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**THE BLACK COLLEGE STUDENT: HOW SUCCESS ON A COLLEGE
CAMPUS IS INFLUENCED BY RACE**

by

Jeffon F. Stubbs

A Thesis

Submitted to the
Department of Educational Services and Leadership
College of Education
In partial fulfillment of the requirement
For the degree of
Master of Arts in Higher Education
at
Rowan University
March 22, 2022

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Dedication

Dedicated to the Black students in White spaces—those who crave a campus culture of excellence without institutional boundaries or margins inspired by race.

Acknowledgements

First and foremost, I would like to thank God for blessing me with the opportunity and means to pursue this experience. Without His provision and protection, I would have never made it this far.

I would also like to thank my family and friends, who bore me up throughout the course of this program and research. Their continuous support and encouragement drove me to persist and persevere through doubt, frustration, and stagnation.

I would like to acknowledge the individuals whom I have encountered on my journey—Elijah, Dyone, Shanell, and Angie—who inspired me to advocate for Black students on predominantly White campuses. Without you sharing your lived experiences with me, I would not have had the basis to fuel my passion to address concerns regarding underrepresentation and the lack of an active voice for Black students.

I also thank my colleagues in the higher education community at large for providing me with the tools and resources to put action behind theory and effect positive change in the lives of Black students pursuing tertiary degrees.

Abstract

Jeffon F. Stubbs

**THE BLACK COLLEGE STUDENT: HOW SUCCESS ON A COLLEGE CAMPUS IS
INFLUENCED BY RACE**

2021-2022

Stephanie Lezotte, Ph.D.

Master of Arts in Higher Education

The purpose of this study was to evaluate how the racial identity of Black and African American students at Rowan University impacts the success of those students. Success was evaluated from three perspectives—academic success, social aptitude, and emotional wellness. In addition to conducting a comprehensive review of literature related to this topic, an independent research design was carried out to assess how student success is affected by race. A qualitative survey was constructed and distributed to residential students at Rowan University who identified themselves as either Black or African American. The survey asked questions to ascertain the experiences and perspectives of students as it relates to navigating their academics, social circles, and emotional welfare on campus. From the survey responses, it was seen that students did not perceive their racial identity to largely impact their ability to succeed on campus. Some responses, however, did indicate that race and race relations affect and are implicated in the student experience, but for the most part other factors affect success more tangibly than race. From the results obtained, it was recommended that Rowan University should hire more minoritized staff and faculty, review protocol regarding the management of student events, revamp its approach to Black student advocacy, and incorporate a student-centered approach that amplifies the student perspective and ensures the equitable and indiscriminate treatment of students.

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Chapter I

Introduction

Many factors influence the performance of the college student. Socioeconomic pressures, ideal campus fit, social aptitude, and K-12 educational preparation can all impact whether a student makes it to college, how long that student remains at an institution, and what the student achieves while enrolled (Mushtaq & Khan, 2012). Employing critical race theory, one can delve into how the race of a student is compounded with these factors to contribute to student achievement and success (Harper et al., 2018). One may even argue that the aforementioned factors are predisposed to race above all else. In American society today, social/class standing is largely influenced by race, racial heterogeneity in historically White-serving spaces affects minoritized populations, and urban communities (which consist of higher populations of minoritized citizens) are constantly marginalized in the K-12 school system. Understanding all of this, it is important that research be conducted and discussions held on how race affects (whether positively or negatively) the success of students of color—specifically Black students.

Statement of the Problem

The reality that students are predisposed to challenges in academia solely based on their race should be a widespread acknowledgement. If institutions of higher education wish to optimize the engagement and success of students, it is imperative that they assess possible factors which may hinder that engagement and success (Johnson et al., 2007; McDougal et al., 2018). As McDougal et al. (2018) discussed in their study, the shifting racial and ethnic paradigms in the United States now require institutions to be

more culturally responsive. As it stands, countless Black students pursuing tertiary degrees experience resistance to their persistence and success particularly due to their racial identity (Gilliard, 1996).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to determine whether or not the racial identity of Black students at Rowan University has an effect on those students' ability to succeed during their campus journey. Using qualitative surveying methods, the study will evaluate the academic success, social aptitude, and emotional well-being of these students as integral aspects of success (Tardy, 1985). This study will:

1. Identify salient themes, practices, policies, and institutional norms that affect (whether by inhibition or promotion) the success or persistence of Black and African American students at Rowan University.
2. Ascertain what type of solutions students desire to be implemented by Rowan University to promote their individual and collective success as a racial class on campus (Mandra, 2006).
3. Highlight current practices/policies/initiatives at Rowan University that bolster the success of Black and African American students.

Importance of Topic

In terms of existing research, aggregate data does exist that reflects large samples of Black students and the factors that affect how they engage and thrive at their institutions. An important detail in this scope of research is the type of institution being explored. Brower & Ketterhagen (2004) understood this and conducted a comprehensive study which explored the experiences of Black students in comparison to their White

counterparts at both predominantly White institutions and historically Black institutions. This dichotomous approach is important as it prioritizes improved insight into how a sense of belonging based on racial homogeneity can bolster student success (Johnson et al., 2007). Overall, concerted effort ought to be invested in determining if and how institutions of higher learning can improve their posture to better educate and develop Black students—whether that includes revamping policy, faculty dynamics, or general campus culture (Astin, 1993; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). In the context of Rowan University, it is important that Black student persistence and success is looked at and catered to separately from that of White students. This would ensure that an individualized but equitable approach is taken to promote widespread student engagement and success that transcends racial barriers.

Furthermore, by exploring the effects of race on Black students, light will be shed on how institutions can support all of its minoritized students. Although this study focuses on the issue(s) experienced by one specific race, the true issue is undoubtedly bigger than race. Institutions ought to be proficient at supporting and safeguarding the academic, social, and emotional welfare of all its students across racial, religious, socioeconomic, and cultural barriers. The experiences of a student are individualized and contextualized to the circumstances that that student has faced and is currently facing. However, as colleges and universities take steps toward culturally holistic, equitable and inclusive approaches, the greater community benefits (Blanchard & Frasson, 2005). This means, as an institution increases its capacity to support its Black student population, that capacity may simultaneously expand to better support the Hispanic student population, or the Jewish student population, or students with disabilities. Thus, the ramifications of

engaging in this discourse extend beyond the obvious benefit of Black student empowerment.

Assumptions and Limitations

The premier assumption of this study was that the responses obtained from the survey distributed were all factual and candidly representative of the actual views of the participants. A limitation of this study was the fact that responses were exclusive to solely residential students. This introduced partiality into the results and the conclusions of the study as the perspectives of commuter students were excluded. Another limitation is that the study only surveys students at Rowan University. The results therefore may not be representative of the views and experiences of students who attend private institutions, institutions outside the state of New Jersey, or institutions that are significantly larger or smaller by population than Rowan University. Finally, the use of a qualitative survey proved to be a limitation to this study. The substance of the answers may have been diluted due to the data collection method used (Ponterotto, 2015). Throughout the course of data collection and analysis, it was found that many responses lacked explanatory substance which could have been captured if one-on-one interviews or focus groups were conducted.

Definition of Key Terms

1. **Success:** This the operative focus of this research topic. The goal of this study is to analyze three key aspects of student success: academic achievement, social aptitude, and emotional well-being. In much of the literature cited, success is synonymized with terms such as resistance, persistence, and resilience (McDougal et al., 2018). Other measures of success included engagement with

other students on campus, a reported sense of belonging, and grades attained (Griffin, 2006; Harper et al., 2018).

2. Student: For this study, the term student operationally refers to a participant pursuing a tertiary degree. In the review of the literature, the term student encompasses any individual who is enrolled at a college or university. This includes community college students, students attaining four-year degrees, and students pursuing graduate degrees. Nonetheless, an overwhelming amount of data discussed in the review has been collected from participants pursuing undergraduate four-year degrees.
3. Black and/or African American: Another key term that should be clarified is Black. As it will be discussed later in this paper, in American culture a distinction sometimes exists between individuals who identify as either Black or African American and those who identify only as Black. Therefore, it is important that it is clarified here that most of the studies which will be reviewed in this paper use the terms Black and African American interchangeably, meaning that the representative samples likely include participants that identify as just Black as well as those that identify their race using both terms.

Research Questions

This study addressed the following questions:

1. How are Black students at Rowan University impacted in their academic progression, social integration, and/or emotional welfare?
2. How do Black students at Rowan perceive these impacts to be shaped by their race?

3. How can Rowan University further promote the success of its Black students?

Overview of the Study

Chapter II provides a review of pertinent scholarly literature that will undergird the basis of this study. The literature cited illustrates how success can be divided into three distinct sub-categories and it provides context from Black students regarding their perceived persistence in pursuit of higher education. This chapter also offers limitations of existing research on this topic.

Chapter III delineates the procedural approach to the independent study designed to supplement the literature reviewed. This chapter details sampling approaches, recruitment practices, data collection, and analytic methods used to synthesize data from participants.

Chapter IV gives details of the results from the survey administered to participants. This chapter objectively presents the raw data obtained from the study prior to data analysis.

Chapter V includes a summary of the study and discussion of the research findings. This chapter incorporates data analysis to synthesize meaning from the results presented in Chapter IV and presents conclusions derived from the analyses as well as recommendations for future practice and further research on this topic of study.

Chapter II

Review of the Literature

For the review of the literature, scholarly research was sought after and examined to identify how success could be measured in different aspects. Research supporting academic achievement, social aptitude, and emotional wellness were explored and cited in this review to illustrate that success is not a monolith. Especially considering success in an academic setting such as a university or college, it is important to emphasize that, contrary to popular belief, academic achievement is not the only facet of success (Crum, 2015). Overall, this review highlights and describes empirically researched evidence of how success is made up of cofactors—all of which ought to be assessed when evaluating the persistence and success of Black college students.

Success as Academic Achievement

Extensive research links academic performance and achievement to racial integration and other race-related factors. Griffin (2006) explored how different factors such as social support, engagement with other Black students, and quality interactions with faculty play a part in precipitating high academic achievement for Black students. The research employed a qualitative multi-case study approach to ascertain what motivations drove scholastically superior Black students to continue excelling. Responses to questions posed to the nine Black college-enrolled participants were supplemented by quantitative metrics including SAT scores and GPAs. The cumulative results showed that the students capitalized on their self-motivation and relied on support structures like family to persevere in the face of academic challenges. This study is particularly important as it explores the experiences of high-achieving Black students, whereas many

studies only seek to understand why Black students may underperform in academic environments.

Jones (2010) also explored how faculty engagement intersects with the racial identity of Black students to affect academic thriving. In this study, 43 Black students completed a questionnaire that allowed the researchers to ascertain different correlative relationships. The correlative relationships that were being assessed were students' relationships with professors, peers, and close friends and how they possibly tied to the students' achievement. In the second phase of the study, four students participated in a focus group which built upon the data collected in the first phase. The in-depth interviews delved into how faculty support and peer interaction affect the achievement of Black students. Salient themes deduced from the focus group sessions were how the accessibility, role modeling, and teaching styles of professors greatly influenced how Black students performed. A limitation of this study, however, is that much of the data that was collected to link the aforementioned themes to the racial identity of students was not statistically significant and was therefore somewhat inconclusive. Nevertheless, both studies point to how Black students have to navigate their academic experiences in college always mindful of their race.

Success as Social Aptitude

There is a relationship between social support and the success of Black college students (Grier-Reed et al., 2008). McDougal et al.'s (2018) study, while also exploring and speaking to the implications of race with academic success, also explored how race intertwines with social aptitude and affects the success of the Black college student. Forty-one Black students participated in focus groups which ultimately showed that racial

homogeneity bolsters student success which manifests as apt social integration (McDougal et al., 2018). This social success included activities such as studying, participating in extracurricular activities, and social collaboration. This study juxtaposed how Black students may be withdrawn and disengaged because they are at institutions that are predominantly White and cannot cater to their cultural identity and needs.

Holt (2019) also conducted a photovoice study which, among other things, illustrated how the social support perceived by Black students at a predominantly White institution affects their overall persistence and success. For this study, a phenomenological approach was used to capture the lived experience of the six Black undergraduate participants enrolled at a predominantly White university. The participants were asked to capture photos of aspects at their institution that corresponded with given research questions/prompts. Factors including the physical campus environment, welcoming classroom atmospheres, sense of self, and social support were all cited in the research findings. These factors were illustrated by the different photos captured by participants and used to indicate how well-integrated and satisfied student participants felt at their institution. In the context of social support, the participants discussed how the campus community, social organizations and support offered by friends all helped in cultivating their thriving on campus (Holt, 2019). When discussing the support of peers, one of the participants coined the term *P.E.A.C.E.*, which stood for Pursue Excellence and Cherish Everyone. This term was used to title one of the pictures displaying the participant presenting a research poster with a fellow Black student who was also a friend. The participant elaborated on how having a fellow student of color in the same major gave her the opportunity to share her academic experiences and struggles with

someone she could identify with. She also attributed this to her success as she was able to persist through different challenges as she had the support of individuals like the co-presenter and another Black student/friend who would encourage her to persevere through the challenges she would face at the institution. This is a stellar example of the importance of racial representation in student populations and how racial identity and race relations in a social context can affect student success. These findings also align with Palmer and Gasman's (2008) research which showed how the support that Black college students received from their peers significantly impacted the achievement of those students.

Success as Emotional Wellness

Sparkman et al. (2012) conducted a study that illustrates the implications of race and student success in the context of emotional well-being. The study focused on how emotional intelligence affects students' ability to successfully matriculate through a four-year college experience. Data were collected from a sample of "traditional students who initially enrolled as freshmen for the fall semester of 2002 and attended freshman orientation the weekend prior to the beginning of classes" (Sparkman et al., 2012, p. 646). This data included high school GPAs, ACT scores, enrollment statuses, cumulative GPAs, gender, ethnicity, and emotional intelligence scores measured by the Bar-On EQ-i:125. The Bar-On model emphasizes that expression and other emotional exhibitions can also be considered "intelligent behavior in Darwinian terms of effective adaptation" (Sparkman et al., 2012, p. 3). After the data were collected and analyzed, there was a positive correlation between students who scored high on the emotional intelligence test and who persisted successfully to graduation. Although this may not be a causative

relationship, it strongly supports the notion that emotional well-being is an inseparable component of student success. It should be noted that the research did not detail the racial demographics of the sample population.

Harper et al.'s (2018) study also supports emotional security being a precipitation of student success, or a lack thereof, for Black students. This study focused on measuring the success of Black students at an urban commuter institution. Factors comprising overall success included financial aid, adjustment, academic performance, and persistence. Interviews were conducted with 23 Black undergraduate students and 20 members of the Black Student Success Task Force and the same institution. The results of the study showed that the challenges faced by Black students at the institution included inadequate representation, lack of a sense of belonging, and racist encounters. It is unquestionable that these experiences affect the emotional well-being of Black people, and definitely Black students (Harper et al., 2018). As these students are forced to navigate these racially disparaging realities on campus, their emotional welfare is adversely affected. This consequently affects the overall success and persistence of the student.

Millea et al. (2018) also conducted a study on how factors such as residential living, average class size and academic preparation contributed to student success and retention. The longitudinal study compiled and analyzed student data from 1998-2004. The research took samples from a pool of approximately 13,000 first-time freshman students. This study contextualizes emotional well-being particularly as the results showed that retention and graduation rates were higher for students who were academically prepared, and who received financial support in the form of grants and

scholarships. This finding can be tied to the previous sub-topic on emotional well-being because emotional security (which includes the absence of anxiety and stress) can undoubtedly be tied to financial security (not having to worry or stress about paying to attend/stay enrolled in college). Moreover, this study reports that race was not a factor identified as affecting retention and graduation rates. Although this assertion somewhat antagonizes the central thesis that race influences emotional wellbeing and academic success, it aptly discusses how financial support and formal education impact college success, independent of race. Furthermore, a limitation of this study may be the omission of considering how financial support and college preparation is inextricably tied to race/socioeconomic disposition.

Limitations of Existing Research

Aside from the limitations already mentioned in the body of this paper, general limitations in the research conducted and data collected also exist as sample sizes are either too large and diverse to account for the specific and nuanced experiences of individual students, or sample sizes are too small to be representative of the larger population of focus—Black college students in America. Furthermore, the scope of the research studies cited includes all students who racially identify as Black. In the United States, this racial identity is nuanced, particularly because of the distinction between Black people who identify as African American and those who do not. Specifically in the realm of higher education, there may be a myriad of Black students who, for whatever reason, may not consider themselves African American. For example, a Black international student from Jamaica could participate in a study on Black students, but his/her/their experiences could not necessarily be paralleled with that of a Black, African

American student who was born and raised in Georgia. This contrast is accompanied by numerous other sociocultural implications which may also contribute to the differing success or persistence of Black vs. African-American students.

Conclusion

Based on the literature reviewed, a strong argument can be made that the racial identity of Black students predisposes them to a multitude of impediments to success. These hindrances can present themselves as academic challenges, faculty incompatibilities or difficulties, social isolation on campus, or emotional trauma. Regardless, it is important that higher education practitioners and institutions take the time to ensure that Black students are being cared for in a holistic way that safeguards their welfare in all the aforementioned aspects. As detailed in the following chapter, an independent research was designed to further assess how student success is affected by race and how this can be combated and mitigated. Ultimately, sound contribution ought to be made to the body of knowledge on how to support and advance the interests of all students, with their intersecting identities (including race) in mind.

Chapter III

Methodology

Context of the Study

This independent research was conducted solely at Rowan University at the main Glassboro campus. Rowan University's student population is made up of 8,616 males and 7,247 females (College Factual, 2021). Of these 15,863 students, 65% are White, 9.46% are Black or African American, and 11% are Hispanic or Latino (College Factual, 2021). The study was conducted over the course of one semester, beginning and ending in February. The research employed qualitative data collection strategies (McMillan, 2016). Qualitative research, as described by Cresswell (2014), is "a means for exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem." For this study, the 'means' was an open-ended survey that allowed participants to describe their experiences on campus. Overall, the research design was intended to maximize the capacity of data collection in a reasonable amount of time, understanding that many students on a given college campus experience survey fatigue and are generally disinterested in participating in research that is not monetarily incentivized.

The central tenet of this research is that the racial identity of a Black college student influences that student's success on a college campus. Blackness can have an impact on the academic, social, and emotional success of a college student. Research cited in the literature review focuses on how either of the three aspects of success are more so adversely impacted by race. The hypothesis of this study is that Black and African American students will perceive their success in all three aspects to be

disproportionately affected as a specific result of their race in comparison to their White counterparts.

Population and Sampling

As stated before, the sample exclusively included residential students at Rowan University seeking four-year degrees. This study focused solely on residential students, as co-contributing factors surrounding student success are germane to the live-on experience for college students (Dakin, 2008; Millea et al., 2018). The study used a convenience sample of self-selected participants. A mass email was sent out to residential students at Rowan University who had the opportunity to respond to the email to express an interest in participating. An overview of the research and a debrief of the methodology was shared with prospective participants beforehand concurrent with the informed consent process. After the initial survey appeal was made, a total of six survey responses were included in the study. This was after the survey remained live for approximately three weeks. The research studied participants across the spectrum of academic interest and did not exclude a participant on the basis of academic major. Participants had to identify as only Black or African American and any participant expressing a non-Black, biracial, or mixed-race identity was excluded. This is because the nature of this study was specific to the experiences and perceptions of Black and African American students. Understanding that age may influence persistence in the three specified areas of focus, only participants between the ages of 18 and 26 were used for the study (Jacobs & King, 2002; Navarro et al., 2015). For the sake of anonymity and confidentiality, participants were also assigned pseudonyms and their names were not identified.

Data Instrumentation and Collection

Open-ended surveys were issued to participants to gather qualitative data and a baseline understanding of how they perceive their progression on campus as a Black student. The survey was divided into three sections, congruent with the three aspects of success that are being assessed in this study. The first section pertaining to academic success asked participants to describe their experiences with classes, academic advising, and obtaining academic support on campus as a Black student (Hoffman et al., 2003). In the portion pertaining to social success, participants were asked to describe how Rowan University is doing at creating and maintaining avenues to boost social integration for Black students. This included extracurricular activities, campus events, and residential structures/curricula (Hurtado & Carter, 1997). The final section of the survey pertaining to emotional wellbeing asked participants to describe how the university responds to safeguard the emotional and mental welfare of Black students. The questions also asked students to express their opinions on the university's response to events like police-perpetuated injustices against Black people, university-sponsored events during Black history month, and claims of racial inequity that are made by Black students (Chavous, 2005).

Surveys were conducted virtually through Qualtrics. The open-ended questions used in the survey were reviewed by the Rowan University Institutional Review Board (IRB) prior to distribution. As stated before, an appeal to participate in the survey was sent via email to the entire residential population at Rowan University. The email also detailed the inclusion criteria of the study so that consenting students could comprise a self-selected sample. A reminder was sent approximately every seven days after the

initial email to invite students to participate. Students electing to participate responded via email indicating their interest and were sent further details regarding completing the survey. The scope of the results reflected a nuanced selection of student perspectives.

Data Analysis

For qualitative data obtained from the surveys, emerging patterns were identified (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008). The qualitative nature of the research design also called for responses to be coded thematically to identify salient themes and draw conclusions from the data (Saldaña, 2016). Anticipated coded themes identified from previous research included lack of support, unjust, injustice, apathy, disinterest, performative, and unequal. After the Qualtrics survey was closed, the data were exported to the Dedoose application for coding and thematic analysis.

Chapter IV

Findings

Profile of the Sample

Of the approximate 5,400 residential students at Rowan University, a total of 16 responses to the survey were recorded. Nine of those responses were excluded from the data analysis as the participant chose not to complete the survey, and one response was excluded as the participant identified as having a mixed racial identity. There was an even ratio of male and female respondents with 3 participants (50%) identifying as male and 3 participants (50%) identifying as female. The age of the respondents ranged from 19 to 24, with both the median and average age being 22. Of the six participants, three students (50%) reported studying at Rowan University for two years, two students (33%) reported studying at Rowan University for three years, and one student (17%) reported studying at Rowan for the past five years. The respondents ranged from a variety of academic majors including one Advertising/Public Relations major, two Higher Education majors, one Biology major, one Mechanical Engineering major, and one Law and Justice major.

Participants were asked open-ended questions which were designed to elicit data that would answer the following questions:

1. How are Black students at Rowan University impacted in their academic progression, social integration, and/or emotional welfare?
2. How do Black students at Rowan perceive these impacts to be shaped by their race?
3. How can Rowan University further promote the success of its Black students?

One of the survey questions asked participants' classification. This question was designed to assess which year of study each participant was currently persisting in (freshman, sophomore, junior, senior, or graduate student). However, responses from participants were inconsistent in this category as some respondents stated their sex, sexuality or did not answer this question at all. This category of results was therefore excluded from the study. Furthermore, a word visualization tool was going to be used to illustrate common words that populated the survey responses. However, due to the low number of responses, the results were synthesized in paragraph form.

Analysis of the Data

Race and Academics

When asked to describe their experiences with academic advising at Rowan University, participants responded with statements such as “never talked to anyone,” “they served their purpose,” “it’s cool but not the best,” “it was alright,” and “they have always helped me when I needed it.” When asked to describe how they enjoyed their current academic program, all the respondents stated that they enjoyed their program. Responses included, “Yes program is interesting, learn new things everyday;” “I do because I feel like it will lead me to accomplishing my goals;” and “Yes, I enjoy the academic program because of the professors.” Another supporting factor that was mentioned was the ease of the program. When asked to describe the preferential treatment of their White classmates by professors, all of the respondents shared that they did not perceive this because they have experienced equitable treatment in their courses or have not paid attention to racially biased tendencies by their professors if there were

any. Two notable responses to this particular question were, “I do hope not! Because I have not heard of it happening yet;” and

“I do not feel like someone is treated better than me just because of their race in my classes. Most times there are so many people in our classes they do not even know who you are when grading comes around.”

When asked to describe their satisfaction with tutoring services offered at the university, almost half of the respondents shared that they barely or never used tutoring services, while one respondent stated that, “The tutoring center has helped me get through a lot of my classes.” Another respondent, however, shared that they were “not helped properly” after going to the tutoring center for assistance. When asked to describe how their racial identity has impacted their academic progressing at the university, 50% of the respondents shared that they do not feel like their race impacts their academics, while other responses indicated that general racial marginalization and lack of high school preparedness due to school district zoning has caused them to have to work harder to persist in their academics at the same rate as their White classmates. A response that aptly presents this idea is:

“I feel like it has. My school district did not really educate me well in STEM courses. Or I should say I was not as ready as other students that came from mostly white sending districts. They came in knowing a lot of material that I was never exposed to.”

This response corresponds with the notion that Black students are at a disadvantage due to subpar K-12 education, scarce resources, and disparaged socioeconomic status (Cokley, 2014; Harper, 2010; Valencia, 2010). When asked to discuss what Rowan

University could possibly do differently to better support the academic success of Black students, a salient theme elicited was the need to hire more minority professors. Other responses included changing “the academic pursuits” and improving conditions “in every way” for graduate students.

Race and Socialization

The second portion of the survey asked students to discuss their experience with social integration on campus at Rowan University. When asked to describe their involvement in extracurricular activities, more than half of the participants indicated partaking in at least one club/activity on campus. Some of the extracurriculars mentioned by the respondents were student government, Beauty in Distress, “other Black organizations,” and “mostly White” clubs. When asked to discuss how the current selection of campus activities and organizations meet their social needs, 50% of the respondents shared how they are satisfied with their current extracurricular activities while other respondents shared a dissatisfaction with extracurricular activities that promote social integration. One participant stated that the clubs he is in are “work related” and cater more so to his academic pursuits which is why he does not believe they are conducive to his social endowment. When asked to describe how being Black has affected their ability to make friends on campus, an overwhelming majority of the participants shared that their race has not impacted their ability to form social bonds. Responses included, “No not at all. I feel like it’s easy to make friends when you talk a lot” and “No, bc I am a friendly person so I get along with people fast.” Another participant stated, “I went through the ASCEND program so I would say no. But if I was not in that program I would say. I would have to force myself to find black clubs.” One

respondent, however, did share that they do feel that their social persistence is influenced by their race. This participant shared that, “at times I feel like one of the few students of color around campus. At times I am one or two of the black males in my class.” When asked to describe how the university could persist or change its approach in promoting social engagement among Black students, responses varied from participants. One response stated that the university should allow Black students to express themselves “freely like the White students.” Another response shared that events hosted by predominantly Black student organizations are over-policed or always shut down which serves as an impediment to socialization. It was also shared that the university could “promote Black clubs more.” Nonetheless, responses from other participants indicated a strong social fabric and momentum within and behind the Black student community at the university. These were responses that stated, “the black community is pretty solid” and “I feel like "Black Rowan" does a great job of building a community.”

Race and Emotional Wellbeing

In the final part of the survey which asked participants to describe their emotional wellbeing in the context of their racial identity, responses varied among participants. When asked to describe their sense of belonging outside of the classroom, many participants shared that they do not struggle with feeling like they belong. One participant stated that they have “multiple different friend groups that make me feel like I belong.” Other respondents, however, shared that their sense of belonging is diminished because Rowan University is a predominantly White institution and because they are most active in their classes. When asked how Rowan University has supported the wellbeing of its students, responses were less favorable. Respondents indicated that the university has

implemented a lot of “fake offices for show” and “performative events and initiatives” which do not seem to truly support and advocate for the best interests of students. One participant stated that “more work can be done” by the university to support the wellbeing of Black students. On the other hand, one participant commended Rowan University’s Office of Social Justice, Inclusion, and Conflict Resolution and stated this entity promotes inclusion “among all cultures”. Another response spoke to the university’s openness to let Black students form clubs and host programs. Finally, participants were asked how their ability to navigate their overall experience at Rowan University has been impacted by their race. Most respondents indicated that their race did not make their navigation more challenging. However, respondents indicated that their compounded marginalized identity, such as being a Black student and a woman, has affected their ability to speak up of themselves in certain spaces. A respondent also indicated that it was “hard trying to connect with mostly students outside my race in the beginning because they see me for my skin color before who I am as a person.” Another response was,

“It was definitely challenging because many people did not understand why I was struggling academically or even how to help me. They did not understand my minority school district did not really prepare me for this. But I realized that if I wanted this to be a great experience I had to make it happen. I had to study hard and network with different people to help me. Once I did find these people I realized the ones that helped me learn my material were White people and it almost made me feel somewhat better because they helped me realize I was not struggling because I was black or because of where I came from. They helped me

realize I am actually smart and that I was struggling because the material was difficult. And the teachers did not spend a lot of time explaining the material.”

Chapter V

Summary, Discussion, Conclusion, Recommendations

Summary of the Study

The purpose of this study was to assess how Black and African American students at Rowan University perceive their racial identity to impact their success. Success was evaluated from three perspectives—academic success, social aptitude, and emotional well-being. It was hypothesized that Black and African American students would perceive their success (in all three aspects) to be disproportionately affected as a specific result of their race in comparison to their White counterparts. Scholarly support of this study rests on research that assessed how factors such as social support, engagement with other Black students, and interactions with faculty promote high academic achievement for Black students (Griffin, 2006). Adept social integration and its relation to racial identity was also researched by McDougal et al. (2018) and these findings heavily influenced the methodological approach for this study. Sparkman et al. (2012) also conducted a study that delved into how the emotional intelligence and wellbeing of Black students influenced their ability to persist through the completion of a degree program. This study and its findings also contributed to the construction of the research design.

The study was conducted on the main Glassboro campus of Rowan University and enlisted a total of six participants who completed a qualitative survey of open-ended questions. The questions were designed to assess the participants' perception regarding their academic, social, and emotional success at Rowan University. The survey consisted of 21 questions. Participants completed the survey electronically via Qualtrics. The sample was self-selected and consisted of students between the ages of 18 and 26 who

identified as either Black or African American. Students identifying as mixed-race or racially ambiguous were excluded from the study.

After the sample was established and the participants completed the survey, the results were compiled into a spreadsheet and analyzed for consistent/overlapping themes in participant responses (Ryan & Bernard, 2003). The data collected from the survey was also processed through the Dedoose app for analytic thematic coding. Due to the insubstantial nature of the responses acquired, satisfactory coding was not achieved and results were presented in prose.

Discussion of the Findings

This section will use participant responses to qualify the hypothesis established at the beginning of the study. Responses will be discussed in the context of each of the three research questions:

1. How are Black students at Rowan University impacted in their academic progression, social integration, and/or emotional welfare?
2. How do Black students at Rowan perceive these impacts to be shaped by their race?
3. How can Rowan University further promote the success of its Black students?

Academic Progression

Based on participant responses from the survey regarding academic success, salient themes included adequate/satisfactory academic advising, equitable treatment by faculty across race, and a desire for institutional change by onboarding more faculty of racially minoritized identities. There appeared to be an even split between the amount of students who did and did not take advantage of institutional resources for academic

support. Moreover, academic progression at the collegiate level, based on responses, seemed to be more heavily influenced by the racial implications of participants' high school education. This was seen as participants noted that their ability to persist academically was more heavily influenced by their lack of college preparation in high school due to racially discriminatory school district zoning. It was also interesting to note that although participants did not report preferential treatment of White classmates by their professors, it was still reported that the university could better support the academic progression of Black students by hiring more faculty members of minoritized racial identity. This indicated that Black students may not feel overtly marginalized in the classroom but still desire that sense of racial homogeneity that Brower & Ketterhagen (2004) studied. This also aligns with Wilson & Stith's (1993) postulation that Black students consider faculty of color leaders who can guide their careers.

Social Integration

Responses from this portion of the survey illustrated how participants' individual choice to take part in campus activities affected their overall perception of their social persistence at the university. Those participants who were not a part of a campus organization or who did not participate in an extracurricular activity expressed that the university did not adequately meet their social needs as it relates to campus activities. On the other hand, those participants who were highly engaged in campus activities shared that their social needs in this regard were being adequately met. As it pertains to racial identity and the ability to make friends at Rowan University, most participants did not report a relationship between these two factors. On the contrary, students indicated the ability to make friends easily due to innate personality traits and the establishment of

summer bridge programs like “ASCEND” that cater to students from low socioeconomic backgrounds. However, this was not the consensus across all participants. Some participants still reported a struggle in establishing strong social partnerships on campus due to on-campus work commitments and a perceived lack of Black students. The latter reported survey response introduces a subjective argument of “how many Black students is enough Black students to promote social success?”—a question that this study will not seek to answer. This, however, would be an ideal research question to fuel further research. This question, nonetheless, was very important to ask especially when considering how peers can have a substantial impact on the lives of Black students (Somers et al., 2008). When asked how Rowan University can better support the social needs of its students, many responses spoke to the already established resilience of the Black student community at the institution. However, survey responses cited factors such as the university’s failure to adequately promote Black student organizations and events as well as the over-policing Black student events as threats to the persistence of social resilience and persistence among Black students. This was interesting to note, particularly because this indicates a strong sense of social perception among Black students. Responses like these also prove useful to recommendations for future practice. Another response to the question regarding what Rowan University can do to promote social success was allowing Black students to express themselves as freely as the White students. This response was interesting to note as equitable treatment by faculty was reported by all participants, but according to this response there is still a perception that other entities of the university still perpetrate inequitable treatment between Black students and White students.

Emotional Welfare

The final portion of the survey sought to assess success in the context of emotional well-being. Employing the context of Harper et al.'s (2018) study that a racial sense of belonging can be connected to emotional well-being, participants were first asked how they perceived their sense of racial belonging at Rowan University as Black students outside of the classroom. For the most part, participants indicated that they did not struggle to establish a sense of belonging in the context of their racial identity. Other respondents indicated a difficulty to establish that sense of racial belonging due to factors that included not being active enough outside of work and class to invest in establishing a sense of identity and belonging. Another factor contributing to Black students finding it difficult to feel like they belong was reportedly because Rowan University is a predominantly White institution. This goes back to the notion that to some students there seems to not be enough Black people or in this case—too many White students for Black students to persist in different aspects of success. Participants in the study spoke to Rowan University's accomplishments in supporting Black students' emotional wellbeing as they reported the impact of the institution's Office of Social Justice, Inclusion, and Conflict Resolution. One participant also commented on the array of Black student organizations that the university has also promoted the overall emotional welfare of students. This response was interesting to note as other participants in the previous section of the survey regarding social integration stated that Black organizations needed to be promoted more by the institution. This introduces the opportunity for Rowan University to use student advocates who are satisfied with the different clubs and activities to promote those clubs and activities to their peers who may not be

knowledgeable of the array of events and organizations that the institution offers. Some participants, however, did report they perceived the university's initiatives surrounding the support of Black students to be performative and inconsequential. It was also reported that Rowan University has more work to do regarding supporting the wellbeing of its Black students. These responses showed that there were split perceptions among respondents concerning how well the institution is doing with promoting Black student success.

The last question of the survey asked participants to describe the challenges and/or simplicities of navigating their experience at Rowan University as a Black student. Several respondents indicated that they have experienced challenges in navigating their college life based on race. One respondent stated that discriminatory treatment from others based on her compounded marginalized identity as a Black woman has impacted her ability to speak up in certain spaces. This data partially supports the general focus of the study, but introduces the confounding influence of gender identity which can also affect Black students' success on a college campus. Other respondents also reported that how their race is perceived by others largely impacted their ability to comfortably navigate their college experience. One participant particularly mentioned that others would prejudicially develop a perception of who he was as a person based solely on the color of his skin, before getting to know him. Majority of the participants, however, indicated that their race did not impede their ability to navigate their college experience. It is important to particularly note the response that stated:

“It was definitely challenging because many people did not understand why I was struggling academically or even how to help me. They did not understand my

minority school district did not really prepare me for this. But I realized that if I wanted this to be a great experience I had to make it happen. I had to study hard and network with different people to help me. Once I did find these people I realized the ones that helped me learn my material were White people and it almost made me feel somewhat better because they helped me realize I was not struggling because I was black or because of where I came from. They helped me realize I am actually smart and that I was struggling because the material was difficult. And the teachers did not spend a lot of time explaining the material.”

All of these responses supported the idea that racial identity does not have a substantive effect on the success of Black students on a college campus.

Recommendations for Future Practice

Based on the findings and conclusions of the study, the following are recommended:

1. Rowan University should explore the possibility of onboarding more faculty and staff of marginalized/minoritized identities. This would include more Black/African American employees.
2. Rowan University should review standard protocol and procedure regarding how student events/crowd control are managed by the Rowan University Police Department. Necessary changes should be made to ensure that Black student events are not discriminately scrutinized by Rowan police officers.
3. Rowan University should review its approach across all departments concerning the development of programs, initiatives, and curriculum surrounding Black

student advocacy and success. Attention should be investing in building programs and initiatives that are pervasive, impactful, consequential, and not performative.

4. Rowan University should review its student engagement practices to ensure that inequitable and preferential treatment is not being given to other racial groups to voice their concerns and express themselves.
5. Rowan University should employ or enlist the assistance of student advocates to help promote the selection of campus activities and events for specific minoritized groups.

Many of these recommendations align with Kuh's (2008) description of high impact practices. These advances and modified approaches would bolster student engagement and persistence (Kuh, 2008).

Recommendations for Further Research

Based on the findings and conclusions of the study, the following are recommended:

1. Further research on this specific topic should be conducted, ideally with a larger sample. This would allow responses to be more representative of the widespread and varying perceptions that exist among the Black student community.
2. Research should be conducted regarding the ideal size of a Black student population on a college campus to inspire and promote social engagement among the Black student community.
3. Research should be conducted on how the converging effect of multiple minoritized identities impacts a student's ability to progress and succeed in college. This could further explore the notion brought forth concerning the

persistence of Black women being hindered not only because of their race, but also their gender.

Conclusions

The data collected from the survey indicate that, while racial identity may affect how students persist and succeed throughout their college experience, factors aside from and independent of race also affect success. These other factors, based on the data obtained, include high school preparation, student investment in choosing to get involved on campus, and innate personality traits. Factors such as these have proven to impact the Black student success just as much as it was anticipated that racial identity would impact success. Responses to most survey questions were not unanimous in their nature as it relates to either confirming or refuting racial identity as a significant factor in impacting the student experience and success. Therefore, the results proved to be unclear as to whether or not the racial identity of Black students impacts their success.

From the responses collected, it can also be concluded that Rowan is making an effort to support and bolster student success, but there still remains much to be desired from the Black student community. The availability of various Black student organizations, the implementation of summer bridge programs, and the establishment of the Office of Social Justice, Inclusion, and Conflict Resolution have been perceived as high impact practices by Black students.

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Appendix A

Institutional Review Board Approval Letter



DHHS Federal Wide Assurance Identifier: FWA00007111

IRB Chair Person: Dr. Ane Johnson

IRB Director: Eric Gregory

Effective Date: January 3, 2022

Notice of Approval - Initial

Study ID: PRO-2021-591

Title: "The Black College Student: How Success on a College Campus is Influenced by Race"

Principal Investigator: Stephanie Lezotte

Study Coordinator: Jeffon Stubbs

Co-Investigator(s): Jeffon Stubbs

Sponsor: Department Funded

Submission Type: Initial

Submission Status: Approved

Approval Date: January 3, 2022

Expiration Date: January 2, 2023

Approval Cycle: 12 months

Continuation Review Required: Yes

Closure Required: Yes

Review Type: Expedited

Expedited Category: 6. Collection of data from voice, video, digital, or image recordings made for research purposes.

7. Research on individual or group characteristics or behavior (including, but not limited to, research on perception, cognition, motivation, identity, language, communication, cultural beliefs or practices, and social behavior) or research employing survey, interview, oral history, focus group, program evaluation, human factors evaluation, or quality assurance methodologies.

Pregnant Women, Human Fetus, and Neonates Code: N/A

Pediatric/Children Code: N/A

Prisoner(s) – Biomedical or Behavioral: N/A

ALL APPROVED INVESTIGATOR(S) MUST COMPLY WITH THE FOLLOWING:

1. Conduct the research in accordance with the protocol, applicable laws and regulations, and the principles of research ethics as set forth in the Belmont Report.
- 2a. Continuing Review: Approval is valid until the protocol expiration date shown above. To avoid lapses in approval, submit a continuation application at least eight weeks before the study expiration date.
- 2b. Progress Report: Approval is valid until the protocol expiration date shown above. To avoid lapses, an annual progress report is required at least 21 days prior to the expiration date.
- 3a. Expiration of IRB Approval: If IRB approval expires, effective the date of expiration and until the continuing review approval is issued: All research activities must stop unless the IRB finds that it is in the best interest of individual subjects to continue. (This determination shall be based on a separate written request from the PI to the IRB.) No new subjects may be enrolled and no samples/charts/surveys may be collected, reviewed, and/or analyzed.
- 3b. Human Subjects Research Training: Proper training in the conduct of human subjects research must be current and not expired. It is the responsibility of the Principal Investigator and the investigator to complete training when expired. Any modifications and renewals will not be approved until training is not expired and current.
4. Amendments/Modifications/Revisions: If you wish to change any aspect of this study after the approval date mentioned in this letter, including but not limited to, study procedures, consent form(s), investigators, advertisements, the protocol document, investigator drug brochure, or accrual goals, you are required to obtain IRB review and approval prior to implementation of these changes unless necessary to eliminate apparent immediate hazards to subjects. This policy is also applicable to progress reports.
5. Unanticipated Problems: Unanticipated problems involving risk to subjects or others must be reported to the IRB Office (45 CFR 46, 21 CFR 312, 812) as required, in the appropriate time as specified in the attachment online at: <https://research.rowan.edu/officeofresearch/compliance/irb/index.html>
6. Protocol Deviations and Violations: Deviations from/violations of the approved study protocol must be reported to the IRB Office (45 CFR 46, 21 CFR 312, 812) as required, in the appropriate time as specified in the attachment online at: <https://research.rowan.edu/officeofresearch/compliance/irb/index.html>
7. Consent/Assent: The IRB has reviewed and approved the consent and/or assent process, waiver and/or alteration described in this protocol as required by 45 CFR 46 and 21 CFR 50, 56, (if FDA regulated research). Only the versions of the documents included in the approved process may be used to document informed consent and/or assent of study subjects; each subject must receive a copy of the approved form(s); and a copy of each signed form must be filed in a secure place in the subject's medical/patient/research record.
8. Completion of Study: Notify the IRB when your study has been completed or stopped for any reason. Neither study closure by the sponsor nor the investigator removes the obligation for submission of timely continuing review application, progress report or final report.
9. The Investigator(s) did not participate in the review, discussion, or vote of this protocol.
10. Research protocol and study documentation and instruments is approved as of the Approval Date on this letter. All final approved versions of the study documentation, including but not limited to the protocol, advertisements and recruitment instruments, pre-screening instruments, surveys, interviews, scripts, data collection documents, all manner of consent forms, and all other documentation attached to this submission are approved for final use by the investigators up to the expiration date listed above (Expiration Date) in this letter.
11. Letter Comments: There are no additional comments.

CONFIDENTIALITY NOTICE: This email communication may contain private, confidential, or legally privileged information intended for the sole use of the designated and/or duly authorized recipients(s). If you are not the intended recipient or have received this email in error, please notify the sender immediately by email and permanently delete all copies of this email including all attachments without reading them. If you are the intended

recipient, secure the contents in a manner that conforms to all applicable state and/or federal requirements related to privacy and confidentiality of such information.

Appendix B

Survey Instrument



ONLINE SURVEY (ALTERNATE CONSENT)

You are invited to participate in this online research survey entitled “The Black College Student: How Success is Influenced by Race.” You are included in this survey because you identify as a Black, undergraduate, residential Rowan University student and are willing to share your experiences and opinions to improve the Black student experience at Rowan University. The number of subjects to be enrolled in the study will be approximately 312 students.

The survey may take approximately 20 minutes to complete. Your participation is voluntary. If you do not wish to participate in this survey, do not respond to this online survey. Completing this survey indicates that you are voluntarily giving consent to participate in the survey. After completing the survey, you may be called to participate in a follow-up group interview.

The purpose of this research study is to evaluate how the racial identity of Black and African American students at Rowan University impacts the success of those students. Success will be evaluated from three (3) perspectives—academic success, social aptitude, and emotional well-being. Approximately 312 students will be enrolled in this study.

There are no risks or discomforts associated with this survey. There may be no direct benefit to you, however, by participating in this study, you may help us understand how to better support and promote the persistence of Black students collectively at Rowan University.

Your response will be kept confidential. We will store the data in a secure computer file and the file will be destroyed once the data has been published. Any part of the research that is published as part of this study will not include your individual information. If you have any questions about the survey, you can email the address provided below, but you do not have to give your personal identification.

Stephanie Lezotte
lezotte@rowan.edu

If you have any questions about your rights as a research subject, please contact the Office of Research Compliance at (856) 256-4078– Glassboro/CMSRU.

This study has been approved by the Rowan IRB, PRO-2021-591.

Please complete the checkbox below.

To participate in this survey, you must be 18 years or older. Place a check box here

Completing this survey indicates that you are voluntarily giving consent to participate in the survey

1

Version #:
Version Date:
Creation/Revision Date: 10-26-2020

Leave Blank for IRB

Rowan University
PRO-2021-591
Approved on 1-3-2022
Expires on 1-2-2023

Show Block: General Information (6 Questions)

Q1 What is your age?
Q2 What is your sex?
Q3 What is your classification?
Q4 How many years have you been attending Rowan University as a student?
Q7 What is your major?
Q8 What is your racial identity?

Show Block: Academic Success (6 Questions)

Q5 Describe your experience with academic advising at Rowan University.
Q6 Do you enjoy your current academic program? Why or why not?
Q9 Do you believe that White students receive preferential treatment in your courses? Why or why not?
Q10 Are you satisfied with the tutoring resources available at Rowan University? Why or why not?
Q11 Do you believe your racial identity has impacted your academic performance or progression at Rowan? If so, how? If not, why?
Q12 Does Rowan University need to change in any way to better support the academic pursuits of its Black students? If so, how? If not, why?

Show Block: Social Integratoin (5 Questions)

Q13 Describe your involvement in extracurricular activities on campus.
Q14 Are there adequate campus organizations to meet your social needs?
Q15 Has being Black/African American made it harder for you to find friends at Rowan University? If so or if not, why do you feel this way?
Q16 Are issues plaguing the Black community at-large (in the world) adequately discussed/advocated for in student organizations? Explain.
Q17 Does Rowan University need to improve in any way to promote social engagement among its Black students? If so, how? If not, why?

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Show Block: Emotional Wellbeing (3 Questions)

Q19 Do you ever find it hard to establish a sense of racial belonging outside of class? Describe.

Q20 What do you think Rowan University has done or continues to do to support the wellbeing of its Black students?

Q21 Do you ever feel like navigating your experience at Rowan University is more challenging due to your racial identity? Why or why not?

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