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Eliezer Marcellus  
*Rowan University*

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**FOREIGN-BORN BLACK MALES: AN INTERPRETATIVE  
PHENOMENOLOGICAL ANALYSIS OF THEIR PERSISTENCE IN HIGHER  
EDUCATION**

by

Eliezer Marcellus

A Dissertation

Submitted to the  
Department of Educational Leadership  
College of Education  
In partial fulfillment of the requirement  
For the degree of  
Doctor of Education  
at  
Rowan University  
May 2018

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### **Dedications**

I would like to dedicate this manuscript to my wife, Tamara, and our two children Ava and Levi Marcellus. My mother and father, Martha and St. Juste Marcellus, as well as my siblings Josie Mathews, Abner Marcellus, and Judeline Marcellus. My brother-in-law Todd Mathews, sister-in-law Paula Marcellus, and the Thomas-Petit family. My nieces Bryanna, Maliyah, and Tatiana. My nephews Isaiah, Quincy, and Preston.

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Importantly, I want to thank my wife, Tamara Marcellus, who deserves to be acknowledged as the single greatest supporter and fan through my doctoral process. I am grateful for all the time you sacrificed to keep the kids occupied so I could attend class, write my dissertation, and enjoy my education to the fullest. This degree is not just for me, but it is for you and our children. We did this as a family. I would also like to acknowledge my children, Ava and Levi Marcellus. To complete this degree is one thing, but to show my children that you can achieve anything you set your mind to is something altogether different. Dream big dreams, my children, nothing in this world is impossible when you work hard. I love you. In addition, thanks to my siblings Josie, Abner, and Judeline Marcellus for all your love and support. Lastly, to my parents, thank you for always pushing me to do my best and chase my dreams.

## **Abstract**

Eliezer Marcellus  
FOREIGN-BORN BLACK MALES: AN INTERPRETATIVE  
PHENOMENOLOGICAL ANALYSIS OF THEIR PERSISTENCE IN HIGHER  
EDUCATION  
2017-2018  
James Coaxum III, Ph.D

The purpose of this study is to explore the academic and social integration experiences of foreign-born Black male students who persist at a four-year research institution. Research has shown that foreign-born Black males do not self-identify, and, as a result, their experiences in higher education have been grouped in with the persistent experiences of native-born Black males (Nesbett, 2002; Williams, 2005). This phenomenological study examines the lived experience of foreign-born Black males in higher education. Ten face-to-face interviews were conducted in order to describe the essence of this phenomenon. The findings from this study revealed five themes that explained the lived experience of foreign-born Black males in higher education is complex and challenging. These five themes are family influence and expectations, coping with language proficiency challenges, discovering the race card, bridging the gap through campus support programs, and mixed interactions with faculty. In addition, this study provides a narrative about the experience of foreign-born Black men in a predominantly White institution. Lastly, this study provides insight to aid policymakers, higher education practitioners, and others connected to foreign-born Black males to better understand how unique their experiences are in American higher education.

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## **Chapter 1**

### **Introduction**

While there have been improvements in accessibility for historically underrepresented populations at the postsecondary level, Black males continue to lag behind their peers in the critical areas of enrollment, achievement, and persistence (Cuyjet, 2006; Harper, 2008; Strayhorn, 2008). In fact, researchers have found that in contrast to other major ethnic groups, Black males have the lowest educational achievement rates in the United States (Jackson & Moore, 2006; Palmer et al., 2010; Tate, 2008). Particularly, Black males have the lowest college completion rates and highest attrition rates among all ethnic groups and genders. Educational outcomes for Black males continue to plummet. Some scholars have gone so far as to describe this population of students as “vanishing,” and “disappearing” from the educational scene (Harper, 2008; Sáenz et al., 2008). Other researchers have predicted that if the current trend of low graduation and enrollment rates continues, Black males may not be involved with higher education by the year 2070 (Cross & Slater, 2000).

For instance, Black male students make up roughly 29% of students between the ages of 18 to 24 years old enrolled in colleges and universities while African American women made up 34% and white males made up 42% in 2008 (Harper & Nichols, 2008). Additionally, Black males account for only 34% of bachelor's degrees awarded to African Americans compared to 65% for African American females and 44% for White males during the same period (J. M. Lee & Ransom, 2011). Small numbers of Black males along with low achievement among Black males in higher education have triggered extensive research regarding Black males in higher education (Harper, 2012; Strayhorn

& Strayhorn & Saddler, 2009). Much of the literature highlights the fact that Black males are more likely to face obstacles in their educational pursuits, which can therefore lead to their failure to persist in higher education (Harper, 2006; Sáenz et al., 2008).

Although enrollment in higher education has increased for Blacks males, the retention and graduation rates have not (Harper, 2008; Strayhorn & Terrell, 2010). The Institute for Higher Education Policy (2010) reports that enrollment in postsecondary education for African Americans increased by over 45 % from 2000 to 2010 (Institute for Higher Education Policy, 2010). Yet the growing disparity between participation rates of Black women and males still remains. Even with steady increases in Black male enrollment throughout the 1960s and healthy surges throughout the 1980s and 1990s (Cuyjet, 2006), enrollment for this student population continues to be far less than White and other minority male populations (Harper, 2012). For example, a 2011 report by the American Council on Education on degree attainment shows that between 1989 and 2009, White males increased their degree attainment by 7%, Black females by 8%, and Black males by only 2% (Harper, 2012). Within a 10-year span, both White males and Black females witnessed a higher increase in degree attainment, than their Black male counterparts (Harper, 2012; National Center for Education Statistics, 2012; Strayhorn, 2012). These numbers reveal a disparity between the persistence and the performance levels of Black males compared to their white male and Black female counterparts. As scholars mention (Cuyjet,2006; Harper, 2006a, 2006b, 2012; Strayhorn, 2012), this gap will continue to widen if counteractive measures are not immediately taken to successfully integrate Black males academically and socially in higher education in order to increase their persistence.



## **Black Males Academic & Social Integration**

Much of the research concerning the state of Black males in higher education tends to be centered on issues that impact their academic and social integration experiences which impact their overall retention and persistence. L. D. Reid and Radhakrishnan (2003) found that Black males in college can be affected by the institution's academic and social environment. If faculty, staff, and institutional members do not properly integrate them into post-secondary education, Black males can become disengaged from the campus community (L. D. Reid & Radhakrishnan, 2003). The lack of social skills may also prevent student learning. According to Reid and Radhakrishnan, Black males remain socially segregated in higher education. Implementing academic and social programs in higher education influences student learning and social interaction among Black male students (L. D. Reid & Radhakrishnan, 2003). According to Swail et al. (2003), factors such as institutional fit and campus integration can also negatively impact Black male students' persistence. An important issue for retaining college students through to degree completion is a positive campus climate, which can play a major role in undergraduates' academic and social success in college (Swail et al., 2003).

Research on the background of Black males concludes these students want to go to college but lack social skills for coping in a learning environment (Bell, 2010). To develop effective programs and raise accountability standards for educating Black males, researchers are focusing more on the identity development and success of Black males as these relate to college experiences (Harris et al., 2011). Understanding behavior and adaptive functioning to college life helps colleges and universities implement social and educational experiences for Black males (Harris et al., 2011). Black males entering

college may have limited resources for academic support while facing demands of social growth (Strayhorn, 2008). Tinto's theory on academic and social integration concludes that Black males undergoing supportive programs experience high levels of satisfaction rather than experiencing academic achievement (Tinto, 1997). Because supportive programs can be influential among Black male college students, teachers and the school environment can be effective and maximize the success of Black male students.

### **Problem Statement**

Even though there is a considerable amount of research on Black males in higher education, much more is needed. In particular, when examining the literature on Black males, there are within-group differences, such as ethnic identity and acculturation, which are not addressed. Much of the current research that focuses on Black males is grounded in an American perspective. Black males are not from a monolithic group. There are differences between Black males who are born in the United States and those who are born in other countries. However, the current literature treats all Black males' educational experiences as one, without making a distinction between their cultural heritage and background. Black males born outside of the United States but enroll in postsecondary education in the United States may experience other challenges that come along with their foreign or international status.

The United States has been a home for diverse groups of immigrants since the 1800s (Davis-Willey, 2002). The rapid growth of the immigrant and foreign-born population in the United States is one of the most important demographic and social trends confronting this society. The immigrant and foreign-born populations in the United States have grown considerably over the past 50 years. In 2011, there were 40.4 million

immigrant and foreign-born people residing in the United States, whereas the immigrant and foreign-born population in 1960 was 9.7 million (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2011).

The influx of immigrants and foreign-born people, both legal and illegal, has exceeded one million per year in the United States (Conway, 2009). According to the Center for American Progress (2014), from 2000-2012, 9.7 million immigrants settled in the United States. Black immigrants are an important group in the United States with more than 3 million people comprising 8 percent of the U.S. foreign-born population (Center for American Progress, 2014). With the high birth rate among immigrants and foreign-born students and the low level of high school attainment for many immigrants and foreign-born students, the future of higher education in the United States may well be dependent on the United States' ability to address the needs of immigrant and foreign-born students (Conway, 2009).

American education has been attractive to various pockets of international communities across the globe. Enrolling in United States colleges, universities, and trade schools remains an important avenue for foreigners to enter the country (Populating Bulletin, 2007). United States colleges and universities have hosted nearly 15,000 students from the leading Caribbean immigrant-source countries annually between 2001 and 2006. Between 17,000 and 18,000 Africans were enrolled each year during most of the 1990s. Since 2001, at least 30,000 students from sub-Saharan Africa have enrolled annually in U.S. educational institutions. According to data provided by the Pew Foundation for Research (2014), an overwhelming number of foreign-born students are currently enrolled in higher education institutions within the United States. These foreign students in the United States are classified into the following three categories:

international students, undocumented students, and immigrant or foreign-born students.

### ***International Students***

International students are defined as those who travel to a country different from their own for the purposes of tertiary study. They then return to their nations as prominent leaders with a prestigious education from America's best schools. While all students entering higher education have to cope with the new facets of this educational environment, the majority of international students have to deal with additional challenges, such as language and culture gaps (Bradley, 2000). Similar to Black male students, international students are at risk for developing mental health problems, but international students are at higher risk due to loss of support systems and acculturation stress (McLachlan & Justice, 2009).

International students face these conventional difficulties and more. They struggle to adjust to new and sometimes contradicting social norms and values, achieve academic success while experiencing different and unfamiliar modes of teaching and learning, and cope with homesickness and loneliness (McLachlan & Justice, 2009). Also, since the majority of international students are funded by personal or family sources, they are likely to feel greater pressure to succeed. International students must cope with these challenges without their usual social and emotional support system; additionally, they may feel pressured by the implications that academic failure will have upon their visa status (Carroll & Ryan, 2005). Additional challenges for international students include race and ethnic difficulties, adverse experience in the host country, unfamiliar modes of teaching and learning, few meaningful relationships with the host nationals, isolation and alienation (Lee, 2007; J. J. Lee & Rice, 2007; J. Wang, 2009).

### *Undocumented Students*

While international students are sought by higher educational institutions, undocumented students experience yet a different set of challenges. Undocumented students are defined as residents of the United States who are not U.S. citizens, and who do not hold current permanent-resident visas or who have not been granted permission under a set of specific authorized temporary statuses for longer-term residence and work (Passel & Cohn, 2008). Undocumented students have historically faced multiple barriers to higher education. While most students grapple with the expected transition to college, undocumented students' challenges are often compounded by legal, racial, and culturally based feelings of isolation (Gildersleeve et al., 2010; Gonzales, 2007; Pérez, 2009). Undocumented students have fewer academic, social, and financial resources and greater work and family responsibilities than their peers. Building networks of support and advocacy are critical for the success of undocumented students. Barriers, legal and otherwise, help explain the complex reasons behind the low rate of undocumented students seeking postsecondary degrees. These hurdles stem from systematic factors that have contributed to the high dropout rate in the K-12 system as well as the low enrollment in higher education (Gildersleeve et al., 2010; Gonzales, 2007; Pérez, 2009). Their undocumented status often wrongly leads teachers, counselors, and other school administrators to assume a college education is not a possibility for these students (Gonzales, 2007; Pérez, 2009). Despite these challenges, many undocumented students are class valedictorians, active community members, and are capable and eager to continue with post-secondary education. Some of the experiences of undocumented students mirror those of the immigrant/foreign-born students such as issues of

acculturations, languages, and academic barriers (Gildersleeve et al., 2010; Gonzales, 2007; Pérez, 2009).

### ***Immigrant Students***

Immigrant students have plans to live permanently in the United States, whether or not they hold permanent residency at this time or the United States citizenship. Thus, immigrant and foreign-born students are defined as students who are naturalized citizens, permanent residents, or who seek to obtain status to live in the United States permanently (Rumbaut, 2008; U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). Students who are undocumented and those who are foreign-born are likely to have attended primary and/or secondary school in the United States. In many cases in the literature, the terms “international,” “undocumented,” and “immigrant and foreign-born” are used interchangeably to describe students born outside the United States. (Rumbaut, 2008).

While foreign-born or immigrant Black students currently make up 13% of the nation’s college-age Black population (National Center for Education Statistics, 2012), the number of foreign-born Black males entering the United States and enrolling in higher education is increasing annually (National Center for Education Statistics, 2012). There is a dearth of literature focused on the overall experience of foreign-born Black males in higher education. Although this subpopulation of Black males in higher education has not been studied, there is evidence to suggest these students may have the same educational challenges as their Black male peers born in the United States (Rumbaut, 2008). Foreign-born Black male students are faced with an additional set of academic barriers, such as language, cultural and social challenges, discrimination, and acculturation. Collectively, these characteristics can shape their educational and personal

experiences in higher education. This study will seek to understand the experiences of foreign-born Black males in higher education, particularly focusing on issues impacting the persistence of foreign-born Black males in higher education in the United States.

### **Purpose of Study**

The purpose of this study is to explore the academic and social integration experiences of foreign-born Black male students who persist at a four-year research institution. Research has shown that foreign-born Black males do not self-identify, and, as a result, their experiences in higher education have been grouped in with the persistent experiences of native-born Black males (Nesbett, 2002; Williams, 2005). Scholars, throughout higher education, have provided great depth to the literature concerning the factors impacting Black males' experiences in higher education (Harper, 2006; Harper & Nichols, 2008; Palmer & Maramba, 2010; Toldson, 2012). However, what is missing is a discussion about the experiences of foreign-born Black males in higher education.

Additionally, persistence refers to students who continue to enroll quarter after quarter to achieve their educational goals (Tinto, 2012). This term implies that students are making progress towards achieving their educational goals. Persistence is only one measure of success for any student. The term 'retention' is interwoven throughout the persistence literature. A student is retained when he or she enrolls in consecutive terms at the same institution (Tinto, 2012). 'Attrition' is another term prevalent within the persistence literature. Over the last few decades, the retention of students entering college and persisting to graduation has risen to the forefront of higher education discussion agendas. Several studies, including a 2010 study by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), have documented persistence gaps between the educational attainment

of White males and that of Black males and Hispanic males among other racial/ethnic groups. There is also evidence of a growing gender gap within racial/ethnic groups, as females are participating, achieving academically, and persisting at much higher rates than their male counterparts (Noguera, 2003; Polite & Davis, 1999; Strayhorn & Terrell, 2010). This growing gender gap within racial/ethnic groups presents a unique problem for Blacks and for Black males in particular. Black males continue to fall behind their white male and Black female counterparts with respect to college participation, retention, persistence, and degree completion (Noguera, 2003; Polite & Davis, 1999; Strayhorn & Terrell, 2010). For the purpose of this study, persistence will be measured by overall retention, academic success, and social involvement on campus.

One of the major ways persistence has been studied in higher education is through the examination of academic and social integration theory, particularly for Black males. In examining foreign-born Black males, academic and social integration cannot be the only theoretical perspective that informs the experiences of foreign-born Black males. Their status as immigrants must be accounted for as well and their experiences as sojourners must be highlighted.

Furthermore, three major factors guided the selection of this theoretical approach to understanding foreign-born Black male students' academic and social integration in higher education. First, considering the fact that this study focuses on foreign-born Black males, recognizes there is a gap in the literature when it comes to experiences of foreign-born Black males as it relates to higher education. Second, foreign-born Black male students in the United States come from various countries throughout the world. Lastly, the recognition that these students come from different historical-cultural backgrounds



and educational experiences is critically important in selecting the theoretical approach. These three theoretical perspectives are appropriate in this study for understanding the experiences faced by foreign-born Black male students.

First, I drew from the work of Church (1982) sojourner adjustments framework, and secondly, from Oberg's (1960) culture shock framework. Lastly, I drew from the academic and social integration theory based on the work of Vincent Tinto (1975, 2001). These three theoretical approaches were very relevant for study since they explicitly attend to higher education persistence, race, and class that affects foreign-born Black male students in higher education throughout the United States. For instance, Church (1982) sojourner adjustments framework focuses on the adjustment process of foreign-born Black males. This framework expands the acculturation concept to apply to groups residing in foreign environments and suggests that engagement, participation, and integration into the host culture may contribute to less psychological and sociocultural difficulty while in the environment (Pedersen et al., 2011).

In addition, Oberg (1960) describes culture shock as a phenomenon resulting in the inability of some foreign-born students to unreachability of the home culture through four stages; 1) honeymoon, in which the relationships with the new culture and the hosts, while superficial, are idealized; this stage can last anywhere from a few days or weeks to six months; 2) crisis stage, when language and communication differences produce anger, frustration, and inadequacy that may lead to departure from the host culture; 3) recovery, when individuals begin to learn more about the host culture, accept their lot, and develop coping strategies such as humor that will lead to the successful resolution of crises; and 4) adjustment, in which individuals know how to function in the host culture and may

even develop positive impressions.

Lastly, Tinto's (1975) academic and social integration theory suggests that students who wish to persist in college and to graduate successfully need to participate in the student culture, both within and outside the immediate context of the learning environment. Integration is defined by Pascarella and Terenzini (1991), as the degree to which a student adopts the institution's values and adheres to its formal and informal rules. The formal academic integration includes the contacts related to the institution itself, while informal academic integration involves contacts between students, faculty, and staff outside the direct context of the learning environment (Tinto, 1993). The experience of student-institution fit is an important factor in the process of academic and social integration because it tremendously impacts the retention rates of students (Spady, 1970; Tinto, 1993). Social integration refers to the level of comfort that a student feels toward his or her college environment and its effect on student persistence. Social integration mainly involves contacts between peers on matters of learning. These contacts often revolve around collaborative efforts in which students experience by working together on tasks (Tinto, 1993).

The use of Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) was chosen as the methodology for this study because of its focus on understanding individuals through their own perspectives. Creswell (2009) states, "phenomenological research is a strategy of inquiry in which the researcher identifies the essence of human experiences about the phenomenon as described by participants" (p. 13). The goal is to comprehend "how participants are making sense of their personal and social world. The main reason for an IPA study is the meanings particular experiences, events, states hold for participants"

(Smith, 2008, p. 53).

### **Research Questions**

The research objective is to explore and understand the academic and social integration experiences of foreign-born Black males and the impact on their persistence and success in higher education. Research questions are essential to discover what or why a study is being conducted (Blaikie, 2003). It is a description of the research problem in question format. For this study, the following questions will be addressed:

1. What are the lived experiences of foreign-born Black males enrolled at a four-year public research institution?
2. How do foreign-born Black males describe their academic and social integration experiences while in college?
3. How does foreign-born Black males' cultural background impact their persistence in college?
4. How do foreign-born Black males describe race as an impact on their persistence in college?

### **Significance of the Study**

The literature highlights the factors that impact the experiences of Black males in higher education (Harper, 2006; Harper & Nichols, 2008; Palmer et al., 2010; Toldson, 2012). Nevertheless, there is a gap in the literature reflecting the experiences of foreign-born Black male students in higher education (Constantine et al., 2005). Scholars and higher education administrators have often grouped the educational experiences of foreign-born Black males in the literature with native-born Black males. This has occurred without ever making the distinction between American-born and foreign-born

Black males. Research on Black male students has put all students, regardless of their nationalities, into one group, ignoring students' cultural differences and academic needs (Constantine et al., 2005). For example, the literature does not account for the numerous challenges faced by this population because scholars of research on Black male students have historically treated all Black males of African descent as members of a homogeneous group, failing to acknowledge cultural and ethnic differences among them (Constantine et al., 2005).

Furthermore, Mori (2000) notes that the issues related to the adjustments of foreign-born students have been over-generalized. The results of this study will add to the knowledge base regarding foreign-born Black males' persistence in higher education. In particular, this study should shed considerable light on the factors impacting the academic and social experiences of foreign-born Black male students in higher education. This study is intended to narrow the existing gap in the literature on the overall educational experiences of foreign-born Black males in higher education. The literature throughout higher education has provided great depth concerning the factors impacting Black males' persistence in higher education.

This study is important for validating the experiences of foreign-born Black male students, who do not see themselves in the literature ostensibly because their experiences are not reflected in what they read about themselves. Another reason this study is important is because this population of students is a component of those in higher education in the United States. Not having their experiences highlighted in the literature, foreign-born Black males may not feel the current United States educational system is invested in them. This study is also important because its results will add empirical data

to the literature regarding foreign-born Black males in the U. S. and will contribute information to higher education institutions in order to address these students' overall educational needs.

This study is important for researchers, students, and higher education practitioners. It sheds light on a new line of research on foreign-born Black males by examining their academic and social integration as it relates to persistence. In addition, this study thus highlights the need for higher education to better support the academic pursuits of foreign-born Black males. Given the variety of problems foreign-born students encounter in higher education, such as culture shock, language barriers, discrimination, and acculturation (Sodowsky & Plake, 1992), higher education must create culturally responsive learning environments if foreign-born Black male students are to persist in higher education.

### **Definitions of Terms**

This study is to explore the academic and social integration experiences of foreign-born Black males as they relate to their persistence in higher education. Before presenting an in-depth description of the study, the following is a listing of terms used throughout the current work:

1. *Foreign-born Black male*: Black male of African descent who was not born in the United States of America.
2. *American-born Black male*: Black male of African descent who is born in the United States of America.
3. *International student*: Refers to those who travel to a country different from their own for the purpose of tertiary study.

4. *Immigrant*: An individual who plans to live in the United States permanently, whether or not he holds at this time permanent residency or United States citizenship. Thus, immigrant students are defined as students who are naturalized citizens, permanent residents, or who seek to obtain status to live in the United States permanently (Rumbaut, 2008; U.S. Census Bureau, 2010).
5. *Undocumented student*: A foreign national who: (1) entered the United States without inspection or with fraudulent documents; or (2) entered legally as a non-immigrant but then violated the terms of his or her status and remained in the United States without authorization (as defined by the National Immigration Law Center).
6. *Acculturation*: The process by which a person absorbs the culture of a society.
7. *Academic integration*: Describes a student's academic-related perceptions and experiences (i.e., program orientation, commitment, and affiliation; academic activities and performance; and student-faculty formal interaction).
8. *Social integration*: Describes a student's social-related perceptions and experiences (i.e. informal interaction with faculty, peer relations, participation in campus activities, use of campus facilities, and sense of belonging in the campus community).
9. *Adaptation*: The process by which a foreign-born student incorporates the values and behaviors of the new culture.
10. *Adjustment*: A foreign-born student's ability to cope with the new culture.

## **Summary**

This first chapter provides an introduction and background for this study of foreign-born Black males. For the past 30 years, Black males in higher education have been a well-researched population (Palmer et al., 2010). Nevertheless, foreign-born Black males have been included within that literature without making a distinction, as their experiences are, in fact, different. Research on Black male students in higher education has treated all students the same, regardless of their nationalities; they have been put into one group, by ignoring their cultural differences and academic needs (Palmer et al., 2010; Y. Wang, 2004).

In addition, this information is lacking regarding foreign-born Black male students. The findings from this study will provide educators with insights and clear recommendations for how they can begin to provide foreign-born Black males the tools they need to persist in higher education (Harper, 2012; Sedlacek, 2007; Strayhorn & Terrell, 2010). Furthermore, it is necessary to understand the issues that foreign-born Black males face regarding persistence in higher education. This study will add to research relating to the academic and social integration experiences of foreign-born Black males in post-secondary, which could prove helpful for professionals to understand what they can do to help this population.

In the following chapter, the existing literature that is relevant to this study will be reviewed. The review of the literature will focus on issues related to foreign-born Black males, native-born Black males, international and immigrant students in higher education. This study is guided by the following theoretical perspectives: Church (1982) sojourner adjustments, Oberg (1960) culture shock framework, and Tinto (1993)

academic and social integration model. In Chapter 3, the research methods selected for this study will be described. The chapter provides rationales for sampling, data collection, and data analysis. Chapter 4 will present the findings. Chapter 5 will address the research questions, use data to offer suggested conclusions, identify the limitations of the study and conclude by making recommendations for future research, improved practice, and implications for educational policy.



## **Chapter II**

### **Literature Review**

The focus of this proposed qualitative study is to explore the academic and social integration experiences of foreign-born Black males as they relate to their persistence in higher education. Various lived experiences of foreign-born Black male students were investigated based on their descriptions, recollections, reflections, and points of view on their experiences. This chapter consists of a review of the literature that informs this study. This literature review is divided into two sections. The first section reviews studies on retention, persistence, foreign-born students, international students, immigrant students, and Black males in higher education, while the second section discusses the theoretical framework of this study.

#### **Retention and Persistence in Higher Education**

The National Center for Higher Education Management Systems (NCHEMS) calculates retention by “the number of first-time, full-time undergraduates who return either as full-time or part-time students” the fall semester following their initial fall enrollment. While this definition of retention is similar to Hagedorn’s (2005), it does make a distinction between institutional efforts and student desire. Hagedorn (2005) defines persistence as a student's desire to continue their academic studies at a single institution. The author is careful to note the differences in these terms in that retention is an institutional measure, while persistence describes the intentions or decisions of individual students. This definition of persistence encompasses the tenets of Tinto’s (1993) theory, which focuses on student perception as the main factor in explaining an individual’s desire to maintain enrollment in a single institution. It is important to note

the difference between these two terms, persistence and retention, because, although they both refer to the similar notion of staying at an institution, retention does not capture the student decision-making process nor does it account for factors that cannot be controlled by the institution and its practices. Persistence captures all institutional and external factors, which influence a student's desire to remain at an institution. For this study, both institutional retention and student persistence are considered to gain an understanding of both institutional actions, which attempt to retain students, and student goals and needs, which affect their persistence at a single institution.

### ***Retention***

This section will examine the concept of retention from the view of the institution. Retention is an institutional term, which refers to maintaining student enrollment from the first to the second year of study (Hagedorn, 2005). This definition of retention is supported by the NCHEMS (2009a) use of the term, which assesses the phenomenon through an institutional lens without consideration for student perspective. Instead, they focus on what does not work and what should be changed.

### **Tinto's Interactionalist Theory**

The best practices in student retention, as described by Tinto (1993), can be employed to examine colleges and universities through the administrative lens. Tinto's Interactionalist Theory focuses on levels of commitment of the institution towards its students based on academic and social groups, which require that the institution work to place student needs before the needs of the institution. This multi-dimensional theory emphasizes the types of interactions a student will have on a college campus as the rationale to explain retention.

Tinto places institutional actions at the center of his theory, giving important focus to both academic and social actions constructed by the institution, which are designed to aid students (Tinto, 1993). Similarly, Tinto also examines the problem of retention from the student perspective, employing the concept of departure to denote an action taken by the student. Tinto (1993) describes student departure as arising from two factors, student goals, and student integration into the university community. Tinto's (1993) theory suggests that student goals, which are tied to entry characteristics, describe an individual's intentions for his or her academic progress before and at the beginning of entry into higher education. Integration into the university community is a portion of the theory, which happens once the student has begun their time within higher education and relies upon the student's ability to form relationships with other institutional members, such as peers, faculty, and staff, as well as their ability to adapt to institutional culture and ability to navigate academic challenges.

Furthermore, Tinto's (1993) theory relies upon institutional actions to aid in socialization of students, rather than a student's ability to adapt to the setting. The ability of a student to integrate within the academic community requires that the institution provide support structures to aid the student in identifying aid where needed and requires that the institutional culture be conducive to the building of relationships between not only students and peers but also students and faculty and students and institutional staff. The culture of the institution can also help to reset the academic goals of students to encourage students to progress towards degree attainment in cases where students did not enter with this goal.

Tinto's (1993) work regarding student retention has been tested for validity (Braxton et al., 2011). While Braxton et al. (2011) did not find all of the components of Tinto's theory to be valid for all samples, through the development of tenets which are components of Tinto's interactionalist theory, they were able to test the validity and importance of each component across institutional types. Braxton et al. (2011) do note that for some groups, Tinto's Interactionalist Theory is reliable to understand student retention within the higher education setting. Braxton et al. (2011) found that for residential institutions, social integration and goal setting were most important in student persistence decisions. The key concept within Tinto's theory is the relationship between students' ability to integrate within the university setting and their likelihood to persist to degree attainment (Kuh et al., 2007). According to Kuh et al. (2007), this portion of the theory requires that a student adapts to the academic and social demands of the setting to be retained at the institution.

Moreover, the failure of Tinto's theory to act as a reliable guide for all settings could be due to the variety of characteristics of institutions across the country (Kuh et al., 2007). Each college or university is unique and presents its own academic methods and culture. Each institution also has a population of students with unique student qualities and needs. Further, the disconnect between student goals and student socialization is cause for concern with Tinto's interactionalist theory. Kuh et al. (2007) suggest that student goals may change through their integration within a campus community. If the culture of the campus community is supportive of degree attainment, then a student who successfully integrates is more likely to set degree attainment as a goal. The ability to adapt to the environment is vital to student success as shown through numerous studies

over the past few decades (Allen et al., 2008; Braxton & Hirschy, 2005). Oseguera and Rhee (2009) found that institutions actively seeking to improve their retention rate and thus focus all institutional members on these efforts are more likely to improve retention.

### **Institutional Characteristics**

Pascarella and Terenzini (1991) view retention largely on the entry characteristics of students; however, they do note that some inherent qualities of colleges and universities have some bearing on the retention rate at a specific institution. These authors do not focus on retention as a function of socialization, unlike most of the current research; instead, the focus is placed on specific qualities of the institution, which contribute to retention.

Additionally, Pascarella and Terenzini (1991) view the inherent qualities and the perceived reputation of the institution as the rationale for the retaining of students. Within this theory, private institutions are more likely to display higher rates of retention. Pascarella and Terenzini (1991) explain the phenomenon of high retention for private colleges and universities through the need for a higher level of commitment to degree attainment due to the increased financial investment. Private institutions also often carry a reputation of providing a higher quality education or of demanding a higher level of rigor for student success Pascarella and Terenzini (1991). The perception of private institutions having a better quality often attracts students who display high prior academic performance and are more likely to complete due to their academic goals and aspirations without any action taken by the institution. Yet another institutional quality, which affects retention, is the size of the campus population (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991).

Moreover, the size of the institution is an important factor in understanding why smaller colleges and universities are more likely to retain students. In these smaller institutions, the student-to-faculty ratio is generally small allowing students to have a greater level of interaction with their instructors (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991). Further, students are more likely to interact with peers, as they will have more contact with other students in smaller classes. Campuses with smaller class sizes allow for various types of instruction which increases the likelihood of discussion-focused lessons which provide a deeper level of interaction among students and faculty (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991).

### **Adaptation to the College Setting**

An important method of retention is altering the ways students view education and their ability to achieve within the higher education system. When students are not confident in these areas, this method is often employed by Student Affairs staff to aid students during their first year of study (Brownlee et al., 2009). Student Affairs staffs are often the source of instruction for first-year experience programs and should form an institutional support system for students so that students can identify professionals who can help with problem-solving and advising (Brownlee et al., 2009).

According to Brownlee et al. (2009) students who participate in first-year experience seminars which aim to promote student development, must learn to change how they view learning and how methods of learning in higher education are different from methods employed in the K-12 system. Brownlee et al. (2009) also found that when students are aided in confronting their past learning methods, they are better able to change these methods, leading to a higher level of critical thinking and a greater level of academic success in higher education. Similarly, Brinkworth et al. (2009) found that

students entering higher education suffer anxiety in adjusting to academic methods. An improved level of academic success, according to Brownlee et al. (2009) enables students to persist in higher education, as they can set goals of completion, which are perceived as achievable. Brinkworth et al. (2009) suggest that without the aid of first-year experience programs, students must learn to adjust to the academic methods employed by institutions of higher education on their own, which often creates undue anxiety and feelings of failure and inability to succeed.

### **Integration Within the Campus Community**

While the academic component of First-Year Experience programs is important, Student Affairs staff must also work to ensure that students are successful in socially integrating within the campus environment. Blake (2007) stressed the importance of providing knowledge and access about the various student organizations on campus to incoming freshmen. The authors suggest that student organizations not only provide peers, which can form a social support system but may also reinforce positive academically focused habits. Blake (2007) suggests that Student Affairs staff should function as conduits enabling students to find connections between academic and social life at an institution. According to Blake (2007) through this assistance with finding a balance between academics and social life, students will more easily identify peers who will provide both social and academic support. Institutions where cohorts are assigned or where students are required to reside on-campus show greater success regarding retention as students can form relationships, which serve as student support systems and allow students to identify peers with similar interests and goals (Wilcox et al., 2005).

## **Faculty and Student Interaction**

The interaction of faculty and students is important when considering persistence. College students interact with faculty regularly during their coursework and rely upon these members of the institution to aid in their advancement during their academic careers. This section will focus on how the interaction between faculty and students relates to persistence.

### ***Types of Faculty and Student Interactions***

Pascarella and Terenzini (1991) found that in traditional higher educational settings, faculty and students do not regularly interact outside of class time. Pascarella and Terenzini (1991) do note, however, that this is not always the norm for “small and often selective liberal arts colleges” (p. 393). According to Pascarella and Terenzini (1991), there is no solid evidence to support the relationship between faculty and student interactions and persistence, but the authors do not assert that the two phenomena are unrelated. The authors suggest that students who do interact with faculty on a more frequent basis will likely adapt to the culture of the institution more quickly and have a greater potential to connect life experience to the information presented in coursework. One of the most important points these authors make is that interactions with faculty may have some bearing on a student’s desire to persist in higher education because the faculty members serve as role models for students who are unsure about their desire to persist towards degree attainment. It is of note that Pascarella and Terenzini focus on the faculty-student interaction as one, which continues the learning process and not one that is social.



## ***Frequency***

Koljatic and Kuh's (2001) study on the frequency of students engaging in "good practices" (p. 353) that the frequency of faculty and student interactions is not increasing over time. This is a conforming finding when considering the decline in retention rates over time. However, this does support Pascarella and Terenzini (1991) and Cotton and Wilson (2006) who both suggest the infrequent nature of faculty and student interactions. Tinto (1975) also recognizes the infrequency of student and faculty interactions; however, he places this type of social relationship as one of the most important factors, which affect student persistence. Tinto's stance on student and faculty interactions describes multilayered benefits to the student. This is to say that according to Tinto (1975), students will benefit both academically and socially when there is frequent contact with faculty. Students will also, according to Tinto, benefit to varying degrees based upon the faculty with whom they interact, i.e. faculty who teach within the student's chosen field of major will have a greater influence on the student's persistence. Tinto and Pusser (2006) reinforce the influence held by faculty on student persistence. Tinto and Pusser note that the type of interactions faculty engages in with students such as in class, outside of class, student/faculty-initiated interaction, and academic/social interaction, as well as how faculty address students, is directly related to student persistence. As faculty often serve as the face of the institution, in regards to the student body, Tinto and Pusser (2006) stress the importance of faculty not only involved in student retention measures but also part of the planning process for social integration programs.

### ***Faculty Characteristics***

Gardner (2008) also focuses on the importance of the student and faculty relationship, noting its influence on student persistence. This author mirrors the sentiment that places faculty as role models and representatives of the institution. Gardner also presents the issue of the faculty population not being representative of the student population at most institutions. This is a problem when considering gender and race as students are, in some cases, not able to relate to their faculty mentors. This problem is also presented by Walsh et al. (2009) who note that when students do not have mentors who are like them in gender and race they are far more likely to depart the institution. Jayakumar et al. (2009) also note that a diverse faculty population is supportive of a diverse student population. When students view diverse faculty interactions and engage in personal interactions with diverse faculty members, the students are more likely to be accepting of peers who are not alike in gender and race.

Yet another aspect of the influence faculty have on retention and persistence is their teaching method, according to Braxton et al. (2000). The type of teaching methods commonly employed by faculty as a rationale for the student's desire to persist. Braxton, et al., presents the notion that the fewer the lecture-style courses presented to students, the more engaged students will feel, and they will take an active role in their own learning. While these authors do not speak to faculty and student interactions outside the classroom setting, they mirror what Pascarella and Terenzini (1991) say in that the more approachable the faculty are, the more likely students are to engage in conversation with these faculties. The students will not only perform better in coursework but will become more engaged in their academic pursuits.

In addition, Hemanowicz (2004) found through his study of students at a selective institution that faculty who do not engage in conversations with students both during class time and outside of structured classes are often detrimental to student persistence. These faculties generally employ lecture methods during class time and have little interaction with students. This causes the students at these types of institutions to feel a disconnect between their academic goals and what they are presented with regarding coursework. These students also reported that they felt faculty were not approachable and were not a source of assistance to their academic progress (Hemanowicz,2004).

Faculty have a direct influence on a student's desire to persist. The literature shows that faculty who serve as mentors and role models will aid their students in ensuring the desire to persist at a single institution of higher education. The faculty-student relationship also promotes a greater level of student access to information and aids in their academic decision-making. Furthermore, the faculty-student relationship decreases the likelihood of academic difficulties for students, when it comes to institutional support (Hemanowicz,2004).

Over the past decade, there has been increased research in higher education that indicates major connections among institutional support, campus environment, and academic achievement. Harper (2006) studied Black male students at public flagship universities and reported that more than two-thirds of all Black male students who start college do not graduate. Furthermore, retention and graduation rates for Black males should be tied to standards by which institutional performance is assessed and used in accreditation (Harper, 2006). Those institutions that fail to graduate a certain percentage

of Black male students should be held accountable for creating and implementing plans for improvement.

### ***Persistence***

This section will discuss student persistence with careful attention to individual characteristics and background experiences that influence a student's decision to remain enrolled at a single institution of higher education. As retention is a term that describes institutional action, persistence will be used to describe a student's desire to maintain enrollment in a single institution past the first year of study (Hagedorn, 2005). The literature presented will highlight student needs and goals, as well as issues that high performing, impede student persistence in higher education.

### **Student Goals and Needs**

When compared to Tinto's (1993) work, Astin (1997) found that institutions have less impact on retention through their interactions with currently enrolled students than the goals and needs of students. Astin's talent model asserts that students who attend institutions with high retention rates are those with higher standardized test scores and high academic achievement in the K-12 setting and are likely to persist in higher education regardless of the college or university they attend. Astin (1991) suggests that retention is greatly impacted by the students who chose to attend the institution, as described in his Talent Model. This work clearly shows that retention is a direct effect of the type of students who select to attend a specific institution. Allen et al. (2008) explained the phenomenon of students, who are more likely to remain at a single institution due to prior high performance, stating that a student who has been a high performer is more likely to come to higher education with the goal of degree attainment

and academic success. They note that high performing students are typically those who enter colleges and universities with a greater level of parental support and often have more financial resources available to them. These students are also more likely to possess the ability to identify academic assistance when needed. Allen et al. (2008) do admit that along with this past performance each student must also have a personal desire to succeed in higher education as well as form a network of support. Astin's (1991) work does not account for less selective institutions with high retention rates. As previously stated, current data from IPEDS (2011) shows that some less selective private institutions, like the one being studied here, do report high retention without a focus on students' past performance.

Additionally, the race and gender of the student population also influence the ability to retain students. If a student attends an institution with a large population of the same race and/or gender students, the student will be more likely to be retained (Allen et al., 2008). Retention due to the ability of students to identify peers who are similar in race and gender is less the action of the institution, though it can be argued if an institution works to ensure that the campus population is diverse with regards to race and gender, students will be more likely to adapt to the environment as they are presented with fewer new ways of acting and thinking (Allen et al., 2008).

## **Finances**

Herzog (2005) found that a common issue that affects student persistence is finances. Herzog found that financial aid offers, family socioeconomic status, and residency directly affect a student's decision to persist. Herzog further suggests that students with limited or no financial support from family often experience difficulty in

persistence because employment to pay for the cost of school often influences their goals and priorities. Likewise, the same study suggests that students attending out-of-state schools experience increased tuition costs, limitations on scholarships, and additional costs of living apart from family. The financial burdens often felt by students have strong implications for persistence decisions. These factors are often not remedied by institutional support and are thought of as factors, which cannot be solved or prevented by institutional effort (Herzog, 2005).

Furthermore, student persistence is influenced by their needs, goals, psychological development, and social support (Herzog, 2005). Student factors, such as goal setting, finances, and academic trouble, do play a role in retention rates in higher education and could be considered as a key part of the equation (Herzog, 2005). While institutions should work to aid students in maintaining enrollment until degree attainment, the ever-changing needs and goals of students should be recognized as independent of the institution in the sense that students arrive with these influences. Not every student will persist. The reasons for this are not fully understood and are surely complex, but careful attention to student desires will aid in allowing institutions to create proper methods of support. Persistence cannot be considered entirely independent of retention, but if paired, persistence and retention together impact the achievement of the goal of ensuring the majority of students maintain enrollment in a single institution (Herzog, 2005).

### **Lack of Engagement**

Disengagement is a factor used to explain the high college dropout rates of Black males enrolling in colleges and universities (Bonner & Bailey, 2006). Researchers have discovered that Black undergraduate students are less prepared for the rigors of college-

level coursework in comparison to peers from other racial groups (Bonner & Bailey, 2006). This may contribute to their lack of engagement in college classrooms, clubs, structured campus activities, and impactful educational experiences outside the classroom (Cuyjet, 1997; Harper et al., 2004). Spradley (2001) studied the institutional needs of Black males and discovered several interventions that helped increase Black males' engagement on a college campus. He found peer interactions encouraged social integration, which impacted academic experience. Promoting an educational environment with faculty who foster learning skills and knowledge was critical to students' success. In addition, engagement in extracurricular activities enhanced the leadership and personal development of Black male undergraduates. (Spradley, 2001). Supportive programs and services such as mentoring, advising, and clubs and organizations can potentially influence institutional commitment and satisfaction by increasing the engagement of Black males in higher education. (Bonner & Bailey, 2006) Engagement has a powerful impact on students' educational experience and success (Gardenshire-Crooks et al., 2010).

### **Black Male Students in Higher Education**

In understanding the experiences of Black students in general, it is very important to understand the overall experience of Black males in higher education. This section will discuss understanding the experience.

#### ***Institutional Support for Black Male Students***

College enrollment of Black males increased dramatically from 2000 to 2008. At 4-year institutions, female enrollment grew by 32% and male enrollment grew by 28%.

Although these numbers were impressive, research showed that Blacks lagged far behind

since only 14% of all college students were Black compared to 63% Whites (Toldson, 2012). Since Black women outnumbered Black males in college enrollment, enrollment was especially bleak for Black males. Nationally, Black male students hold the lowest college completion rate (32.8%) among all racial and ethnic groups in higher education (National Center for Education Statistics, 2012). The national college graduation rate for Black men is 33.1 percent compared with 44.8 percent for Black women, according to the U.S. Department of Education (2014). Black men represent 7.9% of 18-to-24-year-olds in America but only 2.8 of undergraduates at public flagship universities. While this troubling trend is most acute among Blacks, young men of color, in general, are underrepresented in colleges and universities. The national college graduation rate of Hispanic men is 41.1% and of Native Americans and Alaska natives is 33.8%. In comparison, the graduation rate for white males is 54.5%. Asian/Pacific Islanders have the highest rate, at 60.6%. The task of enrolling Black males in college has grown increasingly complex. Higher education officials and administrators continue to struggle over increasing the retention and graduation of Black male students (Harper & Nichols, 2008). Black males accounted for only 4.3% of all students enrolled in colleges and universities during those years (Kim & Hargrove, 2013). When we look at college and university enrollments throughout the country, Black male students are enormously underrepresented (Davis, 1999; Wood, 2012).

In addition, Black males face a continuous decline in college enrollment and are underrepresented in gifted education programs and advanced placement courses. Because of these factors, Black males, tend to underachieve or disengage academically (Jackson & Moore, 2006). Researchers have provided a range of hypotheses to explain the retention



and persistence factors impacting Black males' challenges in higher education (Harper, 2012). While these factors focus specifically on the experiences of native-born Black males, an important gap in the literature on Black males in higher education is a discussion about the experiences of foreign-born Black males in higher education.

Furthermore, research shows that Black males in college can be affected by the institution's social environment (L. D. Reid & Radhakrishnan, 2003). If faculty and institutional members in teaching-learning positions do not integrate student development theories into their teaching models, Black males can become disengaged from the campus community (L. D. Reid & Radhakrishnan, 2003). Over the past 10 years, there has been increased research in higher education indicating major connections between institutional support, campus environment, and academic achievement. Harper (2006) studied Black male students within the public university system and reported that more than two-thirds of all Black male students who start college do not graduate. Yet, there is practically no accountability for this level of institutional mediocrity. Harper's (2006) research also indicated that in order to improve Black male graduation rates at public flagship universities, these institutions must hire Black male faculty and administrators to serve as mentors for Black male students. Furthermore, retention and graduation rates should be tied to standards by which institutional performance is assessed and used in accreditation (Harper, 2006). Harper (2006) stated that those institutions that fail to graduate a certain percentage of Black male students should be held accountable for creating and implementing plans for improvements.

In addition, Hall and Rowan (2000) conducted a study to determine qualitatively the differential status of Black male students and the declines in enrollment and

graduation from institutions of higher education. They discovered that racism prevails as a major impediment to the enrollment, retention, and graduation of Black males and find that a cultural schism exists between Black males and institutions of higher education. Few Black males who succeed in higher education do so by the virtue of exceptional skills and personal qualities (Hall & Rowan, 2000). They found that institutions within higher education have done little to increase access for those other than the exceptional applicant. Although Black males continue to demonstrate a desire for higher education, their graduation and enrollment rates are dismal compared to other ethnic groups (Palmer & Maramba, 2010).

Moreover, Strayhorn (2008) studied the role of supportive relationships in facilitating success in college by looking at Black male students' academic achievement, satisfaction with college, and students' supportive relationships on campus. He concluded that when Black male students have a strong support system with peers, faculty, and administrators, they have a higher satisfaction level with their college experiences. His research findings indicate any opportunity that provides Black male students the chance to establish meaningful supportive relationships within the university community creates a potential for retention and graduation among Black male students.

Furthermore, Allen (1992) examined the relationships between the Black male student outcomes of academic achievement, social involvement, occupational aspirations, student educational backgrounds, educational goals, personal adjustment to college, and the college environment between historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs) and predominately white institutions (PWIs). Allen (1992) finds that Black male students from HBCUs reported that they have a higher academic achievement rate, social

involvement, and better supportive relationship with faculties and administrators than students at PWI's. Davis (1994) reported that Black male students who are enrolled at HBCUs were more integrated into the academic life, higher level of academic achievements, and received more institutional support than Black male students at PWIs.

In addition, historically, mentoring in higher education has proven to be a valuable and effective tool in promoting interaction between students and faculty. Black males, in particular, have benefited from formally structured mentoring programs at colleges and universities (Cuyjet, 1997). Currently, Black males have more access to higher education, however, there is a high probability that they will not complete basic course work, let alone graduate (LaVant et al., 1997). Not surprising is the fact that many Black males are in precarious positions when it comes to persistence in higher education. (LaVant et al., 1997). The declining numbers of Black males attending and graduating from college are distressing, not only because of the immediate implications for the men themselves but because many Black male students enter college educationally, economically, and socially disadvantaged (LaVant et al., 1997). By placing them into mentoring programs, the chances of persistence and graduation are enhanced. Mentoring has become a very important tool to help guide Black male students to obtain a college education (LaVant et al., 1997).

### ***Social Factors***

The lack of social development among Black males relates to characteristics of personal development and fundamental differences (Dotterer et al., 2009). The lack of social skills may also prevent student learning. According to Reid and Radhakrishnan (2003), Black students remain socially segregated in higher education. Implementing

social and educational programs in higher education influences student learning and social interaction among Black students (L. D. Reid & Radhakrishnan, 2003).

Bell's (2010) in studying the background of Black males concludes that these students want to go to college, however, they lack the social skills for coping in a learning environment (Bell, 2010). Higher education needs to develop effective programs and raise accountability standards for educating Black males researchers are focusing more on the identity development and success of Black males as these relate to college experiences (Harris et al., 2011). Understanding behavior and adaptive functioning to college life help colleges and universities implement social and educational experiences for Black males (Harris et al., 2011). Black males entering college may have limited resources for academic support while facing demands of social growth (Strayhorn, 2008). Tinto's theory on retention concludes Black males engaged in supportive programs experience higher levels of satisfaction rather than experiencing academic achievement (Tinto, 1997). Further research suggests that supportive influences for Black males include school environment, identity development, resilience, and recognizing leadership potential (Tinto, 1997).

### ***Societal Characteristics***

Currently, Black males comprise less than 6% of the entire U.S. population in 2010 (U.S. Department of Education, 2012). Black males in our society experience tremendous hardships and misfortune due to a variety of factors that place them at a severe disadvantage. Statistics have shown that Black males are the most at-risk population in today's society compared to any other racial and/or gender group (Harper, 2012; Strayhorn & Terrell, 2010; Wood, 2012). At the center of the problem is the fact

that Black males are over-represented in the criminal justice system while they are underrepresented in the educational system. Moreover, there is a disturbing number of Black males falling victim to academic failure (Polite & Davis, 1999; Strayhorn & Terrell, 2010). The inadequate education received, along with the limited employment opportunities they possess, contribute to the current crisis for Black males in America (Harper, 2008; Jackson & Moore, 2006). Throughout many social domains of American society, Black males hold a peculiar but uncertain status such as endangered, uneducable, dysfunctional, and dangerous, which are many of the terms often used to characterize Black males (Jackson & Moore, 2006; Strayhorn & Terrell, 2010).

Additionally, data revealed that Black males are frequently categorized as an "endangered species," a population at risk in education. According to J. M. Patton (1995), Cuyjet (2006), and Strayhorn and Terrell (2010), the educational system in America limits the positive growth of Black males. Black males are often mislabeled and negatively tracked in schools, causing a gap between Black and non-Black males in achievement levels that begins with kindergarten and increases through the post-secondary years (J. M. Patton, 1995; Strayhorn & Terrell, 2010).

Furthermore, Ogbu (2002) examined Black males in K-12 to determine how culture affected their educational experiences. His study analyzed academic experiences among different racial and economic groups compared to Black males. Ogbu concluded that culture influences the education of students of color. Fordham's (1992) study analyzed student achievement levels among various racial groups, particularly Black students. The study emphasized that culture and group identity often preceded academic achievement among Black students.

### *Social Characteristics*

Deci and Ryan (1991), Enger (1993), and Fortier et al. (1995) conducted studies analyzing Black males' educational experiences. Findings from those studies identified that socioeconomic status, motivational approaches, family support, and access to school resources effectively enhanced student performance. Achievement levels could increase among these students through access to educational materials from teachers to parents to support students' academic progress (Phinney et al., 1997).

Furthermore, most of the studies analyzed the academic discipline of Black students (Davis, 1994). In consideration of attitudes and actions occasioned by the history of inequality, social structures were implemented to deter unfair practices based on discrimination (Davis, 1994). Under the conditions of understanding problems from discriminatory practices in education, the purpose of Civil Rights Laws and Affirmative Action is to protect students of all races from racial and ethnic imbalances (Davis, 1994).

Additionally, personal development can be an important factor when facilitating educational growth among Black males. According to Hughes (2010), characteristics connected to high achievement levels normally manifest before adolescence or early adulthood among Black males. If these students are not thinking in terms of academic success, or if academic capabilities are not identified during this period, Black males are more likely to visualize failure rather than educational success (Hughes, 2010). The lack of social development among Black males relates to characteristics of personal development and fundamental differences (Dotterer et al., 2009). The lack of social skills may also prevent student learning. According to Reid and Radhakrishnan (2003), Black students remain socially segregated in higher education.

## **Foreign Students in US Higher Education**

### ***Immigrants in the United States***

The rapid growth of the immigrant population in the United States is one of the most important demographic and social trends confronting this society. In 2011, 40.4 million foreign-born people were residing in the United States, whereas the immigrant population in 1960 was 9.7 million (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2011). The breakdown of the immigrant population includes the following: 15.5 million naturalized U.S. citizens, 13.1 million legal permanent residents, and 11.1 million unauthorized migrants (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2011). The influx of immigrants, both legal and illegal, has exceeded 1 million per year in the United States (Conway, 2009). The immigrant population in the United States grew considerably over the past 50 years. Immigrants made up 13% of the total U.S. population, meaning that they were one in every eight U.S. residents. With the high birth rate among immigrants and low level of high school attainment for many immigrants, the future of higher education in the United States may well be dependent on our ability to address the needs of immigrant students (Conway, 2009). Moreover, employment and the immigration reforms of 1965, which lifted the national origin country quotas and replaced them with a system based on family reunification, further increased the size of the Caribbean population in the U.S, there are approximately 3.5 million foreign-born people residing in the United States nine percent of the total foreign-born population identified themselves as Black with Caribbean origin (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2011).

### ***Acculturation Experiences of Foreign-Born Students***

Along with other social institutions, the educational system plays a vital function in providing the country's immigrants with opportunities for economic and social mobility. At the same time, immigrants bring an additional layer of ethnic, cultural, and linguistic diversity to the educational system (Szelenyi & Chang, 2009). The new wave of immigrants is overwhelming and significant not only due to its size, but also due to its unprecedented diversity of race, ethnicity, language, class, and cultural origins. In addition, immigrants bring with them various cultural experiences, linguistic abilities, and educational backgrounds, as well as a multitude of achievement levels and aspirations for the future (Szelenyi & Chang, 2006).

Immigrants arriving in the United States enter a period of transition from their original culture to the new culture. They leave their communities of origin in search of change, and they seek accepting political climates, improved economic conditions, and protection of their beliefs and values. These changes have produced more intense cultural and ethnic contact than ever before in the history of humankind (Trimble & Gonzalez, 2008). The theoretical concept that best captures the process of cultural adjustment during this period of transition is acculturation. Acculturation became an important concept in the explanation of the varied experiences of ethnic and cultural minorities as international migration, economic globalization, and political conflicts supported the creation of multicultural societies (Trimble & Gonzalez, 2008).

Jandt (2004) presents a framework that explains intercultural adjustment which leads to acculturation for foreign-born students that is based on four stages which are the following: the honeymoon phase, disintegration, and difference, reintegration, gradual



adjustment reciprocal interdependence. The first stage is the honeymoon phase, where everything is new and exciting. Jandt (2004) explained that in this phase, the person is similar to a tourist with basic intensity rooted in the home culture. Also, this stage is characterized by interest, excitement, and positive expectations about being part of the new culture.

Stage two is disintegration and difference. This stage emphasizes that the individual becomes irritated and hostile as familiar cues of his/her home culture disintegrate and the differences between home and new culture become more visible. Disenchantment with the host country sets in and the person recognizes cultural differences causing depression and alienation that often results in homesickness and withdrawal. According to Huntley (1993), a person in this stage finds the behavior of the host culture unusual and starts to hate the culture. Some people in this stage withdraw or isolate themselves while others experience symptoms of culture shock. Winkelman (1994) describes this stage as the crisis phase characterized by negative experiences and reactions.

The third stage of the acculturation process is reintegration. During this stage, an individual starts recognizing the home and host cognitive cues and starts melding them together. Although a person in this stage may still exhibit some elements of anger and resentment toward the host culture for being different, there is an increased ability to function in the new culture. The fourth stage is the gradual adjustment. This is where one can see good and bad elements in both the home and host cultures. An individual in this stage starts becoming comfortable in the host culture as she or he can understand and predict the actions and expectations of the host society. In light of this knowledge, a

person feels less isolated, feels more comfortable, and more in control (Jandt, 2004). In this gradual adjustment stage, an individual assumes the position of a settler identity and state of mind and commits to stay and progressively adapt to the new culture.

Finally, the last stage is reciprocal interdependence. Jandt (2004) explained in this stage that there is a clear understanding of the reciprocal interdependence between home and host cultures and one can cope comfortably in both the home and host cultures. This stage is regarded as the optimal stage of acculturation by Shih and Brown (2000), describing it as a biculturalism stage where a person “adopts characteristics of both the host culture and the original culture” (p. 37). Likewise, Winkelman (1994) argues that this stage is achieved as one develops stable adaptations in being successful at resolving problems and managing the host culture. It is important to acknowledge that when international students are in this stage of acculturation, there is a potential for substantial personal change through cultural adaptation and development of a bicultural identity and integration of new cultural aspects into one’s previous self-concept.

### ***Acculturation in the Higher Education Setting***

Higher education professionals working with newly arrived immigrants can provide insights into the challenges facing student populations when working their way into American society and particularly into its higher education system. Brilliant (2000) explained how concepts addressed in the acculturation theory literature play out in two-year college settings and how students, faculty, and staff negotiate the process of adjusting and becoming successful in the community college environment. Brilliant (2006) discusses barriers that recently arrived foreign-born students encountered in their new cultural surroundings and addresses such difficulties with suggestions for counselors

working with foreign-born students. He highlights that foreign-born students who are new to the American college classroom may be required to develop strategies for learning, test-taking, group work, interactions with faculty and classmates, and use of campus resources. Acquiring language skills quickly and becoming proficient enough for the academic setting is another major concern for newly arrived immigrants. Lack of language proficiency, unfortunately, is sometimes perceived as a lack of knowledge and academic ability (Brilliant, 2000). This can lead to frustration, low self-esteem, and isolation.

### ***Persistence Factors Impacting Immigrant Students***

**Cultural Assimilation of Foreign-Born Students.** For immigrant students in the United States, making the transition into a foreign culture, new environments, social culture, and new educational system can be overwhelming and very challenging. Perhaps one of the most challenging aspects of this transition is the need to deal with a high degree of cultural, social, and educational changes for the first time. Many of the changes and challenges immigrant students face include a different value system, separation from family and friends, and the loss of social status (Lacina, 2002). Furthermore, immigrant students being considered as part of a minority group, becoming aware of their skin color, and having experiences with language barriers continue to add to the culture shock they experience when coming to a new country (Rong & Brown, 2001). For immigrant students enrolled in institutions of higher education, expectations to function academically and socially amidst unfamiliar teaching and learning styles and sensing that others perceive them as inferior, are additional daily struggles they face. It leads to them

having a general sense that academically and socially they do not fit in (Rong & Brown, 2001).

Additionally, Constantine et al. (2005) explained that many foreign-born students who sojourn to the United States experience culture shock, confusion about role expectations, loss of social support, alienation, discrimination, and language barriers that significantly impact their educational persistence. Research has also shown that once foreign-born students overcome the initial language barrier and culture shock, they can persist and achieve greater academic success than native-born students ((Lacina, 2002). Prior research has found that assimilation into American culture is a significant factor influencing the adjustment of international students (Alexander et al., 1976). Gordon (1964) states that an immigrant is assimilated as soon as he has shown that he can adapt to the country; that is, the immigrant has adapted to the lifestyle and cultural conditions of the host country. This includes the development of basic proficiency in the language of the host country as well as a basic level of knowledge of native customs and values. Assimilation to American culture would facilitate the competency of an international student in meeting academic demands and personal life needs. The student would have a deeper understanding of the social expectations of professors and fellow American students, gain more from in-class experiences, and be better able to communicate and demonstrate his academic ability. Further, personal needs which require interaction with Americans to be met could more easily be realized (Gordon, 1964).

### ***Sense of Belonging for Black Male Students***

One factor linked with the persistence of Black male students is the retention construct of a sense of belonging (Hurtado & Carter, 1997). Research indicated that Black males

perceive their college environment to be less supportive than White students perceive and are thus less likely to persist to graduation (Carey, 2004; Kinzie et al., 2008; Pascarella et al., 1986). In the same manner that achieving an adequate sense of belonging can produce positive results for Black males, failure to achieve a sense of belonging can have important negative consequences (Hausmann et al., 2009). The difficulty in Black males achieving a sense of belonging can encourage the emergence of identities opposed to the dominant culture of an institution, thereby increasing the likelihood of feelings of alienation and subsequently oppositional behaviors (Ellis, 2002; Perrakis, 2008). This process dramatically reduces the likelihood a student will persist. The research found that students who reported more involvement behaviors in their first year of college also reported higher levels of academic and social integration, as well as increased institutional commitment (Hausmann et al., 2009). In recognizing the importance of Black male students' sense of belonging, research seeking to understand why some Black male students feel a sense of belonging and others do not is minimal.

### ***Faculty and Institutional Support of Black Male Students***

Bensimon (2007) suggests institutional staff and faculty behaviors are key variables in Black male students' ability to succeed in college. Research shows that academic support services are crucial to the success of Black male students in higher education (Laskey & Hetzel, 2011). Diel-Amen (2011) contends that institutional agents, rather than student characteristics, play an instrumental role in creating social capital and an environment conducive to Black male students' persistence. There exists a necessity for focus to be placed on "institutionally-located people" that can impact the success of this demographic of students (Bensimon, 2007; Diel-Amen, 2011). Certain aspects of the

faculty-student interaction have been shown to influence students' decision to remain enrolled or withdraw from college (S. Myers, 2004; Wheelless et al., 2011). However, scholars have yet to identify specific instructional behaviors that directly impact Black male students' attitudes related to attrition and persistence (Wheelless et al., 2011). Research reveals the stronger the student's perception of their institution's commitment, the higher the level of student's commitment to the institution (Braxton et al., 2008; Braxton et al., 2011).

### ***Language Barriers for Foreign-Born Students***

There is a consensus from foreign-born student scholars that language is the initial overriding concern for foreign students for whom English is not their primary language (Huntley, 1993; Lin & Yi, 1997; Poyrazli et al., 2002). Examining the language barrier, Huntley observes that language can affect active participation in the class. While participation for foreign-born undergraduate students is less emphasized, the expectations of foreign-born students are considered one of the requirements of learning. This finding was recently acknowledged and confirmed by Y. Wang (2004) who investigated multiple aspects of 21 foreign-born students' experiences pursuing graduate education in the United States including pre-arrival motives, experience within academic programs, and the impact of U.S. education. The participants of the study had a minimum of two foreign-born at the time of the study. The study found that foreign-born graduate students exhibited uneasiness with class activities that involved oral participation resulting from language deficiency that affected students' speaking, reading, writing, and comprehension. The study also concluded that while academic and career-related motives were primary reasons behind students' pursuit of U.S. education, social relations marked

by isolation, feelings of exclusion from class activities, and prejudiced attitudes were positively correlated to academic adjustment.

Furthermore, one of the major hurdles foreign-born students face is the English language, a critical influence in the acculturation process. Zehtabchi and Houck (1996) conducted a qualitative study exploring the communication and acculturation of Iranian college students in the U.S. The study concluded that greater proficiency in English yielded a greater level of acculturation. This finding was consistent with the work of Thompson and Thompson's (1996) study of international students enrolled in business programs who found a lack of confidence in language skills to be one of the significant barriers to a positive adjustment experience. An earlier, similar study by Huntley (1993) examining the relationship between language skills and interaction with American students, found that there is a high correlation between poor English language speaking skills and lack of interaction with American students (as well as with others in the broader community), concluding that English proficiency influences adjustment of international students. Even a more recent qualitative study with both undergraduate and graduate students yielded that language inadequacies were a factor in problematic cross-cultural communication interactions (Hinchcliff-Perias & Greer, 2004).

Language is perceived as a predictor of academic success for foreign-born students. Examining the factors associated with the academic achievement of 77 undergraduate students, Stoyanoff (1997) concluded that a positively significant relationship exists between a student's language proficiency and his/her academic performance. This conclusion was later confirmed with the study of adjustment issues of Turkish college students in the United States by Poyrazli et al. (2001) who found a

correlation between high English language skills proficiency and high GPA's. They also concluded that students who had better reading and writing proficiency in English had fewer adjustment problems.

### ***Foreign-Born African Male Experiences***

Williams (2005) explained that when African-born Black males are studied in regards to retention and persistence, the struggles that Black males experience appear to be a factor in their transition in American society as a whole or at post-secondary institutions. However, when African-born immigrants, whether U.S. citizens or internationals are added to the achievement gap equation, the disparity between Blacks and whites in general, and Black male achievement in particular, appears to be more a function of culture than a function of race. By no means does the literature suggest that an achievement gap is absent, but it appears to favor African-born Blacks more than white or other ethnic Americans (Williams, 2005). Because of the documented gender disparity in African educational attainment that appears to systematically favor African males, it is obvious that African male immigrants outperform native-born Black males in regard to incidents of success in institutions of higher learning (EFA Global Monitoring Report, 2008). Following Schlossberg's (1989) transition model, it can be concluded that African males have greater experiences with mattering than Black males; therefore, transition and persistence for the African male is stronger and is compromised for the native-born Black male due to greater incidents of marginality. Kunjufu (1997) noted that for many Black males, excelling academically threatens perceptions of masculinity. These in-group stereotypes must be combated, and healthy masculine identities promoted



so that Black male leadership and engagement on college campuses can be protected from marginalization (Harper, 2008).

For instance, African immigrants in the U.S. are more likely to have a higher level of education compared to other U.S. immigrants (Nesbett, 2002). The literature points out that of African-born immigrants, age 25 and older, 81 % had acquired a high school diploma in comparison to 62 % of the total foreign-born U.S. population. In addition, more than 40% had acquired a college education. African-born Blacks are 16% of the U.S. foreign-born Black population but are on average vastly more educated than other immigrants (Nesbett, 2002). Also, foreign-born Black immigrants to the U.S. are more likely to hold a post-secondary degree than immigrants from Europe, North America, or Asia (Nesbett, 2002).

Furthermore, the majority of the literature reveals that between 43.8 and 49.3% of all U.S. African immigrants hold a college diploma. This is four times higher than that of Blacks in the U.S., and more than eight times that of Hispanic Americans (Nesbett, 2002). Rates of college graduation for African immigrants in the U.S. are more than double that for the U.S.-born native population (Williams, 2005). Internationally, the literature appears to report similar findings. In England, African immigrants had the highest incidence of years of education than that of Indian and Chinese immigrants. On average, second-generation African immigrants did better than their parents and substantially better than their white peers in most socio-economic indicators and outcomes (Dustmann & Theodoropoulos, 2006).

## **Summary**

This first section reviewed the factors of Black males in higher education in the United States. As well, the section provided an overview of the factors affecting various immigrant students in the U.S. In addition, there was a review of retention, persistence, culture shock, and language barrier as factors. While the literature presents some information regarding the factors, which impact the adjustment process of foreign-born students and Black male students in higher education, it fails to provide studies specific to foreign-born Black males in higher education in the U. S.

The second section will discuss the theoretical framework upon which this study is based. It will include a discussion on Acculturation Frameworks, and Academic and Social Integration Theory.

## **Theoretical Framework**

Conceptual frameworks are systems of concepts, assumptions, expectations, beliefs, and theories that support and inform research (Miles & Huberman, 1994). A conceptual framework is a map that provides consistency to your inquiry. It explains key constructs and terms as well as, introduces and/or clarifies any theoretical models. Maxwell (2005), explains that conceptual frameworks are used to integrate different approaches, lines of investigations, or theories that no one had previously connected. (Maxwell, 2005). Since this study focused on the experiences of foreign-born Black males in higher education, academic and social integration theory and acculturation models of foreign-born students in higher education are appropriate theoretical lenses for this study. However, to gain a better understanding of the concept of the theoretical framework, it is important to provide an overview of the current setting of higher

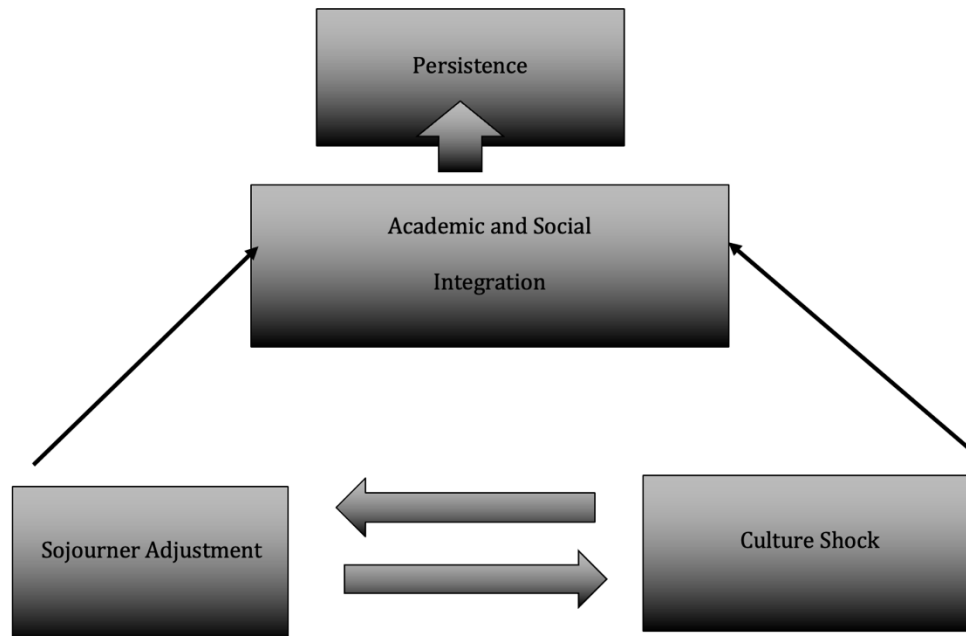
education in light of its growing diversity and increasing numbers of foreign-born students.

Due to the fact that this study is focused on foreign-born Black males' persistence in higher education, recognition of those profiles that identify and describe Black male students is critical in choosing the theoretical approach. In addition, foreign-born Black male students in higher education come from various Afro-Caribbean and African countries. These students come from very different historical, political, and cultural backgrounds, which was critical in selecting the theoretical approach.

The conceptual framework for this study was guided by the work of Church (1982) sojourner adjustments framework, Oberg's (1960) culture shock framework focused on the adjustment process of foreign-born Black males, and Vincent Tinto's academic and social integration persistence theory. These three theoretical approaches are significant to this study because they explicitly provide a framework to examine and interpret the experiences of foreign-born Black males. The following chart (Figure1) outlines the conceptual framework for this study.

**Figure 1**

*Conceptual Framework*



### *Sojourner Adjustment*

One of the important aspects of acculturation is sojourner adjustment. Foreign-born students come as sojourners to the United States for mainly academic reasons, which they may not be aware will also require more than intellectual effort. Brein and David (1971) defined the term sojourner: which includes different types of travelers such as foreign students, trainees, technical assistants, tourists, businessmen, military personnel, missionaries, and professors. For the purpose of this study, the word sojourner has been used to describe a traveler and a sojourn is an unspecified period of time in a new environment (David, 1971). Researchers have considered specific aspects such as the nature of stranger-host relationships (Gudykunt, 1983); frequency of contact (Bochner, 1982); and geographic distance (Furnham, 1986). It is important to note that these aspects neither separate sojourners from other groups nor suggest what different sojourners groups have in common.

Considering the backgrounds of foreign-born students, it may be expected that they will experience some adjustment issues after coming to the U.S. because foreign-born students come from places where political, economic, or demographic situations are different from those in the United States (Berry, 1997). The adjustment of foreign-born students is not a straightforward process, as this process is related to many factors. These factors may involve stress, social support, English proficiency, length of residence, and self-efficacy (Zhang & Goodson, 2011). Brown and Holloway (2008) suggest that feelings of stress, anxiety, depression, and loneliness dominate the positive aspects of the sojourners' experiences, especially in the initial stage of their residence.

## ***Culture Shock***

The study of culture shock has its roots in the works of Oberg (1960) who describes culture shock as an “occupational disease” of people who are suddenly transplanted abroad. According to Oberg (1960), culture shock “...is precipitated by the anxiety that results from losing all familiar signs and symbols of social intercourse” (p. x). Center for Research and Education (2014), echoes a similar definition which defines culture shock as being “cut off from the cultural cues and known patterns with which you are familiar; living/or working over an extended period of time in a situation that is ambiguous; and having your own values brought into question and being continually put into positions in which you are expected to function with maximum skill” (p. X). It follows that the greater the distance between the home and host country’s signs, beliefs, values, and customs, the greater the adjustment required on the part of the international student. In addition, more time is needed for that adjustment to occur. Major symptoms include a feeling of hopelessness, withdrawal, irritability, stress, and tension (Stewart, 2003). In this case, foreign-born students can be described as people who try to walk in the dark surrounded by fog, because when they come into their new environment, they lose the familiar signs and clues that are used to guide them. Foreign-born students’ adjustment process evolves over time as they experience life in their new environment.

Despite the multiple definitions attributed to culture shock, there is a consensus among researchers that culture shock is associated with “multiple demands for an adjustment that individuals experience at the cognitive, behavioral, emotional, social, and physiological levels, when they relocate to another culture” (Chapdelaine & Alexitch, 2004, p. 168). There are four stages used to explain culture shock. The first approach is

the honeymoon or tourist phase when the sojourner is fascinated by the culture. This is cognitive, whose proponents argue that cross-cultural adjustment is dependent on one's ability to accurately understand the values, beliefs, behaviors, and norms associated with the new culture. In other words, they interpret, judge, and behave in the new culture using their own cultural knowledge as the standard measure (Oberg, 1960).

The second approach is the crisis phase, which is behavioral, when the sojourner experiences serious emotional, academic or social problems. The supporters of the behavioral approach hold that culture shock occurs because individuals do not know what verbal and nonverbal behaviors are appropriate in the host culture. In other words, behaviors that were acceptable in the home country may not necessarily be welcomed in the host country. For example, direct eye contact with an individual from African countries during communication may be interpreted as a sign of disrespect while such may be viewed as an attentive communication sign in American culture.

The third approach is the adjustment or reorientation phase when the sojourner tries to figure out how to adjust to the new culture. This phase argues that culture shock is a "transitional experience from a state of low self-and cultural awareness to a state of high self-and cultural awareness" (Chapdelaine & Alexitch, 2004, p. 169). According to this approach, foreign-born students face culture shock because they are incapable of exercising their cultural references to convey and validate aspects of their own identity in the new culture. For example, if politeness is one of the concepts of self-identity, the meaning associated with politeness is determined by the social rules and therefore, one may not be able to convey and validate this aspect of self-concept in the same way as in one's own culture, thus challenging one's self-concept.

The final approach to culture shock is the adaptation resolution or acculturation phase when the sojourner can resolve problems and manage the adaptation to the new culture which is socio-psychological. This approach postulates that affective or psychological and social adjustment can facilitate understanding of culture shock. According to this approach, cross-cultural adjustment is dependent upon one's ability to bridge cultural differences between his or her home countries and the host country, as well as the extent to which one can interact with members of the host culture. In other words, the psychological adjustment of foreign-born students relates to their feelings of well-being in American culture while the social adjustment is associated with international students' ability to interact effectively with the American students. The experience of culture shock is evident and disturbing for foreign-born students when they begin their college life on U.S. campuses. Although all foreign-born students at different levels may experience culture shock, the impact is more severe for students from non-western countries (Shigaki & Smith, 1997), obviously resulting in greater difficulty in adjustment.

### ***Academic and Social Integration Theory***

Vincent Tinto's (1975) academic and social integration theory suggests that students who wish to persist in college and to graduate successfully, need to participate in the student culture, both within and outside the immediate context of the learning environment. Integration is defined by Pascarella and Terenzini (1991) as the degree to which a student adopts the institution's values and adheres to its formal and informal rules. Pascarella and Terenzini's (1991) study of college students showed that first-generation students experience lower levels of academic and social integration than



students of college-educated parents. According to Tinto (1993), high levels of social integration are indicative of increased student persistence. Student social integration is usually sustained through faculty and peer interaction and their involvement in intellectual and social activities. Moreover, students choose to persist when they perceive intellectual and social congruence. Tinto (1993) later referred to this as academic and social integration. He described lack of integration as isolation, or incongruence, between a student and the intellectual and social communities in college, which hinders commitment and leads to withdrawal.

### **Academic Integration**

Academic integration includes the contacts related to the institution itself, while informal academic integration involves contacts between students, faculty, and staff outside the direct context of the learning environment (Tinto, 1993). According to Tinto (1993), students who feel at home, participate in extracurricular activities and feel connected with fellow students and faculty and staff are more inclined to persist in their studies. Integration, naturally, has an academic and social aspect, which depends on students' willingness and ability to belong to a group. Equally, faculty and staff have to provide an educational context that invites students to integrate academically. While this requires certain cognitive abilities, time and effort are required. Similarly, faculty and staff within higher education institutions have to provide an educational environment that is inviting and friendly to integrate students academically. Furthermore, the concepts of academic and social integration also entail an extra distinction, one between formal and informal integration, each of which is important for successful integration (Severiens & Wolff, 2008).

Additionally, Braxton et al. (2014) described academic integration as “a student’s perception of their congruence with attitudes and values of the academic communities of the institution, and a perception that they are not intellectually isolated” (p. 118).

Academic integration is a central focus of the college or university experience, and researchers have studied its impact on student retention (Braxton & Lien, 2000; Tinto, 1993). While research has indicated that GPA is the most influential predictor of college retention and graduation (Nunez, 2008; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005), strong empirical research also exists to support the relationship between academic integration and subsequent institutional commitment in commuter college contexts (Braxton et al., 1997). For residential colleges and universities, the relationship between social integration and subsequent institutional commitment has strong empirical support while academic integration and subsequent institutional commitment have modest empirical support (Braxton et al., 2011). As such, the research indicates that academic interaction plays a significant role at residential colleges and universities, but the relationship to institutional commitment is unknown. If that theory is accurate, social interaction plays a more significant role in retaining students at residential colleges and universities than academic integration. Tinto (2000) purports the classroom can become a gateway for subsequent student involvement in the academic and social communities of the college, especially for new students. He sought to understand how the student experience in the classroom was linked to persistence, and how models of student departure may be adjusted to also account for this important element of learning and leaving. Included in his meta-analysis of the classroom experience on college student retention, he specifically looked at student-faculty relationships, pedagogical styles, and communities of learning.

## **Social Integration**

Social integration refers to the level of comfort that a student feels toward his or her college environment and its effect on student persistence. Social integration mainly involves contacts between peers on matters of learning. These contacts often revolve around collaborative efforts that students experience by working together on tasks. This is especially in departments where project work is a substantial part of the curriculum, which is very important in determining students' attrition. The formal level is distinct from the informal level, which is characterized by factors such as frequent social contact and participation in student activities. Students who have many friends at a university, feel at home, enjoy going to the institution and have a greater chance of obtaining their degree (Tinto, 1993).

Research suggests that social integration promotes degree attainment. Tinto (1993) explained that higher levels of social integration are indicative of increasing student persistence. Student social integration is usually sustained through faculty and peer interactions, and their involvement in intellectual and social activities (Stage & Hossler, 2000). Social integration holds more relevance to degree completion among men than it does for women. Under this circumstance, gender is more weighted when social integration is measured by peer group relations, residency, and hours spent engaged in social activities (Astin & Oseguera, 2005). For Black males, early engagement into the fabric of campus life is significant to their persistence (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). For these students, campus involvement and social networks provide the social and cultural capital necessary to succeed in higher education. Therefore, sustained levels of

involvement and networking can stimulate Black males to successfully negotiate their educational environment and persist toward a college degree (Strayhorn, 2008).

According to the literature on the experience of immigrant college students, colleges represent a unique culture for foreign-born students who experience a form of culture shock or border crossing (Jandt, 2004). This experience causes foreign-born students to feel isolated from the college environment and less socially accepted than their peers (McGreggor et al., 1991). These feelings of alienation can affect the student's level of involvement in college. Utilizing a composite index that measured contact with faculty outside of the classroom, frequency of meetings with academic advisers, regularity of going out with school friends, and level of participation in college organizations and activities, researchers at the National Center for Educational Statistics (1998) found that Black male students are less socially integrated into the college environment than their peers. Similarly, Y. Wang (2004) found that immigrant students are less likely to be involved in campus activities and other experiences which would connect them to the college. One reason why foreign-born college students are less socially integrated into the college environment is that they face conflicting obligations of school, work, and family (Constantine et al., 2005). Once in school, foreign-born students are less likely to be involved in campus organizations and are more likely to have their most significant friendships with peers outside of the college (Constantine et al., 2005). According to Tinto's (1993) work on retention, a student's lack of integration into the college results in a lowered commitment to school and increases the probability that the student will fail to persist (Tinto, 1993).

Finally, the ability to create academic, social, and political exchange is highly affected by the educational and occupational success of college students. The challenges that foreign-born Black male students face in matriculating to college have not been addressed. Yet, it is equally important to look at the first-year academic experiences of foreign-born Black male college students and to explore how their perceptions may be impacted by the academic and social structure of the institution. The Tinto model of college retention provides such a framework.

### ***College Persistence***

Tinto (1993) proposed a model of retention that looked at the longitudinal process through which students integrate into the academic and social systems of the college. According to this model, college persistence is a process rather than a solitary event. Tinto's model (1993) investigates the root causes of student departure while considering institutional factors that affect persistence. The model views the process of persistence as a three-stage interaction between the student and the institution. In the first stage of separation, students begin to distance themselves from memberships in past communities and to re-evaluate previous norms and patterns of behavior. In the second stage, transition, the student adapts to new norms and establishes membership in the intellectual and social life of the college. In the final stage of incorporation, the student discovers and adopts behaviors appropriate to the college and becomes integrated into the academic and social life of the institution.

Tinto's (1993) model accentuates the importance of student goals and commitments in the process of integrating into college. Tinto's model (1993) shows how pre-entry characteristics, i.e. skills/abilities, family background, and prior schooling,

influence individual student goals. The pre-entry characteristics that Tinto identifies refer to the accumulated social capital with which the student enters the college. The formal and informal experiences within the academic and social realms of the institution determine how successfully integrated into the college the student becomes. This affects the student's level of commitment to, and persistence in, the institution. Tinto (1993) points out that investigating student perceptions of the college environment is important because perceptions determine how likely it is that a student will integrate into the academic and social realms of the college.

Moreover, the mere occurrence of interactions between the individual and others within the institution need not ensure that integration occurs: that depends on the character of those interactions and how the individual comes to perceive them as rewarding. Thus, the term membership may be taken as connoting the perception on the part of the individual as having become a competent member of an academic or social community within the college. Therefore, no study of the roots of student departure is complete without reference to student perception (Tinto, 1993).

Tinto (1993) relates this stage to the experience of entering college students. Whereas students who are familiar with the expectations of college may find this adjustment exciting, foreign-born student may feel isolated and lost. This feeling of disconnect may lead to voluntary or involuntary withdrawal (Tinto, 1993), or what Durkheim (1951) terms as 'suicide.' Emile Durkheim's (1951) theory of suicide has been applied to the collegiate setting by theorists such as Spady (1970) and Tinto (1993). The interest in this theory arises from the belief that the study of suicide can provide insights into the characteristics of our society and its effect on individuals. Durkheim (1951)

explains fatalistic suicide as the result of excessive normative control, evolving from excessive regulation, that of persons with futures pitilessly blocked and passions violently choked by oppressive discipline (Durkheim, 1951). Fatalistic suicide is experienced by foreign-born Black male students who may be ill-prepared for the academic rigors of the institution.

### **Summary**

Given that the study is about foreign-born Black male students in United States' higher education, the theoretical framework of this study is grounded primarily in a combination of theories, which are Tinto's (1993) academic and social integration, and the acculturation models of foreign-born Black male students in higher education. Church's (1982) sojourner adjustment, and Oberg's (1960) Culture shock and academic and social integration theory, guided this study. This model and theory will provide two lenses to address the lived experiences of foreign-born Black males.

Lastly, Tinto's theory of academic and social integration suggests that students who wish to persist in college and to graduate successfully need to participate in the student culture, both within and outside the immediate context of the learning environment. Finally, this study is also based on the assumption that foreign-born Black male students undergo intercultural experiences, which are identified by Church (1982) Sojourner Adjustment and Oberg (1960) Culture Shock stages of acculturation. These frameworks were used to investigate the adjustment process of the students under study.

## **Chapter III**

### **Methodology**

#### **Purpose**

The purpose of this study is to explore the impact that academic and social integration experiences of foreign-born Black male students have on their persistence in higher education. Scholars of higher education have often treated all Black male students of African descent as a homogenous group (Nesbett, 2002; Williams, 2005). Literature on Black male students in higher education categorizes all Black males of African descent into one group, ignoring the cultural differences, and academic needs of these students and does not speak to the differences. While there is overwhelming literature addressing the factors impacting Black males' persistence in higher education (Cuyjet, 2006; Harper, 2006a; Harris, 2006; Whiting, 2009), most of these studies have been conducted using only the educational experiences of Black males from a native-born perspective. Therefore, this study examined the lived experiences of foreign-born Black males enrolled in a four-year research university.

#### **Research Question**

In order to better understand the lived experiences of these students, this study attempted to answer the following questions:

1. What were the lived experiences of foreign-born Black males enrolled in a four-year public research institution?
2. How did foreign-born Black males describe their academic and social integration experiences while in college?



3. How did foreign-born Black males' cultural background impact their persistence in college?
4. How did foreign-born Black males describe race as having an impact on their persistence in college?

This chapter describes the research method and procedures selected to support the purpose of this study. This chapter also provides a detailed explanation of the research study design, overview of the research site, the selection methods of the participants, strategies and data collection, and data analysis procedures. The chapter concludes with a discussion of trustworthiness and ethical consideration important to ensure the integrity of the study.

### **Research Design**

This study utilized a qualitative research methodology to address the proposed research questions. Qualitative research is utilized when trying to determine and understand a research problem from the individuals directly associated with the phenomenon in question (Creswell, 2007). According to McRoy (1996), qualitative research is concerned with non-statistical methods of inquiry and analysis of social phenomena. McRoy (1996) further states that qualitative research uses detailed descriptions from the perspective of the research participants themselves as a means of examining specific issues and problems under study. Qualitative studies in educational research have advantages over quantitative studies because they produce more in-depth and comprehensive information, offer a holistic (the complete phenomenon) understanding of the entire situation, observe the participants in their natural settings, and

collect data over an extended period of time, which allows for longitudinal analysis of processes (Creswell, 2007).

The purpose of qualitative research is to describe and interpret some human phenomenon in the words of selected individuals to grasp a holistic perspective of a situation by utilizing observations in natural settings (Heath, 1997). Strauss and Corbin (1990) stated that qualitative methods help to understand any phenomenon about which there is limited information. This research method enables researchers to gain new perspectives on issues already known or to gain additional in-depth information which is difficult to convey quantitatively. Qualitative research is also emergent in design, meaning that it does not have predetermined outcomes, which affords the researcher the opportunity to focus on the process as well as the result (Hoepfl, 1997). The emergent design is a beneficial aspect of qualitative research because it is non-static and offers flexibility to engage in further examination of a particular topic in order to excavate the most information possible to explain the rich details of foreign-born Black experiences at a post-secondary institution. While qualitative research proposes five strategies of inquiries; ethnographic, narrative, phenomenological, grounded theory, and case study (Creswell, 2009), for the purposes of this study, phenomenology was selected to gain an in-depth perspective of the academic and social integration of foreign-born Black males.

### ***Phenomenological Research***

A phenomenological study is designed to explain a phenomenon through human lived experiences (Byrne, 2001). The tenets of phenomenological research support the belief according to which knowledge and understanding are embedded in our everyday world (Byrne, 2001). The phenomenon of Black males in education has been studied

describing the shortage of Black males in education (Harper, 2009; Strayhorn, 2010).

While the plight of Black males in education can be highlighted in demographic statistics, charts, and percentages, a phenomenological research approach is required to understand the academic and social integration, beliefs, attitudes, thoughts, and perceptions of foreign-born Black males related to their persistence in higher education (Harper, 2009; Strayhorn, 2010).

Furthermore, phenomenology emerged from philosophy as an attitude of science, with Hegel providing the first definition: phenomenology is “knowledge as it appears to consciousness, the science of describing what one perceives, senses, and knows in one’s immediate awareness and experience” (Moustakas, 1990, p. X). It was Edmund Husserl (2001), who developed the methodology to enable a clear and unbiased procedure to study human consciousness and experience (Cross et al., 2003). According to Cross et al. (2003), Husserl intended to remove the outside observer from interpreting human experiences, offering researchers the opportunity to discover the essential elements of a subject’s experiences as they lived them out. Thus, phenomenology provides structures of conscious experience as experienced from the first-person point of view, along with relevant conditions of the experience (Cross et al., 2003).

In addition, there are basic assumptions underlying phenomenology. According to Moustakas (1990), phenomenology is “focused on the appearance of things, a return to things just as they are given” (p. 58), as opposed to seeking explanations or casual relationships related to the experience. The product of phenomenological research is rich, evocative descriptions of the essence of an experience. This is brought about by the researcher’s exploration of a perspective of the experience in its entirety as well as an

objective examination of various perspectives of the experience. To derive the essence of an experience, the phenomenological researcher immerses herself or himself in the data by engaging in self-reflection throughout both data collection and analysis.

According to Husserl (2001), a major component of phenomenological research is bracketing. Bracketing is the act of suspending judgment about the natural world preceding phenomenological analysis and is used to explain how the perceived state and what is thought to be true of a phenomenon must be stripped away until the study is conducted; the data is examined and analyzed in a pure form. Husserl (2001). There have been assumptions and generalizations made about Black males in education that must be cast aside to create the most accurate study. The experiences of foreign-born Black male students need to be included in this discussion.

### ***Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis***

The qualitative methodology chosen for this study is interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA). IPA was chosen because it aligns with the researcher's worldview of constructivism. Constructivism is an inductive qualitative research approach in which the researcher seeks to understand the worldview in which the research subject lives and works (Creswell, 2014). In essence, constructivists believe that there is no single interpretation of reality, that each individual constructs his or her reality through his or her perception of it (Creswell, 2007). A central attribute of constructivism is the interaction between the researcher and the participant (Ponterotto, 2005), as well as the interpretations that are formed through this interaction (Creswell, 2014). Also, the researcher in a qualitative study utilizing a constructivist approach is the tool through which meaning is constructed in an interpretive manner, which aligns well with the tenets

of IPA. As such, my own experiences as a foreign-born Black male will allow me to construct meaning as I engage in self-reflection during the data collection and analysis phase of the research process (Creswell, 2014; Moustakas, 1990; Ponterotto, 2005).

An IPA research design was employed to acquire an in-depth understanding of the experiences of foreign-born Black males (Creswell, 2013). The use of IPA allows the researcher to design a research study that asks *how* and *what* questions (Smith et al., 2009). The research questions utilized center on '*how*' the students integrated and persisted. Further, the research questions explored through the '*what*' and '*how*' seeking to highlight the participants' "understanding and experiences within the context of being a student at a four-year research institution. These questions aid in the research goal of ensuring that viewpoints presented are from the perspectives of the participants in both social and academic contexts (Creswell, 2007). In order to gain an in-depth understanding of the academic and social integration experiences of foreign-born Black males in post-secondary education.

Furthermore, through the social interactions in the form of a semi-structured interview between researcher and participants, the researcher will "generate or inductively develop a theory or pattern of meaning" (Creswell, 2007, p. 21). In IPA research, research questions attempt to gain insights into a phenomenon. The data collection process involves recruiting a small number of participants that have experience with the phenomenon (Creswell, 2012). As Creswell (2012) further describes the process, data is then analyzed to develop descriptive themes, and the analysis is presented to the reader as a detailed account of lived experiences of the participants clearly and engagingly.

In addition, as a strategy, IPA is similar to traditional phenomenology in that it seeks to understand the lived experiences of human phenomena. However, IPA is also concerned with the principles of hermeneutics and ideography, which are utilized to better understand the how and what of the phenomenon under investigation (Smith, 2009). IPA is grounded on the core principles of phenomenology and, in particular, in the person's direct experience (Smith et al., 2009). The phenomenon under study is fully understood by listening to the participant's account of their own story in their own words (Smith et al., 2009). Smith et al. (2009) explain that through IPA, the researcher can reveal the participants' experiences of their personal learning journeys. Therefore, the approach is largely dependent upon how people describe their experiences in order to determine the essential characteristics of these experiences (Maggs-Rapport, 2000). According to Smith et al. (2009), the description of the theoretical underpinnings of IPA is phenomenology attempting to get as close as possible to the personal experiences of the participant but recognizes that this inevitably becomes an interpretative endeavor for both participant and researcher. Without phenomenology, there would be nothing to interpret; without the hermeneutics, the phenomenon would be seen (Smith et al., 2009). According to Smith et al. (2009), there are three foundations of IPA: phenomenology, hermeneutics, and ideography. First, phenomenology as already discussed is the study of experiences and is filled with a structure to provide a researcher with rich sources and ideas "about how to examine and comprehend lived experience" (Smith et al., 2009, p. 11). IPA enables the researcher to observe the point of view and meanings of a phenomenon, as expressed by the participants, which are unique to the participants and their relationship to the world in which they live (Smith et al., 2009).

Secondly, hermeneutics, in addition to being a foundation of traditional phenomenology, is also a component of IPA focusing on interpretation (Smith et al., 2009). As Smith et al. (2009) indicated, IPA involves a double hermeneutic state wherein “the researcher is making sense of the participant, who is making sense of x” (p. 35). This double hermeneutic state introduces a dual role for the researcher. The researcher is like the participant, where he or she can draw on his or her resources to make sense of the world. Yet, because the researcher is not the participant, he or she can only access the experiences of the participant through what the participant reports it to be (Smith et al., 2009). As Smith et al. (2009) stated, “so, in a sense, the participant’s meaning-making is first order, and researcher’s sense-making is second-order” (p. 36). Finally, the final foundation of IPA is ideology, which is a term that describes ‘the sense of detail’ presented in the data provided by the participants (Smith et al., 2009, p. 29). Idiography helps IPA researchers tie together and understand how a participant phenomenon is understood from the perspective of the study participants within the context of their world (Smith et al., 2009).

Furthermore, the rationale for selecting an IPA was to comprehend how the academic and social integration experiences of foreign-born Black male students experience the world from their perspective (Smith et al., 2009). The semi-structured interviews provided critical information for comprehending the persistence of foreign-born Black male students in higher education. Presently, increased retention and persistence rates in higher education are needed and this study provides valuable research to assist in graduating a greater number of foreign-born Black male students.

The participants within this study all shared their experience of being a foreign-born Black male student who was enrolled at a four-year public research institution. The use of IPA as a framework was appropriate to collect those personal perspectives while acknowledging the individual experiences of participants and the meanings they attached to those experiences.

### ***Research Site***

This study took place at the main campus of a major northeastern public research institution. The institution has three campuses in total, which are located in the northern, central, and southern parts of the state of New Jersey. The central campus comprises a Liberal Arts College and eight professional schools, which include pharmacy, nursing, engineering, business, management, and labor relations, communications, planning, and public policy, and education. The overall enrollment of this institution is approximately 49,359 students. Moreover, the undergraduate population consists of 33,653 students and 8,435 graduate students. Currently, there are 17,340 male students enrolled at the university and, of that number, 6% are Black males and 8.7% identify as foreign-born males. According to the National Center for Education Statistics (2016), male students pursuing 6-year bachelor's degrees at this institution have a 74% graduation rate. Data for this study was collected during the 2015-2016 academic school year, after obtaining approval from the institutions' research review board.

### ***Participant Selection Criteria***

The qualitative methodology often focuses on relatively small samples in which in-depth investigation and exploration are carried out (Creswell, 2014). This section provides the criteria and a rationale for the selection of participants. The selection of the



participants for this study was through purposeful sampling. Purposeful sampling is the process of selecting participants who are likely to be information-rich in terms of the purpose of the study (Gall et al., 2007). In purposeful sampling, the criterion for inclusion must be predetermined before drawing the sample. Purposeful sampling is not intended to attain population validity, it is used with the intent of achieving a thorough and in-depth understanding of selected individuals (Gall et al., 2007). The selection included 10 foreign-born black males who are of African descent. The following criteria were employed to select the participants in the study:

- Registered as full-time foreign-born Black male students on the main campus.
- Full-time status is defined as enrolled in 12 or more credit hours.
- Must be born in the Caribbean or one of the African countries.

The study employed homogenous purposeful sampling, which entails intentionally selecting participants who are the same or similar in nature and uniform throughout (M. Q. Patton, 1990). Homogenous purposeful sampling is used when conducting a study on a specific phenomenon to gain an understanding of the collective (M. Q. Patton, 1990). The qualitative phenomenological study purposefully sampled participants who were foreign-born Black males in higher education (homogenous). Ten foreign-born Black male students participated in the current research study. For a phenomenological study, Smith et al. (2009) recommend studying between four and ten participants. By incorporating ten participants, this study will have a sizable amount of data to identify salient similarities (Smith et al., 2009).

Additionally, upon the approval of the Institutional Review Board (IRB; see Appendix A), for this study, I identified participants through a student organization called

the Black Men's Collective. It is a Black male student organization that focuses on off-campus Black male empowerment on campus. I attended one of their weekly meetings and announced this study. There were fifty students in attendance for the meeting. Of that number, 20 people identified racially and ethnically as being born in the Caribbean or one of the African countries and consented to participate. However, when I followed up with them, only 10 responded. All the respondents ranged from second-year students to graduating seniors. When selecting the appropriate number of participants for a qualitative study, it is more important to identify, seek, and include the participation of the people who would be the most informative and helpful than to try to include a large population (Doyle, 2006). The participants in a qualitative study should be a small and purposive group utilized to acquire an in-depth understanding (M. Q. Patton, 2002). I took all precautions possible in protecting the identity of these participants, including the use of soundproof conference rooms, and maintaining all audio recordings and transcripts off campus.

### ***Participant Profiles***

All the participants in this study identified as foreign-born Black males. Demographically, five participants were born in African countries and five were born in countries throughout the Caribbean. Table 1 provides additional data of the participants, including country of birth, classification, major, and grade point average. Two of the participants were born in Haiti, one in Jamaica, one in Trinidad, two in Ghana, two in Nigeria, and two in Cameroon. Two of the student interviewees were sophomores, four juniors, and four seniors. The participants had a combined grade point average of 3.1 out of a 4.0 scale. Finally, eight of the participants were persisting in STEM-related majors,

one business and one in human resources management. All names provided are pseudonyms to provide anonymity to the participants. Table 1 introduces the participants for this study.

**Table 1**

*Respondent Demographics*

<i>Pseudonym</i>	<i>Country of Birth</i>	<i>Classification</i>	<i>Major</i>	<i>GPA</i>
Rick	Haiti	Junior	Engineering	3.4
Charles	Jamaica	Sophomore	HRM	3.2
Jordan	Ghana	Senior	Biology	3.5
Bill	Haiti	Junior	Chemistry	3.2
Carry	Cameroon	Sophomore	Biology	2.8
Ben	Nigeria	Senior	Computer Science	3.0
Mike	Ghana	Senior	Business	3.3
Clay	Trinidad	Junior	Biology	3.0
Matt	Nigeria	Senior	Business	3.2
Sam	Cameroon	Junior	Engineering	3.0

*Note.* (GPA) – Grade Point Average

## Participants

### *Participant One: “Rick”*

Rick is a junior majoring in Mechanical Engineering. Rick was born in Haiti and moved to the United States at the age of 15 and went straight to high school. Because he did not speak any English upon arriving in the United States he was placed in English as a Second Language (ESL) classes to learn to speak English. He was the first person in his

family to attend school in the United States and he was very involved on campus and held numerous leadership positions in student organizations. He has been able to maintain a 3.4-grade point average in his major and he will graduate in 2018. His goal is to move back to Haiti in 10 years and start his own engineering company.

***Participant Two: “Charles”***

Charles is a sophomore majoring in Human Resources Management. He was born in Jamaica and moved to the United States at the age of 14. Charles is a first-generation college student because he is the first person in his family to attend college. During his first two years, he was involved in multiple student organizations, such as Black Men’s Collective and the West Indian Student Association. He has been able to maintain a 3.2-grade point average in his major and he plans to pursue the 5-year master’s program in Human Resources Management. His goal is to be successful and make his parents proud.

***Participant Three: “Jordan”***

Jordan is a graduating senior, with a major in biology. He was born in Ghana and moved to the United States at the age of 15. Jordan is the second person in this family to attend college. Throughout his time on campus, he was very involved and held numerous leadership positions such as president of Black Men’s Collective, Vice President of the African Student Association. He also completed over 600 hundred hours of community service. His goal is to become a medical doctor and he is currently in the process of applying for medical. He would like to go back to his country of Ghana to practice medicine.

***Participant Four: “Bill”***

Bill, a junior majoring in Electrical Engineering was born in Haiti and moved to the United States at the age of 14. Although he lived in one of the poorest school districts in the country in the United States, he graduated from high school on top of his class and received acceptance letters from 15 colleges and universities. He chose to attend this institution because he wanted to be close to home and they offered him an academic scholarship. Since entering this institution he has been very involved in many student organizations on campus and held multiple student leadership positions such as the president of the Haitian Student Association, vice president for the future Engineering of Tomorrow Club, while still being able to maintain a 3.2 good grade point average. His goal is to graduate with honors and get a Ph.D. in engineering.

***Participant Five: “Carry”***

Carry is a sophomore majoring in Biology. He was born in Cameroon and moved to the United States at the age of 13. Carry indicated that he struggled tremendously with adjusting to the educational system here in America because of the language barriers and cultural differences. Carry is a first-generation college student and he is the oldest of four siblings. As a result, there has been a lot of pressure and very high expectations from his family for him to succeed academically. In addition, he worked two part-time jobs in order for him to help his parents financially. Carry has not been able to be as involved as he would like to be on campus because he spends so much time working. Carry aspires to be a medical doctor and he hopes that one day he will return to his home country of Cameroon and open a hospital.

***Participant Six: “Ben”***

Ben is a senior majoring in computer science and is the first in his family to attend college. He was born in Nigeria and moved to the United States at the age of 14. He is the oldest of four siblings and as a result, he has experienced a lot of pressure from his family to succeed in college. While he has been able to maintain a 3.0-grade point average, he struggled with making a successful transition academically and socially to college. His goal one day is to open a technology company in his country.

***Participant Seven: “Mike”***

Mike, a senior majoring in business administration, was born in Ghana and moved to the United States at the age of 13. Because he did not speak any English he was placed in English as a second language (ESL) classes in. Since entering this institution, he has maintained a 3.3-grade point average in his major and will graduate in 2017. After graduation, he will pursue a Master’s degree in business administration. His goal is to work on Wall Street.

***Participant Eight: “Clay”***

Clay is currently a senior majoring in biology, born in Trinidad, and moved to the United States at the age of 15. Clay is a first-generation college student and he is the oldest of three siblings. Clay struggled significantly with adjusting upon arriving in the United States. He was very involved on campus. He has been able to maintain a 3.0-grade point average and hopes to go to medical school to become a doctor.

***Participant Nine: “Matt”***

Matt, a senior majoring in business was born in Nigeria and moved to the United States at the age of 14. Matt was a first-generation college student. Throughout his

college career, he has been very involved in student organizations. He held positions such as President of the Future Business Leaders of Tomorrow, Vice President of the African Student Association and he is a member of a Black Letter Greek organization. He has maintained a 3.2-grade point average. He is currently applying for graduate school to get an MBA so that he could pursue international business.

***Participant 10: “Sam”***

Sam, a junior majoring in Engineering was born in Cameroon and moved to the United States at the age of 15. He attended high school in one of the worst districts in the country and graduated in the top two percent of his class. Sam is also a first-generation college student. Since entering this institution he has been very involved both academically and socially. He has studied abroad in Spain, conducted undergraduate research, and held numerous leadership positions in student organizations, such as Vice President of Black Men’s Collective, and President of the African Student Association. His goal is to get a Ph.D. in engineering.

***Summary of Participants***

For this study, 10 foreign-born Black male students were purposefully selected. They come from strong, close families who have been in the United States for less than 10 years. Although not intended, all of the participants are high achieving foreign-born Black male students with high aspirations. According to Gross et al. (2001), a high-achieving group of students is identified by their affiliation with a program geared toward academically talented students such as an honors program or a college preparatory curriculum. Although most high-achieving students have been labeled as such, it is often understood that these students do not experience the same issues as their same race

counterparts, an assumption based on their high scholastic ability and stellar academic performance. However, the reality is high-achieving Black students face many challenges in their pursuit of higher education (Fries-Britt, 1997, 1998; Person & Christensen, 1996). First, high-achievers often report a lack of a sense of belonging to their institution (Strayhorn & Saddler, 2009). Within the narrow strand of existing research, the focus has tended to target experiences and attitudes of Black male students recognized as academic “high-achievers” (Harper & Quaye, 2007, p. 132). The limited focus on high-achieving Black undergraduate students typically identifies those with cumulative grade point averages (GPAs) of 3.0 or higher on a 4.0 scale (Fries-Britt, 1998; Guiffrida, 2005; Harper, 2012; Harper & Quaye, 2007).

Moreover, in higher education, the success of high-achieving Black undergraduates often draws great praise; however, research on Black male college students has focused primarily on those who experience academic difficulty (Cornell & Lee, 1991; Fries-Britt, 1997). Harper (2012) looked at an anti-deficit approach to inform stakeholders about the experiences of high-achieving Black males. Harper described the experiences of the participants, highlighting the following categories; the pre-enrollment experience, financing college, getting integrated, and dealing with climate issues. His findings show consistency with Tinto’s theory. That is, each student was academically and socially integrated into their campus community.

Finally, high-achieving Black have been described as “the best and the brightest” and are predicted to achieve the greatest levels of academic and professional success (Harper, 2012). Because they are labeled as high-achievers, university staff may assume that academically talented Black males do not need special support services or that they



experience the same issues as academically talented White students (Fries-Britt, 1997). Aside from experiencing a lack of connection between the institution and a hostile campus and social environment, high-achieving Black students must also balance their academic responsibilities while handling the stressors of racism and social stereotypes (Fries-Britt, 1997).

### **Researcher Role**

My role as the researcher in this IPA study was to discover the inner reflection of participants that often goes unnoticed in everyday conversation (Glesne, 2011; Merriam, 2002). As an administrator where this study took place, I was in the role of advisor and mentor. My job was overseeing retention, student services, and academic support services. These resources include peer tutoring, conducting engaging educational activities, and other support mechanisms aimed at improving students' persistence in higher education. Since this was my immediate work setting, the sample population was selected from students who have no potentially conflicting issues or relationships with me. Also, as a foreign-born Black male myself, I refrained from biased comments or probing questions based on a personal attitude toward instructional support or feelings in general about the institutional setting (Glesne, 2011; Merriam, 2002).

As a foreign-born Black male and a higher education administrator, I hold a social justice, advocacy, and participatory worldview (Creswell, 2009). According to Creswell (2009), social justice leaders strive to simultaneously promote human development and the common good through addressing challenges of injustice and inequality in society related to both individual and distributive justice. Advocacy and participatory worldview individuals focus on empowerment and bringing about change to society from societal

constraints such as inequality, oppression, domination, suppression, and alienation. In my attempt to try to understand the factors that impact the experiences of foreign-born Black males in higher education over the past 10 years, I have engaged in in-depth conversations with numerous higher education professionals regarding Black male persistence, achievement, retention, and graduation rates. Through this study, I hope to become a better research practitioner and to increase retention, graduation, and persistence rates among both American-born Black and foreign-born Black males in higher education.

Moreover, I must ensure that questions are not one-sided or too focused on the negative aspects of the institution. Also, I must always adhere to ethical standards and be impartial throughout the research. Because I know most of the campus members, including senior administrators and departmental deans, I am obligated not to write biased comments or influence the outcome in any manner that is subject to ethical reflection and expression throughout the research (Glesne, 2011; Merriam, 2002).

Additionally, because I am an administrator, participants may react inappropriately toward research procedures, which may influence the data. Although the established interview questions were direct and open-ended, responses may not be true or may indicate information based on the respondent's feeling of answering to satisfy his perception of his wants or needs (Hiles, 1999). In fact, Hiles (1999) asserts that within a phenomenology research design, interviews afford more opportunities to examine participants' responses to questions than do standard questionnaires. Although interviewing provides an opportunity to capture interpersonal depth and detail, the design must ensure equilibrium to prevent overly biased and subjective responses from the

participants as well as from me when analyzing the data (Hiles, 1999). Data collection and reporting followed strict guidelines to limit biases and increase trustworthiness (Creswell, 2009). An expert in qualitative research methodology on the dissertation committee served as a guide during the process to enhance the credibility of the data. Further strategies concerning trustworthiness will be identified later in this chapter to ensure confidence in the findings of the research.

### **Data Collection**

According to Seidman (2006), social and educational issues are abstractions that are based on concrete experiences. If a researcher is interested in the meaning that individuals make of their experiences, which as noted above is a tenet of IPA, then interviewing may be the best approach of inquiry (Smith et al., 2009). Based on this assumption and the phenomenological underpinnings of the study, semi-structured interviews, focus groups, and follow-up interviews were used to collect data that captured the participants' understandings of their experiences of being foreign-born Black males in higher education.

The ideal method for IPA data collecting is to conduct semi-structured interviews (Smith et al., 2009). This method provides the opportunity for the participant to drive the conversation and share their voice as they describe their experience. During the interviews, Merriam (2002) suggests that the researcher put aside personal feelings, biases, and thoughts in order to fully understand the phenomenon. The ultimate goal is to capture the themes, experiences, and feelings that surround foreign-born male persistence in higher education. Semi-structured personal interviews were used to collect data to capture the participant's understanding of their experiences of being a foreign-born Black

male student. Respondents were prompted to share stories about their lived acculturation experience in higher education. Audio-recorded interviews lasting approximately one hour were conducted with each respondent in a soundproof conference room on the campus. (Smith, 2008).

Moreover, in this research study, two sets of focus group interviews were conducted as the third tier in the data collection process using the same set of questions. Ten participants were separated into two groups, which allowed for a smaller group so that all had a chance to participate (Morgan, 1998). The participants were informed that this project would help the researcher learn more about the overall experiences of foreign-born Black male students in higher education. Participants were also told that their participation was voluntary and in no way would affect their enrollment at the university (Seidman, 1998). They were informed that completion of the focus group would take no longer than 60 minutes and that all responses were confidential and used only for the purposes of the study. Lastly, the researcher informed the students that their names would not be used in the study. Pseudonyms would be used as a substitute for each participant (Seidman, 1998). Each focus group participant consented to audio taping using an electronic recording device.

Furthermore, the semi-structured interview protocol was constructed especially for meeting with the participants (see Appendix A). According to Smith et al. (2008), semi-structured interviews provide flexibility during the interview process and their suggestions have influenced the development of the interview questions (see Appendix A): there is an attempt to establish rapport with the respondent. The ordering of questions

is not so important, leaving the interviewer free to probe interesting areas that arise, and the interview can follow the respondent's interests or concerns.

Additionally, in semi-structured interviews, a limited number of questions are prepared by the interviewer ahead of time (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). The research questions of this study were built around 'what' and 'how' questions (Smith et al., 2006). Based on the study, and participants' answers to the initial interview questions, additional open-ended probing questions were asked. These probing questions were used to gather additional detail, depth, richness, and nuances in the participants' answers, allowing the participants to further explain the phenomenon in (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Similarly, Smith et al. (2009) recommended that an interview that utilizes an IPA framework be developed so that it has several stages to help the interview flow. This flow should shape the tone of the interview, and therefore, the transcripts, as well. The flow of the questions should take the participants from broad and general concepts at the beginning of the interview, allowing them to describe events more specifically in the middle and close with a synthesis or wrapping up (Smith et al., 2009).

The interview was scheduled for 1 hour and was held in a soundproof conference room in the campus center that was free from interruption (Smith, 2008). Upon arrival at the interview, the individuals were greeted and given a brief overview of the research study and the nature of their involvement. During this time, the informed consent form was reviewed and signed by the participant (see Appendix B). Once the overview and papers were completed, the interview was conducted.

In addition, using Smith (2008) as a guide for this IPA study, the questions were developed like a funnel. They began with general questions and responses and then

moved into more specific questions and answers. Each interview was audio recorded for transcription. This ensured that the researcher could listen and engage in the conversation and not try to take notes on every pertinent point (Smith, 2008). Each tape was individually coded, with no descriptors identifying the participant in order to maintain confidentiality (Groenewald, 2004). The coded tapes were stored in a secure location during and after the study. Multiple recording devices were on hand to ensure no technical issues prevented the interview from proceeding (Groenewald, 2004). Following the interview, each tape was transcribed for accuracy (Creswell, 2013). The IPA transcription takes more at the semantic level than a prosodic one (Smith, 2008). Capturing all parts of the conversation during the transcription aided in the quality of the analysis. Finally, all the data collected from the interviews, observations, and focus groups were coded into themes.

Furthermore, follow-up interviews took place after the first semi-structured interview. This allowed the researcher to use information from the first interview to gather more information about the participant's experiences. Follow-up interviews will also have an interview protocol (Smith, 2008). The questions are generated from the information the participants express during previous meetings with the researcher. Follow-up interviews provide the researcher the opportunity to clarify any information that is unclear or needs further explanation (Creswell, 2013).

### ***Data Storage***

To ensure the protection of human subjects and provide confidentiality of the research, participants were assigned pseudonyms known only to the researcher. This list of pseudonyms was kept in the researcher's office in a safe, locked location along with a

backup copy of the originally coded transcriptions and a copy of the audio recordings.

The original audio recordings were stored on the interviewer's personal computer which is password protected. All data, including recordings and transcripts, were destroyed upon the successful completion of this research study.

### ***Data Analysis***

The data collected from the interviews, observations, and field notes were coded using descriptive coding. According to Saldaña (2009), coding in qualitative inquiry is most often a word or short phrase as an attempt to reduce and summarize that which is collected during interviews, transcripts, participant observation, and field notes. "The assumption in IPA is that the analyst is interested in learning something about the respondent's psychological world" (Smith, 2008, p. 66). The analysis sought to comprehend the story, the meaning of the conversation, and not necessarily the frequency of topics (Smith, 2008). Meaning, not frequency, is crucial to IPA. Specifically, it is important to learn about their mental and social world. Those meanings are not transparently available and must be obtained through a sustained engagement with the text and a process of interpretation (Smith, 2008). Smith et al. (2009) provided a four-step unidirectional guide for conducting IPA analysis to help minimize the potential for anxiety, confusion, and risk of feeling overwhelmed by the process of analysis for the novice researcher. The four steps are: 1) the researcher's initial encounter with the text (reading and re-reading the text); 2) identification of themes (label and characterize each part of the text); 3) clustering of themes (provide structure and a hierarchical relationship); 4) and production of a summary table (quotations that illustrate each theme and capture the experience; Smith, 2008; Willig, 2001). Although Smith et al. (2009) are

explicit that IPA does not have a single prescribed method for working with data, the data analysis process in IPA is very similar to the traditional phenomenology: Interviews and focus groups data are transcribed using descriptive coding. Once each interview was coded and a cross-comparison was completed to identify themes.

In addition, Data analysis in IPA studies does not try to fit the research findings into existing theoretical frameworks. This is distinct when compared with other qualitative research traditions. Smith et al. (2009) write, “IPA is concerned with the detailed examination of human lived experience. It aims to conduct human lived experience examination in a way that enables the experience to be expressed in its terms, rather than according to predefined category systems (p. 33). Current literature on analysis relative to IPA does not prescribe any single method for working with data; however, Smith et al. (2009) recommend using several strategies. In analyzing the data for this study, I used the following:

1. The researcher describes his [sic] own personal experiences, in this case in being a foreign-born Black male, with the phenomenon being studied. Creswell (2007) defines this as creating an “epoche.” This permits the readers to better understand the researcher’s personal experience and how it might impact the study.
2. Reading through the transcribed interviews, the researcher develops a list of significant statements regarding how the participants are experiencing higher education. Creswell (2007) defines this as horizontalization of the data (p. 159).



3. The researcher takes significant statements and groups them into larger units or themes. Miles and Huberman (1994) describe this step in the initial phases of working with data as data reduction.
4. The researcher writes a “what” description using verbatim examples from the participants’ interviews about what they experienced with mentoring. Creswell (2007) calls this the “textural description” (p. 159).
5. The researcher writes a “how” description of the setting and context in which the participants experienced mentoring. Creswell (2007) refers to this as the “structural description” (p. 159).
6. Finally, the researcher writes a composite description of the participants’ experiences in higher education, which incorporates both the textural and structural descriptions. This provides the “essence” of a phenomenological study.

Descriptive coding was used to code the data collected from the interviews and focus groups. According to Saldaña (2009), coding in qualitative inquiry is most often a word or short phrase as an attempt to reduce and summarize that which is collected during interviews. To reduce the data that was collected for this research study, the researcher analyzed all the data using descriptive coding by organizing and analyzing the findings of the four student participant’s observations and interviews. During the first cycle of coding, the researcher printed out the transcribed interviews and observations and began to look at writing and highlighting recurring themes that appear during the responses from the participants. Member checking was used to establish the rigor and trustworthiness of the data-coding process (Saldaña, 2009).

Another form of coding utilized by the researcher is first level coding, which Saldaña (2009) describes as In Vivo coding. According to Saldaña (2009), Vivo coding is used in studies to “prioritize the participants’ voices” (p. 77), which is a tenet of IPA. Saldana explains that when using Vivo coding, the researcher develops codes that come directly from the study participants’ own words. Each participant’s transcripts were coded individually and themes were established (Creswell, 2009).

### **Trustworthiness**

For this study, transferability and member checking were utilized to help in the trustworthiness of the study (Glesne, 2011). In IPA, multiple semi-structured interviews are used to obtain participants’ in-depth and detailed descriptions of a phenomenon (Smith et al., 2009). Thick, narrative data was collected. Lincoln and Guba (1985) stated that the use of such a thick description aids in transferability, i.e. use of the findings in other settings of a research study. Trustworthiness of research can be built by the increase of credibility, transferability, dependability, and conformability (Erlandson et al., 1993; M. Q. Patton, 2002). Credibility is defined by Erlandson et al. (1993) as the degree of confidence in the “truth” that the findings of the study possess, and how much the researcher shows an authentic portrait of what she or he investigated (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Transferability represents the external validity of the study. It asks whether the findings can be applied in other contexts or with other respondents (Glesne, 2011; M. Q. Patton, 2002). The transferability of this study was evidenced by offering a detailed description of the data collection process; this included the sampling process, interview questions and procedures, and thick descriptions of contexts. In addition, dependability refers to the reliability of the research and is communicated through a dependability audit

trail (Erlandson et al., 1993). An audit trail included documentation such as interview notes, personal communications, transcripts, and themes generated from the data. Finally, confirmability is determined by the degree to which the findings can be confirmed by others (M. Q. Patton, 2002). To address confirmability in this study, a triangulation process, personal journaling, and the review of interview notes and data analysis were employed.

### ***Member Checking***

In addition to thick narratives, member checking was utilized both during the interview process and post-interview. As mentioned earlier, Lincoln and Guba (1985) indicated that member checking is considered to be the “most critical technique for establishing creditability” in qualitative research studies (p. 314). Member checking allows the participants to correct factual errors or challenge the researcher’s interpretations (Thomas, 2006). Member checking was used during conversations with the study participants whereby the participants were asked to verify the transcripts as well as any initial interpretations of the data gathered in the interviews (Thomas, 2006).

### ***Triangulation***

The study also employed the use of triangulation. Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggested that the use of multiple sources, or “multiple copies of one type of source, such as interview respondents” (p. 305), may serve as a source of triangulation. For this study, several individuals who experienced the same phenomenon were used as multiple sources for triangulation.

### ***Bracketing***

In phenomenological research, it is necessary for a researcher to bracket his or her understanding of the phenomenon. Giorgi (2008) described bracketing as when the researcher “puts aside his or her understanding of the phenomenon” (p. 8). Bracketing allows the researcher to experience the phenomenon as if for the first time. The researcher, a foreign-born Black male student with his own experience of the phenomenon, had to bracket his understanding of his own experiences and allow the participants to describe the meaning of their experiences of being foreign-born Black male students. This was an extremely difficult challenge for the researcher because each story and explanation of the experiences developed in the interviews brought back strong feelings of familiarity to the researcher’s own experiences.

### ***Ethical Considerations***

It is critical for any researcher to adhere to ethical standards by making every effort to protect participants. It was critical in this research to strictly comply with the standards set forth by the IRB for the protection of human subjects in research at Rowan University and Rutgers University. The researcher informed all the participants in this study about the purpose of the study, the use of data collected, confidentiality rights, and the voluntary nature of participation. In addition, all participants were provided with an informed consent form that explained the study procedures. The consent form addressed issues such as confidentiality, withdrawal from research, audio-recording consent, and the right to obtain research results. This is consistent with M. Q. Patton’s (2002) recommendation that “the interviewer needs to have an ethical framework for dealing with such issues” (p. 406). All participants reviewed and signed the consent form prior to

conducting interviews. Once the study was underway, there were no concerns raised about the interview process by participants that would have led them to withdraw from the study.

### **Protection of Human Subjects**

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) regulations explain that research involving the use of human subjects must obtain internal Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval by submitting a report containing the following components for evaluation: risks to the subjects must be identified; adequacy of protection against these risks; potential benefits of the research to the subjects and others, and importance of the knowledge.

As a way to gain Institutional Review Board approval, Rowan and Rutgers University's IRB was provided with a completed IRB application outlining the aforementioned components. It was very important to make sure that all individuals in the study were respected as autonomous agents, therefore guaranteeing that the research participants would have absolute authority to examine the potential risks and benefits of the study. The participants could analyze these risks and benefits and act up to and as far as removing themselves from the research at any time. Furthermore, no data was collected prior to receiving written approval from Rowan and Rutgers University's IRB to proceed with the study.

The participants were notified that all data for this research would be secured on a password-protected computer. The original copies of the participant consent forms and a copy of the original transcripts were kept in a locked safe in my office. These transcripts were transcribed and only the researcher knew the original identity of the participants.

Finally, there were no known risks to the participants of the study because none of them would be identified by name. The participants signed the informed consent document prior to beginning the interview, affirming they understood the aforementioned and were willing to continue in the study.

### **Limitation of Transferability**

Because this research is site-specific to a North Eastern University and to the research participants whose feelings and experiences were expressed in this institution within the time of their experience, readers of this study will have to judge for themselves and decide regarding the transferability of the research data. According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), it is not the researcher's responsibility to provide an index of transferability, but for him or her to provide a "database that makes transferability judgments possible" (p. 316). For that reason, readers of this study will have to compare their population of foreign-born Black male students with those being studied in this research and decide regarding transferability as well as the generalizability of the findings. The most notable limitation of this study can be attributed to the nature of the sample. As this study employed a homogenous sample, it did not provide for generalizations, rather the findings were designed to produce emerging themes (Creswell, 2014).

### **Limitations of the Study**

This study focused on the academic and social integration experiences of foreign-born Black males as they relate to their persistence in higher education. The sample subjects were male students from African countries and Afro-Caribbean countries who

are currently enrolled at a 4-year Research institution. As a result, there are several limitations to the study:

1. This study utilized a qualitative methodology, which eliminates the possibility of generalizing the findings to any other foreign-born Black males. However, findings from this study will be useful for understanding the overall experiences of foreign-born Black males in higher education.
2. Participants for this study included representatives from various African and Afro-Caribbean countries who displayed cultural and ethnic differences. Also, the findings cannot be generalized.

Finally, one potential threat to reliable data collection is the possible lack of understanding by the participants regarding how to answer the questions. Member checking and probing will be used to establish rigor and trustworthiness of the data-coding process. Further, participants' identities were not disclosed in order to obtain the most vivid and candid information possible. The reliability of the instrument was tested to measure consistency.

### **Assumptions**

The following are the assumptions that were considered in the study:

1. Participants will be able to describe their overall academic and social experience in higher education.
2. Foreign-born Black male students have various special concerns and needs in their adjustment at a predominately white institution.

3. There are certain factors and variables that affect foreign-born Black male students' needs and concerns, such as language barriers, adjustment, discrimination, and cultural differences.
4. Foreign-born Black male students will experience significant personal change through cultural adaptation and the transitional process that occurs over time.

### **Chapter Summary**

This chapter highlighted the use of qualitative methodology to study the academic and social integration experiences of foreign-born Black male students' persistence in higher education. Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) was employed as the method of collecting and interpreting the study participants' understandings of their lived experiences. These foreign-born Black male students are currently enrolled as full-time students at a four-year research institution.

Furthermore, IPA is a methodology that combines traditional phenomenology with a double hermeneutic interpretation, as well as ideography. Utilizing semi-structured interviews with a small group of participants who have experienced the same phenomenon allowed the researcher to gather rich, thick narratives. All the interviews were transcribed by the researcher, who interpreted each participant's transcript to begin building themes according to the participant's understanding of the phenomenon being investigated.

Moreover, trustworthiness and member checking were utilized to provide credibility, authenticity, and potential transferability of the research conducted. All the participants in the study were asked to sign an informed consent form which explained the purpose of the study and clarified their right as voluntary participants to withdraw



from the study as they see fit. This document also informed the participants that they would be given pseudonyms known only by the researcher. In addition, the informed consent document highlighted that there is no potential risk for the participants of the study.

Additionally, based on the literature review, it can be safely determined that there is a need to research to explore the academic and social integration experiences of foreign-born Black male students' persistence in higher education. Findings from the literature provide a theoretical framework for this study as a mechanism to analyze the factors negatively impacting the overall experience of foreign-born Black males in higher education.

Finally, the purpose of this study was to explore the experiences of lived academic and social integration of foreign-born Black males in post-secondary education. This can contribute greatly to the scholarly literature and begin national conversations on the importance and significance of foreign-born Black male students, and further develop best practices to remedy any issues or challenges that present themselves within this study regarding the lived experiences of foreign-born Black male students in higher education.

## **Chapter IV**

### **Findings**

The plight of Black males' persistence in higher education is well documented (Harper, 2009; National Center for Education Statistics, 2012; Toldson, 2012). Research indicates the persistence and retention rates of Black males in higher education are the national average (Harper, 2009; National Center for Education Statistics, 2012; Toldson, 2012). This study investigated the lived experiences of foreign-born Black male students at a four-year research institution in New Jersey as it relates to their persistence.

Researchers provide a range of hypotheses to explain the retention and persistence factors impacting Black males' challenges in higher education (Harper, 2012). because these factors focus specifically on the experiences of native-born Black males which is a gap in the literature on Black males in higher education. This study is a discussion about the experiences of foreign-born Black males in higher education.

Additionally, for this reason, the purpose of this chapter is to provide an overview of the findings extracted from the face-to-face and focus group interviews of 10 foreign-born Black male students in higher education. This chapter describes five themes that capture the essence of their lived experiences at a four-year research institution. Each participant provided a unique description of their experience as a foreign-born Black male student at a four-year research institution. Through data collection and analysis, five themes surfaced that exposed the journey of persistence for foreign-born Black males at a predominately white research institution. The six prominent themes that emerged from the study were: 1) family influence and expectations, 2) coping with language proficiency challenges, 3) discovering the race card, 4) bridging the gap through campus support

programs, and 5) mixed interactions with faculty. Collectively, these themes were important because they provided great insight into the experiences of foreign-born Black males in post-secondary education. I begin by discussing each of these themes and presenting how they impacted foreign-born Black male's lived experiences in higher education.

### **Theme One: Family Influence and Expectations**

Family support plays a major role in the lives of foreign-born Black males who successfully transition and succeed in all aspects of life. Each of the participants acknowledged their reason for attending this four-year research institution in part was due to family influence. Jordan, the first person in his family to go to college, shared the significance of his family influence and motivation about attending college:

My family really influenced my decision to attend this school. My parents made me apply to this university. When I got accepted they were very excited and extremely happy for me to attend this institution. It was a dream come true for them to see me attend this institution because of its great diverse student body and it was close to home. Where I lived, there was not much diversity in my neighborhood. I was in high school and felt the need for a change. I was living in Newark for over ten years without even exploring the wonderful places around New Jersey. My parents could not stop bragging to their friends about me going to this institution. This institution was not only diverse, but the community was diverse. In this institution alone, there are so many people from different backgrounds living together.

Mike, also the first person in his family to go to college, share the enthusiasm of his

family and motivation about attending college:

I remember it just like yesterday. When I got my acceptance letter to this institution, my family was so excited for me to attend this great institution. When I first got to campus, I was amazed by this institution because it had such a stellar academic reputation. Where I lived, there were not many universities that offered Human Resource Degrees and this institution provided me with this opportunity. This school also has one of the best research programs in the nation.

Rick, indicated his motivation for attending this institution:

When I was in high school everyone around me including my family always talked about how great this school was and how it was the best university in the state. It was very affordable and there was a lot of support and campus resources in the school to help me with tuition and this institution is a world-class research institution. As a result, this was the only school I applied to because I did not grow up in a family with a lot of money. This institution made it possible for me to pay for school and the support I received from being part of the Educational Opportunity Fund Program made this possible for me as well.

Data shows that family involvement has a significant impact on foreign-born Black males' educational experiences in higher education. Relying on family and close friends for support and guidance has been a tradition for foreign-born Black male students (Parade et al., 2009). When it comes to adjusting to college environments, foreign-born students look to extended family for emotional and social support (Parade et al., 2009). The participants acknowledge that parental involvement and family support play a major role in their acculturation to college. Matt shared the significance family

involvement had on his educational experiences. His family's level of excitement on acceptance to college, family influences of the choice of majors, and high level of family expectation for his academic success proved substantial. He discussed various ways in which he received support from his family:

My family has always been there for me educationally and financially. My family always supported me, giving me what I needed. They always motivated me, bringing me to the U.S from Africa. The higher education system is good. My parents definitely influenced my decision to pursue a degree in Business Management. They always tell me that I had to become either a doctor, an engineer or a business person. They told me that those were my only choices. The reason why they told me to come here is because I have the adequate resources and the technology needed to help me achieve my educational goals.

Several participants acknowledged that parental involvement was an extremely important and valuable factor that determined the future and success in education. For example Clay shared:

The main thing for me would be the major that I chose. I definitely chose a STEM-related major because of the pressure from my family and the expectations of my culture. Parents in the Haitian culture only know of three things their children should be in life. They want their children to be either doctors, lawyers or engineers.

The participants also explain that because of the family support the level of family expectations ominously affected their approach to achieving academic success. Matt has similar expectations by his parents and other relatives:

Being that I'm Nigerian there is a saying that you can only be three things in a Nigerian family, lawyer, doctor, or engineer. So my parents wanted me to become a doctor and I wasn't having none of that. However, because my parents are helping to pay for my education, I had to comply with them. So, I took science classes my freshman year. I didn't do well, and I failed miserably. My failures were not because of lack of trying but I was not strong in science or math classes. After failing math and science classes multiple times, I had to man up, talk to my parents and let them know that I understand that in our culture you have to be a doctor, and even more importantly you have to follow what your parents say, but I'm not with it. I wanted to major in computer science and focus on Information Technology. My parents did not talk to me for weeks because of this decision. However, eventually they got over it and they finally came on board.

Family support and involvement contributed to the participants' acculturation process in higher education. The amount of family involvement indirectly affects academic success, while directly affecting how students feel about their studies (Stewart, 2006). Family influences start with the moral values students learn at home and apply to life decisions, including their educational choices.

### **Theme Two: Coping with Language Proficiency Challenges**

The inability to speak the host language fluently makes it difficult for foreign-born students to become socially involved in their host country (Haiwen et al., 2006; Hayes & Lin, 1994). Most foreign-born students are able to pass standardized proficiency language tests but are unable to understand lectures, express ideas, or write reports (He & Shi, 2008). Language proficiency, both spoken and written, is a major determinant of

academic success for foreign-born students (Luzio-Lockett, 1998; Selvadurai, 1991). The participants described language proficiency, both speaking and writing, as having played a major role in their educational experiences within higher education. Language is perceived as a predictor of academic and social success for foreign-born students (Luzio-Lockett, 1998; Selvadurai, 1991). Participants describe language barriers as exceptionally challenging and complex. They told stories of language issues and American English proficiency as one of the major concerns in their adjustment process. It is important to point out that all the participants come from African and Caribbean countries where English is not a spoken language. Also, some participants speak two or more non-English languages. Ben indicated:

Coming here to this institution, I felt like I did not speak good English and my language was not up to par. So for me personally I felt like I was at a disadvantage coming here and working with other students because I was always conscious of myself. Hey, are you going to be able to contribute to the group discussion or will you be able to put your best foot forward in each project.

Most of the participants express similar sentiments that language barriers involving speaking and writing significantly influence their transitional experiences in higher education. English language proficiency is positively correlated with the ease and stability of one's adjustment. Jordan stated:

Growing up in Ghana, I was taught the English language in school as you know from our childhood. Therefore, it really was not a problem speaking it, but it is just the accent that you have. It makes it hard for people to understand you. Sometimes if you try to get something across, it is as if people do not get it and

it's like the reactions of people toward you is different than if you have a perfect accent. In addition, one thing I would say is finding words to explain yourself can be hard. I'm one person, I am not really good with public speaking so it's like, sometimes articulating myself can be a struggle because I'm not used to that type of speaking.

All of the participants spoke two or more non-English languages before being taught English in school. Most of the participants expressed that because English is not their first language, they have an accent when they speak English. For Bill, issues of language barriers have had an impact on his acculturation experiences in higher education:

For me, I really struggle with language because of my accent. It is not as if people cannot understand you, it is just that they do not want to make an effort to listen. That is the problem that I feel when it comes to language. You hear people just tuning in but they are not really listening, because at the end of the day you do not sound like them, so they really do not want to take that extra initiative to hear you out and understand you. Therefore, it's always been a problem. Most of us speak like 2 or 3 different languages and that kind of collides because each language sounds different and you speak it differently. When I speak my native language, I have to speak with a different accent. If I go back to English, I have to go back to the American accent, whatever that means. Therefore, it is hard jumping between languages and trying to stay in tune with whatever that language is.

Rick provides another example of how language barriers and having an accent seriously impact his acculturation experience in this higher education institution. He



explained:

Language is the primary barrier that I face at this institution. In class for instance, it takes me some time to understand what the professors are saying when they are lecturing. In order for me to fully understand some of the concepts in my classes, I have to process the concepts in both English and Creole in order for me to fully understand class lectures and discussions. Because I have a strong accent and because my vocabulary is very limited people often think I am stupid because sometimes when I speak people do not really understand me that well. A lot of my professors and classmates would look at me in a way that says, “you don’t belong here.”

Having an accent was a major acculturation issue that the participants experienced throughout this institution. Mike describes his experience in the following way:

When I got to this country, I spoke with like a really thick accent. People could understand what I meant, but they just wanted to show that there was a difference like you don’t belong here. For example, I always pronounce the words differently because in Ghana we used to say it like instead of water you’d go “woter” (in a Ghanaian accent), and that’s how I pronounced it when I got here. People would understand that I’m trying to say water or however it’s pronounced, but they would be like “you mean water” and I’m like yeah you heard what I said. Why would you repeat it to me if you already know what I’m trying say. I feel like that was a big one I faced. Another issue I faced when I came here was when my friends and I went out to find a job. We basically took a bicycle and walked into stores and as soon as we opened our mouths to speak, it felt like they just

didn't take us as seriously. They acted like we weren't smart enough or we weren't qualified. You could tell they had prior interest but as soon as we opened our mouth and they figured out I had an accent, and I can't speak like them or I'm not Americanized, they feel a certain way. It was hard finding a job.

Another major problem foreign-born Black male students face during their acculturation into higher education is writing. According to Pardue & Haas (2003), foreign-born students' comprehension and writing require them to transition from English to a native language for informational processing in order to completely understand the information. Foreign-born students who demonstrate writing and reading skill deficiencies experience difficulties in their coursework leading to more stress and more adjustment problems (Poyrazli et al., 2001). Some of the respondents describe writing as exceptionally challenging and complex. Carry describes his issues with writing English:

I really struggle with my writing classes and writing papers because I write the way I speak. I often find myself taking much longer to write papers. I used to get C's and D's in my writing classes because I had a hard time writing. When I first came to school, I took the writing part of the placement test. I did bad. As a result, I was placed in a basic composition class because I had a grammar deficiency and most people who have grammar deficiencies are able to speak English properly. When you are put in that class you are put at a disadvantage because you are being in a lower biology class such as concepts of biology which is a placeholder and does not prepare you for anything. It's just there because they need to take your money so if someone is not informed that class is useless, they take the class not knowing that it does help them, it doesn't give you bio credits, it doesn't help

you with Bio 116, it's just there so that class is unnecessarily hard.

The participants encountered numerous language barriers that affected their acculturation process in higher education. This often led them to struggle to adjust to the culture of that four-year research institution. Several participants found this new environment difficult to navigate because of the language barriers. Their challenges with language resulted in profound frustration. While their experiences were varied, each participant discussed language issues that made their acculturation process more difficult.

### **Theme Three: Discovering the Race Card**

Racial discrimination and stereotypes has been difficult for foreign-born students, especially those from racially homogenous countries. They did not have encountered racial discrimination until they became ethnic minorities in the United States (Constantine et al., 2005; Sandhu & Asrabadi, 1994). Members of the host society often have negative perceptions of these foreign-born students because of their race (J. J. Lee & Rice, 2007). Traditional racial discrimination based on color and neo-racism based on culture are examples of such negative stereotypes that have affected foreign-born students (J. J. Lee & Rice, 2007). Under this third theme, two sub-themes emerged to provide unexpected results in the participant experiences: 1) my skin color matters, and 2) being the only one. These two sub-themes point out that foreign-born Black males experienced racism, discrimination, and alienation of their race within that four-year research institution.

#### ***My Skin Color Matters***

In the case of race and discrimination, the data highlights the fact that many of the participants are subjected to racism and discrimination because of race and language. All

the participants grew up and were socialized within a homogeneous group where the concept of 'minority' and the color of their skin was not conscious in their minds because in their countries they were not minorities. Realization that they were 'Black' and a 'minority' took place when they enrolled into at this four-year research institution. For example, Carry shared:

Race and the color of my skin do play a role in my daily interactions with my peers and with my professors. It is something I have to used to because in my home country everyone I interact with and go to school with looks and speaks like me. Skin color was not a factor. Coming to this country where the color of your skin plays a major role in your future and how successful you are, you have to have a strong mind. This is something that is in back of my head and I think about it all the time. Most people in this country have a certain expectation of you and a negative outlook on you because you are Haitians, African, or Black. Race is definitely a factor you can either use it or let it harm you. It has affected me by way of motivation. I know a lot of my peers and professors at this institution are saying negative things when they look at me and they don't take me seriously. They are discounting me so for me to see that, take that as you know let me show them that this is what I can do. It definitely gives me a push to do better.

Rick described his experience:

I am constantly judged and disrespected by others because I am black and I'm from a different country and I have an accent. When I try to work on group projects, some students don't want to work with me because I'm black. I remember a group of students saying to me that we prefer to work with people

that have the same values and beliefs as us. I feel like sometimes students rather discriminate against me because they don't want to have an open mind.

Everybody wants to work with his or her own race. They do not want to work with students from other different races so that poses a challenge. Even if you go up to them and say can you work with them, they like to shut you out and say no. I'm working with this person without even knowing your work ethic or knowing what you can add to any assignments or any projects.

Given that all the participants in this study were all foreign-born Black male students, it is likely that Americans merely observing them assumed them to be native-born Black males. This assumption held until the participants began to talk, revealing their accents. Jordan explains his experience around this issue occurred during conversations with Americans and other foreign-born Black male students:

I think racism is in everybody. People often do it unconsciously. It does not matter if we walk out of here, they all see us as black people. They do not know if we are Africans or just Blacks. To white people, if you are dark skinned, you are Black. I have had many people ask me what are you doing? What is your major? They are very surprised. I tell them that I am African, they react differently and they start giving me props because I go to this school and what my major is because you're black. Your professors see you, they do not know what you are, and they do not know if you care about your education. They just see you as a typical Black guy, an athlete, and you are not smart enough to be here. When you finally do show them that you really want to get your education and you're not just here you know just to be lounging around, then you get classified and taken

more seriously basically. Yeah you get more respect I guess.

Becoming aware of one's racial and skin color difference was only one aspect of the participants' experiences while attending this institution. Another element was introduced to their experience when they began to perceive differential treatment based on their racial identity or skin color. Perceived negative racial treatment from both white students and higher education administration and faculty in the U.S. education system was demoralizing to participants and required additional effort to succeed in their academic work. Clay indicated the following:

Yes, race has definitely impacted my educational experiences. As I already said, being in an institution where sometimes it feels like I don't belong here, I don't have many people to look up to or to serve as a mentor for me. There is really no one that looks like me in order for me to get inspiration from. It feels like the odds are already against me and in certain ways because statistically speaking there are not enough Black males in college in this country. In addition, if you look at most statistics, like most Black male are incarcerated and there are not enough Black males in the education system to actually look up to. Therefore, when you get to a place like this sometimes you feel like you do not belong here because of your skin color. You don't see people who are Black who you relate to or people who you can have a connection with.

My skin color matters was a solid subtheme for the impact of race and discrimination as it discussed how foreign-born Black male students immediately begin feeling on at four-year research institution environment interactions. Based on what the participants have stated and their experiences, it seems foreign-born Black male students encountered

numerous negative racial experiences that affected their acculturation process at that four-year research institution. While the experiences of the participants were different, each participant experienced racial issues that negatively impacted their acculturation process.

### ***Being the Only One***

Participant stories further illustrated the difficulties foreign-born Black male students encountered when entering an unfamiliar culture or environment that are incongruent with their culture of origin. Several participants shared experiences of difficulties fitting in because they often found themselves as being the only Black student in classes. Some of the participants experienced isolation as a result of not being able to connect with classmates as directly. This, they believed, affected their ability to acculturate at this institution. Most of the participants were pursuing STEM-related majors. Matt indicated that the acculturation battle within the classroom environment at this institution wherein most of his classes he is the only student of color and he was not able to relate to professors or any of the students. He had to quickly find ways to overcome this challenge. He stated:

As a business major at this institution, I am the only Black male in almost all of my classes. It was difficult for me to fit in with my classmates. Sometimes when I speak, people do not really understand me that well. A lot of my professors and classmates would look at me in a way that says, “You don’t belong here.” For instance, in my business seminars class where we have a lot of class discussion, I often find myself feeling isolated and cannot relate to them because these are not experiences that I lived through. In addition, we would have discussions about

things I have never heard of before. In my accounting class we were talking about the Enron case. I sat there and I was thinking to myself as my classmates talked about Enron how much of a big deal it was and I had no idea what that was.

Sometimes I would question if I belong here because I often find myself in the classroom where not one of my classmates was black and it was not easy looking around and noticing that you're the only black student, it's hard. The only time I actually have been in a class where I have seen another black student is in a large lecture hall of more than 20 students and even that was rare because there would be like one other black student so it was hard like fitting and people to talk to. So it's been kind of difficult. However, I cannot let those things stop me from accomplishing my goals and dreams because I know my purpose for being here.

The participants discussed their experiences with race and the lack of diversity in the classroom. On campus with few students of color, it is very important to have ethnic student organizations that can provide foreign-born Black males a safe space where they can be authentic and not have to straddle their culture of origin and the campus' culture. Sam shared how being the only Black male in all his classes served as a motivation for him for success in higher education. He shared the following encounter:

Being one of the only two black males in most of my classes really frustrated me. Being an Engineering major people look at me as if I did not belong here. Most of the time, the white students would look at me as if I was stupid. I feel like they don't respect me and my abilities. I did not have any anger toward any of them but I feel that I have to prove myself and let them know that I made it here like you did. As a result, I was able to use that as motivation for me to do well



academically.

Additionally, Mike discussed the challenges of fitting that made his transition experiences even more difficult at this institution:

I really put everything on me and to do everything I can do in order for me to be successful because there were many challenges and barriers I faced at this institution: I was the only black males in almost all of my classes. It was difficult for me to fit in with my classmates. In addition, all my professors are white men and they often make me feel like I do not belong here.

The participants encountered numerous barriers and challenges through racism that made their acculturation experiences in higher education unnecessarily challenging. They found race issues to be very disheartening. While their experiences varied each one of the participants discussed challenges that made their acculturation in higher education even more difficult.

#### **Theme Four: Bridging the Gap through Campus Support Programs**

Academic and social integration through campus support programs in higher education institutions encourages persistence (Tinto, 1993). The function of these structures should be to smooth the transition of the students into a new environment, encourage the building of learning communities with peers, foster interaction between students and faculty and staff, identify student needs and provide adequate support, and foster academic involvement and learning, among other activities. Researchers posit when Black male students are supported and engaged through campus support programs they are more likely to persist in higher education (Harper 2004, 2006; Moore et al., 2003; Strayhorn, 2008; Strayhorn & Saddler, 2009; Williamson, 2010). Within higher

education and by institution, the definition of student engagement varies greatly. From intellectually stimulating experiences with campus support programs, professors to social activities meant to encourage the building of peer-to-peer relationships, student engagement can have a profound impact on the overall level of student satisfaction (Kinzie & Kuh, 2004).

Mamiseishvili (2010) explained that support from peers, family, faculty, and staff is crucial for foreign-born students to succeed academically. Similarly, being engaged in the institution, integrated into the campus culture, involved in campus support programs, engaged in courses, and involved in extracurricular activities were among the factors frequently reported by foreign-born students as reasons related to their ability to persist. The participants often referred to academic and social integration through campus support programs as the cornerstone to persist successfully at this institution. Academic support comes from many different places in academia. Ben shared that:

The academic campus resources I often used to help me academically are tutoring, Student support services (SSS), the Educational Opportunity Fund Program (EOF), and learning centers. In addition, I am always in the library because I cannot really study in my apartment. Another campus resource that was helpful for me when I was taking Biology was the Office for Diversity and Academic Success in the Sciences (ODASIS) program, and the learning resource center to get my grade up.

Campus support programs such as learning centers, office hours, and tutoring offered the participants the support they needed to succeed academically. Jordan recognized the value of taking advantage of the resources that were available on the campus:

I was really involved in programs such Louis Stokes Alliance for Minority (LSAMP), which helps students in the science field. I took advantage of everything the program offers, tutoring, mentoring, and scholarship and internship opportunities. Also, being part of the EOF program, I have a counselor who is always helping me with my academic plans, scheduling, my time management and my career goals. Finally, I joined the ODASIS which is academic support and it's goal is to increase the recruitment and academic success of underrepresented students, as well as educationally and economically disadvantaged students, who are interested in pursuing careers in the science, technology, engineering, and mathematics professionals.

Additionally, the participants offered numerous examples of how academic campus resources aided in their ability to persist at this institution. Bill indicated the following:

In addition to all the student support services and learning centers; I definitely use my professor's because they are the ones that are teaching the class. It's always best for me to get the knowledge directly from them or what to expect on the exams or how should I go about studying a certain topic or which topics should I skim over as opposed to which topics should I focus more time on. They are the ones that create the exams and teaching the class so I definitely go to them first. Secondly, I definitely go to my peers and classmates because often there are gaps between my peers and me. Whenever someone is doing better than I am in class, I make sure that I connect with them and create study group in order to go over materials I might not understand.

Getting involved in student organizations provided participants an opportunity to gain leadership opportunities on campus. Billy described his experiences as follows:

Since my first year, I have been a part of the Minority Association of Pre-Health Students and so now it's come to the point. I have been on the E-board since my freshman year to the point where I am now the president of the organization. I have also been a part of Liberated Gospel Choir and I am a Resident Assistant. I am a peer mentor for Student Support Services. I do a bunch of different things on campus and the reason why I do them is because I have a passion for them. Those leadership positions provide me with great resume experience and look great for medical school.

In addition, campus employment provided a supportive environment that enabled students to improve and gain the critical skills necessary for their career success (J. J. Lee & Rice, 2007). The participants note that employment on campus has positively impacted their social experience in higher education. They discussed how employment on campus helped them to successfully transition socially at this institution. Larry stated:

I currently work on campus at the Recreation Center as a fitness assistant. I also work off campus as an IT consultant at a charter school. The jobs have been able to help tremendously not just with my finances, but it provided me the opportunity to build relationships with other people who have a different background than me.

The participants expressed that employment on campus provided them with the opportunity to build their resumes while gaining some working experience and leadership development skills. Ben described his experiences that way:

While on campus, I work as a Resident Assistant, student supervisor at the library, and student supervisor at the café. Having these campus jobs helped me significantly financially. But it takes time away from my studies and my abilities to forge relationships and networking. However, there are some very important things that I learn on the job, which are management skills, leadership skills, and teamwork. These jobs provide me with growth opportunities that are extremely important for my development.

On-campus employment was vital to participants' growth and persistence in higher education. The participants recognize the importance of gaining a meaningful experience both in and out of the classroom. Jay described his experiences that way:

On campus, I would say as far as employment, I am doing an internship with the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission. It has been a great experience so far because it provided me with the opportunity to learn more about what the workplace is like for someone with a Labor Studies and HR major. I have been able to learn skills about the workplace. In addition, I am a part of community organizations around where I live. I work with students who do not speak English. My job is tutoring them in English and helping other students who may have difficulty academically. I really learned and enjoy working with those students because working with them has allowed me to grow as a person.

Academic and social integration through campus support programs significantly contributes to the participants' ability to do well academically and persist at this institution. They depend on on-campus resources for academic support and take full advantage of all the resources available on campus in order for them to succeed

academically.

### **Theme Five: Lack of Positive Faculty Interaction**

Faculty interaction is a critical component of student engagement, which is linked to positive student outcomes (Boyer Commission, 1998; Chickering & Gamson, 198). Scholars have noted that the number of interactions students have with their faculty members greatly impact the undergraduate student experience and satisfaction (Alderman, 2008). Additionally, several researchers have confirmed the significant relationship between student-faculty interaction and satisfaction (Lamport, 1993). Kuh and Hu (2001) reported that students who reported a higher frequency of interaction with their faculty members are more inclined to engage educationally. Student-faculty interactions have had a significant impact on academic achievement and students are more satisfied with college when they experience higher levels of interaction with their faculty members, both inside and outside of the classroom (Alderman, 2008). However, few faculty members have a full understanding of the impact their interaction with students can have on students (Chang, 2005). Student-faculty interaction has been found to contribute to student motivation and persistence (Barnett, 2011; Cejda & Rhodes, 2004). Negative interactions with faculty can have a negative impact on students and ultimately their decision to persist. When it comes to faculty interaction with foreign-born Black males, the participants seem to have mixed reactions when it comes to their overall interaction experience with faculty at this four-year research institution. The participants share a range of sentiments regarding their interaction experiences with faculty on campus. The experiences range from feelings of positive and negative.

### ***Positive Faculty Interaction***

Several participants describe their interaction experiences with faculties as very positive and that faculty opened the door of opportunities to them. Mike described his experience in this way:

My interaction with faculty at the university has been great I would say. I can always go to my professors for any issues and they will help me with anything that I need as far as academics, financial aid. Most of my professors have really taken their time to invest in my education in order for me to be successful academically. In addition, they have helped me to find internship opportunities, mentors in the career field I am interested in. Overall, my interactions with my faculty have been great experiences.

Bill shared that he had very positive experiences with interacting with faculty at this institution:

The faculty at the institution have been really good to me. They are always available when I need help during office hours, before and after class. Two of my faculty have served as mentors for me. They have provided me with the guidance and direction I need in order for me to be successful after graduation. They have written me recommendation letters for medical school, scholarship, and internship opportunities. My experience with the faculty has been great.

Interacting with faculty was vital to the participants' overall persistence at this institution. Participants sense that faculty has the time to personalize services and build relationships with students. The faculty goes above and beyond all their ability to connect with

students and put them at ease and build their confidence for them to succeed. Matt shared the following encounter:

My interactions with faculty have been good so far. I try as much as possible to have a good relationship with my faculties because it will help open the doors for opportunities. Maybe if they have any internships or if they have any connections with other people of higher classes they could actually help me reach my educational goals. As a result, I try to build a relationship with them. Most of my professors are very flexible with their schedules. Whenever I send emails to my professors, they are always there to reach out to me and respond to whatever questions or issues I have.

#### ***Lack of Positive Faculty Interaction***

Several of the participants describe their interaction with faculty as a negative experience. While the rest of the participants express they have positive interaction with faculty. Billy described his interactions with faculty as the following.

I do not really interact with the faculty at this institution. When I am not doing well in a class, then I will attend office hours but besides that, I do not interact with faculty. The first time I went to speak with one of my professors about my Biology class, my experience was not good. Going to his office was useless and a waste of time. For example, I attended one of my professor's office hours for this class called earth systems because I did not do well on the first exam. I wanted to talk to him about the exam so I went to the teacher to ask where I went wrong. I felt like the teacher was telling me oh you made a stupid mistake here a stupid mistake there. I am never going back because I do not need to come to office



hours just to hear how stupid I am. I am not going to come back because I came to office hours looking for help and all he did was tell me how stupid I was for 20 minutes.

Carry expressed similar sentiment about his experience with faculty interactions.

Most of these professors do not look like me and do not care about me, especially since I'm the only Black student in their classes. Most of my professors are White Males. They look down on me when I ask questions in class and they make me feel like I don't belong here.

Ben shared that he had very negative experiences with interacting with the faculty at this institution:

Some bad, some good. There are some faculty that are openly racist. There were times when I'm in class and I would ask questions because I did not understand something and they just waved me off. Sometimes, I raise my hand in class to ask questions and they just look like they do not see me. They show favoritism. Most of the professors that I have experienced have this attitude where they would give more time to students that are doing well, and students that they know. A student that may need a little more help, they would not give as much time and attention to. This makes no sense to me because the student that is struggling is the one that needs the most attention.

Jordan described his experiences with faculty this way:

Since I have been here, I have yet to build a relationship with my professors and it's not because I have to try to do so. Most of the faculty who teach in my major do not look like me. When I go to office hours to speak with them about issues I

might be having in classes, they often don't make me feel comfortable. They often looked at me as if I didn't belong here. I'm not smart enough. They talk down at me and make me feel stupid.

Overall, the participants present mixed reactions regarding faculty interaction. Some of the participants found their interactions with members of the faculty to be very negative and disheartening. Thompson (2001) suggests that students with higher levels of interaction with faculty report higher levels of effort in their coursework. Higher levels of student-faculty interaction profoundly influenced the level of effort of students. Students work harder in class when they interact with the professor more frequently (Alderman, 2008).

## **Discussion**

In this chapter, I present the findings from the research of lived experience of foreign-born Black male students at a four-year research institution. The findings show that the participants found family was a major influence on participants' basic outlook. While here, they found the support of the family to be extremely helpful in coping with academic and social issues in the college setting. The results indicate that this support is invaluable in negotiating the system and building up their confidence.

Furthermore, foreign-born Black male students encounter numerous obstacles on their journeys through college, including language proficiency challenges, discovering the race card, and mixed interactions with faculty that negatively informs their acculturation process (Alderman, 2008; Barnett, 2011; Cejda & Rhodes, 2004; Chang, 2005; Hayes & Lin, 1994; J. J. Lee & Rice, 2007; Maddux & Smaby, 2006; Sandhu & Asrabadi, 1994). While leveraging family support, campus support programs and peers to

help them persist (Harper, 2004, 2006; Mamiseishvili, 2010; Parade et al., 2009; Smith, 2003; Strayhorn, 2008; Strayhorn & Saddler, 2009; Williamson, 2010). The issue for foreign-born Black male participants in this study is that each participant had issues with understanding language and being understood in written and spoken form. This was heightened by the fact that they were studying technical subjects. It affected their participation in classes, causing them to hesitate or not contribute to class discussion or ask questions. The results also are that participants were exposed to the concept of racial discrimination, having come from culturally homogenous societies where they were the majority: issues of race did not exist. Additionally, the participants encountered issues of adjustment to the campus environment.

Furthermore, each of the participants report having much success with campus resources (academic, career, student life). They all made good use of these resources and how they have contributed to their success. About their relationship with faculty, the participants report positive and negative results. For some, the faculty interaction provides them with a solid mentoring relationship and some faculty even encourage a pathway for them to succeed beyond the classroom (e.g., internship and research opportunity). As well, other faculty impede this progress by being openly racist and ignoring the participant's questions in class.

These findings are presented sequentially in the same way they were conducted throughout the research. The mode of inquiry for this study is from the perspective of interpretative phenomenological analysis research with the use of an academic and social integration theory and acculturation theory lens. This study provides a unique perspective and insight using semi-structured interviews and focus groups.

Finally, in the next chapter, I provide a discussion of the findings related to the research questions and the literature used for this study. Further, I close with discussions, recommendations, limitations to my study, and conclusions that will tie in recommendations for future research in the field.

## **Chapter V**

### **Discussion, Recommendations, and Conclusion**

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore the academic and social integration experiences of foreign-born Black male students in higher education. Historically, the experiences of foreign-born Black males in higher education have been grouped in with the persistent experiences of native-born Black males. This study examined the lived academic and social integration experiences of foreign-born Black males at a PWI's and found five themes that capture their experiences. The themes were: (a) family influence and expectations; (b) coping with language proficiency challenges; (c) discovering the race card; (d) bridging the gap through campus support program, and e) mixed interactions with faculty.

Collectively, these five themes revealed that the lived experience of foreign-born Black males in higher education is complex and challenging. The finding in this study shaped the experiences of foreign-born Black males through family influence, language proficiency, race, campus support program, and persistence. Research and significant statements explained participants' perceptions about being foreign-born Black males in a predominantly White institution.

Although these themes were found to outline the lived experiences of foreign-born Black males in higher education, results from this study indicated that regardless of a PWI's effort to provide additional support, foreign-born Black males pursuing higher education experienced many issues and challenges that derailed their progress. Additional findings indicated while foreign-born Black males were extremely appreciative of the services provided by the institution, they also acknowledged that the institution could

only do so much to help their acculturation experiences. Findings revealed foreign-born Black males are resilient to overcome any situation they encounter into an opportunity for success.

### **Discussion of the Findings**

The participants of this study presented a compelling case for the need to enhance the lived experiences of foreign-born Black Males at this institution. The research questions revealed six major themes through the data. The themes of family influence and expectations, coping with language proficiency challenges, discovering the race card, adjustment, bridging the gap through campus support programs, and mixed interactions with faculty were resounding concepts in data collection.

Using an interpretative phenomenological analysis approach, with the incorporation of the acculturation model and Tinto's academic and social integration theory, this study examined how foreign-born Black male students describe their lived academic and social integration experiences of male students who persist at a four-year research institution. An interpretative phenomenological analysis allows the researcher to design a research study that asks *how* and *what* questions (Smith et al., 2009). The research questions utilized center on '*how*' the students integrated and persisted. Build from the research questions and are explored through the '*what*' and '*how*' seeking to highlight the participants' "understanding and experiences within the context of being and persisting within a four-year research institution (Smith et al., 2009). To understand foreign-born Black academic and social integration, the culture shock model of acculturation was used to explain their experiences.

The perception from the participants is that family influence and expectations had a significant impact on foreign-born Black males' educational experiences in higher education. Relying on family and close friends for support and guidance has been a tradition. Because of background, family involvement plays a strong role. They are expected to do well academically and pursue lucrative majors. When it comes to unknown and potentially uncomfortable situations such as going to college, Black students look to extended family for emotional and social support (Parade et al., 2009; Tinto, 2007). The participants acknowledged that parental involvement and family support played a major role in acculturation in college. Many of the participants select their major because of family pressure and the expectations of their culture.

During this study, it was determined that most of the participants within the study shared a common concern regarding barriers to language proficiency, both speaking and writing. Their inability to speak and write the host language fluently makes it difficult for foreign-born Black male students to become socially involved in their host country (Haiwen et al., 2006; Hayes & Lin, 1994; Li & Stodolska, 2006; Lin & Yi, 1997). Most foreign-born students are able to pass standardized proficiency language tests but are unable to understand lectures, express ideas, or write reports (He & Shi, 2008). Language proficiency is a major determinant of academic success for foreign-born students (Luzio-Lockett, 1998; Selvadurai, 1991). According to the participants, one of the major hurdles foreign-born students face is the English language, which has a critical influence on the acculturation process. Challenges in English language proficiency include the general meaning of words, the different pronunciations of words made by foreign-born students, and the different contextual meanings of certain words in different countries. These

challenges create communication barriers that result in misunderstandings or misinterpretations. Which then creates academic challenges and difficulties in interpersonal communications and relationships with locals of the host country (Myburgh et al., 2006).

Issues of race are prevalent in the everyday lives of foreign-born Black male students at the four-year research institution. The participants in this study believed that racism existed on this campus and all the participants have experienced racism from both faculty and students. This made the transition into a foreign culture, new environments, social culture, and new educational system even more overwhelming and challenging. Racial discrimination and stereotypes have been difficult for foreign-born students, especially those from racially homogenous countries, because they may not have encountered racial discrimination until they became ethnic minorities in the United States (Constantine et al., 2005; Sandhu & Asrabadi, 1994). Traditional racial discrimination (based on color) and neo-racism (based on culture) are examples of such negative stereotypes that have affected foreign-born students (J. J. Lee & Rice, 2007). Participants indicated that they were subjected to racism and discrimination because of race and language by faculty and students both in and out of the classroom. Participants explained in the classroom, they are often overlooked, dismissed and ignored during class discussions because of their skin color and accent. As for the outside of the classroom, participants indicated they are frequently subjected to racism and discrimination by their peers because they are foreign-born back with an accent. Many of the participants claimed this was the first time in their lives where they had to be aware of their skin color.



Foreign-born Black males had trouble adjusting at the four-year research institution because they often found themselves being the only Black student in classes. Isolation and not being able to connect with classmates are directly affecting their ability to acculturate at this institution. Adjustment issues played a major role in the acculturation process of foreign-born Black male students at this institution. The participants further illustrated the difficulties foreign-born Black male students encounter when entering an unfamiliar culture or culture that is incongruent with their culture or origin. Participants revealed that the difficulties transitioning to this new environment led to culture shock. The participants explained their struggle to persist within the classroom environment at this institution because in most of their classes they were the only students of color. As a result, they were not able to relate to professors or any of the students. The perception from the participants is that academic and social integration through campus support programs has significantly impacted foreign-born Black male students in their success and well-being at the university and within the campus community.

Finally, some of the participants of this study expressed they had negative interactions with faculty which had a significant academic impact on their experience at this four-year research institution. According to Hemanowicz (2004) faculty not engaging in conversations with students both during class time and outside of structured classes is often detrimental to student persistence. Participants indicate their positive relationship with faculty had a major impact on their ability to persist at the four-year research institution. Sax et al. (2005) express that student-faculty interactions are related to a wide range of college outcomes such as GPA and satisfaction. Positive student-faculty

interaction has been shown to have a broader impact on students' general ways of thinking, methods of problem-solving, and interest in various life goals.

### **Answer to Research Questions**

To identify the lived experience of foreign-born Black males in a four-year public research institution. There were four research questions that guided this study. These questions were exploratory in nature and described the essence of being a foreign-born Black male in higher education. The following are answers to the research questions.

#### ***Research Question 1: What are the Lived Experiences of Foreign-Born Black Males Enrolled at a Four-Year Public Research Institution?***

The positive stories were that foreign-born Black male students were able to successfully acculturate and persist at this four-year public research institution. However, many challenges and obstacles were presented. These challenges include family influence and expectations, coping with language proficiency challenges, discovering the race card, adjustment, bridging the gap through campus support programs, and mixed interactions with faculty. Additional challenges at this four-year public research institution revolved around culture shock, discrimination, racism, lack of faculty interaction and engaging socially with staff and mentors.

Another, positive part of these stories was that foreign-born Black males were able to successfully integrate academically at this institution. All of the participants acknowledge that they were able to take advantage of the academic resources that are available at this institution. They felt that this institution did a good job providing academic resources to support students' success. Foreign-born Black male students were able to fully take advantage of the social resources such as student organizations,

mentoring programs, and clubs that are available at an institution in order for them to persist.

From the acculturation model perspective, the participants went through all of the four stages of the culture shock at this institution from both negative and positive aspects of acculturating into a new environment. In telling their stories, the participants indicated no matter how difficult and challenging their experiences were, failing was not an option. As such, they understood their overall purpose for being here at this institution, which was to earn their college degree.

In conclusion, when telling these stories of their lived experiences, foreign-born Black males at this four-year public research institution describe their overall experiences as both extremely positive and negative. Foreign-born black males within this study stated their experiences are worthwhile because they are succeeding and persisting. Overall, the participant revealed that higher education needed to acknowledge that foreign-born Black males are a part of the student body in higher education and their experiences are not the same as native-born Black males.

***Research Question 2: How Do Foreign-Born Black Males Describe Their Academic and Social Integration Experiences While in College?***

The participants within this study describe many factors that impacted their academic integration experiences at this four-year public research institution. All of the participants agreed that this four-year public research institution does a good job providing academic and social resources to support their students. In fact, many of the participants indicated that if it was not for the institutional support provided by this institution they would have not been able to succeed academically. However, many

participants agreed that their classroom experience was exceptionally challenging and complex. They told stories about the classroom atmosphere as being much more segregated and informal than what they were used to in their home countries. In addition, some of the participants indicated that they had negative interactions with faculty at this institution. When telling their stories regarding faculty interactions, participants acknowledge that more could have been done in this area by the faculty and department of this institution to make themselves more available to students.

The participants within this study describe their social integration experiences at this four-year public research institution as a function of time which mean it is a day to day process. They told the stories of how when they first came into this institution they struggled socially. However, as time went by, they were able to successfully integrate socially because they were able to make connections through campus organizations, mentorship, and campus involvement. Most of the participants agreed that they have been positively integrated socially at this institution. The participants have expressed that they have had meaningful social experiences, which played an important role in their ability to persist at this institution. Foreign-born Black males stated campus involvement enhanced their persistence and success. In addition, they discussed the importance of having a racially diverse campus. On campus, with few students of color, it is very important to have ethnic student organizations that can provide foreign-born Black males a safe space where they can be authentic and not have to straddle their culture of origin and the campus' culture.

Moreover, peer interactions contributed positively to integrating foreign-born Black male students into college life and can become a source of distraction that positively

helps student adjustment. The participants' social interactions experience with their peers made their overall experience at this institution less challenging because they were able to build meaningful relationships with their peers that contributed significantly to the transition within the campus environment.

Finally, the lack of engaging with faculty seems to overtly affect the foreign-born Black male student experience. Some of the participants described their inability to find and build connections with faculty on this campus was a disappointment because there is a lack of faculty of color to build connections in and outside of the classroom. When telling their stories regarding engaging with faculty experiences, participants expressed that most of the campus faculty do not make the necessary effort to connect and build mentoring relationships with students. Foreign-born Black males desired long-term mentoring relationships that could have potentially made their adjustment experiences much smoother.

***Research Question 3: How Does Foreign-Born Black Males' Cultural Background Impact Their Persistence in College?***

Foreign-born Black males' cultural background had a significant impact on their persistence in college. The participants express that their cultural background has shaped their ability to succeed regardless of the environment. According to Ogbu and Simons (1998), foreign-born Black males attribute the discriminatory treatment they receive in the United States higher education to their status as "guests in a foreign land" and believe that the barriers they face are temporary challenges they can overcome through hard work, greater acculturation, and academic attainment because of their cultural background. As a result, it was important to them to acknowledge that because of their

different cultures, and background, people at this institution will have different mindsets, expectations and behaviors than they do. The participants told stories about the impact their culture backgrounds had on their ability to overcome the challenges and issues they experience at this institution. For example, the participants explained that they have experience many challenges and obstacles such as; language barriers, racism, and discrimination this institution but they not let those issues stop them being from succeeding.

Furthermore, the participants express that their cultural background taught them to be resilient and that failure was never an option, regardless of the situation. Foreign-born Black male students viewed being at this institution as an opportunity for them to change their lives as the foundation of their future.

***Research Question 4: How Do Foreign-Born Black Males Describe Race as An Impact on Their Persistence in College?***

Foreign-born Black males stated that race had a major impact on their persistence in college. The participants expressed that they grew up and socialized within a homogeneous group where the concept of ‘minority’ and the color of their skin was not at the forefront of their minds. The realization that they were ‘Black’ and a ‘minority’ took place when they enrolled into predominantly white educational institutions. Foreign-born Black males face additional barriers related to intersections of nationality and race. When enrolled in U.S. colleges and universities, they find themselves in new cultural contexts and racial climates (Constantine et al., 2005). The participants indicated that for the first time in their lives race was an issue. Many of the participants indicated they experienced racism and discrimination because of their ethnic background and their skin color.

According to Allen et al. (2008), the race of the student population also influences the ability to retain students. If a student attends an institution with a large population of same race students, the student will be more likely to be retained. Retention due to the ability of students to identify peers who are similar in race and gender is less the action of the institution, though it can be argued if an institution works to ensure that the campus population is diverse with regards to race and gender, students will be more likely to adapt to the environment as they are presented, with fewer new ways of acting and thinking (Allen et al., 2008).

Furthermore, for foreign-born black males becoming aware of their racial and skin color difference was only one aspect of their experiences while attending this institution. The participants stated that one of the most interesting elements to their experience was when they began to perceive differential treatment based on their racial identity or skin color by their peers and some faculty at this institution. For example, participants stated that many of their classmates refused to work with them during group projects because they are Black, and some faculty intentionally ignored their presence in the classroom by not allowing them to participate in class discussions. According to Hemanowicz (2004) faculty who do not engage in conversations with students both during class time and outside of structured classes are often detrimental to student persistence. This causes the students at these types of institutions to feel a disconnect between their academic goals and what they are presented with regarding coursework. These students also reported that they felt faculty were not approachable and were not a source of assistance to their academic progress (Hemanowicz, 2004). While issues of race

had a significant impact on foreign-born Black males overall, experiences at this institution, the participants were able to successfully persist.

### **Recommendations**

Previous studies that focus on Black males in higher education often group the experiences of all Black males together without making the distinction of American Black males and foreign-born Black males because there is limited research that focuses on the foreign-born Black males in higher education. This present study is an addition to the extant literature. Inquiring about foreign-born Black male students in higher education indicated that their lived experience is extremely complex. Although the findings for this study are not universal to all foreign-born Black male students in higher education, the following recommendations from this study can be used to enhance the overall experiences of this specific group and individuals connected to this population.

The first recommendation is that higher education must acknowledge that foreign-born Black male student's populations exist within the higher education community and the experiences are different from American born Black males. Data from this study indicated it is important for higher education to understand the difference between native-born Black males and foreign-born Black males and all Black male students cannot be treated the same because there are nationalities and cultural differences among Black males. With this in mind, this study suggests higher education leaders consciously work to understand the issues that are impacting the foreign-born Black males on campus. One reason for this recommendation is that foreign-born Black male students feel there are issues and challenges such as parental involvement, language proficiency, racism, campus support program, and interactions with faculty, which are impacting the overall



experience for foreign-born Black male students in higher education. According to participants, they view these issues as significant on their ability to persist in higher education.

The second recommendation is to increase the presence of Black male faculty and staff on campus. Data from this study indicated that foreign-born Black males struggle to find male faculty and staff of color to identify with on campus. It is important for foreign-born Black male students to have people they can identify with and relate to in order for them to persist. This study suggests leaders in higher education need to work harder to improve the presence of Black male faculty and staff on campus. The purpose of this recommendation is foreign-born Black male students feel strongly connected to other Black males. According to participants, they view Black male faculty and staff as mentors because they believe they share some similar experiences. According to Bensimon (2007), the increased presence of Black male faculty and staff in higher education strongly benefits both foreign-born and native-born Black male students because they are a visual reminder that they can be successful as well.

The last recommendation to improve the lived experience of foreign-born Black males at four-year research institutions is to establish more campus support programs that focus on both academic and social integration development. According to research, foreign-born Black male students in higher education need more access to campus support programs that discuss challenges they face and advice on how to succeed in education and in society (Rong & Brown, 2001). Establishing more programs such as mentoring programs, tutoring, seminars, and conferences that allow foreign-born Black male students the opportunity to connect and build meaningful relationships both

academically and socially will help them successfully persist in higher education.

Connecting foreign-born Black male students to campus resources not only provides them with the academic and social support they need to help them with their transition process into the institution but it also helps them with their academic and social development for them to persist and to graduate from higher education.

There are some major implications of this research study as it relates to higher education. First, positive academic and social integration is a substantial component of persistence in higher education, and all foreign-born Black male students within this study stated that they had some positive and negative experiences that impacted their persistence. Participants gave suggestions for higher education professionals regarding their lived experiences. Additionally, the findings provide higher education institutions with supporting and descriptive evidence on what could be done if they are serious about retaining and graduating foreign-born Black male students in higher education.

Moreover, higher education administrators can use this information to institute new best practices to improve the lived experiences of foreign-born Black males in the academy. Reflecting on the findings from this study and their implication for higher education institutions will hopefully help to assist in retaining and graduating more foreign-born Black males in higher education.

### **Implications for Future Research**

Further research is essential on the overall experiences of foreign-born Black males in higher education. Specifically, a continuation of further understanding of the characteristics of foreign-born Black male students who persist and those who leave higher education. A comparative qualitative study between Foreign-born Black males and

foreign-born Black female students is recommended. Using similar research questions, higher education professionals might find this study interesting and helpful to retain students. The findings from that study might produce factors that would support persistence and provide more information about acculturation, retention, and persistence factors that impact the Foreign-born Black students in higher education. The findings may also provide a more holistic picture of how foreign-born Black students view factors related to persistence in higher education.

Further research needs to be done on this population to better understand the issues affecting acculturation and transition experiences of foreign-born Black males in higher education. While, this study begins to shed some light on the issues at hand, and helps to clarify the difference between native-born Black males and foreign-born Black males in higher education. The findings discussed in this analysis offer further insights regarding opportunities to conduct more research on this population. Conducting in-depth research on the individual themes may offer greater understanding of the origins and impact of issues on acculturation, transition, and persistence. Specifically, investigating the intricate details of why foreign-born Black students leave higher education would offer valuable data and insight into higher education.

Finally, expanding this qualitative study to include a larger sample size could provide information on factors impacting foreign-born Black males' persistence in higher education. Lastly, a quantitative study approach may allow for the broader generalization of this study's findings.

## **Leadership Reflection**

As a foreign-born Black male and a higher education administrator, I hold a social justice, advocacy, and participatory worldview (Creswell, 2009) in my attempt to try to understand the factors that impact the experiences of foreign-born Black males in higher education. Over the past ten years, I have engaged in many in-depth conversations with numerous higher education professionals regarding Black male persistence, achievement, retention, and graduation rates. My worldview and role in higher education have provided me with a lens that allows me to be critical and analytical about the experiences of people of color in higher education across the racial spectrum. Through this study, I hope to increase retention, graduation, and persistence rates among American-born and foreign-born Black males in higher education. From a leadership perspective, the findings from this study have motivated me, even more, to continue to work harder to create more opportunities for marginalized student groups to have adequate access to good education.

As a social justice leader, this study helped me to understand some challenges and issues foreign-born Black males and other marginalized student groups experience in higher education. According to Theoharis (2007), social justice leaders advocate, lead, and keep at the center of their practice and vision, issues of race, class, gender, disability, sexual orientation, and other historically and current marginalizing conditions in education. As a social justice leader in higher education, it is my responsibility to advocate, support, and empathize with students in order to help them to achieve their educational goals by ensuring that they are receiving fair treatment, and their voice and needs are addressed within higher education.

As a researcher, I acknowledge my standpoint of being a foreign-born Black man and my marginalized position as a man of color in the United States. Instinctively, I chose an interpretative phenomenological analysis approach of understanding that foreign-born Black males' experiences have been overlooked and neglected in American higher education. I learned that my presence as an administrator and faculty member within higher education establishes me as a leader not only to foreign-born and native-born Black males but to all students, because my presence in higher education symbolizes to students that I have the courage and determination to overcome some of the same barriers, issues, and challenges they experience, and if I can do it, they can do too.

This research has taught me a lot in regards to the deep difficulty of emotional, psychological, and physical stress that foreign-born Black male students in higher education experience and how many are overburdened with issues of acculturation and persistence. I can only hope that I will be able to bring awareness and a voice concerning that population throughout higher education.

### **Trustworthiness**

Several techniques were used to ensure that the data analysis and findings represented the participants' experiences. Reliability and validity were employed to ensure additional credibility for this study (Giorgi, 2008). Reliability and validity are means by which quality research is assessed. According to Schwandt (2014), validity is the criteria that serve as a benchmark for inquiry. Lincoln and Guba (1985) indicated that validity is one set of criteria in qualitative research to determine the trustworthiness of the naturalistic investigations and procedures of the study.

In an attempt to further support the validity and quality of the results, the researcher employed Lucy Yardley's (2000) criteria for validity, as recommended by other qualitative researchers (Heffron & Gil-Rodriguez, 2011; Smith et al., 2009). Yardley's work presents a broad array of quality criteria that can be applied in a variety of qualitative studies, including in IPA (Smith et al., 2009). Yardley (2000) details four principles for assessing the merits of qualitative work: sensitivity to context, commitment and rigor, transparency and coherence, and impact and importance, noting that these principles are flexible in their application, but should coincide with qualitative methodologies. Yardley's (2000) criteria were used to ensure that research is indeed credible, both in terms of technique and interpretation, and that the results are an accurate representation of a student's lived experiences in higher education.

To ensure the credibility and reliability of the study. First, the researcher's experiences and understanding of previous experiences have been bracketed, recognized, and identified as part of the research process. This has helped ensure that any preconceived notions about phenomena did not influence the participants or the analysis throughout the progression of the study. All interviews were recorded and transcribed to guarantee accuracy and to ensure that the analysis focused on participant responses. Member checking was used to enhance trustworthiness (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). Member checking is a qualitative term used to determine the trustworthiness of the data analysis (McCoy, 2006). Member checking to ensure that the interview transcripts and recording were an accurate reflection of the participants' thoughts and experiences. Member checking allowed verifying what the participants meant. The participants had the opportunity to review their transcripts for accuracy. Second, each participant was

asked to review the description formulated to determine whether it captured their experience. Finally, I reviewed related literature to provide additional context for the participants' experiences. An iterative process, one based on analysis and participant feedback, helped to ensure that the researcher accurately captured and explained the "essence" of the participants' experiences as foreign-born Black male students.

## **Conclusion**

Foreign-born Black male students contribute both tangibly and intangibly to the university community. Given the importance of the global village, these students serve as intellectual capital and ambassadors of cultural goodwill between their host countries and their countries of origin. Many of these foreign-born Black male students come from homogenous countries that face countless political, economic, social crises. In this study, I examined the overall lived experiences of foreign-born Black males at a four-year research institution.

The foreign-born Black male students in this study provided personal examples of their lived experiences through the conceptual frameworks of culture shock, sojourner adjustment, and academic and social integration. Some of the examples, such as language barriers and racism, are factors that influence foreign-born Black male students' acculturation and persistence in higher education in the United States. This information was important because the experiences of foreign-born Black males in post-secondary education are limited. Their voices are absent from the literature on higher education. Students in this position will have a more difficult time adjusting to and functioning in the United States higher education learning environment. Even so, the findings in this study revealed the fact that foreign-born Black males were persisting in higher education.

All of the participants within this study related race, language barriers, and culture shock as the main factors in all aspects of their lived experience at this institution.

Higher education administrators can use this information to institute new best practices to improve the lived experiences of foreign-born black males in the academy. This can be done by making faculty aware of the perspective and possible academic struggles of foreign-born students in their classes. Further, future aspiring foreign-born Black male students can use this report as a guide on what to potentially expect in higher education and be able to better prepare for the challenges ahead of navigating the campus culture. At a minimum, this information can be used to validate what these students are experiencing. Findings within this study alluded to the fact that foreign-born Black males are persisting in higher education, however, there are many challenges that impact their experiences both positively and negatively. In fact, all of the participants within this study equated family support, race, language barriers, culture shock, and campus support program as the main factor in all aspects of their lived experience at this institution.

Additionally, this study contributed to the literature on foreign-born Black male students in higher education. This contribution to postsecondary education has the ability to increase our understanding of the overall experiences of foreign-born Black male students in higher education across the country. Higher education must begin to acknowledge this population as a member of its student body and become more mindful and sensitive to the experiences of this population to provide appropriate resources. More research on foreign-born Black males persisting in higher education needs to be done to continue to encourage students and help lead them to academic success. Once that affirmation takes place, then and only then can significant strides be made with this



population of students. Although foreign-born Black males are persisting in the higher education system, more attention needs to be paid in order for these students to not only persist, but to graduate.

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## **Appendix A**

### **Email Message**

#### **The Lived Academic and Social Integration Experiences of Foreign-Born Black Males in Higher Education**

Dear:

I am a doctoral student under the direction of Professor James Coaxum at Rowan University. I am conducting a research study to understand the lived experiences of foreign-bong Black Males in higher education. I am inviting your participation, which will involve an audio-recorded interview taking about 45 minutes to an hour of your time. You have the right not to answer any question, and to stop the interview at any time. I am requesting that you read, complete and return the attached Informed Consent form if you accept my invitation to participate in the study. Your participation in this study is voluntary. If you choose not to participate or to withdraw from the study at any time, there will be no penalty, nor will it affect your current or future status as a student. The results of the study may be published; however, your name will not be used. All interview data will be kept locked up and secured and will be destroyed immediately after the conclusion of this study. If you have any questions concerning the research study, please call me at (856-520-9137. You can also contact Rowan University if you have additional questions. The contact information is on the Inform Consent form.

Sincerely,

Eliezer Marcellus, Doctoral Student

## **Appendix B**

### **Informed Consent Letter**

Two copies of the consent form must be signed by you. Please retain a copy for yourself and I will keep a copy for my records. If you have any questions following the study, you may contact Eliezer Marcellus at 856-520-9137 or Emarcellus13@gmail.com .

I \_\_\_\_\_, give my consent to take part in Eliezer Marcellus research study regarding the experiences of foreign-born Black male in higher education. I understand that I will be answering questions concerning my own experience as a foreign-born Black male in higher education. I understand that my participation is voluntary for this study. I understand that I can withdraw from the study at any time, if I withdraw; I understand that my interview questions will be destroyed. To ensure confidentiality, I understand that Eliezer Marcellus will use an alternative name and keep my responses secure in a locked folder on his computer. All records will be kept for the minimum of three years after publication of the study. At the end of that time, the data will be destroyed permanently. If you would like a copy of the result of this study, you can email Eliezer Marcellus at Emarcellus13@gmail.com. I understand that my participation in this study will require responding to interview questions in a single session that will take approximately 45 minutes to an hour. I may refrain from answering any question at any time and I may stop participating in the study at any time with no negative repercussions.

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**Appendix C**  
**Interview Protocol**

Tier 1.

**First Interview Protocol Model**  
**Foreign-born Black Males Persistence in Higher Education**

First, thank you for meeting with me today. Is it okay to tape record this interview so I do not miss anything? You signed the consent form for the interview, however, I want to remind you that your participation is voluntary and you are free to withdraw from this study at any time.

**Background Information**

Participant (alias):

Interview location:

Interview date:

How long you been in this country?

What is your current classification in college?

Are you a first generation college student?\_

What is your major?

### **First Interview questions**

1. As a foreign born black male, please describe your educational experiences at this university
2. How would you describe your overall adjustment to college life?
3. Please tell me about your most rewarding experiences at this institution.
4. Please describe any challenges you face as a foreign-born black male at this institution?

### **Tier 2.**

### **Second Interview Protocol Model Foreign-born Black Males Persistence in High education**

#### **Academic Integration**

1. Please describe your academic experiences here at this University?
2. Please describe any academic services available to you at this university?
3. What are some of the resources you actively used to increase your academic success?
4. How readily accessible are these resources?
5. Describe your classroom experiences this university.
6. Please describe any academic barriers facing you at this institution
7. How would you describe your interactions with faculty at this institution?
8. How would you describe your experiences with the faculty of this institution?
9. How readily accessible are your professors at this institution?
10. Please share additional information about your academic experience at this institution

#### **Social Integration:**

1. Please describe your social experiences here at this institution.



2. Describe social engagement opportunities that are available for you at this institution.
3. Describe the social dynamics of your campus environment.
4. What social factors would you describe as having an impact on your development at this institution?
5. Please describe your social interaction with your peers.
6. Please describe your campus involvement at this institution.
7. Please list any of the campus organizations in which you are involved.
11. Please share additional information about your social experience at this institution.

### **Tier #3**

#### **Acculturation & Race**

1. Describe how your culture has impacted your experiences at this institution.
2. How have your educational experiences been impacted by your culture and race.
3. Please describe how your cultural background impact you as a student.
4. Please describe how race impact you as a student.
5. Please share additional information that has not been presented or addressed in the previous questions.

#### **Language**

1. Please describe how language impacts your educational experiences at this institution.
2. Describe how language impacts your academic success at this institution
3. Have you experience discrimination as a result of your language barrier at this institution? If so, please describe.

4. Describe how language affects your level of engagement academically and socially at this institution?
5. Please share additional challenges you face because of your language barriers?