students, faculty and staff made them feel important. For others, efforts by staff or faculty to reach out were described as “cool.” These faculty and staff members were not always Black. Often, the staff members were coordinators of programs or advisors of student organizations that supported underrepresented students. When faculty and staff reached out and engaged with students to “check in” or offer academic opportunities, such as undergraduate research experiences or TA positions, students’ viewed these actions as positive, and it helped students feel like they belonged.
All of the men except Huey and MJ indicated that their relationships with faculty and staff were supportive. Huey described having “mixed reviews” of his perceptions of faculty-to-student cross-racial interactions. Huey did not believe that some professors and other non-Black students understood how the world might be different for Black students. In the days following the 2016 presidential election, Huey shared his thoughts and feelings about Donald Trump’s election during one of his political science classes. This was not a good experience for Huey. Huey told his classmates and the professor that he did not feel safe on campus anymore. Huey stated that the professor and his classmates dismissed his feelings, trivializing the significance of Donald Trump’s presidency and campaign rhetoric on Black students. Huey’s professor told him that the election results were not going to affect him. Huey stated that he did not expect everyone in his class to share his feelings. However, he was surprised by the lack of empathy from his professor. He shared:

I said, “People are feeling unsafe just going to class,” and the guy next to me said, “Well, I voted for Hilary, and I still don’t think you have a reason to feel unsafe, I think you’re fine.” I picked myself up and left. That was on Friday, and then that Tuesday, [the professor] kept talking about the election. And then that Wednesday, he continued to talk about the election.

The extent to which students experienced empathy or understanding from White professors on matters that related to race was important to their sense of belonging at NU. The absence of empathy seemed to amplify Huey’s and MJ’s feelings of not mattering, which negatively affected their sense of belonging. In MJ’s experience, the lack of empathy was salient inside and outside classroom. He provided an example of both, explaining:
Black men especially are being killed, and I’ve heard a bunch of times from students walking down the streets. Talking like, “Oh, it’s just not that big of a deal.” I can hear from time to time—NU professors talk about topics like that. They don’t understand the true terror that people like me face every day. So the lack of empathy.

Whereas Huey and MJ reported negative interactions with faculty, other students offered positive examples. Harold shared his experience with a White faculty member who helped him get engaged in theatre at NU. Harold performed in plays when he was in high school but did not believe he was good enough to perform in college. He described how a White faculty member reached out to inform him about an acting opportunity.

And this recently happened where a professor asked for me. It was the theater professor because I’m in the professor’s class. He was like, “I need you to play this part because I know you do theater well.” He reached out to me, and that’s why I’m in the play this semester because he reached out to me and knew I would be the best fit for this role. I want to say to that professors don’t reach out to you for your professional goals, I guess they kind of reach out to you for either what they know you’re good at or the passions you have.

Jesse shared that he is one of “those kids” who sits in the front of class if the course is difficult. Jesse described how his engagement in the classroom helped him connect to his professors. When I asked Jesse if his level of engagement in class was working, he said the following:

Yeah, I get professors asking me what my name is. I get professors remembering my name. I even had my statistics teacher literally tell me, “Jesse, if you need a recommendation, just let me know.” So I feel like it’s good.

Jason recounted how a Black female staff member suggested to him that he needed to engage with more African American men. Jason described how he was raised by his mother and did not have a heavy influence from men in his life. When Jason was a first-year student, he struggled connecting with other Black men. Jason stated that his
advisor told him that she did not want to serve as his advisor anymore because he needed to step outside his comfort zone. Jason described his initial discomfort engaging with Black men and the role Ms. Morrison played in helping him overcome this challenge:

I definitely struggle with that, and that’s not just a NU thing. I’ve struggled with that my entire life. Not having a father in the household really played a part with that, so . . . because my family is actually majority women, so just being around women all the time for the majority of the time, I know I had my grandfather there, he stepped in and played that sort of father figure, but he’s old. So, you can’t do that much. And then my uncles all live out of state, so they’re pretty disconnected as well. So, all the people I’m connected with were strong, African American women. And so this naturally is what I know the easiest, so when I came to college like I said, Angel and Sidney, were my first two best friends. It was easy for me to connect with them instantly. I first met Ms. Morrison junior year. It was instant connection because this is familiar, I know how to interact with African American women.

I asked the students to provide examples of faculty or staff who had helped them engage in opportunities at NU. Chaz talked about an adjunct professor with whom he connected around music:

One of my professors, he’s not like an actual professor here. He’s just like, what is that called? Adjunct, there’s like an adjunct class last semester. He’s really cool and stuff. He knows I’m good with music and everything, so we just started composing our own piece, which I think is really cool.

In addition to providing a space for the students to connect with other Black students, faculty and staff were people in whom some men in this study felt comfortable confiding. Both Harold and Matthew felt comfortable engaging with staff members whom they considered to be supportive. Harold referred to one of the NU Black female staff advisors as a “mom”: “Once you find organizations that you love, your advisors become like a second family to you. Like Ms. Morrison, I call her mom, because she’s mom to me.”
Matthew’s bond with one of the engineering advisors is so strong that he seeks her counsel often, even if he has to sneak past her assistant to avoid scheduling an appointment. He shared:

For example, Miss Gilmore, she’ll Doodle, and she’ll schedule appointments and stuff, but I’ve never made an appointment with her. It’s always been like, I go in. “Can I talk to Miss Gilmore?” “No, she’s in a meeting.” I’ll sneak in the back of the office. Then I’ll wait for her to be done, or I’ll knock on her door and be like, “My life is falling apart, Ms. Gilmore.” And the amount of extra hours people put into me, just because they see something in me is wild, that’s why I really made it through here, that people were invested in me. People make sure I keep certain programs. People made sure that I was getting tutored or talking or using resources. That’s what I think kept me, are people that were invested in me.

Rick mentioned two Black staff members and one Black faculty member in the School of Engineering whom he believed have been invested in his success at NU since his freshman year. Rick shared:

Anytime I’m in any of my like advising gigs with people from NU ACCESS. Freshman year, when I was a diversity scholar at the time, meeting with Dr. Abasute or meeting with Ms. Ray or meeting with Halim. They all were really invested in my success, and they made that known. It was really nice being able to talk to them and get advice from them. I still do.

Roger described one of his professors, to whom he referred as Dr. B., as “quirky and fun.” He described how she influenced his decision to serve as an undergraduate teaching assistant:

I didn’t think she even knew my name, Dr. B. When she emailed me; I was like ... because I went two times after class to ask her a question, just about the material. And I guess I just did well enough where she just thought I would know my stuff and I might want to do it. But then after that, when I was a TA for her, that’s when we developed our relationship.

Huey discussed two professors, one Black male and one White female, who were influential in his development as a student:
In my first semester, I took [a faculty member’s] masculinity course, and that defined my college experience and has continued to shape me today even though I haven’t had the class in 2 years. We still talk outside of the classroom; we have breakfast or lunch or whatever. And so that class has been largely influential for me, and I tell everyone to take it and take him as a teacher. I also have teachers that aren’t Black that I’ve been able to connect with, my biology teacher is amazing, and I was able to be a TA for her. She’s written me letters of recommendation for programs that I’m able to do that also continue to shape me. I owe that to her.

In another example, Jimmy described a positive relationship with a White female faculty member:

The first one, just from a faculty standpoint, sophomore year, I had a really great experience with Dr. Erin McCarthy. Really, really great teacher. Was able to kind of build a relationship with her and applied to be a TA. She’s really, really been helpful along the way.

Matthew mentioned being able to visit Ms. Morrison, an advisor and program coordinator for one of the academic programs for underrepresented students. Matthew described his frustration “fitting in” at NU. He noted that, with Ms. Morrison, he had a personal connection because they were both from the same city. Matthew stated that Ms. Morrison understood where he was coming from, which helped him feel like he could be authentic and safe. The offices occupied by these faculty and staff members were sometimes referred to as safe spaces for Black students. Matthew explained how it matters to have what he called “absolute safe spaces,” stating:

I’ve had low points in those offices where I’ve had to be cussed out and had interventions. I’ve had my high points in those offices where I’ve gotten awards and what not, just knowing those offices, those back offices are a real space where I can be as ratchet as I want to be and I know you’re not going to judge me because you’re going to sit there, you’re going to enjoy, we’re going to enjoy ourselves, and then it’s a nice duality because it’s like . . . I can be that way but when business needs to be handled we can handle the business, but after that it’s like we’re going right back to kicking it, hanging out, talking about life.
The Supportive Role of Parents

It was uncommon for students to discuss dropping out with their parents. Chaz and MJ were the only students who shared conversations they had with their parents when they considered dropping out of NU. Chaz’ and MJ’s parents discouraged them from dropping out. Chaz recalled a conversation he had with his father about transferring to the University of Buffalo:

I remember actually, after a month at being at school, I told my Dad, I was like, “I don’t know if I want to be here. I don’t have any friends. I don’t know if I want to be here.” I was like, “Can I just go back at U.B. at Buffalo?” He’s like, “No, you’re going to stay there.” I was like, “Come on; I think I want to transfer.” Looking back, if I had transferred to the University of Buffalo, I would be pretty miserable.

Chaz’s conversation with his father exemplified the role parents played in some students’ decisions to continue their education at NU. Some students stated that their parents told them they must not give up or quit. MJ never considered dropping out but stated that he had not thought about dropping out because of his scholarship and his parents. After stating that he had not thought about quitting, MJ explained:

That has less to do with the work here and has more to do with I’m on a scholarship, and my parents basically like, “You’re not dropping out.” It’s just like, “If you mess up and you lose your scholarship, you’re paying for it yourself, and you’re not coming home.” So it’s like, either I finish, or I find a place to live in the boonies.

Students perceived their parents’ reactions to be a reinforcement of their usual motivational role and the importance of earning a college degree. The students’ resistance to dropping out, coupled with supportive relationships with parents/family, served as reinforcement to the students that they belonged and could be successful.
In summary, the students in this study perceived their personal relationships with White students as generally good with some exceptions, which included students who perceived minimal cross-racial interactions among all students or perceived poor cross-racial relationships. Even when participants’ friends were predominantly Black, they recognized the importance of friendships with non-Black students and emphasized that “supportive” friends were the most important characteristic, not race. One type of experience that reduced students’ sense of belonging was related to interactions with White roommates whom they perceived to be uncomfortable with Black students. A second type pertained to experiences with White students and faculty in which the students perceived a lack of empathy. On balance, the students’ positive experiences with students from a different race appeared to outnumber negative encounters.

**Role of Student Organizations and Programs in Sense of Belonging**

Involvement in student organizations, including predominantly Black student organizations and/or institutional programs for underrepresented students, also served to promote students’ sense of belonging at NU. For the Black men at NU, involvement in Black student organizations served as spaces that conveyed that Black men’s voices mattered. The students in this study were all involved in academic and/or social organizations that increased their sense of belonging. Student organizations were a source of purpose and thus belonging for some of the men who desired to give back or uplift others.

Malik, Jason, Jay, and Matthew formed relationships with other Black students during pre-orientation programs for first-year underrepresented students. Each of these
four students believed the pre-orientation programs and student organizations helped them make connections. The NU Excellence Program, an academic program for underrepresented engineering students, was highly regarded by several engineering majors who participated in this study. Some of the students’ relationships from the NU Excellence Program carried over into their subsequent years on campus. Jason met his closest friends through the NU Excellence Program and described how the Summer Academy pre-orientation program was a great way to meet other Black students:

We all met through NU Excellence, their summer engineering academy, so it was the summer before freshman year. It’s a 2-week program, come in, take your general intro classes, Chem, Engineering, Calc, and Physics. And we met through that, and ever since then . . . like, that’s your foundation period, where you just like, all right, I know who I can depend on throughout the semester.

Articulating a similar perspective, Jay stated:

I would say my two closest friends I made at NU. Their names are Chris and Joe. They’re both also in NU Excellence, engineering majors. When I came to campus as an incoming freshman, NU Excellence had something called the Summer Engineering Academy, or SEA, and that’s how I met my core group of friends.

Archer discussed how his resident advisor position was fulfilling because it allowed him to help other people:

So I’ve been an RA since I was a sophomore. I really just wanted to help people have a great experience. There’s nothing more, I guess, satisfying and rewarding than helping someone find their way in school, which is what I’ve been doing this entire process, just like anyone else.

Huey described a similar attraction to being involved on campus. He explained how his position on the student government board allowed him to assist other students which made him feel like he mattered:

I enjoy being able to bring voices to the table that aren’t being normally heard, and I like the fact that people feel like I am approachable and being able to come
to me with their direct issues. There are organizations that wouldn’t normally try to connect to student government board, so I find that really rewarding.

Student organizations also appeared to serve as a means to express a counternarrative to stereotypes and a way to resist microaggressions. In addition to helping students connect with other students and develop supportive relationships with peers, as previously discussed, student organizations served as platforms to engage students in meaningful work in the NU and local communities. The meaningful work gave the students a sense of purpose and opportunities to feel valued, which positively affected their sense of belonging.

For example, several of the men in this study used their leadership position or membership in student groups to promote positive images of Black men and to help uplift the Black community at NU. In some cases, students also supported the local Black community. Harold described his motivation for his involvement in student organizations on campus:

What motivated my decision was typically talking to brothers on campus. Well, they’ve all graduated by now. And how they communicated with each other, how they kind of wanted to push each other to build each other up. That was my one key reason to joining because I like seeing African American men succeed. I wanted to make sure to at least find my way to help guarantee those men succeed by just doing whatever I can for them.

Matthew attributed his decision to stay at NU to his membership in a Black fraternity:

I feel like it’s definitely been a shift, because I know after my freshman year, if it wasn’t for my financial aid and for me being interested in my fraternity, I would have left. Like if I could have transferred to Temple and had the same amount of money and been the only one at school for a couple thousand dollars, I would have left the school for sure, because I was having so much of a bad time here, especially after Milo.
Student organizations served as small communities that allowed the men to engage in meaningful work that helped others, to create a sense of belonging, and to engage with students with whom they shared a commonality. In most cases, the commonality was race. In some cases, the commonality was race and gender or a shared interest in an academic area of study or advocacy issue. Jimmy, Malik, Rick, and MJ were members of Black Males in Medicine (BMIM), a student organization for Black men interested in medical school and public service. The program was founded by Black men interested in the health sciences and includes mentoring and professional and leadership development opportunities. Jimmy, one of the founders of BMIM, indicated that BMIM is also a way to increase the representation and involvement of Black men on campus, a need identified by other men in this study. Jimmy shared:

There’s a lack of involvement, I feel like. Nobody really knows why. Yeah. Nobody really knows why. We’re trying to help with that with BMIM and everything like that. Put these people in leadership positions and really get them excited to do better, be greater and everything like that. It goes all the way up from a membership standpoint all the way up to the top and everything like that.

MJ and Malik became involved in BMIM because of their interest in biological sciences and the opportunity to associate with other Black men. MJ highlighted the connections he felt with other members:

BMIM, I guess what I like about it is it’s so specific. It’s literally for people who are just like me. Black males who want to go into medicine, which is very similar to myself. So that’s definitely a positive aspect.

Malik described the value of connections to people with similar goals:

In terms of BMIM, there’s nothing I really dislike about BMIM. I do like being with a group of people who I know can relate to and have similar goals. I just think that’s a really important thing to be involved in.
Student organizations also provided opportunities for some of the men to connect with the Black community at NU, which helped them feel more comfortable on campus. Smokey joined NU’s Minority Business Association and the Black Student Association to get connected to Black students. He shared:

I am the Vice President for the Minority Business Association, and I got involved with that my junior year because . . . honestly, I don’t remember exactly why. I think I was looking for other Black skins in the business school and that was where they were. I joined the Black Student Association, kind of the same thing. I did all this because I was looking for Black people like me that I could hang out with.

Student organizations were also opportunities for students to be seen, and, in some cases, appreciated by other Black students. For Malik, student organizations served as a platform to demonstrate Black men’s presence on campus. Expressions of appreciation for Black men by other Black students seemed to be a source of gratification. Malik felt valued through his experience with one of the Black student organizations on campus when someone said, “Oh finally, Black men who do things.”

Smokey was another student who expressed the importance of representing Black men through involvement:

I feel good representing the Black Student Association here a bit. Then also I noticed we don’t have a lot of Black male engagement, especially in leadership positions because it’s only me and three other Black guys on the leadership team. I was happy to represent and help out.

The most common examples of involvement included participation in NU-sponsored programs that were focused on supporting Black and other underrepresented students. Jerry, a member of CONNECTIONS, NU’s peer mentoring program for
underrepresented scholarship recipients, indicated that his role as a peer mentor made him feel valued:

I think I’m valued in CONNECTIONS because, especially for parents who have African American students who are going here, they see me as somebody their students can look up to and somebody who has paved a certain path they can follow and branch off of. Someone who can help them get from not knowing anything in college to knowing these simple tricks you can do to integrate yourself and make it easier on yourself, the transition in college.

Chaz talked about how the program director for CONNECTIONS personally invited him to join the CONNECTIONS pre-orientation retreat for first-year students. The retreat helped Chaz connect with other Black students. Chaz described how he felt when he received an invitation to the retreat:

Because when I was a freshman, I came in, it was really cool, Mariah reached out, and I was like, “This is really cool, there’s like a bunch of kids that look like me. That have the same type of mindset I do maybe.” . . . So, that was really cool. It was the first year they did the retreat. I really liked it freshman year. From then, I was like, “I really like this organization. I want to be a part of it.”

Chaz’ participation in CONNECTIONS helped him connect with students with whom he felt like he had something in common. Jason is a member of another program called NU ACCESS. ACCESS is a diversity program committed to the recruitment, retention, and graduation of engineering students from groups historically underrepresented in the engineering field. Jason succinctly communicated the benefits of his involvement in this organization to his sense of belonging, stating: “I always feel like I belong when I’m in ACCESS.”
Summary: To Belong or Not to Belong?

With a few exceptions, the students in this study felt a sense of belonging and expressed an appreciation for and connection to NU despite some of the difficulties they experienced during their time at NU, especially during their first-year.

Of the 20 participating students, two—a sophomore and a junior—did not generally feel a sense of belonging at NU. These two students were connected to peers and engaged in one or more student organizations. However, one of the students characterized student cross-racial relationships as “not great,” indicating that he did not see a lot of engagement between Black and White students. The other student could not think of an experience in which he felt important or like he mattered. He also described how he struggled to connect to the Black community at NU. My impression is that their experiences at NU were marred, in part, by unfortunate early experiences, including an inability to connect to the Black community and lack of empathy and compassion from White peers and/or professors.

Many of the students reflected on their early memories on campus and specific experiences that occurred during new student orientation week. The beginning of college was a time of fun, excitement, and intrigue for some of the students. Moreover, several students described how they felt like they mattered during certain new student orientation programs, such as a required program on diversity and inclusion at NU. I was struck by the saliency of new student orientation memories and surprised by how orientation was both a time of immense sense of belonging for some students and heightened anxiety for others. Some of the students noted how their feelings of belonging had either increased or
decreased since their first-year at NU. On balance, the high-achieving Black men in this study had figured out ways to satisfy and sustain a sense of belonging at NU, primarily through supporting relationships with other people, involvement in student organizations, and a determination to succeed.
CHAPTER 6 – CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of this mixed-methods study was to understand how sense of belonging varies among students of different races/ethnicities and gender, as well as how Black undergraduate men experience sense of belonging at a predominantly White institution (PWI). Three conclusions cut across the quantitative and qualitative analyses.

First, Black undergraduate men were able to persist and/or perform well academically on a continuum of belonging. Sense of belonging, in and of itself, was not an absolute analog for persistence or high academic achievement. And, not all Black men in this study experience the same sense of belonging. Several forces supported and worked against sense of belonging, including some forces that both supported and limited sense of belonging depending on the context. Second, the forces that supported sense of belonging included supportive relationships with White and Black peers, faculty/staff, and parents and involvement in student organizations or programs that support underrepresented students. Third, the forces that worked against sense of belonging included underrepresentation, racial microaggressions, and external events that elicited racial tension. Finally, underrepresentation and supportive relationships with peers and faculty/staff were divergent forces that both supported and worked against students’ sense of belonging.

The Continuum of Belonging

Not all Black men experienced sense of belonging in the same way. The findings in this study confirm that Black men are not a monolith. The students in this study experienced Northeast University (NU) through their own lenses. For some, sense of
belonging was connected to their involvement in student organizations, close relationships with peers, supportive relationships with faculty and staff, and connection to the Black community at NU. The findings in this study suggest that assumptions should not be made that all Black men, because of their Blackness, will struggle to adjust to a predominantly White campus. This is not always true. Some of the men in this study stated they had not experienced discrimination, racism, or marginalization from their White peers. To avoid “patronizing” Black undergraduate men, it is important for institutions to assess the level of belonging for individual students by creating opportunities for Black men to talk about their experiences, including their sense of belonging. While it might be prudent to discuss the challenges of transitioning to college with all students, broad brush strokes that assume all students of a particular race or gender are struggling should be avoided. Many of the students in this study described an ongoing journey toward belonging or a tug of war in which they sometimes felt like they belonged and sometimes felt like they did not belong at NU. The men in this study experienced sense of belonging at different times, in varying degrees, in certain contexts, but on average, less than their White and Hispanic peers.

The statistical analyses indicated that, among non-first-year students attending nine ugSERU participating institutions, African American students and their racially minoritized peers (e.g., Asian, international, and multiracial students) experienced, on average, a lower sense of belonging than their White and Hispanic peers. African American Men, on average, reported a sense of belonging that was 45% of a standard deviation lower than White Women but comparable to African American Women, Asian
Women, Asian Men, Nonresident Men, and Nonresident Women. Hispanic Women and Hispanic Men also averaged higher sense of belonging scores than African American, Asian, and Nonresident Women and Men. The statistical analyses suggested that, on average, across the nine participating institutions, sense of belonging did not vary substantially by gender. However, the qualitative analyses showed that gender and race were relevant to how some of the participating Black men experienced belonging at NU. Some Black men reflected on the involvement of Black men relative to the involvement of Black women and perceived a higher level of engagement for Black women at NU. Some of the men speculated that the low engagement of Black men in student organizations and campus life may be due to a lack of programming relevant to Black men. The students’ perceptions of the low engagement of other Black men motivated some men to help increase the engagement of Black men at NU. These efforts sometimes resulted in frustration when the men were not successful or a sense of purpose when they were successful.

Contrary to common perceptions, Black men attending the institutions that were part of the 2015 ugSERU Survey generally were not experiencing a “belonging crisis” any more than other minoritized peers. The results of the quantitative analyses could be interpreted as providing a somewhat positive outlook on sense of belonging of Black undergraduate men attending at least some PWIs.

Another important finding that broadens an understanding of sense of belonging and the extent to which it matters for Black undergraduate men attending PWIs is the ability for students to overcome a belonging deficit through a determination to succeed.
The high-achieving Black men in this study collectively expressed a determination to succeed and a persevering mindset that helped them overcome challenges and find purpose through active engagement in uplifting other Black men and the broader Black community. Despite their underrepresentation, several students appreciated being asked their perspectives on issues that were germane to Black men. Their desire to uplift Black students is consistent with research conducted by Harper and Quaye (2007) who found that the Black men in their study were committed to “uplifting the African American community (both on campus and broadly defined)” (p. 134). Higher education administrators, faculty, and staff should help facilitate opportunities for Black men to engage in meaningful and uplifting activities to provide more opportunities for engagement in uplifting experiences.

**The Effect of Campus Racial Climate on Sense of Belonging**

The students in this study indicated that the underrepresentation of Black men at NU resulted in their feeling lonely, isolated, and tokenized. All of the men in the study recommended increasing the overall number of Black men at NU as a critical step in improving the experience of Black men. Racially charged incidents on and off campus, such as the 2016 U.S. presidential campaign and the invitation of polarizing speaker Milo Yiannopoulos, affected many of the men in this study and served as the impetus for feeling unsafe, unvalued, marginalized, and uncomfortable. Students described classroom incidents in which both their White peers and/or professors were perceived to lack empathy for Black students who expressed that they felt unsafe or who were upset about Donald Trump’s racially polarizing campaign and eventual presidency. The extent to
which racially charged incidents dramatically affected some of the students’ otherwise uneventful time at NU should not be understated.

Microaggressions that often occurred through interactions with White students frustrated and perplexed Black men in this study. Microaggressions and racial stereotyping influenced the students’ perceptions of campus racial climate, which served as an important backdrop that influenced the fluctuation in sense of belonging for the men in this study. The students’ responses to underrepresentation, hostile and racially charged incidents, and negative cross-racial interactions were consistent with the literature on campus racial climate (Hurtado, Alvarado, & Guillermo-Wann, 2015).

The Importance of Supportive Relationships

Participants generally described NU faculty and staff as engaging, supportive, and welcoming. The men provided examples of opportunities they received based on professors making personal efforts to engage with them, and some even offered opportunities for internships, teaching assistantships, or undergraduate research. Staff members were seen as supportive and integral to the success of the programs intended to support underrepresented students. The students who were members of these programs described the staff members as mom-like, mentors, or really cool.

Despite these relatively positive experiences with faculty and staff, not all students had positive things to say about their experiences or relationships with faculty. Students’ relationships with peers and involvement in student organizations or institution-sponsored support programs for students served as a gateway into the Black community and helped the students feel like they mattered and/or were valued.
Several students referred to the Black community at NU as “Black NU.” Black NU was described as a subcommunity within NU’s campus comprised of Black students and Black student organizations. Black NU served as a place for students to socialize, network, and support each other. On balance, students at NU sought out Black NU at some point during their time on campus to connect with and help other Black students. Black NU was one of the few places where many students felt like they belonged or wanted to belong.

The relationships these Black men had with other students, including Black and non-Black peers, were important to their sense of belonging at NU. All of the participants described how their ability to make friends and establish supportive relationships with peers was important to their success at NU. These supportive relationships served as opportunities for students to associate with people they trusted, shared common interests, and leaned on for advice and motivation. Supportive relationships with other students were particularly effective in promoting sense of belonging when they were with other Black students. However, students also appreciated and valued cross-racial relationships. Some of the men articulated how their ability to engage with non-Black students would prepare them for life after NU and future success navigating a global community.

Implications for Colleges and Universities

Colleges and universities have a responsibility to provide safe, academically enriched, diverse, and inclusive environments that support student learning and development. Moreover, higher education institutions are communities of scholars, students, employees, and community partners whose missions are devoted to teaching.
research, and service. When institutions admit students, one important measurement of success is graduation. It goes without stating that students cannot graduate if they do not persist. When college students do not feel like they belong, they may leave before graduating, sometimes before their sophomore year. In worst-case scenarios, students may never return to complete a degree. If sense of belonging is an important factor in a students’ decisions to stay or leave, colleges and universities can play an important role in supporting students’ sense of belonging to prevent high attrition rates, especially for Black undergraduate men. The findings from this study have several implications for higher education administrators serving at PWIs.

First, the numbers really do matter. Representation of people of color within the student body, faculty, and administration at PWIs is important to sense of belonging for underrepresented minority students (Hurtado & Ruiz, 2012). The findings from this study suggest that increasing the enrollment of Black men would support Black undergraduate men’s sense of belonging. The impact of underrepresentation on students’ experience at NU was striking and underscored the importance of establishing and maintaining a level of racial diversity on college campuses that mitigates the effects of underrepresentation. Students generally agreed that NU was not racially diverse. The percentage of the NU undergraduate student body that identify as African American is 5%. In the case of NU, the enrollment of African American students has not reached a point sufficient to mitigate or eliminate students’ perception of underrepresentation. For most PWIs, students’ perception of underrepresentation is likely affected by a multitude of variables, including the percentage of underrepresented students, representation of faculty and staff,
geographic location, institution type, and sociohistorical legacy of the institution. Students’ comments and experiences at NU were consistent with research conducted by Hurtado and Ruiz (2012) who found that minoritized students feel excluded on less racially diverse campuses. Hurtado and Ruiz also found that students reported lower incidents of being the target of racial microaggressions when the percentage of underrepresented students on their campus was higher than 35%.

Higher education institutions should adopt and employ strategies designed and intended to recruit and retain more Black men and other students of color to mitigate underrepresentation. Some of these strategies include helping Black undergraduate men establish relationships with mentors, acculturate academically, and integrate socially (Brooks, Jones, & Burt, 2013). Montalvo (2013) found that images that evoked a commitment to diversity and inclusion and visible representation of social and cultural capital improved the recruitment and retention of Hispanic students. Programs that help Black men adjust to the academic demands of college should be highlighted along with interventions that provide Black men with the skills to effectively respond to microaggressions, understand the psychosocial effects of attending a PWI, and engage in academic support and co-curricular opportunities (Harper & Kuykendall, 2012).

Second, relationships matter. The Black men participating in this study reported that supportive relationships with others, including peers, faculty/staff, and parents were important to their sense of belonging. For many of the men in this study, finding supportive relationships led to engagement with and connection to their Black peers at NU. Feeling connected to Black students helped support sense of belonging for the men
in this study. Harper (2013) also found that same-race peers helped enhance Black undergraduate men’s ability to respond to racism at PWIs. Black men who are able to connect with their Black male peers often find these relationships exceptionally supportive because of the shared experiences of negative stereotypes and feelings of isolation on predominantly White campuses (Jackson, 2012). Same-race supportive relationships are important, but supportive relationships in spite of race increase sense of belonging for Black undergraduate men (Strayhorn, 2009). Black peers were not always a safe haven for Black men. For some of the students, connection to the Black community was a strong desire and the extent to which they were able to achieve a connection affected their sense of belonging. Some of the students at NU likely unintentionally marginalized several of the study participants by imposing a Black “litmus test” for acceptance into the Black community. When Black students were unable to pass the “test,” they expressed frustration and isolation.

Higher education institutions that currently focus on connecting first-year students to their peers and their campuses through purposefully designed new student orientation and first-year experience programs should continue to do so to improve students’ transition to college and retention. One effective approach is establishing a pre-college/orientation program that acclimates Black undergraduate men to the academic and social environment on college campuses and provides opportunities for students to bond and develop supportive relationships with each other and with faculty mentors (Brooks et al., 2013). Providing Black men opportunities to connect with other Black men will increase the likelihood that they form bonds and friend groups that may play a
vital role in their support system and sense of belonging. Colleges and universities that do not provide opportunities for first-year students to form social connections should consider the impact they might have on sense of belonging for Black undergraduate men on their campuses. First-year students make their decision to leave college within the first semester, which places a premium on programs that focus on helping Black undergraduate men connect with other students, faculty, and student organizations to support their sense of belonging (Gardner, Barefoot, & Swing, 2001).

The findings underscore the importance of programs purposefully designed to help Black students meet other Black students, learn about Black student organizations, connect with members of the Black campus and local communities, and engage with students from other races/ethnicities. If colleges and universities are going to improve sense of belonging for Black undergraduate men, they should leverage the collective network of other people of color in their campus community, including alumni, and provide mentoring and engagement opportunities and support for cross-racial engagement. As was the case for the Black men in this study, all of these strategies helped the men feel a sense of belonging.

Third, Black men see the value of and desire programs that support the unique interests, needs, and experiences of Black men. The programs and student organizations that exist on college and university campuses to support the needs and interests of Black students make a difference in their sense of belonging. For NU students, these “support” programs served as “safe havens” for students who wanted to engage with Black students in a more comfortable environment. The programs allowed for the development of
supportive relationships with other students who shared similar experiences and backgrounds. These programs and student organizations were predominantly Black student organizations, peer mentoring programs for underrepresented students, and academic programs that support Black and other underrepresented students.

Prior research suggests that Black student organizations support Black identity development (Harper & Quaye, 2007), help Black students acquire social capital at PWIs, improve resistance to racial stereotypes (Harper, 2015), and enhance Black male academic achievement (Strayhorn, 2010). These programs and organizations might also mitigate the effects of underrepresentation by creating micro-Black communities within the macro-White community. Black student organizations and programs at NU provided opportunities for Black men to coalesce around common interests in “safe spaces” that allowed students to escape their perception of isolation and onlyness temporarily. Academic and social programs like the ones mentioned and embraced by the Black undergraduate men in this study should continue to be supported. If PWIs do not have predominantly Black programs or student organizations, they might consider the viability and effectiveness of these types of groups/programs on their campus.

Fourth, racially charged external factors can affect campus racial climate and students’ sense of belonging. The most diverse and culturally aware university cannot shield itself from racially charged external events that affect students. Since the election of Donald Trump in November 2016, the Southern Poverty Law Center (2016) has recorded over 200 incidents of hateful harassment and intimidation including over 60 anti-Black incidents in the United States. A local White supremacists rally, a one-time
student-to-student racially charged incident, or the death of an unarmed Black man by a White police officer can influence Black students’ perceptions of campus racial climate, and subsequently, their sense of belonging. This study discovered that despite a relatively stable campus racial climate, external events that provoked racial tension were integral to the experiences of many of the Black men attending NU.

The implications for colleges and universities is that external or proximate political events, geopolitical crises, and local unrest can permeate throughout a campus community and influence the feelings and attitudes of students on campuses. In some cases, racially charged external events can amplify existing racial tension and underrepresentation. When hostile racial-themed events occur on predominantly White campuses, the findings in this study suggest that students may begin to doubt their institution’s values and feel uncomfortable, unsafe, or not valued, especially if White students or faculty do not acknowledge or validate their expressed concerns or feelings. Several of the men in this study expressed disappointment that the administration and professors appeared to be tone-deaf to external racial incidents that involved Black men or Black people generally. A recent example of an institution that took too long to grasp the significance of racially charged events in close proximity to campus is the University of Missouri. In the fall of 2015, Missouri students protested against what they believed to be inaction by the University of Missouri’s administration to address racism on campus and in the surrounding community. After ongoing student protests, a hunger strike by a graduate student, and a threat by the football team to boycott a game, the chancellor of the university resigned (Hartocollis, 2017). When appropriate, reaffirmation of
institutional values and expressions of understanding, empathy, and concern may help students feel like they belong during times of racial controversy.

The findings in this study reveal strategies that PWIs can employ to increase retention and graduation rates of Black undergraduate men on their campuses by supporting their sense of belonging. One strategy is to increase the number of supportive experiences that Black students encounter and decrease the number of debilitating experiences that Black men encounter at PWIs such as microaggressions, racial profiling, and racial stereotyping. Another strategy is to improve the representation of minoritized students on campus through increased enrollment of Black men and other students of color. Admissions offices can play an integral role in the recruitment and admission of Black men at PWIs. Finally, institutional commitment to diversity and inclusion as core values, cross-cultural awareness and curriculum enhancement, and support and facilitation of cross-racial engagement among faculty, staff, and students can improve Black men’s perceptions of campus racial climate and their sense of belonging. Campus racial climate is embedded in the culture of a university. Changing culture is a long-term strategy that should be a priority for all colleges and universities. A campus in which all students perceive a level of respect for differences benefits everyone by enriching the educational environment and creating a welcoming community where everyone feels like they belong.

**Implications for Future Research**

First, future research may seek to understand how minoritized students socialize and either serve to support or work against their Black peers’ sense of belonging at PWIs.
The role of supportive relationships in affecting sense of belonging, particularly with Black peers, was strong for the Black men in this study. A better understanding of perceived marginalization by Black peers on sense of belonging for Black undergraduate men may encourage Black students to be more mindful of the influence their behavior has on their peers’ sense of belonging.

Second, I analyzed ugSERU data for nine public research institutions that participated in the 2015 administration of the ugSERU Survey. Future research might analyze ugSERU data for the years when participation in the survey was higher and therefore provide a more robust dataset of students attending public research-intensive universities. Additionally, the data provided by the SERU Consortium was aggregated. It was not possible to compare sense of belonging composite scores by institution. A better understanding of the difference between institutions could identify factors related to institution characteristics (e.g., size, structural diversity, geographic location, sociohistorical legacy) to help higher education administrators adopt more effective strategies to improve sense of belonging for Black men on their campuses.

Third, I limited the qualitative study to 20 high-achieving Black undergraduate men attending one PWI. The students in this study performed well academically, as measured by persistence and their GPA. Future research could include a larger number of participants, irrespective of GPA.

Fourth, this study identified that Black women, not Black men, had the lowest average sense of belonging scores compared to all other groups. However, retention and graduation rates for Black women are considerably higher than for Black men. Future
research could investigate how Black undergraduate women experience sense of belonging at PWIs and its relationship to their persistence and graduation. Either sense of belonging affects persistence differently for Black men and women, other factors have a stronger impact on the persistence of Black men, or Black women, on balance, possess unique coping mechanisms to overcome racial microaggressions, perceived underrepresentation, and low sense of belonging.

**Concluding Note**

Sense of belonging is a human desire and motivation. If higher education administrators are to help Black undergraduate men feel a stronger sense of belonging on PWIs, it begins with higher education administrators and faculty who have the will, desire, and courage to change. This change begins with how PWIs support Black undergraduate men, beginning with developing and sustaining a climate that values personal engagement with Black men and a genuine concern for their well-being. Improvements in campus racial climate begins with a change in how nonminoritized students, faculty, and staff perceive, understand, and most importantly, interact with Black undergraduate men.

A commitment to increasing structural diversity, equity, and inclusion as core values, and programs intended to support the success of minoritized students will likely decrease perceptions of underrepresentation, reduce instances of microaggressions, and encourage more frequent and positive cross-racial interactions. Most of all, on PWIs, faculty, staff, and students must effect positive change. Of the utmost importance is the extent to which White and other non-Black faculty, staff, and students at PWIs foster a
climate in which Black men can feel like they belong. This type of change is not happenstance nor does it emanate from inert ideological acquiescence. Colleges and universities that desire to imbue a sense of belonging for Black men who socialize and study in spaces that have not historically felt welcoming, representative, or familiar must first acknowledge that belonging is a categorical imperative and possess the courage to abandon the ivory towers of intellectual elitism, dismantle structural inequities, and disrupt behaviors that work against sense of belonging.
APPENDICES

Appendix A

Student Experience in the Research University Survey Questions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indicate how strongly you agree or disagree</th>
<th>ugSERU Variable Code</th>
<th>SD (1)</th>
<th>D (2)</th>
<th>SWD (3)</th>
<th>SA (4)</th>
<th>A (5)</th>
<th>SA 6)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I feel like I belong at this campus.</td>
<td>RUCSATGPA</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowing what I know now, I would still choose to enroll at this campus.</td>
<td>RUCAAGREEREENRLL</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Please rate your level of satisfaction**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Satisfaction with grade point average</th>
<th>RUCSATGPA</th>
<th>VD (1)</th>
<th>D (2)</th>
<th>SWD (3)</th>
<th>SS (4)</th>
<th>S (5)</th>
<th>VS (6)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Overall social experience</td>
<td>RUSATSOCIAL</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall academic experience</td>
<td>RUSATACADEMIC</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Value of your education experience for the price you are paying</td>
<td>RUSATVALUE</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note. Strongly Disagree (SD), Disagree (D), Somewhat Disagree (SWD), Somewhat Agree (SA), Agree (A), Strongly Agree (SA); Very Dissatisfied (SD), Dissatisfied (D), Somewhat Dissatisfied (SWD), Somewhat Satisfied (SS), Satisfied (S), Very Satisfied (VS)*
Appendix B

Interview Script

Date of Interview: ______________________

Pseudonym: ______________________________

Interview Start Time: _____________________  End Time: ________________

Interviewer: ______________________________

This research study has been approved by the University of Pennsylvania Institutional Review Board. I am Kenyon Bonner, a doctoral candidate in the Executive Doctorate in Higher Education Management program at the Graduate School of Education at the University of Pennsylvania in Philadelphia, PA. Thank you for volunteering for this study. This study focuses on understanding how Black undergraduate men experience sense of belonging at this predominantly White institution. Before we begin, I ask that you provide me with a pseudonym (fictitious name) for confidentiality purposes. What would you like your pseudonym to be? ______________________________

Before we proceed, please review and sign the consent form. If you have any questions regarding the purpose of this study and the interview process, please feel free to ask me. I will give you a copy of the consent form as well. I do wish to remind you that your participation in this study is voluntary and you have the right to discontinue participation at any time.

Before I turn on the audio-recorder, I ask you to give me a verbal permission to tape the interview. Do I have your permission to audio record this conversation?

________________

After the interview has been transcribed, I’d like to touch base with you if I have any follow-up questions. Is it okay that I contact you for a follow-up?

Thank you.

Please state the following: I give permission to be recorded.
Appendix C

Interview Questions

1. Please tell me about yourself.
   a. What is your hometown?
   b. Why did you choose to attend the research site?
   c. What is your racial/ethnic identity?
   d. What is your gender identity?
   e. Do you have other identities that you would like to share with me?

2. Tell me about your current enrollment status.
   a. Are you a full-time or part-time student? School? Major?
   b. Are you a residence hall student, commuter student, or off-campus student?
   c. Are you a transfer student? If so, what was your previous institution?

3. What student organizations or programs have you been involved with as a student? Why did you select to participate in these groups? How much time per week do you spend in each? What do you enjoy about being involved with each? What do you not enjoy? To what extent do you feel part of those groups/communities?

4. In terms of academic engagement, tell me about your involvement in your classes and the type of interactions you have with faculty. What classes are you taking this semester? How are you doing academically (grades) in each course? Please describe your participation in class. To what extent do you take advantage of any opportunities offered by your professors or academic program?

5. Who do you spend time with?
   a. Who are your closest friends? How did you meet them? How would you describe your relationships with them? What do you do with these folks? How much time do you spend with them? Peers from other races/ethnicities?

6. On a scale of 1 to 10, how would you rate the research site in terms of its acceptance of people of different races? Please explain.

7. On a scale of 1 to 10, how would you rate the research site in terms of its acceptance of people of different gender identities? Please explain.

8. What is your perception of student-to-student race relations at the research site?
   a. Faculty-to-student race relations? Staff-to-student race relations? Is your perception a factor in how you feel about research site? Please explain.

9. In what ways do you feel a sense of connection to research site?
   a. Are there locations on campus (e.g., residence hall, student union, academic department, dining hall), where you are more or less comfortable? Please explain.

10. Could you describe in detail any experience during your time at research site where you felt like you belonged or mattered?
   a. What factors contributed to that feeling of belonging or lack thereof?
11. Could you describe in detail any experience during your time at research site where you felt like you did NOT belong or matter?
   a. What factors contributed to that feeling of belonging or lack thereof?
12. What’s been easy for you here so far?
13. What would you say has been the most difficult thing here for you so far?
   a. How did you handle (or how are you handling) that? Is this a typical strategy?
14. Tell me about a time when you felt your identity as a Black/African American man was valued/appreciated by research site.
15. Tell me about a time when you felt your identity as a Black/African American man was NOT valued/appreciated by research site.
   a. What role does your race play in your experience at research site? What role does your gender play in your experience at research site?
16. Tell me about your perceptions of experiences of other Black men on campus.
17. To what extent is research site meeting your expectations?
18. What would you like to see research site do to improve the experiences of Black/African American men?
19. Have you ever felt like quitting/dropping out of research site or were afraid that you could not finish? Please explain.
20. With whom do you share your experiences at research site? Why?
21. Why do you believe you made it this far in your education?
22. Have your feelings about research site changed over time? If so, how?
23. Think about a place (any place) where you feel most comfortable being you. Where is this place? How does it feel? To what extent do you feel this way at research site?
24. Please describe any other experiences that you have not had a chance to talk about during this interview, but which you find important regarding your experience.
25. If you were to give any advice about how to succeed at research site to a Black male first-year student, what would be your advice?
Appendix D

Consent Form

Sense of Belonging for Black Undergraduate Men

**DESCRIPTION:** You are invited to participate in a research study on sense of belonging at a predominantly White campus. You will be asked to participate in an interview which will focus on your experiences as a Black undergraduate male on campus. Interviews will be audio recorded and transcribed, and the audio files and transcriptions will be kept in a secure location. All publications and presentations will ensure your confidentiality. This research is being conducted as part of the requirement for the Executive Doctoral Program at the Graduate School of education at the University of Pennsylvania.

**RISKS AND BENEFITS:** There are no direct benefits by participating in this study. I do not anticipate any risks to you participating in this study other than those encountered in day-to-day life. A breach of confidentiality is possible although the proper precautions are in place to help prevent this from happening.

**CONFIDENTIALITY:** As a participant in this study, you may request to receive a copy of the summary findings upon completion of this project. Upon your consent, this interview will be audio recorded. The audio file will later be transcribed for research purposes, but will never be played for any audience other than the researchers directly involved in the project. Upon completion of the project, audio files will be erased.

**TIME INVOLVEMENT:** Your participation in this interview will take approximately 60 minutes. Brief (approximately 30 minutes) follow-up interviews or telephone conversations may be conducted as needed. You will be invited to review the interview transcript and make corrections.

**PAYMENTS:** Although your assistance is greatly appreciated, there will be no payment for your participation.

**SUBJECT'S RIGHTS:** If you have read this form and have decided to participate in this project, please understand your participation is voluntary, and you have the right to withdraw your consent or discontinue participation at any time without penalty. You have the right to refuse to answer particular questions. Your individual privacy will be maintained in all published and written data resulting from the study. If you have questions about your rights as a study participant or are dissatisfied at any time with any aspect of this study, you may contact—anonymously, if you wish—Office of Regulatory Affairs with any question, concerns or complaints at the University of Pennsylvania by calling (215) 898-2614.
FOR QUESTIONS ABOUT THE STUDY, CONTACT: Kenyon R. Bonner, University of Pennsylvania Graduate School of education, 3700 Walnut Street, Philadelphia, PA 19104, 412-XXX-XXXX, XXXXX@gse.upenn.edu or PI, Diane E. Eynon, Senior Fellow and Director of the Penn GSE Executive Doctorate in Higher Education Management at eynond@gse.upenn.edu or 215-573-8072.

You will be given a copy of this form to keep for your records.

STATEMENT OF CONSENT: I have read the above information, and have received answers to any questions I asked. I consent to take part in the study. I give consent to be audio-recorded during this study: ______ Yes ______ No

SIGNATURE: ___________________________ DATE: ______________

PRINTED NAME: _________________________________
BIBLIOGRAPHY


Metz, G. W. (2002). Challenges and changes to Tinto’s persistence theory. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the Mid-Western Educational Research Association, Columbus, OH.


