ABSTRACT

Title of Dissertation:	CROSSING THE CULTURAL BRIDGE: EXAMINING THE CROSS-ETHNIC INTERACTIONS AND RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN BLACK IMMIGRANT AND BLACK AMERICAN STUDENTS AT A PREDOMINANTLY WHITE, PUBLIC, STATE FLAGSHIP INSTITUTION
	Ashley Ogwo, Doctor of Philosophy, 2024
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The discourse surrounding Black immigrant and Black American student relationships in higher education has often centered tensions between the two groups related to their enrollment in private elite institutions (e.g., Bennett & Lutz, 2009; Charles et al., 2008; Massey et al., 2007). However, both inside and outside of the private elite context, there is little research that intentionally examines the cross-ethnic interactions and relationships between Black immigrant and Black American students (Awokoya, 2012; De Walt, 2011; George Mwangi et al., 2016; Jackson & Cothran, 2003). Existing literature's primary focus on circumstances surrounding Black immigrant and Black American undergraduates that are out of their control, such as their respective over- and underrepresentation at elite colleges (Bennett & Lutz, 2009; Charles et al., 2008; Jaschik, 2017; Massey et al., 2007), has left a significant gap in the knowledge base regarding the actual communicative experiences of these student populations across ethnic lines.

Few studies have ventured beyond the private elite institutional context to explore these relational dynamics, resulting in limited scholarly understanding of the benefits and challenges of Black immigrant and Black American interactions and relationship-building from the perspectives of students themselves. This study aims to address these knowledge gaps by examining the cross-ethnic relationship dynamics between Black immigrant and Black American undergraduates in the institutional context they more frequently attend: a predominantly white, moderately selective, public, state flagship institution (U.S. Department of Education National Postsecondary Student Aid Study, 2016, as cited in Espinosa et al., 2019).

Utilizing communication theory of identity and case study methodology, this study empirically unpacks the cross-ethnic interactions and relationships between Black immigrant and Black American undergraduates at a predominantly white, public, state flagship institution in the Mid-Atlantic U.S. This study was guided by the following two research questions: 1) What do Black immigrant and Black American students at a predominantly white, public, state flagship institution perceive to be the role of their ethnic identities in their cross-ethnic interactions with one another? And 2) What do Black immigrant and Black American students at a predominantly white, public, state flagship institution perceive to be the benefits and challenges of Black cross-ethnic interactions and relationship-building?

My study uncovered six themes that were prevalent across participants' case narratives, including three challenges and three benefits to cross-ethnic interactions and relationship-building between Black immigrant and Black American students: 1) Challenge #1: "I Don't Really Have Time": How Students' Schedules Limit Their Cross-Ethnic Engagement; 2) Benefit #1: "For the Sake of Community": Developing Strong Cross-Ethnic Bonds to Support One Another at the PWI; 3) Challenge #2: "Instilled from Childhood": The "Cycle" of Passing Down

Cross-Ethnic Stereotypes and Preconceived Notions; 4) Benefit #2: “Breaking Generational Curses”: Combatting Instilled Interethnic Stereotypes through Cross-Ethnic Communication and Relationship-Building; 5) Challenge #3: “Trying to Reach and Understand the Other Side”: How Lack of Cultural Knowledge Limits Cross-Ethnic Interactions and Relationships; and 6) Benefit #3: “There’s So Much to Learn and Love”: Building Cross-Cultural Understanding through Cross-Ethnic Interactions and Relationships. The study’s findings provide critical insight into existing relational dynamics between Black immigrant and Black American undergraduates, detailing how these students perceive, describe, and make meaning of the relationship between their ethnic identities and their cross-cultural communication experiences with one another as well as the utility of their cross-ethnic interactions.

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by

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Dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School of the
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Dedication

To my grandparents, Richard Ugboma Ogwo, Rosaline Ugboma Ogwo, Julius Igbani Emelogu, and Mary Igbani Emelogu, who – despite only finishing elementary or middle school – understood the value of education and encouraged my parents to pursue it.

To my parents, Iheukwumere Ugboma Ogwo and Florence Igbeaku Ugboma Ogwo, who were not afraid to start over after immigrating to the United States from Nigeria and who continuously sacrificed for my siblings and I to have a happy home.

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To my parents – thank you so much for your love, support, and continued prayers. Dad, thank you for always encouraging me to "go to the highest level" and for reminding me that "[I'm] doing exactly what [I'm] supposed to be doing." Thank you for texting me every night to ask about my day, for reminding me to eat, for our hour-long phone calls, and for always reminding me how proud you are of me. Mom, thank you for always reminding me to keep God first in my life and to rest. Growing up, I was not a fan of your mantra for me, "To whom much is given, much will be required" (Luke 12:48). As a child, I thought it was an unfair expectation. But I understand it now, and I thank you for encouraging me to use the "much" that I have been given by way of gifts and talents to help others. Thank you both for everything you do. Thank you for ensuring that laughter and happiness were consistent parts of our upbringing. It was through you that I learned to be kind, caring, and empathetic. There will never be enough words to express my gratitude to you. I could not have asked for better parents. I love you.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

My name is Ashley. My siblings and friends call me Ash. I was born and raised in Detroit, Michigan. I grew up in a predominantly Black American city, eating pizza, chips, ice cream, and McDonalds. I listened to artists like Biggie Smalls and Usher, courtesy of my older sister. From elementary to high school, I went to predominantly Black American schools. My friends were also Black American. I continuously hear negative stereotypes about my Black American city, but I am proud of my city and its culture.

My name is Uzunma. My parents call me Nma. I was born and raised in Detroit, Michigan. I grew up in a Nigerian Igbo household, eating plantains, jollof rice, rice and stew, and garri with egusi soup. I listened to artists like Agatha Moses and Bob Marley, courtesy of my parents. From elementary to high school, my family and I spent holidays visiting other Igbo relatives. My best friend was also Igbo. I continuously hear negative stereotypes about my Black immigrant heritage, but I am proud of my people and their culture.

Both Ashley and Uzunma represent my background. They represent me, as a child, growing up between a Black immigrant household and a Black American city. They represent the balancing act I had to do in trying to navigate and negotiate both aspects of my Black identity – immigrant and American. I am a Black Nigerian Igbo American who grew up in Detroit, Michigan – a predominantly Black American city. I am a product of two cultures, Black immigrant and Black American, that are often seen to be in competition with one another. Growing up, these two aspects of my identity did not always agree nor were they always in positive conversation with one another. There were times in which one aspect of my identity was made to feel different in ways that the other was not. Whether it was Black Americans seeing me as a child of immigrants or Black immigrants seeing me as an American, there was an in-

between that I had to occupy given my identity as an American-born Nigerian. While this in-between could be othering at times, it was also empowering, particularly as I navigated college. Having come from a pre-college environment where I had limited opportunities to interact with Black immigrants outside of my family and close family friends, the college environment allowed me to join a Black cultural organization that put me in direct and consistent communication with others who shared my ethnic background – the African Students Association. Being in the African Students Association created opportunities for my fellow executive board members and I to collaborate with other Black and ethnically minoritized cultural organizations. These collaborative spaces made it possible for me to not only learn about other cultures but to also offer my own cultural knowledge informed by both aspects of my identity as a Nigerian American. This was empowering because I could actively contribute to conversations that foregrounded my Black identity both as an immigrant and as an American.

Through the in-between space I occupied, I could see the amazing qualities of both of my Black cultures. I could see not just the differences, but also the similarities between Black immigrants and Black Americans in ways that others who only held one of these identities could not. I could see the opportunities for unity and celebration of diverse, multifaceted Black identities where others did not. My unique background of being raised in two distinct cultures – the American Detroit culture and the Nigerian Igbo culture – as well as my experiences navigating the similarities and differences between the two were the impetus for my desire to understand within-group dynamics amongst Black populations.

Because I could see so much potential for Black diasporic relationship-building between Black immigrants and Black Americans, I was often puzzled by the strenuous dynamics I noticed between the two groups. I wondered why terms like “African booty scratcher” and “akata” (a

derogatory Nigerian term often used to refer to Black Americans and even American-born Nigerians) were hurled as insults across Black diasporic communities. I wondered why – in the spaces I occupied from grade school to graduate school – I heard so many assumptions placed on both Black immigrants and Black Americans, including the following: "Black Americans don't value education," "Black immigrants think they are better than Black Americans," "Black Americans are squandering their opportunities in this country," "Black immigrants are taking opportunities from Black Americans," "Black Americans look down on Black immigrants because of their accents," "Black immigrants do not want to be seen as Black."

Recently, the tense relations between Black immigrants and Black Americans have permeated both physical and virtual discussion spaces. In a series of responses that stemmed from a 2014 tweet that Twitter user @Luvvie posted about Black African and Black American relationships (see tweet below), the following was said:

> "Much of the tension between Africans and African Americans exists because we don't talk enough about our uncomfortable relationship." – @Luvvie
>
> "and apparently Afro Caribbeans round up the uneasy trinity smh" – @trinigal
>
> "And we don't listen. Really listen." – @AquafarE

Like these Twitter users, I found that a lot of the tensions between Black immigrants and Black Americans within my communities stemmed from a reluctance to not just speak but to also listen to one another actively and openly. While I saw this lack of Black cross-ethnic engagement in middle and high school, it seemed to become more pronounced in my postsecondary educational experiences. Having both heard and been a part of several failed Black cross-ethnic discussions

during my undergraduate years at a predominantly white[1] institution (PWI), it always frustrated me that the outcomes of Black diasporic communication efforts never lived up to the potential they had to create understanding between Black immigrant and Black American populations. However, through my undergraduate and graduate career, it became more apparent to me that one of the main issues hindering positive Black diasporic conversations was incomplete narratives and assumptions between groups, which played a role in the willingness of Black peoples to communicate across ethnicity.

On one hand, I continuously saw a one-sided narrative being perpetuated of Black immigrants as an unintelligible (i.e., hard to understand because of their accents), unsympathetic (i.e., unsympathetic to the plight of Black Americans), and conniving (i.e., opportunity-stealing) group with a superiority complex. On the other hand, I continuously saw a one-sided narrative being perpetuated of Black Americans as a rude (i.e., disrespectful to Black immigrants), ungrateful (i.e., uncomprehending of the benefits afforded in this country compared to other countries), and lazy (i.e., opportunity-squandering) group with a superiority complex. In both cases, it was clear that these one-sided narratives were used to justify separation of Black immigrant and Black American populations. Even at the graduate school level, I saw students mirroring these one-sided narratives in their comments about Black immigrant and Black American students. For example, in my master's program, I attended a Black faculty-student working group's event in which the keynote speaker discussed the importance of diversifying understandings of Blackness and of knowing how historic meanings associated with the term "Black" differ across social contexts. During the event, a Caribbean immigrant student stood up

[1] In capitalizing "Black," but not "white," I am applying the same principle that Crenshaw (1991) used in her writing to elucidate "Black" as a cultural group – similar to "Asian" and "Latine" – compared to "white," which is neither a cultural group nor a proper noun.

to say that she did not see herself as Black because of her immigrant background and the contrastingly negative connotations associated with being Black in the U.S. context. She specifically said that her Caribbean immigrant background taught her the importance of working hard in school and that she believed that Black Americans did not take school seriously. She emphasized that coming from an immigrant background, she always had to take school seriously and that, comparatively, she rarely saw her Black American classmates working as hard as she did. She stated that she believed more Black American students would do well if they took school seriously. This student's comments perpetuated the narrative that Black Americans are lazy, have little desire to work hard, and do not want to take advantage of the educational opportunities afforded to them in the U.S. Likewise, her comments perpetuated the narrative of Black immigrants being hard workers, focused on education, and superior to Black Americans because of their work ethic.

Another divisive comment I witnessed occurred in a class where I was grouped with other graduate students for a discussion. During the discussion, my group and I launched into a conversation on the issues Black students face both at the K-12 level and the higher education level. The only other Black student in the group, a Black American male, began discussing the racial issues that Black American students face both inside and outside of the classroom. When I mentioned that Black immigrant students also face some of the same racial issues that Black American students face, he began using phrases such as "*real* Black" and "*Black* Black" to separate Black immigrants from the conversation on Black student issues. Specifically, he stated that students who are "real Black" or "Black Black" – substitute expressions he was using to describe Black Americans – were facing racial discrimination more severely than their Black immigrant counterparts in school. I responded by giving examples, stating that Black immigrants

also face some of the same racial profiling issues that Black Americans face because there is no visible label on their bodies that distinguishes them as immigrants. As such, unless they are given the opportunity by police, teachers, or other authority figures to open their mouths – which, sadly, is not always the case in racial profiling incidents – no one would know whether they are immigrants or Americans because all they see is Black skin.

I also told my groupmate that Black immigrant students are "real Black" students as well – like their Black American counterparts – and that while they may not face all the same issues that Black American students face, it does not make them any less Black. While he hesitantly conceded to both points, he did not change his language to include Black immigrant students in his description of students he considered "real Black" or "Black Black." In his initial and subsequent comments, my Black American groupmate was effectively excluding Black immigrant student populations from conversations about Blackness and Black issues, reifying the notion that Black immigrants are not considered "real" Black people or that Black Americans are "Blacker" than Black immigrants. Like the Black immigrant student mentioned in my first example, this Black American student wished to draw a clear delineation between the Black immigrant community and the Black American community. Seeing that divisive, one-sided narratives about Black immigrant and Black American populations were even impacting Black intragroup perceptions and interactions at the highest rungs of the higher education context further propelled my interest in examining and unpacking the relationship between Black ethnic identity and Black immigrant and Black American cross-ethnic interactions. My experiences from childhood to adulthood prompted the development of this research study.

The existing gaps in the literature base on Black immigrant and Black American college students also influenced this study. Much of the scholarly discussion on Black immigrant and

Black American students in higher education has either focused on one group at a time (i.e., Black immigrants OR Black Americans) (e.g., Burt, Knight, & Robeson, 2017; Charles, Kramer, Torres, & Brunn-Bevel, 2015; Constantine, Anderson, Caldwell, Berkel, & Utsey, 2005; Davis, 1994; De Walt, 2011; Doucet, 2005; Eakins & Eakins, 2017; Harper, Patton, & Wooden, 2009; McFarlane, 2010; Sinanan, 2012) or has focused on comparing both groups. These comparisons have particularly focused on examining the two groups' attendance in higher education, outcomes in higher education, or their perceptions of certain contexts and/or experiences in higher education (e.g., Bennett & Lutz, 2009; Burrell, Fleming, Fredericks, & Moore, 2015; Byrd, Brunn-Bevel, & Sexton, 2014). For example, as noted by George Mwangi and English (2017), the literature base on Black immigrant and Black American student populations has largely focused on the assimilation (e.g., Perreira, Harris, & Lee, 2006; Thomas, 2012a) or acculturation (e.g., Fries-Britt, George Mwangi, & Peralta, 2014b; Hersi, 2011) process for Black immigrant students, the college-going processes and experiences of Black immigrant students (e.g., Griffin, del Pilar, McIntosh, & Griffin, 2012), and the perceptions native-born and/or foreign-born Black students have about topics like academic motivation and success, campus racial climate, and sense of belonging (e.g., Daoud, George Mwangi, English, & Griffin, 2018; George Mwangi, 2016; George Mwangi, Daoud, English, & Griffin, 2017; Griffin, Cunningham, & George Mwangi, 2016; Griffin et al., 2012). Although these areas of scholarly exploration are both valuable and necessary in unpacking the diverse thoughts and experiences of Black diasporic students on college campuses, they do not provide a deep understanding of the relationships Black diasporic students seek out, develop, and maintain with one another as they navigate their higher education experiences. Specifically, research that examines Black relationality and relationship-building among Black diasporic students – i.e., the cross-ethnic,

relational and relationship-building experiences of Black diasporic students with other Black students – is lacking. Few scholars (e.g., Awokoya, 2012; De Walt, 2011; George Mwangi, Fries-Britt, Peralta, & Daoud, 2016; Jackson & Cothran, 2003) discuss the actual cross-ethnic interactions of Black diasporic students with one another in the higher education setting. In fact, much of the literature that examines the dynamics or relationships between Black diasporic individuals falls outside of the higher education space, either focusing on Black diasporic youth or adolescents in school (i.e., the K-12 space) (e.g., Okpalaoka & Dillard, 2012; Traore, 2006) or falling outside of the school context entirely (e.g., Jones, Andrews, & Policastro, 2015; Nunnally, 2010; Thornton & Taylor, 1988; Thornton, Taylor, Chatters, & Forsythe-Brown, 2017). Along with my personal experiences of Black relationality described previously, these gaps in the existing literature base regarding Black immigrant and Black American relationship dynamics also provide a formative principle to this study.

Background

Black people reside all over the world, with concentrations of Black communities historically emanating from many African countries and African-descended peoples. Scholars both inside and outside of the academy have written about the Black diaspora as an important aspect of understanding the migration, movement, experiences, and impacts of Black peoples (e.g., Butler, 2005; Mars, n.d.; Understanding Slavery Initiative, n.d.; Zeleza, n.d.). A diaspora refers to "a dispersion of a people, language, or culture that was formerly concentrated in one place, to scatter, to displace, to live in separated communities" (DePaul University Center for Black Diaspora, n.d., para. 1). According to Hall (2021), the Black diaspora – also referred to as the African diaspora, the Black African diaspora, or the African Black diaspora – is defined as both the free (voluntary) and forced (involuntary) movement of Africans and African-descended

peoples to various parts of the world. In other words, the term "Black diaspora" is used to refer to Africans and African-descended peoples dispersed globally, including but not limited to Black African, Black American, Black Caribbean, and Afro-Latine populations worldwide. Given that the Black diaspora is inclusive of all populations identifying with or tracing ancestry to Africa, it is important to distinguish that this dissertation specifically examines the Black diaspora living in the U.S. (i.e., the Black immigrant and Black American populations residing in the U.S. either temporarily or permanently at the time of this study). For this reason, all references to the "Black diaspora" in this dissertation refer to the Black diaspora living in the U.S. at the time of the current study, as this population is the central focus of the study.

Rapid Growth of Black Immigrant Populations in the U.S.

Over the last four decades, the Black immigrant population living in the U.S. has grown exponentially. Increasing from 816,000 in 1980 to 4.2 million in 2016, the number of Black immigrants in the U.S. has quintupled, seeing a 70+ percent rise since the year 2000 (Anderson & López, 2018). According to Pew Research Center's March 2016 Current Population Survey (cited in Anderson & López, 2018), Black immigrants make up about 10 percent of the total Black population in the U.S. Within the U.S. context, the largest concentration of Black immigrant populations come from African and Caribbean countries and islands. As attested by data from the U.S. Census Bureau's 2016 American Community Survey, "approximately 50 percent of all black immigrants come from the Caribbean region, nearly 45 percent from the African continent, particularly from sub-Saharan Africa, and 4 percent from South America" (as cited in Neal, 2020, para. 2). While Caribbean migration has consistently been a large contributor to the rapidly growing foreign-born Black population in the U.S., African migration has also driven a significant amount of the recent growth in the U.S. foreign-born Black population. In

fact, the Black African immigrant population living in the U.S. "more than doubled" between 2000 and 2016, increasing from 574,000 to 1.6 million Black African immigrants (Anderson & López, 2018, para. 3). Altogether, Black Caribbean and Black African migrations have been at the forefront of increasing Black immigration rates, with the top three birthplaces of Black immigrants in the U.S. being Jamaica (17 percent), Haiti (17 percent), and Nigeria (8 percent), respectively (Anderson & López, 2018; George Mason University Institute for Immigration Research, n.d.-a).

Black Immigrants & Black Americans in U.S. Higher Education

In terms of educational attainment, Black immigrants are more likely than Black Americans to hold at least a bachelor's degree, with 26 percent of the foreign-born Black population ages 25 and older being bachelor's degree holders (at minimum) compared to 19 percent of the U.S.-born Black population ages 25 and older being bachelor's degree holders (at minimum) (Anderson, 2015). However, educational attainment rates and levels vary among the Black immigrant population by birth region. Particularly, about 34-35 percent of Black African immigrants have a bachelor's degree at minimum compared to 25 percent of Black South American immigrants, 20 percent of Black Caribbean immigrants, and 17 percent of Black Central American immigrants who are college degree holders (Anderson, 2015; Boundless, n.d.). Additionally, while the overall share of Black immigrants with an advanced degree (i.e., a master's, professional, or doctoral degree) and all U.S.-born Americans with an advanced degree is similar – 10 percent and 11 percent, respectively – Black African immigrants are the subgroup boasting the higher percentage of advanced degrees among Black immigrants (Anderson, 2015; Boundless, n.d.). In 2018, almost 16 percent of Black African immigrants reported having an advanced degree, which is almost 5 percentage points higher than the overall U.S.-born

population who hold an advanced degree (11 percent) (Anderson, 2015; Boundless, n.d.). Through these statistics, it becomes evident that while Black immigrants' overall educational attainment rate is higher than that of Black Americans, Black immigrant educational attainment itself is not a monolithic entity. Factors such as social class and high parental expectations of college attendance can play a role in Black immigrant educational attainment in the U.S., as has been found to be the case for Nigerian immigrant students (Onuma, 2021).

According to federal data, in 2020, the overall college enrollment rate of 18- to 24-year-olds (including undergraduate and graduate students) was 40 percent (National Center for Education Statistics, 2022). After correcting a misclassification error made in federal data that incorrectly classified about 100 community colleges as four-year institutions (due to these colleges offering a small number of bachelor's degree programs), the Community College Research Center (CCRC) found that 44 percent of undergraduate students were enrolled at community colleges during the 2017-18 academic year (CCRC, n.d.). The American Association of Community Colleges found that this percentage was also consistent during the 2018-19 academic year (44 percent of undergraduates were enrolled in community colleges) (CCRC, n.d.). These statistics show that many students are entering higher education through community colleges, which are primarily public two-year institutions. Black students are no exception. A CCRC analysis of federal data found that 44 percent of Black undergraduates were enrolled at community colleges in the 2018-19 academic year (CCRC, n.d.). Multiple data sources indeed confirm that Black undergraduate students are highly likely to attend public two-year institutions (CCRC, n.d.; U.S. Department of Education National Postsecondary Student Aid Study, 2016, as cited in Espinosa, Turk, Taylor, & Chessman, 2019).

For Black bachelor's degree-seeking students (i.e., the demographic this study is interested in), across all sectors (both public and private), public four-year institutions boast the highest undergraduate enrollment rates among all Black students enrolled in bachelor's programs (U.S. Department of Education National Postsecondary Student Aid Study, 2016, as cited in Espinosa et al., 2019). In fact, in 2015-16, over 55 percent of Black students enrolled in bachelor's degree programs attended a public four-year institution (U.S. Department of Education National Postsecondary Student Aid Study, 2016, as cited in Espinosa et al., 2019). Additionally, of all undergraduate students enrolled at public and private non-profit four-year institutions, Black undergraduates are most likely to attend moderately selective institutions[2] (over 54 percent attended moderately selective public and private non-profit four-year institutions in 2015-16) (U.S. Department of Education National Postsecondary Student Aid Study, 2016, as cited in Espinosa et al., 2019). From these statistics, it is made apparent that the types of four-year institutions Black bachelor's degree-seeking students are more likely to attend overall are public and moderately selective institutions. With the overall context and landscape of Black student enrollment in U.S. higher education established, I turn now to an examination of the differences in Black immigrant and Black American student attendance at particular higher education institution types.

Within U.S. higher education, the types of institutions Black immigrant and Black American populations attend vary. According to George Mwangi and English (2017),

[2] The National Center for Education Statistics' measure of institutional selectivity classified the selectivity of public and private nonprofit four-year institutions according to three criteria: "(1) whether an institution was open admission, (2) the undergraduate admission rate, and (3) the 25th and 75th percentiles of ACT and/or SAT scores" (American Council on Education [ACE], n.d.). The classification index that ACE created from the admission rates and ACT/SAT data of non-open admissions institutions defined "moderately selective" institutions as those in the middle two quartiles of the index according to their admission rate and ACT/SAT data (compared to all other public and private nonprofit four-year institutions) (ACE, n.d.).

"approximately 13% of all Black undergraduates are immigrants" (p. 101). However, Black immigrant students are more likely than their Black American counterparts to attend selective institutions, particularly private selective institutions (Massey, Mooney, Torres, & Charles, 2007). Massey et al. (2007) found that 29 percent of Black first-year students at private institutions were of immigrant origin, compared to 23 percent of Black first-year students at public institutions being of native-Black American origin. When examining the Black immigrant population at the most selective private institutions (e.g., Ivy League institutions), this percentage increases significantly, with Massey et al. (2007) finding that 41 percent of Black students at Ivy League institutions in their sample were of immigrant origin, which was 18 percentage points higher than the Black immigrant student population at the state institutions in their sample (23 percent). Massey et al. (2007) also noted that approximately 77 percent of Black first-year students attending public institutions in their sample were of native-Black American origin, compared to 71 percent of Black first-year students at private institutions being of native-Black American origin. In looking at the native-Black American population at the most selective private institutions (e.g., Ivy League institutions), this percentage decreased significantly to 59 percent (Massey et al., 2007). There is also a difference in Black immigrant and Black American student enrollment at historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs): about 19 percent of Black immigrant students attend HBCUs while about 26 percent of native-Black American students attend HBCUs (Jaschik, 2009). Although their attendance at selective institutions varies significantly, Black immigrant and Black American students enroll at non-selective institutions at similar rates, with approximately 42 percent of both populations attending community colleges and 30 percent of both populations attending non-selective, non-historically Black institutions (Jaschik, 2009).

Despite both Black immigrant and Black American students attending a variety of institutions and institution types, the scholarly conversation around these two Black ethnic groups has largely focused on their attendance at private selective institutions. Specifically, the conversation has centered on the overrepresentation[3] of Black immigrant students at private elite institutions and the underrepresentation of Black American students at these institutions (e.g., Bennett & Lutz, 2009; Charles, Torres, & Brunn, 2008; Jaschik, 2017; Massey et al., 2007). While discussions of the overrepresentation of Black immigrant students at elite institutions have been around since 2003 – when "Harvard University professors Lani Guinier and Henry Louis Gates Jr. noted that, of the university's 530 Black undergraduates in 2003-2004, only about 180 could claim a completely Black American heritage" (Nealy, 2009, para. 13) – the conversation vehemently resurfaced in 2017 when a Cornell University student group, Black Students United, called for the University to do more to increase the number of "underrepresented" Black students on its campus (Jaschik, 2017). This student group defined underrepresented Black students as Black American students who have more than two generations of family ancestry in the U.S. (Jaschik, 2017). Black Students United's demand for institutional action was met with criticism, disbelief, and disappointment from Black immigrants – namely expressed in opinion pieces in the Cornell Daily Sun and the Wall Street Journal (Eales, 2017; Ndlovu, 2017; Schaefer Riley, 2017) – with one writer (Eales, 2017) stating that they found what they referred to as the "counterintuitive posturing of American blacks denying other blacks from Africa or the Caribbean" to be "appalling" (para. 2). Black Students United somewhat backtracked their statement after receiving widespread criticism and apologized for "any conflicting feelings" their

[3] It is important to note that the term "overrepresentation" does not mean that Black immigrant students outnumber Black American students at private elite institutions. It means that the percentage of Black immigrant students attending private elite colleges is higher than the overall percentage of the U.S. Black population that they make up.

demand may have aroused in Black communities (Schaefer Riley, 2017, para. 2). However, their demand sparked a resurgence in the debate of who counts as Black when it comes to higher education admissions at elite U.S. institutions.

To reiterate, the hot topic of Black immigrant and Black American student presence in higher education has primarily revolved around their attendance at private elite colleges (and resulting tensions between the two groups), focusing on the overrepresentation of Black immigrant populations and comparative underrepresentation of Black American populations at these institutions. This discourse has informed a lot of the conversation around and between Black immigrant and Black American populations in the private elite institutional context (e.g., Charles et al., 2008; Jaschik, 2017; Massey et al., 2007; Ndlovu, 2017; Schaefer Riley, 2017). However, few studies have sought to unpack the perceptions of both Black student groups regarding how they view and describe their cross-ethnic interactions and relationship dynamics within higher education institutions. Even fewer studies have deviated from the private elite institutional context overall in examining these relational dynamics. Likewise, there is little scholarly understanding of what students view as beneficial or challenging about these interactions and dynamics, particularly in relation to their own Black cross-ethnic (or Black diasporic) relationships and relationship-building. This study seeks to fill these gaps in the knowledge base by examining the inter-relational dynamics of Black immigrant and Black American students in the public state flagship institutional context.

Purpose Statement & Research Questions

Aiming to better understand how Black relationality is addressed by Black diasporic students in higher education, the purpose of this qualitative study is to examine how Black immigrant and Black American students perceive and discuss the relationships between their

ethnic groups in their institutional context. Specifically, the research questions posed in the study are:

- What do Black immigrant and Black American students at a predominantly white, public, state flagship institution perceive to be the role of their ethnic identities in their cross-ethnic interactions with one another?
- What do Black immigrant and Black American students at a predominantly white, public, state flagship institution perceive to be the benefits and challenges of Black cross-ethnic interactions and relationship-building?

Given that Black bachelor's degree-seeking students are more likely to attend public, moderately selective four-year institutions (U.S. Department of Education National Postsecondary Student Aid Study, 2016, as cited in Espinosa et al., 2019), a focus on state flagship institutions – which typically fit the description of a moderately selective, public four-year institution – could provide even more insight into understanding the relationships and interactions between Black diasporic students in a setting where 1) both Black immigrant and Black American communities are adequately represented, 2) the conversation of comparative Black immigrant overrepresentation and Black American underrepresentation is less relevant, and 3) the scholarly exploration of Black relationality has not yet been centered.

Theoretical Framework Overview

The theory I used to frame this study and to help answer the above research questions is communication theory of identity (CTI). CTI focuses principally on the multilayered aspects of identity (Hecht, 1993; Hecht & Lu, 2014; Jung & Hecht, 2004). According to CTI, there are four layers of identity: personal, enacted, relational, and communal (Hecht, 1993). The identity layers emphasize how an individual's identity develops because of a combination of internal and

external factors. Specifically, CTI asserts that both interpersonal and intrapersonal communication impact how an individual perceives themselves and develops their identities (Hecht & Lu, 2014; Jung & Hecht, 2004). The main idea of CTI is that identity (in its various forms) is built, sustained, and evolved through relationships and communication – whether in self-expression of identity, in communication of individual identity to others, or in group identification (Hecht, 1993; Hecht & Lu, 2014; Jung & Hecht, 2004). This theory was beneficial in building a more robust understanding of the relationship between Black immigrant and Black American students' ethnic identities and their interactions and relationships with one another, as is the focus of this study. A more comprehensive explanation of CTI, its components, and its relevance to this study are given in chapter 2.

Problem Statement

Inside as well as outside of higher education, in scholarly literature as well as in conversation, discussions on diversity within the Black diaspora are often little more than discussions of differences between Black-identifying groups. These discussions sometimes depict perceived cultural distinctions between diverse Black populations as gaps that hinder understanding and community-building across ethnic groups. Jackson and Cothran (2003) pointed out the consequences of fears and misconceptions communicated across the Black diaspora. They stated that fears and misconceptions of competition between Black peoples for finite resources (like jobs) and misconceptions of Black peoples seeing themselves as separate from one another "have been perpetuated and continue to carry on the idea that although African people have the same beginnings, they are so different culturally, socially, and intellectually that they should be considered completely separate people" (Jackson & Cothran, 2003, p. 579). While Jackson and Cothran (2003) were highlighting such concerns between Black peoples in

the U.S. generally, these fears and misconceptions of competition between Black peoples for finite resources are also seen in the higher education setting, where resources such as admission to college and scholarships are perceived as limited items for which Black diasporic students must compete (Eales, 2017; Givens Terry, 2019; Jaschik, 2017; Massey et al., 2007; Nealy, 2009; Rimer & Arenson, 2004). Overall, the aforementioned literature (e.g., Givens Terry, 2019; Jackson & Cothran, 2003; Nealy, 2009) highlights how misconceptions can have very real consequences for communication.

Additionally, misconceptions of competition and separation are often bred as a result of language used to frame conversations between Black diasporic peoples. Several works centered on highlighting or facilitating Black inter-ethnic conversations have connected communities with the expression "versus," such as Jackson and Cothran's (2003) use of the phrase "Black versus Black" in the title of their article in the Journal of Black Studies or Peres Owino's (2014) documentary *Bound: Africans vs. African Americans*. In these two cases, the goal of each work was not to divide Black-identifying groups, but to examine the relationships and communication between Black-identifying peoples across the Black diaspora. However, the use of "versus" – particularly having this word centered in the title – can subconsciously set up conversations to be combative or competitive instead of connective as was intended. This observation is not at all meant to condemn the works of Jackson and Cothran (2003) or Owino (2014), rather to highlight the importance of language and the potential unintended consequences that can stem from linguistic choices.

Another example of how certain language can prime a conversation for competition instead of community was evidenced by a former undergraduate's recollection of an event hosted by two Black student organizations on her predominantly white campus (O. Ajetunmobi,

personal communication, October 26, 2022). The first organization was comprised primarily of Africans and led primarily by Africans. The second organization was comprised primarily of African Americans and led primarily by African Americans. Both organizations collaborated to host a dialogue between Africans and African Americans. The flyer that was used to promote the event employed the language "Africans vs. African Americans" and included imagery that showed Africa on one side of the flyer (under the word "Africans") and the U.S. on the other side (under the words "African Americans") (O. Ajetunmobi, personal communication, October 26, 2022). When the time for the event came, the chosen seating and overall mood of the attendees mirrored the flyer's language and imagery of us "versus" them: Africans sat on one side of the room and African Americans sat on the other side (O. Ajetunmobi, personal communication, October 26, 2022). This seating-selection process occurred prior to one word even being spoken at the event, making it apparent that the event flyer's language subconsciously primed the attendees for a debate instead of a dialogue. Participants on each side came in with the mindset that the two groups were opponents and that they had to defend their own group against the other, with much of the talk during the event being defensive instead of conversational (O. Ajetunmobi, personal communication, October 26, 2022). The event eventually devolved into a screaming match between the Africans on one side of the room and the African Americans on the other side (O. Ajetunmobi, personal communication, October 26, 2022). This example further illustrates how language can sometimes overpower or override positive intentions, leading to unintended consequences.

In each of the aforementioned cases, Jackson and Cothran's (2003) emphasis on how perceptions of separation between Black peoples can reinforce narratives of Black diasporic rivalry and animosity becomes more concerning. It is concerning because reinforcement of the

idea of rivalry between Black groups or the idea that differences between Black ethnic groups are too large to effectively bridge the gaps in their communication could lead to decreased attempts at initiating Black cross-ethnic discussions and dialogues or decreased motivation to build Black cross-ethnic relationships overall. Decreased attempts or motivation to build diverse Black relationships could pose a significant problem given the positive impact that creating and sustaining Black peer connections have been shown to have on Black students' success, support, and sense of belonging, particularly at PWIs (Allen, 1992; Fischer, 2007; Fisher & Hartmann, 1995; Fries-Britt & Turner, 2002). These potential consequences can be especially concerning in the higher education setting (the focus of this dissertation), where creating diverse environments and building opportunities for interactions between diverse peoples are considered paramount in improving students' college experiences (both academic and social), promoting students' personal growth, challenging stereotypes, and preparing students for the workforce (American Council on Education Board of Directors, 2012; University of Florida College of Journalism & Communications, 2020). Without Black intragroup conversations and the scholarly examination of Black diasporic interactions and relationships, the risk of perpetuating divisive and incomplete narratives on Black relationality and relationship-building across the Black diaspora remains high. If this risk remains high, divisive and incomplete narratives will continue to stand as barriers to impactful cross-cultural collaboration across Black groups. Without cross-cultural collaboration, diverse Black groups will have limited opportunities to learn from and be in community with one another. For Black students in particular, one of the main challenges of Black ethnic groups not being in community with each other is that they have a more limited pool of individuals from which they can seek and receive support throughout the college experience. On the other hand, one of the key benefits of Black students from different ethnic

groups being in community with one another is that they have the opportunity to expand their support network and potentially learn additional strategies for navigating their institutions.

Future research needs to delve deeper into Black intragroup communication. Within higher education specifically, literature on the relationships between Black immigrant and Black American student populations is minute and severely limited. As George Mwangi and English (2017) stated, education scholarship as a whole has historically centered a "'universal Black experience,' in which the experiences of this population are combined and compared to Whites" (p. 101). Historically, literature has barely disaggregated data on Black students in education much less discussed their within-group interactions. In recent years, scholars have called for more intentional study of within-group differences amongst Black populations, particularly as it relates to unpacking the diverse perspectives, attitudes, and experiences of Black student populations on college campuses (e.g., Daoud et al., 2018; George Mwangi, 2016; George Mwangi & Fries-Britt, 2015; George Mwangi et al., 2016; Griffin et al., 2016; Thelamour, George Mwangi, & Ezeofor, 2019).

As previously stated, scholars (e.g., George Mwangi, 2014; George Mwangi & English, 2017; George Mwangi & Fries-Britt, 2015; Kim, 2014) have found that the larger literature base on Black student populations has a habit of lumping the experiences of Black immigrant and Black American students into one monolithic entity. That said, the limited research that actively disaggregates between the experiences of Black immigrant and Black American student populations typically examines the two groups through a comparative experiential lens, focusing on comparing both academic and social aspects of each student group's experience regarding topics like academic motivation, campus racial climate, and sense of belonging (e.g., Daoud et al., 2018; Griffin et al., 2016; Thelamour et al., 2019). This work in and of itself is critical in

building diverse higher education campuses that are not only responsive to the needs of minoritized students but also mindful of how intragroup differences such as ethnicity or nationality may impact the perceptions students have of the campus and their relationships with their peers or the overall institution. However, just as intragroup differences are important to highlight in the literature base to complicate our understandings of the diverse experiences of Black students in higher education (George Mwangi & English, 2017; Thelamour et al., 2019), it is equally important for research to critically examine and understand intraracial interactions and relationship dynamics between Black ethnic groups to paint a clearer picture of the various types of community-building that take place on higher education campuses. This understanding of community-building is especially vital for minoritized groups on predominantly white campuses, given that existing scholarship has continually pointed to the critical role peer networks play in the personal development and retention of minoritized student groups (Gurin, Dey, Hurtado, & Gurin, 2002; Jones & Abes, 2013; Kim, 2009; Palmer & Gasman, 2008; Palmer, Maramba, & Dancy, 2011).

As it relates to Black students, very few studies seek to examine interethnic relationships between Black immigrant and Black American students (e.g., George Mwangi et al., 2016; Jackson & Cothran, 2003). George Mwangi and colleagues (2016) noted that while higher education research has acknowledged the benefits of cross-cultural interactions, the focus has largely been on cross-cultural interaction across race, not within. There is little research in the field of higher education that seeks to examine Black relationality, which this dissertation employs as a term to describe the cross-cultural and cross-ethnic interactions Black students have with one another. Similarly, there is minimal research that explores Black relationship-building, which this dissertation uses as a term to describe the cross-ethnic and cross-cultural relationships

Black students develop and maintain with one another. Because of the positive impacts that Black peer relationships have been shown to have on Black student experiences in higher education (Allen, 1992; Anglin & Wade, 2007; Griffin & McIntosh, 2015) – especially at PWIs (Anglin & Wade, 2007; Guiffrida, 2003; Thelamour et al., 2019) – it is necessary for higher education research to develop a deeper understanding of Black relationality and relationship-building. This understanding should include awareness of the role that varying identity factors may play in the relationships Black students build, particularly as it relates to how Black students perceive, develop, and maintain relationships with other Black students who hold different ethnicities and/or nationalities.

Additionally, the few narratives that do exist surrounding the relationships between Black immigrant and Black American student populations in higher education tend to be one-sided, typically highlighting the tensions between the groups and little else. The portrayal of these two student groups tends to center the overrepresentation of Black immigrant students at private elite institutions, the underrepresentation of Black American students at private elite institutions, or both topics in ways that subconsciously pit these groups against one another in the ongoing fight for Black representation at highly selective historically white institutions (Jaschik, 2017; Massey et al., 2007). However, these stories focus on the circumstances surrounding Black immigrant and Black American student populations at elite colleges without delving deeply into the actual interactions between these groups on these campuses. In other words, the narrative focuses on the environment that the private elite college has created – one in which Black Americans are underrepresented among the already limited Black student population and Black immigrants are overrepresented among the limited Black student population – without examining the actual nature and quality of the interethnic interactions and relationships these student groups foster

with one another in this academically competitive environment. Because the narrative of Black immigrant and Black American student tension – particularly in the private elite college context – has been at the forefront of topics on interethnic relationships among Black students, the conversation on the connection between ethnic identity and Black diasporic student interactions and relationships often stops there. Outside of mentioning intragroup tensions, there is not much discussion in the literature regarding Black immigrant and Black American student relationships. However, the relationship between ethnic identity and Black cross-ethnic interactions and relationships as well as the benefits and challenges of Black interethnic communication and relationship-building are likely more complex than what has been examined in previous literature. For this reason, it is important to gain students' perspectives outside of the oversaturated private elite college context to begin to understand the true depths of cross-ethnic interactions and relationships between Black immigrant and Black American students. Such scholarly exploration would bring nuance and profundity to a conversation that has mostly occurred at the surface level, which could create new avenues through which Black immigrant and Black American students can examine and strengthen their relationships with one another. As it stands, the current literary oversight (i.e., the lack of scholarly examination of Black intragroup connections) has implications for Black relationality and relationship-building, particularly how diverse Black students relate to one another as well as build community with one another. Understanding Black community-building from a scholarly perspective provides a foundation from which researchers and practitioners can seek to bridge gaps, build relationships, and increase sense of belonging and support among Black students of varying ethnicities.

For a minoritized group such as Black students, the importance of community-building and diverse methods of providing support for these students has been vastly documented (Fries-

Britt & Turner, 2001; Grier-Reed, Madyun, & Buckley, 2008; Grier-Reed & Wilson, 2016; Jackson, 2012; Malcolm & Mendoza, 2014; Palmer & Gasman, 2008; Reddick, 2011; Strayhorn, 2008; Thelamour et al., 2019). Higher education researchers and practitioners have developed many programmatic initiatives in efforts to guide Black students in finding communities that support their retention at predominantly white institutions (PWIs) (e.g., Grier-Reed, 2010; Grier-Reed et al., 2008; Maton, Hrabowski, & Schmitt, 2000). For example, the Meyerhoff Scholars Program – a cohort-based program that was initially created to serve Black STEM undergraduates interested in pursuing Ph.D. degrees and still serves a considerable number of Black STEM learners today – has shown the favorable impact of peer networks on the persistence and academic performance of Black students (Hrabowski, Henderson, & Lane, 2021; Maton et al., 2000; Maton et al., 2012). Given that Black students are a minoritized population that has been identified as needing intentional support efforts from various institutional stakeholders (e.g., Grier-Reed, 2010; Hughes & Howard-Hamilton, 2003; Merritt, Bergman, & Berry, 2017; Miles, Bertrand Jones, Moore Clemons, & Golay, 2011; Lee Williams & Nichols, 2012; Waller, Costen, & Wozencroft, 2011), it can be presumed that understanding more about how and with whom Black students build community would be necessary in both research and practice. Likewise, understanding how Black immigrant and Black American peer groups build community with one another could offer deep insight for scholars and practitioners as they explore creative and contemporary ways to advance support initiatives for diverse Black students.

Put simply, a scholarly focus on the ethnic demographic makeup of the Black student population (i.e., each Black ethnic group's presence or lack thereof) on private elite college campuses leaves a large empirical gap in the knowledge base regarding the interethnic

interactions and relationships between diverse Black student populations. While a scholarly focus on demographic makeup has been necessary in ongoing efforts to intentionally diversify student bodies at PWIs and increase minoritized student access to these institutions – as evidenced by Hurtado et al.'s (1999) campus racial climate model (particularly its compositional diversity element) and resulting works stemming from the model – more attention should also be paid to understanding the intragroup interactions minoritized students have once they get to these campuses to understand more about their higher education experiences beyond enrollment. As it relates to understanding more about minoritized students' experiences on college campuses, the examination of relationality and relationship-building provides critical understanding of the peers and community-building resources that minoritized students seek out. The topic of peers and other community-building resources minoritized students seek out has become more prevalent in higher education research given both scholarly interest in best practices to support and retain minoritized students at PWIs and scholarly findings around the importance of community and relationship-building in supporting and retaining minoritized students at PWIs (e.g., Good, Halpin, & Halpin, 2000; Kim, 2009; Landry, 2002; Ovink & Veazey, 2011; Palmer et al., 2011; Shotton, Oosahwe, & Cintrón, 2007). This study directly aligns with the expressed interest of scholars seeking to better understand the relationships of minoritized students at PWIs. Specifically, this dissertation is interested in exploring the relationships and interactions of Black diasporic student populations. More information is needed on both the interethnic interactions and relationship dynamics of Black immigrant and Black American student populations on college campuses as well as these groups' perceptions of how their ethnic identities impact their relationships with one another on college campuses. The current study aims to fill this gap in the literature.

Significance

This study contributes several important points to the knowledge base. By intentionally examining interethnic interactions and relationships among Black immigrant and Black American populations, this study moves away from narratives such as assumed Black ethnic "self-segregation" expressed by student participants in previous literature (e.g., George Mwangi et al., 2016; Thelamour et al., 2019), claiming that Black students prefer to interact solely with other Black students who share their ethnic identities or do not wish to interact cross-ethnically with other Black students at all. Such narratives can spotlight the impact of interethnic differences on Black diasporic communication while ignoring the important cross-cultural learning occurring within Black communities that stems from their cross-cultural interactions and relationship-building with one another – as George Mwangi and colleagues (2016) found in their study of the impact of within-race interactions on students' academic development.

This study also contributes to deepening our understanding of what Black diasporic students perceive to be the potential benefits and challenges associated with cross-cultural communication within the Black community. Up to this point, scholars have primarily discussed perceived conflict between Black diasporic groups. This study can contribute to identifying Black students' perceptions of the positive aspects of cross-cultural interaction and what can be gained by interacting with other Black diasporic students. Additionally, we can learn about other challenges Black diasporic students face in their cross-cultural communication that do not solely revolve around competitive admissions or over/under-representation, as is often the case in the private elite college context. This study allows the students to tell their own stories without imposing narratives of division on them. The current study provides the opportunity to deepen our scholarly understanding of both the benefits and challenges of communicating across

difference, particularly when examining intraracial differences in the higher education context. In understanding how ethnic groups describe the benefits of their communication with others of their own racial groups, we can potentially expand our existing understanding of how cross-difference interaction can benefit student development of intercultural competence, a skill that has been deemed a valuable and necessary outcome of higher education (Feng, 2016; Riley, 2007; Riley, Bustamante, & Edmonson, 2016; Williams, 2013).

Additionally, this study further complicates the narratives of Black student populations in U.S. higher education – specifically Black immigrant and Black American students – by shifting away from the monolithic narratives of Blackness and Black identity that have permeated higher education research for too long. This study also has implications for stakeholders who are interested in understanding the within-group relational experiences of other racial groups who, like Black populations, experience similar monolithic narrativization in higher education research and practice, such as Asian and Asian American populations and Latine populations. Specifically, this study models a conscious move away from the racial/ethnic essentialization of Black student populations and relationships in higher education and encourages others to make comparable moves for similarly essentialized groups. The current study highlights the increased need for understanding the importance of ethnic diversity and the role it plays in students' relationships and experiences in higher education. This understanding is critical in ensuring that resources tailored to particular student racial groups (in this case, Black students) account for factors such as ethnic diversity within racial groups, diverse needs within racial groups, and how such factors may result in differential (or similar) higher education experiences between same-race counterparts.

In addition to providing higher education stakeholders with insight to better tailor experiences, programs, and initiatives to meet the needs of diverse Black students, this study also facilitates better understanding regarding which aspects of intragroup relationships and interactions are beneficial in students' eyes and which are not. This discernment could lead to more effective cross-cultural community-building efforts within racial groups (e.g., community-building across ethnicity and nationality) as well as more scholarly exploration of the concept. An increase in scholarly exploration of the topic would be immensely helpful in initiating practical intragroup communication initiatives that are based on empirical data. Lastly, this research encourages scholars to move away from assumptions of what may hinder cross-difference interactions within Black student populations (e.g., self-segregation, overrepresentation or underrepresentation at elite colleges) towards empirical data that tells a more detailed story of intra-Black interactions, relationship dynamics, and relationship-building from the student perspective.

Overall, as discussions of ethnic diversity within Black populations become more expansive, the topic of relationality across the Black diaspora becomes even more salient. Scholar-practitioners must understand the racial intragroup interactions and relationship-building that occurs between Black ethnic groups. How Black peoples engage across difference – particularly how they engage across difference within the same racial group – is an area that requires further scholarly exploration. Moreover, further research needs to investigate how Black diasporic peoples approach discussions regarding their cross-ethnic relationships with one another. This study seeks to fill these gaps.

Terminology

In the U.S. context, the term "Black immigrant" commonly refers to foreign-born Black persons who immigrate to the U.S. from another country. Although typically used to refer solely to foreign-born Black persons, from this point forward, this dissertation utilizes the term "Black immigrant" to refer to foreign-born Black persons as well as their children, (i.e., children with both parents born in another country and children with one parent born in the U.S. and one parent born in another country, known as second-generation and 2.5-generation immigrants, respectively). As Massey et al. (2007) noted, although many Black immigrant students were born in the U.S., they are the children of parents born outside of the U.S. and, as such, were still raised in an immigrant household. For this reason, the term "Black immigrant" is still relevant in describing children of immigrants and has also been used to identify them in previous research (e.g., Anderson & López, 2018; Awokoya, 2012; Charles et al., 2008; Clark, 2008; De Walt, 2011; George Mwangi, 2014; Onuma, 2021; Tauriac & Liem, 2012). Additionally, common trends found with foreign-born immigrant students, such as increased likelihood to enroll at elite institutions, were also observed in students who were children of immigrants. For example, studies such as Charles and associates (2008) observed that "even after controlling for students' social origins, academic backgrounds, and pre-collegiate experiences, second-generation African and Caribbean Black students were twice as likely as U.S.-origin (i.e., third-plus-generation) Black students to attend the most elite NLSF [1999 National Longitudinal Survey of Freshmen] institutions" (Tauriac & Liem, 2012, p. 2). Given that such effects regarding second-generation immigrants were found in previous studies, it makes sense for this study to group the children of Black immigrants into the category of "Black immigrant" as well, since the considerations and impacts of immigration have been found to last through the second generation (Charles et al., 2008).

In contrast to the Black immigrant delineation, the term "Black American" is used in this dissertation to refer to Black persons with a minimum of two familial generations born in the U.S. (i.e., third-plus-generation Black persons who were born in the U.S. to two U.S.-born parents). Because this third-plus-generation delineation has been made in previous studies referring to Black American populations (e.g., Charles et al., 2008; Massey et al., 2007), it makes sense for this study to continue using the term in ways with which previous literature and scholars are familiar.

It is also necessary to define the term "relationality" in order to grasp how the term "Black relationality" is being utilized in this study. Mayhew (2015) explained the concept of relationality, stating "[r]elational means indicating relation(s) or relationship; concerning the way in which two or more people or things are connected. It would follow, therefore, that relationality means 'being related to'; 'in a relationship'; 'connectedness'" (p. 422). Stemming from Mayhew's (2015) definition, this dissertation uses the term "relationality" to describe the ways in which groups are connected, particularly paying attention to interactions and relationships. This study is specifically interested in examining Black relationality, using Black relationality as a lens through which to examine and comprehend the relationships, communications, and interactions between Black immigrant and Black American students. As stated previously, this dissertation uses the term "Black relationality" to describe the cross-cultural and cross-ethnic interactions Black diasporic students have with one another. The term "Black diasporic students" is used to describe Black-identifying and Black-identified students across the U.S. Black diaspora, both those born in the U.S.[4] and those born abroad.

[4] Black-identified students born in the U.S. includes those born in the five inhabited U.S. territories – territories that are administratively overseen by the U.S. federal government and are not sovereign entities. These territories are American Samoa, Guam, the Northern Mariana Islands, Puerto Rico, and the U.S. Virgin Islands (Cotter, n.d.).

As this dissertation is also interested in Black relationship-building, I want to reiterate how the term is being used. For the purpose of this study, "Black relationship-building" is used to describe the cross-ethnic and cross-cultural relationships Black diasporic students develop and maintain with one another. Together, the study uses "Black relationality" and "Black relationship-building" as lenses through which to examine the cross-ethnic, relational and relationship-building experiences of Black diasporic students with other Black students. There is no one definition of Black relationality provided in academic scholarship. For this reason, I am intentionally stating that how I conceptualize, understand, and frame Black relationality and relationship-building in the context of this study may look different from how others do so in their own bodies of scholarship.

Given that this study examines the interactions and relationship dynamics between Black immigrant and Black American students, I explain here how the terms "interactions" and "relationship dynamics" are defined and operationalized in the study. A standard definition of interactions is "occasion[s] when two or more people or things communicate with or react to each other" (Cambridge English Dictionary, n.d.). In this dissertation, I am adding to this general definition by defining "interactions" as particular encounters between Black immigrant and Black American populations. I use this definition of "interactions" in my study to identify and analyze participants' descriptions of particular encounters between Black immigrant and Black American students on their campus, whether their own encounters or those of others.

Similarly, for the term "relationship dynamics," I build upon a constructed definition of relationship dynamics, as there is currently no clear, singular definition of the term. For this reason, I adapt two existing definitions that describe relational dynamics, combining them into a

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Despite being established by U.S. Americans, the West African country of Liberia – also known as the Republic of Liberia – is not a U.S. territory, as it is not under the administration of the U.S. (Encyclopedia Britannica, n.d.).

more generalizable understanding of "relationship dynamics." The first existing definition I adapt is licensed individual and couples' therapist Dr. Irina Firstein's definition of a "relationship dynamic": "a predictable pattern of interaction or communication between a couple" (Firstein, n.d.). The second existing definition I adapt is from the American Psychological Association's Dictionary of Psychology (n.d.), which defines the term "interpersonal relations" as "the connections and interactions, especially ones that are socially and emotionally significant, between two or more people; the pattern or patterns observable in an individual's dealings with other people." Integrating the definitions provided by these two sources, I simplify the term "relationship dynamics" to refer to a pattern of communication, connection, or interaction between two or more individuals. For the purpose of this study, I am concerned with relationship dynamics as it relates to an individual's stance or viewpoint on the pattern of communication and interaction between ethnic groups. In this dissertation, I specifically define "relationship dynamics" as overall outlooks regarding the state of the relationship between Black immigrants and Black Americans. I use this definition of "relationship dynamics" in my study to identify and analyze participants' descriptions of their perceptions or opinions regarding the condition of the relationship between Black immigrant and Black American students on their campus.

Lastly, I define how the terms "racial identity" and "ethnic identity" are used in this dissertation. The term "racial identity" in the U.S. context typically refers to certain physical features or attributes of a person's identity, most conspicuously including a person's skin color. Individuals in the U.S. are typically categorized as belonging to a racial group based on the perception of their physical attributes. Additionally, a racial categorization system is utilized in the U.S. Census to provide more concrete delineations of racial identity. These racial identity delineations are thoroughly explained in Chapter 2 wherein Black identity in the U.S. context is

discussed further. For now, this dissertation utilizes "racial identity" in alignment with both the U.S. Census' racial categorization system – particularly the categorization of "Black" on the census – as well as the perceptions of a person's physical attributes related to race (i.e., skin color) (particularly related to the Black race).

In the U.S., the term "ethnic identity" often refers to facets or characteristics of a person's identity related to their cultural identification(s) or association(s) (Green, Sarrasin, & Fasel, 2015). Cultural aspects of a person's identity can include national origin, tribal affiliation, traditions, values, beliefs, and norms often associated with a particular group (Green et al., 2015). As such, the term "ethnic identity" is used in similar ways in this study to examine the cultural characteristics of Black immigrant and Black American students' identities. This dissertation centers ethnic identity as opposed to national origin. The primary reason for this focus is that the existing discourse surrounding tensions between Black American and Black immigrant student populations does not solely stem from differences in nationality or national origin (i.e., birth country, country of origin). This is evidenced by the fact that both first-generation immigrants (i.e., people born in another country who immigrate to the U.S.) and second-generation immigrants (i.e., people born in the U.S. whose parents were born in another country before immigrating to the U.S.) are grouped together when admissions advantages or group representations are discussed (Charles et al., 2008). Despite being born in the U.S., just as Black Americans are, second-generation immigrants are still seen as more connected to the country their parents immigrated from than to the U.S. (e.g., Awokoya, 2012; De Walt, 2011; Okpalaoka, 2009). For this reason, it is evident that the discussion regarding Black immigrant and Black American student populations is not just nested within the realm of national origin but also within the realm of ethnic identity.

Chapter 2: Literature Review & Theoretical Framework

Chapter 2 is comprised of four sections – three of which are a review of relevant literature and one of which is an explanation of the theoretical framework apprising the current study. This chapter starts by offering an extensive examination of several bodies of scholarship relevant to my topic of study and ends by providing exposition regarding the theoretical framework used to frame my study. The review of the literature consists of three sections. In the first section, I discuss the history of Black participation in the U.S. higher education system, tracing Black peoples' long-term and continuously evolving involvement in U.S. higher education since its inception. I cover the roles enslaved Black peoples had in early U.S. higher education and the limited inclusion of Black students in early white higher education institutions. I then provide a condensed history of historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs) and discuss the role these institutions played in educating Black peoples both prior to and after *Brown v. Board of Education* and other court-mandated school desegregation efforts. I conclude this literature section by explaining Black attendance trends across both predominantly white institutions (PWIs) and HBCUs.

In the second section of my literature review, I outline how Black identity is constructed in the U.S. context. I begin by describing how racial and ethnic identity are defined and operationalized in the U.S. I then discuss how these racial and ethnic constructions coincide with the contemporary positioning of Black racial and ethnic identity in the U.S. and the interchangeable use of racial and ethnic identity terms to describe Black peoples in this country. I wrap up this section by providing insight into how Black identity is often depicted in higher education research, citing relevant literature that helps explain the ways higher education researchers have conceptualized Black identity in the scholarship base.

In the third and final section of my literature review, I analyze Black relationships in higher education, particularly focusing on Black peer relationships. I highlight existing narratives on Black cross-cultural interactions and relationships, discussing factors that previous literature has identified as impacting Black cross-ethnic relationships in higher education (e.g., racial cohesion, feelings of connectedness to racial identity, salience of Black immigrant ethnic identity, cross-ethnic perceptions) as well as detailing what the literature has to say about Black immigrant and Black American student cross-ethnic interactions in particular. The chosen literature bodies ultimately work together to set a context for this dissertation's population of interest, choice of research site, and overall research framing, scope, and focus.

After the literature review, I give further insight into the theory used to frame the study: communication theory of identity (CTI). While a brief introduction to the theory was provided in Chapter 1, the theoretical framework section in the current chapter expounds upon the individual components of the theory as well as the collective significance of the theory in the study. A summary of the theory's layers, the potential relevance of each layer to the study, and the theory's overall contribution to the framing and execution of the study are provided.

History of Black Participation in U.S. Higher Education

Enslaved Black Peoples in U.S. Higher Education (1600s-1770s)

Although Black people were not always allowed to attend U.S. higher education institutions as students, they played pivotal roles in the construction and operation of U.S. higher education institutions since their inception. When higher education institutions were first established in the U.S., they were primarily created to educate white, male ministers or clergymen (Geiger, 2014). While the individuals who attended these institutions were elite white people, the individuals who provided the labor for building these institutions were enslaved

Black people (Forson, 2020; Schuessler, 2017; University of Virginia President's Commission on Slavery & the University, 2018; Wilder, 2013). Enslaved Black people physically built the structures of U.S. higher education institutions, providing forced free labor toward the buildings' construction (Mustaffa, 2017; Schuessler, 2017; Wilder, 2013). For example, Wilder (2013) pointed out that when the first president of Dartmouth College – Eleazar Wheelock – set out to start the college, he "set out for Hanover with a small group of students, his family, and eight enslaved black people" (p. 113). Wheelock brought these enslaved Black people with him to "start, build, and work the institution" (Mustaffa, 2017, p. 714).

After these early higher education institutions were built, Black people's roles shifted from construction to operation or maintenance of the institutions and their stakeholders. Enslaved Black people served as caretakers, maids, cooks, groundskeepers, among other things to ensure the smooth day-to-day running of early higher education institutions (Dancy, Edwards, & Davis, 2018; Mustaffa, 2017; Wilder, 2013). Not only did enslaved Black peoples serve the institutions directly, but they also served the *leaders* of these higher education institutions directly, with many high-ranking higher education administrators owning enslaved Black peoples (Dancy et al., 2018; Mustaffa, 2017; Wilder, 2013). These top-ranking officials used enslaved Black people for both institutional and personal service (Dancy et al., 2018). For example, Harvard University's former president, Increase Mather (who served as president from 1692 to 1701), "used an enslaved man 'gifted' to him by his son Cotton Mather, to run errands for the college" (Dancy et al., 2018, p. 182). Similarly, former presidents of institutions such as Princeton and Georgetown, used enslaved Black people as personal attendants throughout their presidential tenures (Dancy et al., 2018; Wilder, 2013). Enslaved Black people were also used as house servants who maintained university presidents' mansions (Dancy et al., 2018), further

illustrating their role in both the personal and organizational aspects of maintaining early U.S. higher education institutions.

In addition to building and maintaining higher education institutions during the colonial era, enslaved Black people were also used as sources of entertainment for white students during these early years (Dancy et al., 2018). As Dancy and colleagues (2018) stated, "[i]nducing the humiliation and suffering of Black people for sport comprises the early student life in the colonial colleges" (p. 183). For example, white college students at schools such as Harvard College, Yale College, Williams College, and the University of North Carolina forcibly intoxicated, attacked, raped, and shot at enslaved Black people – among engaging in other violent activities – for "recreation" or "to satisfy their boredom" (Dancy et al., 2018, p. 183; Wilder, 2013). Through such examples, it becomes increasingly evident that Black peoples – both enslaved and free – have historically been a part of the academic, personal, and social aspects of U.S. higher education before they were ever allowed to enter its doors as students.

Limited Inclusion of Black Students in Early White U.S. Higher Education Institutions (1790s-1830s)

Before the 1960s, Black people were largely prohibited from attending U.S. higher education institutions (Kenyon College, n.d.; Library of Congress, n.d.). In 1790, John Chavis – a Presbyterian minister and teacher –became the first known Black person to attend a U.S. college or university (The Journal of Blacks in Higher Education, n.d.). However, according to *The Journal of Blacks in Higher Education* (n.d.), there is no record that Chavis ever obtained a degree from the institution he attended (the institution Chavis attended is now known as Washington and Lee College in Virginia). It was not until 1823 that the first Black person was recorded to have graduated from a U.S. college (The Journal of Blacks in Higher Education,

n.d.). This student was Alexander Lucius Twilight, who received a bachelor's degree from Vermont's Middlebury College[5] (The Journal of Blacks in Higher Education, n.d.). The 1820s also saw the graduations of the second, third, and fourth Black people from U.S. colleges including Amherst College in Massachusetts, Bowdoin College in Maine, and Dartmouth College in Connecticut (The Journal of Blacks in Higher Education, n.d.). Similarly following the trend of other Northern private elite institutions admitting minoritized students, Oberlin College in Ohio – founded in 1833 – became the first college to admit students irrespective of race "as a matter of official policy" (Pilgrim, 2010, para. 2). Although most of the early institutions that became trailblazers by way of admitting and graduating Black students were private institutions, Newark College – now known as the University of Delaware – appeared to become the first state flagship university to graduate a Black student (The Journal of Blacks in Higher Education, n.d.). Researchers believe Isaiah G. DeGrasse was the first Black person to graduate from the state flagship institution in 1836 (The Journal of Blacks in Higher Education, n.d.).

Brief History of Historically Black Colleges & Universities (1830s-1960s)

Despite early efforts by some colleges to enroll Black students in the 1800s, most U.S. higher education institutions remained segregated until well into the 1900s (Allen, Jewell, Griffin, & Wolf, 2007). For example, as a result of *Plessy v. Ferguson (1896)*, colleges and universities in the South were allowed to legally bar Black students from admission into their institutions (Allen et al., 2007). Because of this legal educational segregation, historically Black

[5] It should be noted that researchers have not reached a clear consensus on which Black person was the first to graduate from a U.S. college (Pilgrim, 2010). Some researchers believe the first Black college graduate was Alexander Lucius Twilight (who graduated from Middlebury College in 1823), some believe Edward A. Jones (who graduated from Amherst College in 1826) was the first, while others believe John B. Russwurm (who graduated from Bowdoin College in 1826) was the first Black college graduate (Pilgrim, 2010).

colleges and universities (HBCUs) were established for the specific purpose of educating Black populations in the U.S. The first HBCU, Cheyney University[6] in Pennsylvania, was founded in 1837 to educate free Black peoples (Gasman, Lundy-Wagner, Ransom, & Bowman, 2010). According to Gasman and colleagues (2010), early HBCUs were often privately funded by religious organizations to give basic, primary education to former enslaved and other Black people seeking literacy. With the presence of these early HBCUs, Black illiteracy declined from 95 percent to 30 percent by 1910 (Gasman et al., 2010). As the Black literacy rate increased, the educational agenda of HBCUs expanded to include high schools, seminaries, industrial schools, and, significantly, colleges and universities (Gasman et al., 2010).

The growth and expansion of HBCUs were aided by the passing of the Second Morrill Land Grand Act of 1890, in which it became a requirement for states to either show that race was not a criterion for admission into existing public colleges and universities or establish separate land-grant institutions for the Black population (Gasman et al., 2010). With this declaration, seventeen federally funded, public HBCUs were established (Gasman et al., 2010). Another major piece of legislation that impacted the structure and functioning of HBCUs was *Brown v. Board of Education* in 1954 (Roebuck & Murty, 1993). With the *Brown v. Board of Education* ruling and three other Supreme Court rulings that deemed the concept of "separate but equal" as unconstitutional, U.S. higher education began the slow process of desegregation. Prior to 1954, both public and private HBCUs were segregated by law and, as such, were "the only educational option for African Americans until *Brown v. Board of Education*" (Gasman et al., 2010, p. 8). Although segregation was deemed unconstitutional in *Brown v. Board of Education*, "significant desegregation did not occur until after passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which prohibited

[6] Despite its establishment in 1837, Cheyney University did not become a degree-granting institution until 1932 (The Journal of Blacks in Higher Education, n.d.).

… the spending of federal funds … in segregated schools and colleges" (Roebuck & Murty, 1993, p. 667). Additionally, with the passing of the Higher Education Act of 1965, HBCUs were given a clear, federal delineation, being defined in the Higher Education Act of 1965 as "…any historically black college or university that was established prior to 1964, whose principal mission was, and is, the education of black Americans, and that is accredited by a nationally recognized accrediting agency" (White House Initiative on Advancing Educational Equity, Excellence, & Economic Opportunity through Historically Black Colleges & Universities, n.d.). Today, there are over 100 accredited public and private HBCUs located in 20 states, Washington, D.C., and the U.S. Virgin Islands (Saunders & Nagle, 2018). As a result of the desegregation of U.S. higher education institutions, both the number of Black students attending predominantly white institutions and the number of Black students attending historically Black institutions changed drastically.

Black Attendance at Predominantly White Institutions & Historically Black Colleges and Universities (1960s-Present)

As mentioned previously, rulings and legislation such as *Brown v. Board of Education* and the Civil Rights Act of 1964 really helped to change the types of educational opportunities available to Black students. According to Allen and colleagues (2007), *Brown v. Board of Education* "opened the doors to higher education for many African American students" (p. 264). In fact, between 1950 and 1975, Black student college enrollment grew by almost 600,000 students (Allen et al., 2007). Not only was there a positive shift in the overall number of Black students attending college, but there was also a very pronounced shift in the types of higher education institutions Black students chose to attend (Gasman, 2013). Allen and colleagues (2007) noted that "[p]rior to the 1950s, Blacks were almost exclusively educated at HBCUs" (p.

264). However, following the integration of predominantly white institutions, the U.S. saw an astonishingly large increase in the number of Black people attending predominantly white colleges and universities (Allen et al., 2007). As mentioned by Allen and colleagues (2007), "by 1975, approximately three-quarters of Black college students attended traditionally White institutions" (p. 264).

In addition to school desegregation, other factors also prompted Black students to enroll at PWIs at higher rates. For example, factors such as affirmative action, increased access to financial aid, better academic reputations, and better academic resources led many Black students to attend PWIs (Glenn Jones & Davenport, 2018; Kenyon College, n.d.). Comparatively, Glenn Jones and Davenport (2018) noted that Black student enrollment at HBCUs decreased from 17 percent in fall 1980 to 13 percent in 2000 to "just nine percent" in 2015 (p. 63). With that said, Black student enrollment at HBCUs has seen an increase over the last few years. Saunders and Nagle (2018) recently found that, on average, HBCUs enroll approximately 24 percent of all Black undergraduates pursuing a bachelor's degree. HBCUs also award approximately 26 percent of all Black bachelor's degrees, which is significant given its small proportion of the nation's colleges and universities (HBCUs only make up 3 percent of U.S. colleges and universities) (McClain & Perry, 2017; Saunders & Nagle, 2018).

In this section, I discussed the historic roles of enslaved peoples in higher education, the limited inclusion of Black students in early white higher education institutions, how limited inclusion of Black students in early PWIs led to the creation of HBCUs, how HBCUs have historically and contemporarily served Black student populations, and how Black student attendance at PWIs and HBCUs has evolved over time. This section helps to not only illustrate that Black people have been a key part of the foundation of U.S. higher education since its

creation but to also highlight the shifting roles that Black populations have had in U.S. higher education from the past to the present day. From their presence as enslaved builders of higher education institutions to their presence as students in colleges that have both historically accepted and historically isolated them, understanding the history of Black participation in U.S. higher education establishes a precedent for recognizing how Black students may choose to interact with others in higher education spaces. Particularly, in predominantly white institutions – which is this study's setting – how and with whom Black students choose to interact is partly tied to the historic and systemic legacies of enslavement, oppression, segregation, and racism that are embedded in the structure of these institutions. Such legacies are relevant to this study as they can aid in explaining why Black students may choose to interact with other Black students or to seek out Black spaces at predominantly white institutions. Black relationships and interactions in higher education are discussed further in the third section of this literature review. Also tied to the relationships and interactions of Black students in higher education is how Black identity functions in the U.S. The topic of Black identity in the U.S. context is covered in the following section.

Black Identity in the U.S. Context

Situating Racial & Ethnic Identity in the U.S.

Racial and ethnic identity in the U.S. context is often situated monolithically. Specifically, racial and ethnic identities in the U.S. are commonly conflated, referred to synonymously, or used interchangeably. This is particularly prevalent in research. For example, a large amount of psychology and early education literature either used the joint term "racial/ethnic identity" to describe racial identity or used the term "ethnic identity" to discuss racial identity (e.g., Ajibade, Hook, Utsey, Davis, & Van Tongeren, 2015; Boatswain & Lalonde,

2000; Hyers, 2001). In these cases, the terms "racial/ethnic identity" and "ethnic identity" are both being used to talk about race without examining ethnic identity itself. Although "racial identity" and "ethnic identity" are terms that have distinct meanings in the U.S. context, how these terms are addressed and used in literature can often mask or hide the differences between these identities, and as such, mask the complexities surrounding these two identities.

To understand how the interchangeable use of these terms is relevant to the topic of Black immigrant and Black American identity, it is first important to further explore racial identity and ethnic identity, and how these terms are used in the U.S. context. In the U.S., racial identity commonly refers to physical attributes of a person's identity, prominently including their skin color. In addition to a sixth category labeled "Some Other Race," the 2020 U.S. Census used the following five racial categories for identification purposes, asking individuals to mark their race using one or more of the categories as they were applicable: 1) Black or African American, 2) White, 3) American Indian or Alaska Native, 4) Asian, and 5) Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander (U.S. Census Bureau, 2021). Differentially, ethnic identity in the U.S. often refers to aspects of a person's identity related to their cultural identification(s) or association(s) (Green et al., 2015). Given that ethnic identity deals with an individual's culture, it can often coincide with other cultural aspects of identity such as nationality, tribal affiliation, beliefs, values, norms, and traditions (Green et al., 2015). The U.S. Census offers the following two classifications of ethnicity for individuals to choose from: "Hispanic or Latino" or "Not Hispanic or Latino" (U.S. Census Bureau, 2021). These classifications of race and ethnicity mean that a person can racially identify as white while also ethnically identifying as Hispanic or Latino. Similarly, a person can racially identify as Black while also ethnically identifying as Hispanic or

Latino – a racial/ethnic combination that is increasingly being referred to by the term "Afro-Latinx" (e.g., García-Louis, 2016; García-Louis & Cortes, 2020).

Given that the U.S. Census only inquires specifically about Hispanic or Latine ethnic identification, those who do not ethnically identify as Hispanic or Latine have their ethnic identities simplified under the category "Not Hispanic or Latino." With the lack of ethnic identity disaggregation of non-Hispanic/Latine populations at the federal level, it could be inferred that perhaps race is seen as a more effective measure for understanding the experiences of diverse U.S. populations or that the experiences the "Not Hispanic or Latino" populations have related to their ethnic identities are better understood through the lens of their racial identities and experiences. In other words, it may be seen as more relevant to catalog, theorize, and understand the experiences of more people in the U.S. through the larger lens of race than it is to catalog, theorize, and understand the experiences of people through the lens of ethnicity. Whatever the reason, ethnic identity is not disaggregated at the federal level beyond the acknowledgement of Hispanic or Latine identity. Put simply, at the federal level, ethnic identity is not measured in the same way nor in the same amount of depth as racial identity. Felix and associates (2015) stated that higher education "institutional actors often pay attention to what is measured and reported publicly" (p. 40). It would then follow that, because ethnic identity is not measured and reported as publicly as racial identity, higher education institutions also do not pay much attention to ethnic identity and its implications in the same vein as they do racial identity. At the highest level in the U.S., the ethnic identities of non-Latine populations are not being disaggregated. It would be logical to assume that other institutions, such as higher education, may subconsciously fall into the habit as well. Unfortunately, we see evidence of this practice across various bodies of research.

Black Racial Identity, Ethnic Identity, & Common Interchangeable Use of Identity Terms

Understandings of race and connections to the idea of Blackness often differ depending on the geographic, societal, and demographic context in which Blackness is being discussed. The populations that are considered Black are not always constant, as there are various understandings of race worldwide (De Walt, 2011; Fries-Britt, George Mwangi, & Peralta, 2014a; Griffin et al., 2016). Cultural and immigrant backgrounds in particular play a large role in considerations of race as it relates to Blackness (Fries-Britt et al., 2014a; Kent, 2007). In the U.S. context, "Black" is often synonymous with the term "African American." The two terms are sometimes used interchangeably to discuss the experiences of U.S.-born Black people whose families have been in this country for more than one or two generations (De Walt, 2011). However, Black immigrant populations are also included in the U.S. categorization of "Black/African American" (Kent, 2007; Kim, 2014). Because of their inclusion in the category of Black/African American, Black immigrants' experiences related to their identities are often presumed to be similar to and consequently lumped in with Black American populations (Kim, 2014). This is evident across various fields of research in which there has historically been little disaggregation of data that examines Black populations, as pointed out by scholars such as George Mwangi (2014) and George Mwangi and English (2017).

As mentioned above, the terms "Black" and "African American" are often used interchangeably in the U.S. without thought to the distinctions between the two terms. Although the grouping of these terms is likely meant to capture those who fall into either or both categories, an unintended result has been the interchangeable use of the terms to describe the overall Black experience in the U.S. Given the definitions of racial identity and ethnic identity provided above, it should be noted that, in the U.S. context, "Black" is a racial identity while

"African American" is more of an ethnic identity. This distinction is further evidenced in literature on and by Black immigrants that mention the lack of connection they feel with the term "African American" given its use to typically refer to descendants of U.S. chattel slaves and Black immigrants' differential backgrounds and experiences compared to their Black American counterparts (e.g., Hernandez & Murray-Johnson, 2015). In other words, these terms should not be considered synonymous, especially as the population of Black people in the U.S. continuously evolves. As the number of Black immigrants entering this country and having children continues to grow (Capps & Fix, 2012), the experiences of Black people in the U.S. can no longer be solely encompassed by the term "African American."

In fact, the conflation or interchangeable use of Black identity terms can be severely limiting for those who either were not born in this country (Hernandez & Murray-Johnson, 2015) or were born in this country to immigrant parents (De Walt, 2011), particularly given the connections they oftentimes still feel to their immigrant background. For example, in his study on the identity perceptions of first generation U.S.-born Africans (FGAs) at a PWI, De Walt (2011) highlighted that within "[the U.S.] context's historical legacy, FGAs' identities have often been defined or limited," which – he argued – "set[s] the stage for many of the tensions and harmonies" between the groups he discussed in his study: first-generation U.S.-born Africans, continental Africans, and generational African Americans (p. 16). He believed that limiting how we perceive the identities of these Black students in the U.S. context has a direct impact on the relationships between their ethnic groups as it relates to perceived harmonies and tensions across groups (De Walt, 2011).

Unfortunately, research that unpacks the experiences of Black immigrant students' (both first- and second-generation immigrants) related to their Black racial identity in the U.S., their

nationality, and their ethnicity has been rare. Only in recent years has there been a surge in the literature base discussing the racial identity development and experiences of Black first-generation immigrant students (those born outside of the U.S.) and second-generation immigrant students (those born in the U.S. to immigrant parents) (e.g., George Mwangi et al., 2017; George Mwangi et al., 2016; Griffin et al., 2012; Thelamour et al., 2019). For example, De Walt (2011) noted the stark lack of research focused on understanding the racial development of first-generation U.S.-born Africans. He described the problem with this gap, stating that FGAs are often subjected to some of the same stereotypes that Black Americans are subjected to (due to their phenotypic similarities), which can have significant impacts on their sense of identity. Yet – De Walt (2011) continued – their racial identity development is rarely studied. In his own study, he found that FGAs' understandings of and connections with Black identity varied, with some seeing it as more connected to the African American experience while others saw "Black" and "African American" as distinct categories. Given the similarities and differences in the racial perceptions and experiences of Black immigrant and Black American student populations in the U.S., it is important for scholars and practitioners to understand the complexities of Black identity and how these complexities impact the diversity of experiences Black students have in higher education.

Existing research suggests that there are different constructions and understandings of Blackness across the Black diaspora (De Walt, 2011; George Mwangi, 2016; Hernandez & Murray-Johnson, 2015). However, existing models of Black identity development do not reflect these distinctions. For example, according to Fries-Britt and colleagues (2014a), little research has examined the process foreign-born students of Color must go through to learn race and racism within the U.S. context. In essence, foreign-born students of Color are coming into the

U.S. looking at issues of race and racism through the lenses of their home countries. As such, the racial identity development process for foreign-born Black students can be extremely different from that of native-born Black students. Nevertheless, developmental theories such as Cross' (1995) Nigrescence model do not address Black racial identity development for Black immigrants, choosing to focus more so on a Black American model of racial identity development. In addition to distinctions in racial identity development, foreign-born people of Color may perceive and respond to racialized experiences differently than native-born U.S. peoples, such as was found in Fries-Britt et al.'s (2014a) study on foreign-born students of Color. Given the differential racial understandings of foreign-born Black people, their perspectives on and experiences with race in the U.S. context can be distinct in ways that must continue to be unpacked in theory and practice.

Depictions of Black Identity in Higher Education Research

The depiction of Black identity in scholarly literature has remained largely unchanged with regard to the type of Black identity and experience being discussed. That is to say that Black identity in literature has mostly been depicted monolithically (Hernandez & Murray-Johnson, 2015; Nunnally, 2010). In talking about Black identity and experiences within the United States, George Mwangi and English (2017) stated that scholars and practitioners have often addressed and treated this racial group as though there is a singular Black experience applicable across all members. This narrative is particularly prevalent in education research. Education research is prescribing a universal Black student experience where there is none (George Mwangi & English, 2017). In other words, there is a singular story of Black students being told in this body of literature. According to Charles et al. (2015), use of what are considered to be traditional concepts and definitions of Blackness restrict our knowledge base

and understanding of racial identity. Education scholarship rarely looks within race to identify differential experiences of Black students. Charles et al. (2015) noted that intraracial differences, especially among Black students, was not of interest in early education research. Typically, education research compares the experiences of Black students to those of white students, implicitly assuming that there is a universal Black experience (George Mwangi & English, 2017). This research rarely investigates ethnic diversity in Black student populations and, thus, higher education institutions are not always aware of the best ways to support these students.

According to Thelamour et al. (2019), higher education institutions are not looking into how to support ethnically diverse Black students. They are not understanding how particular issues can differentially impact Black students of varying ethnicities. For example, intersectional identities of Black students, such as socioeconomic status and citizenship, impact their understandings and perceptions of their racial identity as well as their experiences on college campuses. Identities such as ethnicity and nativity help to complicate our understanding of Black identity among students. If such factors are not considered with regard to support for Black students, initiatives to aid in the recruitment, retention, and success of Black students will continue to be lacking or inadequate.

Within the last decade, the higher education literature on Black identity has expanded (George Mwangi et al., 2017; George Mwangi et al., 2016; Griffin et al., 2012; Thelamour et al., 2019). Whereas the majority of literature previously solely included the experiences of African Americans in their discussions of Blackness, the understanding of Blackness has evolved to be more globalized. Now, groups such as Africans and Caribbeans are being included in literature on Blackness, Black identity, and Black experiences (George Mwangi, 2016; Griffin et al., 2012; Hernandez & Murray-Johnson, 2015). For example, several articles discussed the perceptions

and experiences of African and Caribbean immigrants as it relates to their experiences with race in U.S. America (e.g., Hernandez & Murray-Johnson, 2015). The inclusion of these groups' perspectives and experiences shows an increasingly active attempt by scholars to combat the myth of the Black monolith. By including diverse narratives in their research, others are able to understand the multiplicity and complexity of identity that fall underneath the descriptor of Black. However, one gap that still exists in the literature base on Black diasporic students is scholarly examination of the relationships between Black immigrant and Black American student populations.

Black Relationships in Higher Education

Black Peer Networks & Relationships

The relationships that students develop with their peers have consistently been found to have tremendous impacts on the student experience, both academically and socially (Allen, 1992; Astin, 1993; Strayhorn, 2018; Tinto, 1993). Peer relationships are an influential part of the college student experience overall – affecting student outcomes such as sense of belonging, involvement, academic performance and achievement, personal and intellectual development, and college transition and adjustment (Antonio, 2001; Astin, 1993; Fischer, 2007; Harper & Quaye, 2009; Locks, Hurtado, Bowman, & Oseguera, 2008; Quaye & Harper, 2015; Strayhorn, 2018; Tinto, 1993). With that said, peer relationships are an especially critical aspect of the Black college student experience (Allen, 1992; Anglin & Wade, 2007; Fries-Britt & Turner, 2002; Palmer & Gasman, 2008; Sinanan, 2012; White & Cones, 1999). Several scholars have pointed to the importance of positive peer relationships in facilitating favorable social processes for Black students including fostering a sense of belonging amongst Black students, easing their adjustment to the college environment, and helping them feel supported on their campus (Fries-

Britt, 2017; Fries-Britt et al., 2014b; Gasman, Nguyen, Conrad, Lundberg, & Commodore, 2017; Lancaster & Xu, 2017; Stolle-McAllister, 2011). Peer relationships have been found to assist Black students academically as well, increasing their understanding of course materials, bolstering their motivation, and promoting their development and persistence (Fries-Britt, 2017; Gasman et al., 2017; Lancaster & Xu, 2017; Palmer & Gasman, 2008).

Not only do peer relationships as a whole influence the aforementioned student outcomes for Black students, but positive same-race peer relationships specifically also play an important role in Black students' collegiate experiences (Fries-Britt & Turner, 2002; George Mwangi et al., 2016; Hannon, Woodside, Pollard, & Roman, 2016; Jackson & Hui, 2017). Black students who are able to build peer networks and relationships with other Black students experience benefits such as increased sense of belonging, feelings of community, feelings of validation, and increased cultural awareness and engagement (Allen, 1992; Apugo, 2017; Fries-Britt & Turner, 2002; George Mwangi et al., 2016; Lewis, Mendenhall, Harwood, & Hunt, 2013). This is especially critical in predominantly white colleges and universities, where Black students frequently report facing obstacles and problems such as racial discrimination, microaggressions, stereotyping, feelings of isolation, and decreased sense of belonging (Allen, 1992; Anand & Hsu, 2020; Apugo, 2017; Beasley, 2016; George Mwangi, Thelamour, Ezeofor, & Carpenter, 2018; Harper, 2009; Harper & Hurtado, 2007; Patterson, 2021; Sinanan, 2012; Smith, Yosso, & Solórzano, 2007; Solórzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000).

Developing peer networks, particularly Black peer relationship networks is one way that Black students try to combat or minimize the effects of the predominantly white institutional environment (Allen, 1992; McCabe, 2015; Thelamour et al., 2019). At PWIs, Black students often use Black peer networks to validate and affirm their experiences, increase their sense of

comfort and security, empower themselves and one another to persist, and maintain their connection to their racial and ethnic identities (e.g., Allen, 1992; Gilkes, 2019; Guiffrida, 2003; Thelamour et al., 2019; Williamson, 1999). Because Black students are a minority in the predominantly white institutional environment, they can sometimes feel isolated or alone on their campuses (Allen, 1992). For this reason, the ability to have other Black students in the educational space with them, particularly in the classroom, is often seen as important for Black students and offers them a sense of comfort (Davis, Dias-Bowie, Greenberg, Klukken, Pollio, Thomas, & Thompson, 2004). However, Black students at PWIs can sometimes be one of few or the only Black student in their class or even in their major (Booker, 2016). As such, Black students at PWIs must often seek out co-curricular spaces such as student organizations, or campus cultural centers to connect with other Black students (Griffin & McIntosh, 2015; Guiffrida, 2003; Museus, 2008; Sanders, 2016). Engaging with other Black students or seeking out predominantly Black student spaces at PWIs (e.g., Black Greek-letter organizations, Black academic organizations, or Black social/cultural organizations) can provide Black students with a sense of community and the ability to see others who look like them on their predominantly white campus (Griffin & McIntosh, 2015; Harper & Quaye, 2007; McClure, 2006; Thelamour et al., 2019).

Additionally, being around other Black collegians can provide Black students with a space where they can authentically express themselves without fear of racial judgment (Guiffrida, 2003). For example, Guiffrida (2003) found that the Black students in his study saw Black student organizations as places of "respite" (p. 17), where they could feel comfortable being themselves, wearing clothing such as do-rags or baggy jeans, using slang, speaking openly about political views, and temporarily blending in on their otherwise predominantly white

campus. Engaging with same-race peers can also give Black students space to discuss negative racialized or racist experiences with others who can relate to their experience or have had similar racialized encounters themselves (Guiffrida, 2003; Jackson & Hui, 2017; Leath, Quiles, Samuel, Chima, & Chavous, 2022; Sanders, 2016). Black peer networks can also serve as information-sharing spaces where Black students can divulge important information and share academic tips and success strategies with other Black students (Gilkes, 2019; Leath et al., 2022; Williamson, 1999). For example, Black participants in various qualitative studies have reported getting both academic and social advice from their Black peers including encouragement to speak up in classes and feel that they belong in the academic space (Leath et al., 2022), socialization regarding the racial realities they will encounter on their predominantly white campuses (e.g., stereotyping, racial discrimination) (Harper, 2013), and general support for "ensuring their psychological and emotional health" at their predominantly white institution (Williamson, 1999, p. 97).

Connecting with same-race peers can also aid Black diasporic students in feeling connected to their racial or cultural background and/or the larger racial or cultural climate of their institution. For example, both Black immigrant and Black American students in Leath and colleagues' (2022) study reported feeling culturally connected to other Black students for reasons such as shared or similar familial backgrounds, upbringings, and cultural norms as well as familiarity or comfort being around other Black people (which was particularly relevant for students from predominantly Black neighborhoods or precollege environments) (Bentley-Edwards & Chapman-Hilliard, 2015; Torres & Massey, 2012). Interacting with same-race peers from the same ethnic group (i.e., interacting with other Black immigrants or Black Americans) is also beneficial for Black students, particularly for Black immigrant students who are able to

connect with others who share similar cultural backgrounds and lived experiences related to immigrating to another country (Fries-Britt et al., 2014a, 2014b; Griffin et al., 2016; Griffin & McIntosh, 2015; Leath et al., 2022; Malcolm & Mendoza, 2014; Thelamour et al., 2019). Additionally, Black immigrant students benefit from relationships with Black American peers. As suggested by several scholars (e.g., George Mwangi et al., 2016; Griffin & McIntosh, 2015), the relationships Black immigrants build with Black American students can offer them key insight into the new educational and cultural environments in which they find themselves. For example, Black immigrant students have been found to learn more about the racial climate of their institutions and the broader U.S. through their interactions with Black American peers (e.g., Fries-Britt et al., 2014a, 2014b). Through such cross-ethnic interactions, not only do Black immigrant students often gain insight that helps them navigate the predominantly white institutional context (e.g., Fries-Britt et al., 2014b; Griffin & McIntosh, 2015), but also both Black immigrant and Black American students gain more cultural insight and appreciation for one another (e.g., George Mwangi et al., 2016).

Existing Narratives on Black Cross-Cultural Interactions & Interethnic Relationships

As mentioned in Chapter 1, seminal scholarship on Black diasporic relationships (Jackson & Cothran, 2003) stated that African peoples across the diaspora – i.e., Black people from Africa and those with African heritage – have been taught to see each other as so different that they are essentially separate people. This research further outlined how perceived differences have bred fear and misconceptions that have led to perceived rivalries amongst Black diasporic peoples (Jackson & Cothran, 2003). Such perceptions may be why there has been little scholarly study of cross-cultural interactions and perspectives across the African diaspora. As it stands, there is a limited amount of research that examines the interactions and relational

perspectives of Black peoples across Black ethnic identities (Nunnally, 2010; Thornton, Taylor, & Chatters, 2012; Thornton et al., 2017) and even less scholarship that examines these cross-ethnic interactions amongst Black students in higher education specifically (e.g., Jackson & Cothran, 2003; George Mwangi et al., 2016). Because these bodies of literature are small, I use this section to (1) detail the identity factors related to Black student cross-ethnic relationships in higher education as a whole, then (2) focus in on Black student cross-ethnic interactions in particular. I first address the factors that impact Black cross-ethnic relationships in higher education. These factors include (a) racial cohesion, (b) feelings of connectedness to racial identity, (c) salience of immigrant ethnic identity, and (d) cross-ethnic identity perspectives. I then address the smaller literature base on Black student cross-ethnic interactions specifically, detailing the work of several scholars who have been foundational to this line of inquiry.

Factors Impacting Black Cross-Ethnic Relationships in Higher Education

There is a multitude of factors that impact Black student relationships in higher education (Leath et al., 2022). One of the main factors that can affect Black student relationships in higher education is intersectional identity, particularly the intersection of Black students' racial identity and another identity such as nativity (George Mwangi, 2016), ethnicity (Griffin, Cunningham, & George Mwangi, 2016), gender (Winkle-Wagner, Kelly, Luedke, & Reavis, 2019), sexuality (Squire & Mobley, 2015), or social class (Charles et al., 2015; Torres & Massey, 2012). When it comes to the relationships that Black immigrant and Black American students develop with one another, their perceptions of the relevance or salience of their racial and ethnic identities – both individually and communally – play a large role in the relationships they build with one another. In this section, I discuss the foundations that Black students' perceptions of (1) racial cohesion, (2) connectedness to racial identity, (3) salience of immigrant ethnic identity, and (4) cross-

ethnic identity perspectives set for their cross-ethnic relational experiences with one another. These factors are important to name and consider, as they provide necessary context for understanding and examining the actual relationships and interactions that occur between Black immigrant and Black American students (Leath et al., 2022; Thelamour & George Mwangi, 2021).

Racial Cohesion. Racial cohesion is defined as "the intersection of racial identity, common fate destiny, and sociopolitical agency" (Bentley-Edwards, 2016, p. 73). Specifically, racial cohesion deals with interlocking race-oriented concepts such as how connected one feels to their racial identity, how one behaves regarding their racial identity, and how one perceives their stake in the matter of their race's success (Bentley-Edwards, 2016). For example, Bentley-Edwards (2016) asserted that a high racial cohesion "represents a connection based on the struggles and triumphs of Black people in the United States and abroad" (p. 76). Racial cohesion encompasses intrinsic, extrinsic, and relational aspects of racial identification and how one relates to their individual positioning in a group racial identity. According to Bentley-Edwards (2016), racial cohesion "can be described as how racial identity, behaviors, relationships, interests, and/or agency regarding one's own racial group coalesce" (p. 76). While the concept of racial identity (which includes connectedness to racial identity) and the concept of racial cohesion are closely related, Bentley-Edwards (2016) expressed an important delineation or distinction between the two, stating:

> Whereas racial identity focuses on the self-concept processes related to the significance of and attitude toward one's racial group based on a common history and shared values (Sanders Thompson, 1999; Scottham, Cooke, Sellers, & Ford, 2010; Sellers, Smith, Shelton, Rowley, & Chavous, 1998; Thompson, Anderson, & Bakeman, 2000), racial

> cohesion demonstrates the attitudinal, interpersonal, and behavioral manifestations of this attachment. Thus, racial identity focuses on how one feels about being a Black person, while racial cohesion reveals enactments of these feelings. Furthermore, racial cohesion includes a specific race-based connection that may represent a distal emotional connection with the global Black community as well as a proximal, behavior-based bond to Black spaces. (p. 76)

Racial cohesion is important to understand because it can impact how one interacts with other members of their racial group (Bentley-Edwards, 2016). For Black-identifying individuals specifically, racial cohesion can "determine how an individual perceives and interacts with other Blacks, or Black spaces" (Bentley-Edwards, 2016, p. 76).

One aspect of racial cohesion that has been focused on within literature examining Black immigrant and Black American dynamics specifically is common fate destiny. For example, Nunnally (2010) considered the shared experiences of Black people across the diaspora and how these commonalities impacted their within-group dynamics. She believed that the concept of Black linked fate could be relevant in qualifying the relationships between Black-identifying peoples, focusing on their feelings of connection with one another. Black linked fate refers to the idea that all Black individuals share a linked future based on their common experiences with race and racism (Dawson, 1994 as described in Nunnally, 2010). Nunnally (2010) believed Black linked fate would potentially lead Black individuals to build relationships across ethnic differences and stick together because they have similar racialized experiences. Nunnally (2010) specifically examined Black Americans' perceptions of Black linked fate with West Indian and African in the U.S. The study investigates the extent to which intra-racial socialization messages that children receive from their parents influences or impacts Black Americans' perceptions of

Black linked fate, which the author also referred to as diasporic linked fate (Nunnally, 2010). Nunnally used Dawson's (1994) Black linked fate as a theoretical lens through which to test her assumptions. In essence, she wanted to test the theory of Black linked fate and the idea that Black Americans' experiences with race and racial discrimination unify their personal interests with other ethnic groups included in the Black diaspora (i.e., Africans and West Indians in the U.S.) (Nunnally, 2010). According to Nunnally (2010), Black linked fate's theoretical background considers factors such as who is considered "Black" in the United States, differential understandings of Black identity across the African diaspora, the role of racial socialization in diasporic linked fate, and perceived frequency of racial discrimination among Black populations.

In her study, the author utilized quantitative methods, using a web-based survey she created called the National Politics and Socialization Survey (NPSS) (Nunnally, 2010). The survey questions focused on participants' racial and political socialization experiences, interracial and intraracial attitudes, and attitudes about current events. Nunnally (2010) used data from the 2007 NPSS, specifically limiting her data analyses to the 424 Black respondents in the survey who identified as African American. She conducted quantitative coding and regression analysis to analyze her data. She examined distinct variables, including linked fate with Black people in America, linked fate with West Indians, linked fate with Africans, perceived commonality and differences in U.S. Black ethnic experiences, and diasporic linked fate. In her results, Nunnally (2010) found that many Black Americans acknowledged the concept of Black linked fate and understood its relevance; however, they described varying degrees of linkages that differed based on ethnicity. Specifically, Black Americans perceived the experiences that Black Africans and West Indians had with racism as different from their own racialized experiences. Relatedly, many reported having "more tenuous linkages" with their African and

West Indian counterparts in the U.S. (Nunnally, 2010, p. 335). Overall, Nunnally (2010) asserted that "[w]hile intra-racial socialization messages offer some import in explaining perceived differences in Black ethnic groups' living experiences, more frequent experiences with racial discrimination, and membership in a Black organization offer more import in explaining diasporic linked fate" (p. 335).

Although Thornton and colleagues (2017) did not use terminology such as racial cohesion or common fate destiny, they similarly examined aspects of what Bentley-Edwards (2016) described sets racial cohesion apart from connectedness to racial identity, which is that racial cohesion "reveals enactments" of "how one feels about being Black" (Bentley-Edwards, 2016, p. 76). According to Bentley-Edwards (2016), racial cohesion "includes a specific race-based connection that may represent a distal emotional connection with the global Black community" (p. 76). Thornton and associates (2017) investigated feelings of closeness between Black ethnic groups. They specifically sought to understand whether Black Americans and Caribbeans felt close to Africans (Thornton et al., 2017). The scholars believed that the shared experiences Black Americans, Caribbeans, and Africans have related to Black racial identity in the U.S. could potentially outweigh the differences associated with ethnicity, thus making the Black ethnic groups feel closer (i.e., shared experiences navigating race and racism in the U.S. context may make Black Americans and Black Caribbeans feel closer to Black Africans) (Thornton et al., 2017). The scholars did not identify a theory or conceptual framework utilized in their study. Nonetheless, they used existing literature on the following topics to frame the study: Black ethnic identities and relationships, the operation of race and ethnicity in the U.S. social context, ingroup and outgroup attitudes of Black-identifying peoples, and possible factors that affect feelings of closeness to Black Africans (Thornton et al., 2017).

Thornton and team (2017) used the National Survey of American Life: Coping with Stress in the 21st Century (NSAL) as their primary data source. They specifically examined a subset of data related to African Americans and Black Caribbeans. The original NSAL data consisted of 6,082 interviews conducted with African Americans, Black people of Caribbean descent, and non-Hispanic white people (all aged 18+). In focusing on African American and Black Caribbean participants, the scholars examined the responses of 5,191 participants ("3,570 African Americans" and "1,621 Blacks of Caribbean descent") (Thornton et al., 2017, p. 498). The scholars conducted quantitative regression analyses of the NSAL data, examining questions posed and answered using Likert-type categories and values (Thornton et al., 2017). For example, they examined questions such as "How close do you feel in your ideas and feelings about things to Black people in Africa?" which included the following response categories and associated values: 4 = very close, 3 = fairly close, 2 = not too close, 1= not close at all (Thornton et al., 2017, p. 498).

The authors found that – of the two groups of interest – Black Caribbeans felt closer to Black Africans than Black Americans did (Thornton et al., 2017). This finding may be a result of similar immigration experiences and/or concerns of foreign-born Black peoples. For example, the scholars believed that Black Caribbeans having more extended family in different countries played a role in their feelings of closeness to Black Africans, as Black Africans also have many extended family members in other countries (Thornton et al., 2017). Additionally, the commonalities in Black Caribbeans and Black Africans holding other identities as salient in their home countries compared to the U.S. (e.g., the salience of ethnic identity compared to racial identity) may have also factored into their feelings of closeness to Black Africans, as many Black Caribbeans and Black Africans in the U.S. come from countries with predominantly Black

populations. The notion of differential salient identities for Black immigrants from predominantly Black contexts is discussed further in the literature review subsection on the salience of Black immigrant ethnic identity.

Although neither Nunnally's (2010) study nor Thornton et al.'s (2017) study explored the concepts of racial cohesion and Black linked fate in relation to Black relationships in higher education specifically, both articles provide important details on and examples of how the concept of racial cohesion can impact the relationships between Black immigrants and Black Americans. Another factor that affects the overall relationships between Black immigrants and Black Americans (and affects perceptions of racial cohesion) is the extent to which Black people feel connected to their racial identity. As Bentley-Edwards (2016) clarified, racial cohesion and connectedness to racial identity are related but they are not the same. Racial identity "focuses on how one feels about being a Black person" (p. 76). As such, I discuss the role that connectedness to racial identity plays in the relationships between Black immigrants and Black Americans in higher education in the following section.

Feelings of Connectedness to Racial Identity. Because of their experiences of oppression and discrimination, particularly in predominantly white contexts, Black students are often presumed to feel a strong sense of connectedness to their racial identity (Hunter & Joseph, 2010). In fact, several pieces of education literature confirm that many Black students do feel that their racial identity is a central component of their sense of self (e.g., Charles et al., 2015; Rowley, Sellers, Chavous, & Smith, 1998; Sellers, Smith, Shelton, Rowley, & Chavous, 1998). That being said, there are also students who do not feel that their racial identity is central to their sense of self (e.g., Charles et al., 2015; Rowley et al., 1998). There are several factors that may impact Black students' feelings of connectedness to their racial identity. For example, Charles et

al. (2015) examined how racial classification, immigrant origins, social class, and social context impacted the racial identities of Black students at selective colleges and universities. They utilized Stryker's (1987) social identity theory, which discussed how identities are ordered and how some identities are more salient than others. The scholars used this theory to understand how Black students discussed their identities, how their identities interacted, and which identities were salient for them (Charles et al., 2015). They argued that the intersectional identities of Black students at selective institutions (e.g., socioeconomic status, immigrant origins, etc.) impact their understandings and perceptions of their racial identity (Charles et al., 2015). They asserted that Black students at elite colleges perceive their Blackness to have political implications. This perception manifests in how they relate to their Black racial identity and the degree to which they hold it as central to their sense of self.

Charles and colleagues (2015) used data from the National Longitudinal Survey of Freshmen (NLSF), which tracks the college experiences of white, Black, Asian, and Latine undergraduates at selective institutions. They specifically coded, grouped, and analyzed the NLSF's data on 721 Black students at selective colleges and universities. The original NLSF survey data collection was done via face-to-face interviews and telephone interview follow-ups. The NLSF uses subscales from the Multidimensional Inventory of Black Identity (MIBI), whose questions center around understanding racial self-concepts of Black students (e.g., two subscales included: Racial Centrality and Ideology). The authors used these types of subscales to quantitatively analyze the NLSF survey data. The scholars deployed their findings by reporting the results of their descriptive statistical analysis and discussing how Black students' racial centrality, assimilationist ideology, nationalist ideology, and racial identity compared across various social identities (e.g., socioeconomic status, immigrant background) and social

circumstances or contexts such as experience with racial segregation (e.g., experiences in predominantly white contexts, experiences in racially integrated contexts). Overall, they found that "differences in racial classification and nativity status, and racial isolation and exposure to violence and social disorder [were] particularly influential for shaping dimensions of racial identity among elite [B]lack college students" (Charles et al., 2015, p. 295).

Regarding racial centrality, they found that Black students in the NLSF survey, on average, reported that their Black identity was "quite central to their overall self-concept" (p. 289). Students stated that while race was an important aspect of who they were, they did not believe that race had a significant impact on their relationships with others or their feelings about themselves (Charles et al., 2015). This notion was particularly relevant for Black immigrant students, who – according to Charles and colleagues (2015) – exhibited more assimilationist ideologies which "emphasize[d] similarities between African Americans and the rest of US society" (p. 286). In other words, compared to their Black American counterparts, the meaning or connection they associated with their Black identity was less socially oriented. This line of thinking may also be connected to the fact that racial identity in the home country contexts of Black immigrant students from predominantly Black countries may not be as relevant to their social relationships because the majority of people look like them. In fact, this can be the case for several Black immigrant students entering the U.S. context to pursue higher education.

As stated in Chapter 1, many Black immigrants come to the U.S. from majority-Black countries (Anderson & López, 2018), which means several Black immigrant college students come from majority-Black countries (Fries-Britt et al., 2014a, 2014b). Because a large number of Black immigrant students come from majority-Black contexts, these students' racial identities may not be as salient or relevant to their day-to-day experiences in their home countries (e.g.,

Fries-Britt et al., 2014a; George Mwangi & Fries-Britt, 2015; Griffin et al., 2016). However, upon coming to the U.S. – a country in which race and racism are pertinent in daily individual considerations (especially for people of Color) (Horowitz, Brown, & Cox, 2019) and are often embedded into the systemic operations of society (Bailey, Feldman, & Bassett, 2021; Braveman, Arkin, Proctor, Kauh, & Holm, 2022) – Black immigrant students are faced with the daunting task of learning to navigate a new racialized system (Fries-Britt et al., 2014a). According to Fries-Britt et al. (2014a), little research has examined the process foreign-born students of Color must go through to learn race and racism within the U.S. context. This literary oversight is concerning, especially as foreign-born students of Color are often coming into the U.S. looking at issues of race and racism through the lens of their home countries (Fries-Britt et al., 2014a). The process of racial identity development for foreign-born Black students can be extremely different from those of native-born Black students (Fries-Britt et al., 2014a, 2014b). The literature noted that foreign-born students of Color perceive and respond to racialized experiences differently than native-born U.S. students (Fries-Britt et al., 2014a). As a result, these foreign-born students of Color are often perceiving and approaching their racially minoritized status in the U.S. differently than their native-born counterparts.

Fries-Britt and colleagues (2014a) detailed the processes that foreign-born students of Color in higher education go through in learning about race in the U.S. context, learning how to navigate these highly racialized systems, and dealing with racialized and racist encounters. The purpose of their study was to understand the racial perceptions and experiences of foreign-born students of Color in the U.S. as well as how these students make sense of their racial minority status in the U.S. context. The scholars developed their own emergent framework Learning Race in a U.S. Context (LRUSC) to detail a process that foreign-born students of Color go through in

learning how race operates in the U.S. The framework identifies various ways in which foreign-born students of Color deal with stressful encounters with racism as well as the perceived relationship between their racial experiences and academic success. The LRUSC framework is composed of several components: (1) considerations for both students' home country context and the U.S. context and how students' understandings of racial identity and the salience of their racial identity compares across the two contexts, (2) three categorical mindsets that students may find themselves in: (a) unexamined U.S. racial-ethnic identity, (b) moving toward racial-ethnic identity examination in the U.S. context, and (c) integrative awareness, and (3) ethnic/racial encounters in the U.S. context that facilitate students' movement into or through the three aforementioned categorical mindsets.

The LRUSC framework outlines several points in foreign-born students of Color's racial development and navigation process. It first emphasizes that students undergo a racial learning process as they transition from their home country context to the U.S. context because their home country's racial context is often different from the U.S. racial context. Additionally, it asserts that foreign-born students of Color often initially enter the U.S. context with the mindset that race does not affect them (unexamined U.S. racial-ethnic identity). They then can have one or several racial/ethnic encounters (e.g., experiencing racism on their campus) in which they can either choose to "resist" the "distraction" of dealing with racial issues that may detract from their focus on their academic work (p. 9) or they may get to a point in which "racism catches up with [them]" (p. 9) (i.e., they can no longer ignore the racial incidents they face), which then moves them toward an examination of their racial-ethnic identity and positioning in the U.S. In experiencing additional racial/ethnic encounters, students get to another choice point in which they may choose to withdraw or isolate themselves from dealing with racialized encounters or

they may choose to use race as a motivator to succeed. For students who reach the last categorical mindset, integrative awareness, "race serves as a source of commitment to action that leads to social change" (p. 11).

Fries-Britt et al. (2014a) used qualitative methods in their study. The scholars conducted individual interviews and focus groups with 15 undergraduate and graduate physics students who self-identified as racial minorities and were born and raised outside of the U.S. The majority of the study participants were from predominantly Black African and Caribbean countries. Data analysis was conducted through thorough reading and re-reading of interview transcripts, member checks, and thematic categorization of data.

Regarding their findings, the authors broke their findings down according to each category of their emergent LRUSC framework: 1) unexamined U.S. racial-ethnic identity, 2) racial/ethnic encounters in the U.S. context, 3) moving toward identity examination in the U.S. context, and 4) integrative awareness in the U.S. context (p. 4). Within this first status, unexamined U.S. racial-ethnic identity, foreign-born students described being unaccustomed to the salience of race in the U.S. context. Several students "expressed feeling disconnected to the U.S. context of racial issues" (p. 4). Students in this category also expressed seeing race and racial issues as a distraction from their academic work and purpose. In the second status – racial/ethnic encounters in the U.S. context – foreign-born students had uncomfortable, negative racial and ethnic experiences that caused them to begin thinking about their race and nationality in the U.S. context. Some students described racist instances (e.g., the placement of *The Bell Curve* on one foreign-born Black student's desk before class) while others encountered ethnic othering by their native-born peers who sometimes saw them as "foreigner[s]" (e.g., a foreign-born Black student attending an HBCU where they are perceived as foreign to their native-born

Black peers) (p. 6). In the moving toward identity examination in the U.S. context category, foreign-born students began to acknowledge that their identity in the U.S. context was being perceived "differently from how they saw themselves" (p. 7). They began to understand that they were being othered by their peers as a result of their racial and cultural backgrounds. One student described feeling uncomfortably "pushed" to consider race as a result of the negative experiences he had (p. 7). In the last category of integrative awareness, although only one foreign-born student in the study seemed to fall within this category, the authors described this status to encapsulate foreign-born students' "growing awareness of their racial/ethnic positioning within the U.S. context" leading to increased self-driven motivation to succeed as well as motivation to help and support others "as a role model" (p. 8).

Both Charles and colleagues' (2015) and Fries-Britt and colleagues' (2014a) work illustrate several ways Black immigrant students' perceptions of and connectedness to their racial identity may differ from their native-born counterparts. Because Black immigrant students may come from predominantly Black home countries where race is not as salient an identity as others (e.g., tribal or ethnic identity), the learning they must do about race and racism as well as how they view their race, their racially minoritized status in the U.S., and the role race plays in their interpersonal and intrapersonal interactions are not always parallel to Black American students. Often, because these students are coming from majority-Black countries, their ethnic identity is often more relevant to them (especially upon initial arrival to the U.S.), as this identity is more readily linked to their cultural expressions, ways of life, and ways of interacting with others in their home countries.

Salience of Black Immigrant Ethnic Identity. The ethnic distinctions Black immigrants make between themselves and Black Americans can sometimes be interpreted as Black

immigrants seeking to distance themselves from Black Americans in ways that ultimately reaffirm the U.S. racial order, which perpetuates the "racialist myth of Black (American) inferiority" (Pierre, 2004, p. 141). There are indeed instances in which Black immigrants choose to ethnically distinguish themselves from Black Americans as a way to avoid tying themselves to Black Americans and the negative stereotypes held about them (Awokoya, 2012; Ludwig, 2019; Manguvo, 2013; Pierre, 2004; Waters, 1999). For example, speaking on the reasons why Afro-Caribbean immigrants in particular may "resist racial categorization," English (2019) said the following:

> …Afro-Caribbeans may resist racial categorization for a variety of reasons, including to distinguish and distance themselves from African Americans; retain and emphasize their ethnic and national background (i.e., a sense of ethnic/national pride), resist the negative stereotypes attached to "Blackness" in the United States, or simply because they do not understand race and racial politics in the U.S. context (Deaux, 2006; Malcolm & Mendoza, 2014; Phinney, Horenczyk, Liebkind, & Vedder, 2001; Rogers, 2006; Smith, 2014; Waters, 1999; Wilson, 2009). (p. 14)

In her statement, English (2019) pointed to a myriad of reasons why some Black immigrants may oppose being racially categorized as Black. While a potential desire to distance themselves from Black Americans or negative perceptions of Blackness held in the U.S. is a reason mentioned, English (2019) noted that this rationale is not always the case for Black immigrant resistance to racial categorization. Not all reasons for ethnic distinction tie into negative perceptions of Black Americans or Blackness as it operates in the U.S. As English (2019) specified, sometimes, Black immigrants ethnically distinguish themselves in an effort to maintain a sense of ethnic, cultural, or national pride.

One of the reasons why Black immigrant students sometimes feel less connected to their racial identities is because of the salience of their ethnic identities (Manguvo, 2013). For many Black immigrants, maintaining a sense of connection to their home country and peoples is important (e.g., Benson, 2006; English, 2019; Fries-Britt et al., 2014b; Manguvo, 2013). While the salience of their ethnic identity compared to their racial identity is not all-or-nothing or mutually exclusive, Black immigrants can sometimes place greater value/weight on their ethnic identity because it is most relevant to their cultural background and experiences prior to entering the U.S. (English, 2019; George Mwangi & Fries-Britt, 2015; Griffin et al., 2016; Griffin & McIntosh, 2015; Manguvo, 2013). As such, Black immigrants may choose to identify themselves by their ethnicity or nationality first before any other identity in an effort to maintain a strong relationship or association with their culture and its people. The sense of connection they feel to their culture as well as the salience of Black immigrants' ethnic identities can be further heightened when they are in cultural enclaves where there are large concentrations of immigrants from their home country (e.g., English, 2019; Ludwig, 2019; Vickerman, 2001). By building and sustaining social bonds with other Black immigrants – especially those from similar cultural backgrounds as them – Black immigrants strengthen their sense of connection to both their cultural traditions as well as their ethnic or national identity (English, 2019; Ludwig, 2019; Vickerman, 2001).

For Black immigrant students in particular, the challenge of adjusting to not only a new cultural environment but also a new educational system can cause them to lean more heavily into their ethnic identity as they seek familiarity in a largely unfamiliar learning and cultural environment (Fries-Britt et al., 2014b; George Mwangi et al., 2016). The increased salience of their ethnic identity along with the uniqueness of their immigration experiences also lead Black

immigrant students to gravitate towards other Black immigrant students (Fries-Britt et al., 2014b; George Mwangi et al., 2016; Manguvo, 2013). In being around other Black immigrant students, Black immigrant students have the opportunity share their experiences immigrating from another country and navigating the new sociocultural context of the U.S. as well as that of their higher education institution with other students who have been through similar acculturation processes and experiences (Fries-Britt et al., 2014b; George Mwangi & Fries-Britt, 2015; George Mwangi et al., 2016). These students can serve as critical sources of support for Black immigrant students during their adjustment process, providing social, cultural, and even academic support as they get acclimated to the U.S. generally and their educational environments specifically (Fries-Britt et al., 2014b; George Mwangi & Fries-Britt, 2015; George Mwangi et al., 2016; Manguvo, 2013; Ward, Bochner, & Furnham, 2001).

Cross-Ethnic Perceptions. When it comes to their relationships with one another, Black immigrant students often relate on commonalities in upbringing, culture, familial background, and immigration experiences (e.g., Burt et al., 2017; English, 2019; Fries-Britt et al., 2014b; George Mwangi, 2016; George Mwangi & Fries-Britt, 2015; Thelamour et al., 2019). These shared backgrounds, traits, and experiences often lead Black immigrant students to say that they feel closer, more connected to, or more comfortable around their same-ethnic peers than peers with different ethnic identities (e.g., Burt et al., 2017; George Mwangi & Fries-Britt, 2015; Manguvo, 2013; Thelamour et al., 2019). Although not as widely studied, Black American students have also been found to feel more connected to their same-ethnic peers (i.e., other Black Americans) (Thelamour et al., 2019). While commonalities in their identities and experiences can draw same-ethnic peers closer together, perceived differences in their identities and experiences can also cause Black peers to hesitate in engaging with others who hold different

ethnic identities than themselves (Burt et al., 2017; Jackson & Cothran, 2003; Manguvo, 2013). The perceptions that Black immigrant and Black American students have of their cross-ethnic peers can have real implications for how they interact with them (e.g., Awokoya, 2012; Burt et al., 2017; George Mwangi, Daoud, Peralta, & Fries-Britt, 2019; Manguvo, 2013; Thelamour et al., 2019).

General perceptions of and beliefs held about Black immigrants and Black Americans often work to either encourage or discourage communication between the two groups (Awokoya, 2012; Clark, 2008; De Walt, 2011; Imoagene, 2012; Ludwig, 2019; Pierre, 2004). For example, previous research (e.g., Awokoya, 2012; Clark, 2008; Imoagene, 2012; Ludwig, 2019; Thelamour & George Mwangi, 2021) has shown that some Black immigrant parents hold negative views of Black Americans and/or disapprove of their children embracing Black American culture because it is often negatively associated with "underclass, inner cities, crime, hip hop, and adversarial school and behavioral culture" (Ludwig, 2019, p. 192). Furthermore, selectively negative and limited portrayals of Black American culture (often revolving around images of violence, delinquency, and poverty) from sources such as media and even research can cause Black immigrants to distance themselves from Black Americans and any associations with Black American culture (Awokoya, 2012; Clark, 2008; Imoagene, 2012; Ludwig, 2019). For Black immigrant students specifically, exposure to largely negative perceptions and narratives of Black Americans can result in hesitation to interact with Black American students or a choice to distance themselves from Black racial categorization in the U.S. altogether (e.g., Manguvo, 2013).

Black immigrant students can also feel that Black American students are sometimes too focused on racial issues (e.g., George Mwangi, 2016; Manguvo, 2013), which some Black

immigrant students view as a distraction – this view of dealing with race and racism as a distraction is particularly prominent in Black immigrant students who have not yet spent much time in the U.S. (e.g., Fries-Britt et al., 2014a; George Mwangi & Fries-Britt, 2015). As described in the previous section, one of the prevailing reasons why Black immigrants initially hold this perspective is because they are unfamiliar with the U.S. racial system and how racism operates in the U.S. context (Benson, 2006; Brown & Bell, 2008; Fries-Britt et al., 2014a; Manguvo, 2013; Waters, 1999). Research has found that Black immigrants' perceptions of race and racism in the U.S. can change over time as they are exposed to the U.S. racial system and racial encounters (e.g., Benson, 2006; Fries-Britt et al., 2014a; George Mwangi et al., 2019; Waters, 1999), with many Black immigrants ultimately developing an understanding of racial identity and their racial positioning in the U.S. (Benson, 2006; Waters, 1999). This pattern has also been found to be the same for Black immigrant students specifically, as many develop a racial consciousness over time through exposure to racial encounters as well as interactions with native-born peers (e.g., Fries-Britt et al., 2014a; George Mwangi et al., 2019; George Mwangi & Fries-Britt, 2015). Another factor that can discourage Black immigrant students from interacting with Black American students is the negative perceptions that Black American students have of them (e.g., Manguvo, 2013), several of which I address next.

Some perceptions or beliefs that Black Americans hold about Black immigrants can not only discourage Black immigrants from interacting with them but can also discourage Black Americans from wanting to interact with Black immigrants (Awokoya, 2009, 2012; Awokoya & Harushimana, 2011; Traore, 2006; Traore & Lukens, 2006). Previous studies found that – like the one-sided views their Black immigrant counterparts can have of them – Black Americans can have very one-sided views of Black immigrants as well (Awokoya, 2012; Ludwig, 2019;

Manguvo, 2013; Traore, 2006). For example, Black Americans can perceive Black immigrants as being unclean, unclothed, and uncivilized (Awokoya, 2012; Awokoya & Harushimana, 2011; Ludwig, 2019; Manguvo, 2013; Michira, 2002; Traore, 2006). Describing some of the harsh discrimination that Black immigrants can face at the hands of Americans writ-large, Ludwig (2019) said the following:

> First and second generation Black immigrants are also wrongly stereotyped. They report being frequently teased and discriminated against by Black and White Americans. One of the most common taunts is 'booty scratchers' (Imoagene 2015; Kebede 2017; Ludwig 2016a). Other insults, such as 'monkey', 'from the jungle', and 'running around naked' are based in the misrepresentation of the African continent and its cultures and societies that American youth of all races encounter in the media and in school curricula (Awokoya 2012, 258; see also D'Alisera 2004, 2009; Traoré 2004; Clark 2008; Besteman 2016). (p. 192)

Ludwig (2019) pointed out that not only can media perpetuate these one-sided narratives of Black immigrants, but school curricula can also perpetuate misinformation about Black immigrant cultures. Such stereotypes serve as "othering" mechanisms against Black immigrants that can lead some Black Americans to shy away from interacting with Black immigrants. In the case of Black American students specifically, such stereotypical narratives of Black immigrants can also lead Black American students to limit themselves to mainly negative cross-ethnic interactions with Black immigrants (e.g., teasing about cultural background, style of dress, speech), as some Black immigrant students described being the case in both Awokoya's (2012) and Traore's (2006) studies.

Another significant perception that can either discourage Black Americans from interacting with Black immigrants or make Black Americans' cross-ethnic interactions with Black immigrants difficult is the belief that Black immigrants do not desire to be associated with U.S. Blackness or that they do not embrace their racial identity as much as they should (choosing instead to embrace more of their ethnic identity) (Awokoya, 2012; Ludwig, 2019; Thornton et al., 2017). According to Ludwig (2019), "many native-born African Americans expect Black immigrants to show solidarity and experience Black immigrants' stressing separate ethnic and/or cultural identities as divisive" (p. 192). In fact, because many Black immigrants place particular emphasis on their ethnic identity as opposed to their racial identity, their emphasized ethnic delineation or distinction is sometimes perceived by Black Americans as Black immigrants thinking they are better than Black Americans (Benson, 2006; English, 2019; Ludwig, 2019; Waters, 1999). Likewise, some Black immigrant students have described tensions with their Black American peers related to either their limited understandings of how race and racism operate in the U.S. or related to their differential perspectives on racial issues (George Mwangi, 2016; George Mwangi & Fries-Britt, 2015). For example, in George Mwangi's (2016) study, a Black immigrant student attending an HBCU detailed how his response to the shooting of unarmed Black teenager Michael Brown by a white police officer differed from most of his Black American classmates' views. He described how his classmates mostly believed that the police officer was wrong, while he expressed uncertainty, which he said caused tension between himself and his Black American roommate for a while (George Mwangi, 2016). George Mwangi (2016) further expressed that this student's experience was similar to the experiences of other participants "who expressed a desire to better understand forms of systemic oppression that exist

in the U.S., but felt they lacked a way to ask questions or express doubt with their Black American peers and faculty without causing offense" (p. 1026).

Overall, there are many factors that can affect the nature and quality of Black cross-ethnic relationships in higher education. However, the role of race and ethnicity – specifically how Black students relate to, value, or express the intersection of their racial and ethnic identities – plays an extremely significant role across all the factors mentioned. George Mwangi and Fries-Britt (2015) perfectly surmised the impact that race and ethnicity can have on the relationships and interactions between Black immigrant and Black American students, stating that "differences in experiences and perspectives around race can lead to confusion or misunderstanding among students who share the same race, but have differing nationalities/ethnicities" (p. 20). The extent to which racial-ethnic identities have been shown to impact Black immigrant and Black American students' relationships and interactions with one another emphasizes the need for research that examines how these Black diasporic students not only describe the role of their ethnic identities in their relationships with one another but also how these students identify and navigate the benefits and challenges of their cross-ethnic interactions and relationship-building. These considerations are the focus of my study.

Black Cross-Ethnic Interactions

While the need for the current study is apparent, higher education research has historically not been keen or eager to explore students' within-race relationships and interactions, especially those of Black students. This has unfortunately been part of a larger trend of education research that has historically ignored intraracial differences, perspectives, and relationships among Black students (Charles et al., 2015; George Mwangi & English, 2017; George Mwangi et al., 2016; Griffin et al., 2016; Hernandez & Murray-Johnson, 2015; Thelamour et al., 2019).

Charles and associates (2015) noted that intraracial differences, especially among Black students, was not of interest in early education research. Regarding within-race relationships specifically – as George Mwangi and colleagues (2016) pointed out – although higher education has emphasized the importance and value of cross-cultural interaction amongst students, the amount of scholarship that looks at within-race interactions among students is severely lacking. Most research on students' cross-cultural interactions tends to focus on students' interactions across race (e.g., Antonio, 2001; Bowman & Park, 2015; Gurin et al., 2002; Hurtado, Alvarez, Guillermo-Wann, Cuellar, & Arellano, 2012). George Mwangi, Fries-Britt, Peralta, and Daoud (2016) sought to depart from this trend by investigating within-race interactions among Black students. Specifically, George Mwangi and colleagues (2016) examined the engagement and interactions between native-born and foreign-born Black students in college STEM classrooms.

In this section, I particularly focus on literature that details cross-ethnic engagement and interactions between Black immigrant and Black American students as the central purpose of the research. Overall, there are very few studies in higher education whose primary focus is on the intraracial engagement and interactions between Black immigrant and Black American students. There are indeed some studies where the engagement between Black immigrant and Black American students are mentioned (e.g., Griffin et al., 2016; Thelamour et al., 2019), but details on this engagement are only mentioned if they are directly related to the main focus of the study. For example, if the focus of the study is Black students' perceptions of campus racial climate (e.g., Griffin et al., 2016) or Black students' feelings of connectedness to their campuses (e.g., Thelamour et al., 2019), the only times that Black students' cross-ethnic engagement or interactions are specifically detailed are (1) if or when the students' cross-ethnic engagement impacts their perceptions of the campus climate or their campus connectedness or (2) if students'

differential views on campus climate or connectedness lead to cross-ethnic tensions or otherwise impact with whom students choose to engage (such instances are briefly mentioned but not thoroughly expounded upon, as the primary article foci lie elsewhere). In these cases, the interactions between Black immigrant and Black American students were not the main focus of the literature, rather they were either factors that may have impacted Black immigrant and Black American students' cross-ethnic relationships with one another (i.e., the central focus of the above literature review section on factors impacting Black cross-ethnic relationships in higher education) or they were items that student participants mentioned briefly as part of the reason they felt a certain way regarding the campus climate or their sense of connectedness to their campus. While these studies are extremely valuable and necessary, in this section, I focus on detailing those few studies whose *main* purpose (or one of the main purposes) was to examine Black immigrant and Black American student engagement and interactions with one another or whose main findings *thoroughly* detail Black immigrant and Black American student engagement and interactions with one another (i.e., cross-ethnic interactions between Black immigrant and Black American students are a major theme identified and discussed in the findings section).

In studying the within-race interactions between Black STEM students in the classroom, George Mwangi and team (2016) aimed to answer the following research questions: "1) How do native-born Black students describe their perceptions of and interactions with foreign-born Black students in STEM college classrooms? 2) How do foreign-born Black students describe their perceptions of and interactions with native-born Black students in STEM college classrooms? 3) How do native-born and foreign-born Black students in STEM describe the impact of engagement across difference on their academic experiences?" (George Mwangi et al., 2016, p.

774). The scholars utilized the Multi-contextual Model for Diverse Learning Environments (MMDLE) (Hurtado et al., 2012) to theoretically frame their study. This model emphasizes the role that students' perceptions of campus climate and diversity, students' identities, and their curricular and cocurricular experiences play in their success. While the model has five dimensions or elements – 1) historical legacy of inclusion or exclusion, 2) organizational and structural dimension, 3) compositional diversity, 4) psychological dimension, and 5) behavioral dimension – George Mwangi and colleagues (2016) stated that their study highlighted "the compositional, psychological, and behavioral dimensions of the curricular experience for students" and "how the psychological and behavioral dimensions are connected to student identity" (p. 776). Given that part of their examination involved Black native-born and foreign-born students' perceptions of one another, the scholars used the particular dimensions of the MMDLE related to students' cultural perceptions of others in the campus community (e.g., perceived tensions) and the frequency and quality of their cross-cultural interactions (George Mwangi et al., 2016; Hurtado et al., 2012).

George Mwangi et al. (2016) used a qualitative methodological approach to collect data, conducting focus groups with twenty-four native-born and foreign-born Black undergraduate and graduate students enrolled in STEM programs. Fourteen of the participants were foreign-born Black students while ten of the participants were native-born Black students. The participants attended various institutional types including HBCUs, Ivy League institutions, and research-intensive public universities. Focus groups were conducted annually from 2005 to 2009 at the joint conference meeting of the National Society of Black Physicists (NSBP) and the National Society of Hispanic Physicists (NSHP). While the research team conducted a total of seventeen focus groups, the data highlighted in the article only focused on the ten focus groups that

consisted of both foreign-born and native-born students. During the focus groups, students were asked about their perceptions of and interactions with classroom peers and faculty, their educational experiences, and the role they perceived their race, culture, and/or nativity played in their academic achievement (George Mwangi et al., 2016, pp. 779-80). Data analysis was conducted through detailed examination of focus group transcripts, thematic grouping of data, and comparative analysis and interpretation of the findings based on nativity.

The study yielded several relevant findings themed around students' perceptions of classroom dynamics and interactions with diverse peers, experiences working with and learning from diverse classmates, and reactions to being in a diverse learning environment (i.e., a learning environment shared with peers born both inside and outside of the U.S.) (George Mwangi et al., 2016). Overall, the authors found that cross-cultural engagement between foreign-born and native-born Black students was valuable in the academic development of both groups of students. The collaborative nature of physics class settings allowed for more interactions between foreign-born and native-born Black students, which allowed for students to develop an appreciation for each other's cultures and academic contributions. Students felt that they gained insight and different perspectives from being in a learning environment with diverse peers. Similarly, while foreign-born and native-born Black students typically engaged in classroom settings first, "[i]nformal social interactions" outside of the classroom were key to establishing connections between the two student groups (p. 782). These informal interactions helped to strengthen the connections students may have started in the classroom. The scholars also noted that, despite both foreign-born and native-born Black students being aware of cultural gaps or differences between them, the students' interactions with one another were not hindered by perceived cultural differences. In other words, the students acknowledged that cultural

differences could impede their interactions (some even shared examples in which previous interactions had been negatively impacted by cultural differences or perceptions) but they ultimately continued interacting with peers cross-culturally because they felt they benefitted greatly from these interactions (e.g., learning about other cultures, learning new work habits or styles of working).

Although both foreign-born and native-born Black students discussed numerous benefits of working and learning with and from diverse peers, they also described some added pressures of working in these diverse learning environments. For example, both foreign-born and native-born Black students felt that they had to prove their academic abilities to their classmates. Foreign-born Black students felt this way because they believed their classmates associated their accents and non-U.S. nationalities with negative academic performance. On the other side, native-born Black students felt they had to prove their academic abilities because of existing stereotypical views that foreign-born Black peers and non-Black peers had about Black Americans. While native-born Black students acknowledged their foreign-born peers' abilities, they also emphasized their own capabilities as well. For example, some native-born students reflected on their work habits and achievements. They described their foreign-born peers as hardworking but also expressed that they themselves work hard (and achieve) as well. In fact, the academic work habits of their foreign-born peers sometimes served as encouragement for native-born Black students to work harder, with one student saying that seeing his foreign-born peers' work ethic caused him to reevaluate his own.

The scholars' findings show the multitude of ways Black students perceive and describe their cross-cultural engagement and interactions within race. The overall study exemplifies the importance of understanding cross-cultural engagement not just across race, but also within it.

Furthermore, George Mwangi and colleagues' (2016) study shows that there is room in the literature base for similar studies that explore Black students' cross-cultural engagement with other Black students. It especially indicates a need for the phenomenon of Black cross-ethnic engagement and interactions to be studied in various institutional contexts. George Mwangi and associates (2016) examined this phenomenon across several institution types with varying demographics: HBCUs, Ivy League institutions (PWIs), and Research-I public universities (PWIs). A study that particularly focuses on one institutional context, like the current study's focus on predominantly white state flagship institutions, could provide further insight into Black immigrant and Black American students' cross-ethnic interactions with one another. Hence, studies like George Mwangi et al.'s (2016) affirm the relevance of discussing intraracial engagement in higher education research while also illustrating the need for additional studies that build on the knowledge base's understanding of Black cross-ethnic communication and relationship-building between Black immigrant and Black American students. This article helped establish the benefits of cross-cultural academic and social interaction for foreign-born and native-born Black students and helped set a precedent for how I began unpacking Black immigrant and Black American student cross-ethnic engagement and interactions in my own study.

Another article that highlighted the various effects of cross-ethnic interaction on Black diasporic students is Awokoya's (2012) study on the identity constructions and negotiations of 1.5- and second-generation Nigerian immigrants. The purpose of Awokoya's (2012) research was to theorize and dissect how school, peer, and family contexts affected the identity construction and navigation experiences of Nigerian immigrants who were either born in the U.S. to immigrant parents (second-generation immigrants) or immigrated to the U.S. before the

age of twelve (1.5-generation immigrant). As such, all the study's participants either immigrated from Nigeria prior to age twelve or were born in the U.S. to Nigerian parents (Awokoya, 2012). There was a total of twelve participants (nine women and three men), all of whom were Nigerian immigrant college students from the Washington DC area (Awokoya, 2012). According to Awokoya (2012), participants were "between the ages of eighteen and thirty-two at the time of their participation in this study and were born to a Nigerian mother and father who had resided in the United States for a minimum of fifteen years" (pp. 262-3). Participants were recruited through email outreach to multicultural student organizations as well as snowball sampling after the researcher consulted university-affiliated administrators and acquaintances who then recommended potential participants (Awokoya, 2012).

Awokoya (2012) relied on a combination of two frameworks to guide her study. She utilized Phelan et al.'s (1993) multiple worlds framework as well as Waters' (1994, 1999) typology on second-generation Black immigrant identity negotiations to shape her study. Phelan et al.'s (1993) multiple worlds framework advances that youth must navigate three interconnected contexts in their daily educational and social experiences; these three contexts are school, family, and peers (Awokoya, 2012). Additionally, the framework posits that there are factors that affect youths' navigation of these three contexts, factors that negatively affect their ability to connect with others, and strategies that they use to "adapt to various settings" (Awokoya, 2012, p. 260). According to Awokoya (2012), the factors that Phelan et al. (1993) identified that youths must "traverse" in their navigation of the school, family, and peer contexts "include others' norms, values, beliefs, expectations, and actions" (Awokoya, 2012, p. 260). Awokoya (2012) further stated that "young people must present and think of themselves differently" both in their interpersonal interactions as well as within and across the three contexts

"in order to transition between and adapt to each [context]" (p. 260). She specifically utilized the multiple worlds framework to examine the experiences of Nigerian immigrant youth within and between the three aforementioned contexts (i.e., family, school, and peers).

Awokoya (2012) examined specific factors from the three contexts, including "participants' relationships with their parents" from the family context, "participants' interactions with teachers and representations of Africans in teaching and learning" from the school context, and "participants' interactions with African American and co-ethnic peers" from the peer context (pp. 260-1). The researcher also added a fourth context to her examination: media (Awokoya, 2012). Her reasoning for adding this fourth context was that media proved very influential in her participants' self-perceptions, as they had to deal with largely negative depictions of Black people in the media which became relevant in their social and educational experiences. Awokoya (2012) articulated, "[a]cross all three contexts, I found that media representations of Black peoples were significant in how participants in this study perceived themselves. Specifically, 1.5- and second-generation African youth must contend with disparaging representations of both Africans and African Americans" (p. 261). She saw the four contexts – family, peers, school, and media – as "mutually instructive" in that the messages that participants received within one context were "reinforced" in other contexts, which ultimately influenced their responses in navigating within and across the four contexts (p. 261).

The author also utilized Waters' (1994, 1999) typology to frame her study (Awokoya, 2012). Because Phelan et al.'s (1993) multiple worlds framework did not examine the experiences of immigrant youth specifically, Awokoya (2012) also incorporated Waters' (1994, 1999) typology to bring in the immigrant perspective relevant to her population of interest. Waters' (1994, 1999) typology asserted that second-generation immigrants assume or take on

"one of three identities: African American, ethnic American, or immigrant identity" (Awokoya, 2012, p. 261). Awokoya (2012) summarized Waters' typology further, stating:

> Immigrant youth who adopt an African American identity generally identify with the racial challenges experienced by African Americans and adopt their cultural behaviors. Black immigrant youth who identify ethnically are encouraged by their immigrant parents, Whites, and others to strive to distinguish themselves from native Blacks, who are perceived negatively. These individuals seek to differentiate themselves from African Americans and the stereotypes held about them by aligning with co-ethnics. Immigrant-identified individuals, Waters (1994, 1999) contends, are ambivalent about American racial and ethnic labels and ground their identities in their native countries. (pp. 261-2)

In other words, African American-identifying immigrant youth exhibit ways of thinking and behaving that align with Black American people and culture; ethnic American-identifying immigrant youth choose to prioritize their ethnic identity in the U.S. context in order to distance themselves from Black Americans and the negative perceptions associated with them; and immigrant-identifying immigrant youth prioritize their nationality (national identity) as it relates to their home country and do not associate with Black racial or ethnic identity labels in the U.S. Awokoya (2012) explained that since Waters' typology uses a 'one or the other' approach to the identities that second-generation immigrants can adopt, she used Phelan et al.'s multiple worlds framework to "show how individuals may hold multiple Black identities [i.e., Nigerian, African, African American, and Black] simultaneously and to show that particular identities can be more salient in some contexts than in others" (p. 262).

The researcher used qualitative methods to collect data via demographic questionnaires, interviews, and a focus group (Awokoya, 2012). Information from the demographic

questionnaires (e.g., parental education levels, family background in Nigeria, family background in the U.S., socioeconomic background, etc.) were used to inform topics discussed during the participant interviews (Awokoya, 2012). Awokoya (2012) stated that participants "were able to reflect on, describe, and explain a variety of interactions and negotiations with Africans and non-Africans and how these affected their racial and ethnic identities" (p. 263). The researcher conducted all interviews and the focus group in person, with the interviews lasting between one and two and a half hours and the focus group lasting two hours (Awokoya, 2012). While each participant completed an interview, only seven participants were a part of the focus group. Awokoya (2012) offered the following rationale for the structuring of the focus group:

> The focus group achieved two goals. First, it allowed me to explore recurring patterns found in the interview sessions by having participants listen and respond to each other's experiences and perceptions. Second, I posed critical incidents (Erlandson, 1993), which are detailed accounts of an incident that is "critical" by virtue of being important to the respondents with respect to the research topic and as ascertained from the questionnaire and interviews. I used responses to the critical incidents to deepen my understanding of participants' experiences and perceptions and to strengthen my interpretations of the data. (p. 263)

The scholar used a combination of deductive and inductive coding, using codes gathered from previous research as well as codes gathered from participant data to conduct her data analysis (Awokoya, 2012). Additionally, she conducted both within-case and cross-case analyses to analyze her data, looking at patterns within each participant case individually and across all participant cases comparatively.

Regarding findings from her study, Awokoya (2012) discovered that participants encountered various interpersonal and intrapersonal tensions related to their racial and ethnic identities while navigating within and across the four contexts (i.e., family, school, peers, media). The media context, in particular, played a significant role across the other three contexts of family, school, and peers. Within the family context, participants had to navigate their parents' constructions and perceptions of their Nigerian ethnic identity as well as their parents' perceptions of Blackness and Black peoples in the U.S. Participants described their parents instilling in them Nigerian cultural values and observing traditional practices growing up as well as their parents encouraging them to maintain "cultural integrity by passing down cultural norms and traditions" (Awokoya, 2012, p. 265). Likewise, participants recalled their parents' messages about ethnic identity sometimes being intertwined with how they spoke about their children's relationships with non-Africans (e.g., Black Americans, whites). For example, some participants discussed receiving messages from their parents to remain culturally or ethnically distinct from their Black American peers. These participants' parents would espouse messages to remind their children that they were 'not the same as Black Americans' and would make remarks to them such as "Don't be like those African American children. They don't have culture" (p. 265). According to Awokoya (2012), such parents' statements seemed to be their "attempts to dissuade their children from adopting what they saw as negative behaviors among Black youth, such as engaging in criminal activities and not achieving in school" (p. 265). Participants also mentioned how the media served to perpetuate their parents' negative perceptions of Black Americans, with some remarking that, when their parents would see Black Americans on the news committing crimes, they would call Black Americans names such as "stupid" and would compare them to white Americans, saying "you never just see White people doing stuff on the news" (p. 266). For

these participants' parents, their perceptions and understandings of Black Americans and their behavior were partially influenced by monolithic media representations of Blackness in the U.S.

While some parents held negative views of Black Americans, other students described their parents' understanding of how race – particularly their children's Black identity – would pose obstacles and challenges for their children in the U.S. (Awokoya, 2012). These participants recalled being "raised [by their parents] to know [they] were Black," their parents telling them about white Americans' perceptions of Black people as "inferior," and their parents encouraging them to work hard to disprove such negative stereotypes about Black people (Awokoya, 2012, p. 266). Students also reflected on the added difficulty of navigating both their Nigerian identity and their Black identity. As it relates to the family context specifically, these participants expressed how they wished their parents had helped "teach them how to simultaneously negotiate and reconcile their Nigerian and Black identities" (p. 266). One participant described feeling that she could not have such identity conversations with her mother because "when [she] was at home [she] was Nigerian" (p. 266) and that identity was emphasized in her home more than anything else.

In the school context, students also faced difficulties negotiating their Nigerian and Black identities as they interacted with teachers and peers. They described the pressures they felt to represent the Black race when they were the only Black person in their class, one of few, or one of the only Black students doing well in a class. They specifically communicated feeling as though they had to perform well in honors or advanced classes where very few Black students were present and discussed their motivation to excel because of their status as the "only Black kid." Additionally, some students discussed the added layer of pressure they felt and the added spotlight that was placed on them because of their Nigerian ethnic identity. Participants

recounted teachers who would readily separate their good grades and achievements as Nigerian students from the low achievement of their Black American counterparts. The teachers not only perceived that the difference in the participants' performance and behavior occurred as a result of them being Nigerian, they also outright expressed this belief to the students themselves. One participant recalled how a teacher said to her, "I could tell immediately that you guys were African kids . . . you're not like those Black American kids" (p. 268). Likewise, another participant described how her teacher said, "she could tell that my parents were Africans because I was disciplined and well-behaved" (p. 268). This participant went on to discuss how such comments made her feel that she was being used as the "Black example" (p. 268). These types of differential comments made by teachers about Nigerian participants led to additional tensions between them and their Black American peers.

Participants also reported feeling as though they were representatives for the entire African continent. They recalled both teachers and peers making ignorant comments about the continent. They discussed some teachers' perceptions of them and their families as "refugees" (p. 268) and peers' perceptions of them as hut-dwellers or jungle-dwellers. They felt these negative stereotypes about Africa and Africans were exacerbated by one-sided media depictions of Africa shown in schools. Participants described the discomfort and frustration they felt when having to view documentaries about Africa in their classes. One participant described viewing documentaries where Africans would be shown "naked" with "bones…in their faces" and paint, displayed like "bush village people" (p. 269). The student opined that his classmates would tease him saying, "there's Femi's people right there" (p. 269). With such media being displayed and negative encounters with their non-African peers resulting from it, Nigerian participants simultaneously felt ashamed of the depictions of Africans as "primitive" (p. 269) while also

feeling that it was their duty to dispel the one-sided stereotypes about the African continent and its peoples and to educate their teachers and classmates about Africa. For example, one student recalled having to explain to her friends that Africans indeed lived in houses, not just the jungles or huts depicted in the documentaries her teacher showed (Awokoya, 2012). The monolithic media depictions of Africa and Africans that were often highlighted in the school environment conflicted with what students knew to be true of their African background and modern African societies (Awokoya, 2012). This conflict led to students being hyperaware of their identity as Africans, being frustrated at the perpetuation of the backwards African narrative in school curriculum, feeling a desire to dissociate from their African identity, and also feeling determined to disprove negative narratives about Africans (Awokoya, 2012).

Expounding on the dilemmas participants faced in the peer context, Awokoya (2012) noted that participants often dealt with "contradictory and distorted" (p. 270) narratives about their racial and ethnic identities. The author stated, "in their efforts to gain peer acceptance, participants' identities were confounded in three particular ways. They were shunned and ridiculed for being too African, not Black enough, and not African enough" (Awokoya, 2012, p. 270). Participants described the hurtful teasing they faced at the hands of peers (e.g., being called "African booty scratchers," being asked "Do you live in trees?" and "Do you wear clothes in Africa?", p. 270) as well as how such stereotyped mockery "forced" many participants to try to "hide their Africanness" (p. 270). For example, one student remembered "begging her father to change her name to 'Beth,' a name she read in a science book, to avoid teasing and the mispronunciation of her name" (p. 270). Likewise, other participants described doing things such as shortening their African names, trying to hide or lose their accents, and trying to "make [themselves] seem … [as] American as possible" (p. 271) in concentrated efforts to hide their

African identities. While some students were able to "learn and enact Blackness" by code-switching – and "as a result, [gain] acceptance among their African American peers" (p. 272) – many students were unable to achieve the "Black" status that their Black American peers determined. One participant said, "It didn't matter how hard I tried, I just didn't fit in. Just because of my culture, I didn't fit in" while another stated, "We were just different, and [Black American peers] could tell" (p. 271).

Students also discussed the parameters that their Black American peers set and enforced for them to be considered "Black," which included things such as knowing hip-hop and rap music, only interacting with Black American peers, and not having an accent (Awokoya, 2012). The students conveyed their confusion about their peers' conflation and interchangeable use of racial and ethnic identity (i.e., Black racial identity and African American ethnic identity were "viewed as synonymous" and were "used interchangeably" by Black American students, p. 271). For instance, one participant shared, "I didn't understand how I could not be Black, because I look Black" (p. 271). In their efforts to learn and perform Blackness, participants often had to behave how Black Americans were stereotypically depicted in the media in order to be seen as "authentically Black" (p. 272) by their Black American peers. This was because there were "predetermined ways" (Awokoya, 2012, p. 271) in which their peers expected them to be Black. These predetermined ways of "being Black" (pp. 271-2) often coincided with the narratives of Blackness "created and perpetuated by many Whites, mainstream media, and African Americans, and the racialization of popular cultural signs and symbols (music, dress, and speech)" (p. 272). As Awokoya (2012) stated, "[f]or the participants, learning about Blackness in the U.S context was at the center of learning how to be African American" (p. 271).

Just as they faced tests to prove their Blackness to their Black American peers, participants also described facing tests to prove their Nigerianness or their Africanness to their co-ethnic peers (Awokoya, 2012). Ironically, the same characteristics that were used by their Black American peers to authenticate the Nigerian participants' Blackness were also used by their Nigerian peers to discredit or challenge the participants' Nigerian identity. These characteristics included "being born in the United States, having African American friends, and speaking with an American accent" (p. 273). Participants detailed having to endure tests questioning their familiarity with their family's state, village, and tribe, their familiarity with Nigerian cultures and traditions, and their knowledge of their Nigerian ethnic language (Awokoya, 2012). Participants described how their passing or failure of these tests determined whether their co-ethnic peers believed they were truly Nigerian or truly African, with one participant stating, "It's like they have these qualifications set for you, and it's like if you don't meet these qualifications, they look down on you" (p. 273). Participants expressed how hurtful these tests from their co-ethnic peers were because "many had come to love their identity as Nigerian" and yet "were often forced to explain or defend [their Nigerian identity] in social and academic contexts" (p. 273). One participant even expressed the frustration of being teased for her African identity just to not be seen as African by her co-ethnic peers. Awokoya (2012) summed up the impact that the ethnic proving process had on the participants, stating:

> All of the participants had experienced trauma as a result of their African heritage; some were harassed and still others marginalized. As such, estrangement and rejection from Nigerian and African peers caused several participants to experience a sense of alienation that led them to question their place in the world. It is one thing to be denied by people

with whom you have different historical and cultural experiences; it is quite another to be denied membership among those with whom you identify. (pp. 273-4)

Overall, Awokoya's (2012) article illustrated that there is much to be learned about the interactions between Black immigrant and Black American students, especially as it relates to the role their ethnic identities play in their cross-ethnic engagement. One limitation of this article as far as its relevance to the current study is that, because participants were asked to discuss their experiences from elementary school through college, many of the experiences that participants described occurred during their K-12 years (Awokoya, 2012). Similarly, there is no way to distinguish if the experiences participants described in their K-12 schooling were also prevalent in their college years unless specifically stated by the participant or clarified by the author (Awokoya, 2012). Nonetheless, a great deal can be gained from the researcher's methodological approach, analysis, and findings as it relates to examining Black immigrant and Black American cross-ethnic interactions and the role of ethnicity in their relationships with one another. For example, Awokoya's (2012) findings make it evident that the messages students receive in family, academic, social (peer), and media contexts play major roles in their socialization processes throughout their P-20 experiences. This thought is supported by the fact that the author talked to current college students about both their pre-college and college experiences and many students highlighted the impact that pre-college encounters had on their current understandings and performances of their racial and ethnic identities.

Additionally, Awokoya's (2012) article is beneficial for my study in that it allows me to see opportunities where I can alter my protocol as needed to draw out more of participants' narratives surrounding their collegiate experiences specifically. Awokoya's (2012) work also shows the complex, multilayered lens that is required to unpack Black cross-ethnic interactions

between Black diasporic students in that the article demonstrates how several academic and social contexts work together to impact Black students' identity negotiations and interactions both prior to and into their college years. As such, there is room in the literature base for the current study which concentrates on Black immigrant and Black American college students' interactions and relationships with one another in the college context specifically while also taking into account how pre-collegiate socialization messages and encounters can affect the in-college, cross-ethnic social experiences of Black immigrant and Black American students.

Articles such as Awokoya's (2012) also illustrate that the racial identity development process that Black immigrants undergo is often influenced in part by their interactions with their Black American counterparts (e.g., De Walt, 2013; George Mwangi et al., 2019). Previous research found this pattern to be the same for Black immigrant students specifically (Awokoya, 2012; De Walt, 2011; George Mwangi et al., 2019). In the last decade, education literature has begun to unpack some distinctions between different ethnic groups within the Black diaspora, particularly surrounding their racial identity development (e.g., De Walt, 2011; Fries-Britt et al., 2014a). As noted earlier in this chapter, the racial identity development process that foreign-born Black students undergo can differ greatly from that of their native-born counterparts (Fries-Britt et al., 2014a). While early iterations of Black racial development theories such as Cross' (1995) Nigrescence model initially did not address the Black racial identity development process for Black immigrants, recent literature is beginning to unpack that development process for Black immigrants (Fries-Britt et al., 2014a) and is even considering how the development of a Black identity may differ for various generations of Black immigrants (e.g., De Walt, 2011).

For example, De Walt (2011) examined the racial identity development process of first-generation U.S.-born Africans. He noted that there is little research that focuses on understanding

this development process for children born in the U.S. to immigrant parents (i.e., second-generation immigrants) or children who were born in another country but immigrated to the U.S. at a very young age (i.e., 1.5-generation immigrants) (De Walt, 2011). He asserted that this gap in the literature is important to address, as first-generation U.S.-born Africans are subjected to some of the same stereotypes that Black Americans are subjected to (due to their phenotypic similarities) while also having to navigate the added layer of their immigrant ethnic/cultural background (De Walt, 2011). Although De Walt (2011) does not make any explicit mentions of a theory or framework used in the article, he used a historical lens to explore cultural identity and situate the study's design and relevance. For instance, the scholar used the "Barack Obama Phenomenon" (i.e., the impact that the former President's comments in his book *Dreams From My Father: A Story of Race and Inheritance* had on the global Black population) to illustrate the continual evolution of Black identity, and described the "Barack Obama Phenomenon" as having "set the stage for not only the United States but the world to reengage what both *Black* and *African American* mean within a society and world in which both have been sources of rejection, oppression, and marginalization" (De Walt, 2011, p. 480). Likewise, he used historic and contemporary meanings associated with terminology such as "African American" and "Black" as well as literature on the racial identity development of Africana peoples to frame the study (De Walt, 2011). De Walt (2011) believed that Barack Obama's statements on issues facing the African American community could be alienating for first-generation U.S.-born Africans who may not fall into the traditional perception of who is considered "African American." He noted that first-generation U.S.-born Africans (FGAs) have differential understandings of their own Black identity that contrasts the Black identity understandings of their Black American peers and

that FGA's understandings of their Black identity may not fit with traditional concepts of African American identity (De Walt, 2011).

De Walt (2011) used qualitative methodology to design his study, conducting a qualitative case study with six first-generation U.S.-born African students at a predominantly white institution. He conducted three separate one-on-one interviews with his participants that ranged from thirty minutes to two hours. According to De Walt (2011), the first interview focused on participants' life histories, the second interview focused on participants' racial experiences, and the third interview focused on participants' reflections on the first two interviews. His data analysis process consisted of coding, multiple reads, and chronological and categorical organization of data. Regarding his findings, De Walt (2011) broke down his findings based on themes of tension and harmony between different Black groups he identified as continental Africans (CAs), generational African Americans (GAAs), and first-generation U.S.-born Africans (FGAs). Given that the focus of his study was FGAs, he specifically described tensions and harmonies between FGAs and CAs as well as tensions and harmonies between FGAs and GAAs. De Walt (2011) defined first-generation U.S.-born Africans as "children of African-born parents who either were themselves born in the United States or moved to the United States with their parents/families by the age of 3 years old" (p. 481). He described continental Africans as those who were born and raised on the African continent. He defined generational African Americans as "those who are considered and/or identify as African American, Black, and/or of African descent based on their lived scripts resulting from being heirs to the legacy of U.S. enslavement and the subsequent historical movements that occurred" (De Walt, 2011, pp. 483-4).

De Walt (2011) found that the FGAs described contentious interactions with CAs related to their perceived connection (or lack thereof) to the African continent. For example, De Walt (2011) described the main concerns of FGAs in their interactions with CAs as being that they would be perceived as "not African enough" or "too American," with many of their concerns revolving around cultural aspects such as food (i.e., traditional foods from their parents' countries) and language (i.e., lack of fluency in their parents' native language) (p. 490). Nonetheless, FGAs also described harmonious interactions with CAs where FGAs felt they were culturally accepted, acknowledged, or approved by CAs (De Walt, 2011). For example, De Walt (2011) noted that FGAs' perceptions of harmony with CAs came from them "receiving some level of cultural approval from community members," "being accepted or acknowledged for who they are as both the child of CAs and being born in the United States," or – in many cases – both (p. 493).

The author also discussed his findings regarding both tensions and harmonies that FGAs described having with GAAs (De Walt, 2011). FGAs discussed the tensions they experienced with GAAs related to their cultural or ethnic identity, specifically that tensions often arose because of FGAs having "a direct connection with Africa" (De Walt, 2011, p. 492). Some FGAs in the study described GAAs drawing distinctions between their "Black" identity and what they saw as FGAs' "African American" identity, saying things such as "You can be African, but that's not me at all. I don't know anybody in Africa. I don't want to know anybody in Africa" and "I'm not African American, I'm Black. You know where you're from, I don't. I'm OK with being Black" (De Walt, 2011, p. 492). For some FGAs, the clear lines that the GAAs they encountered drew between "Black" and "African/African American" identity led them to associate Blackness with an anti-African mindset and led them to question who is allowed to be

"African American" and who is not (De Walt, 2011). That being said, one FGA drew distinctions between his cultural identity and that of GAAs, stating that GAAs' culture was "American" more so than "African American" because the FGA perceived GAAs to have "a lack of a cultural connection" with Africa (i.e., the cultural practices GAAs have are mostly American as opposed to Africans who live in America but still observe all the cultural practices they did when they were "back home") (p. 492). De Walt (2011) noted that – despite the distinction he made – the particular FGA who expressed this view did not identify as "African American," but rather identified as "Black." Another source of tension that one FGA described with GAAs resulted from the perception that some GAAs have of African immigrants coming to the U.S. and stealing their jobs. The FGA expressed that some "African Americans born in America have some kind of animosity or hate towards Africans that just moved here," described how he witnessed his parents being "shouted at by African Americans who say that they were taking jobs," and reflected on how such beliefs ultimately undermine or impair unity between Black groups in America (De Walt, 2011, p. 493).

Regarding harmonies between FGAs and GAAs, FGAs described harmonious relationships with GAAs that involved mutual cultural respect and acceptance of cultural values and/or identities (De Walt, 2011). For example, one FGA described how the mother of his African American friend was very friendly, checked in with him regarding his grades, and was respectful of his Muslim religion (i.e., he detailed how, at his friend's birthday party, his friend's mother made him beef ribs separate from the pork ribs she made for everyone else because she knew he did not eat pork). As De Walt (2011) described, such considerations are important as they illustrate how the FGA "was embraced for who he was and those cultural values that were part of his cultural identity" (p. 495). Additionally, another FGA described how harmonious

encounters between herself and GAAs often occurred when she interacted with GAAs who acknowledged their cultural connection to the African continent. She detailed how GAAs she encountered on her campus often separated the identities "Black" and "African American." Relatedly, she described how most of the GAAs she had positive encounters with were those who considered themselves to be "African American." She mentioned how these GAAs "have become educated" regarding their connection with the African continent which allowed her to feel comfortable in her Africanness (De Walt, 2011, p. 495). She stated, "I appreciate people who know how to appreciate themselves and where they came from. At least they leave enough room for you to feel comfortable being African" (p. 495). De Walt (2011) said the following about the FGA's statement:

> Inherent within her statement was a sense that as they have become educated, GAAs could now directly connect to Africa, thereby being African American. Her analysis distinguishes Black as independent of African American in a way and, for her, is denoted by GAAs being culturally educated and embracing connections to Africa, thereby no longer being "miseducated" as discussed by Woodson (2006) and Cross (1991). (p. 495)

Overall, the interactions that FGAs described having with CAs and GAAs – whether positive or negative – played a role in their racial identity development process (De Walt, 2011). De Walt's (2011) study helps to illustrate the valuable insight and knowledge that can be gained by examining Black intragroup interactions. Likewise, his study demonstrates that there is indeed much to unpack regarding Black racial identity and the role that ethnic/cultural identity plays in the relationships Black students build with one another across ethnicity and nativity. Lastly, in thoroughly discussing both tensions and harmonies between various Black ethnic groups, De Walt's (2011) research showed that there is room in the scholarly knowledge base to continue

studying Black immigrant and Black American students' interactions with one another and the impacts that such interactions can have on students' identities as well as their cross-ethnic relationships. While my study does not focus on how cross-ethnic interactions impact identity, it discusses the reverse, specifically how Black immigrant and Black American students perceive their ethnic identities impacting their cross-ethnic interactions and relationships with one another. The study aims to address this gap in the literature base – a gap that has unfortunately been prominent since Jackson and Cothran's formative study on the topic in 2003. I explicate their influential study below.

In detailing literature that has focused on Black cross-ethnic relationships and interactions in U.S. higher education, it would be remiss of me not to discuss Jackson and Cothran's (2003) study. Jackson and Cothran's (2003) seminal research on relationships across the Black diaspora is widely cited by scholars of this topic. According to Jackson and Cothran (2003), "[h]ow African people relate to one another has not received as much attention as the relationship between Black and White people" (p. 581). By studying Black diasporic intragroup relationships at a time when most literature focused on racial intergroup relationships, Jackson and Cothran (2003) groundbreakingly deviated from the common trend of solely discussing Black-white cross-racial relations. On the topic of Black diasporic communication, the authors stated that Black people from Africa and those with African heritage (i.e., Black/African diasporic populations) have perpetuated fears and misconceptions about one another that emphasize difference and separation (Jackson & Cothran, 2003). Specifically, fears and misconceptions related to the scarcity of resources such as jobs (as was mentioned by one of the students in De Walt's (2011) study detailed above) have been of great significance in the

contentious relationships between Black diasporic populations (Jackson & Cothran, 2003). Jackson and Cothran (2003) opined:

> The fears and misconceptions [between Africans, African Americans, and African Caribbeans] have been perpetuated and continue to carry on the idea that although African people have the same beginnings, they are so different culturally, socially, and intellectually that they should be considered completely separate people. Thus, there is a continued rivalry for economic and social advantages among West Indians, African Americans, and Africans in the United States. (p. 579)

While Jackson and Cothran go on to say that this is a "casual observation" on their part and not a fact that has been "established or proven" (p. 580), more recent research (e.g., Okonofua, 2013) has since shown the authors' observation to be valid, that indeed the notion of "resource deprivation" and "competition for scarce economic and social opportunities amongst … groups of Black people" has led to tensions, "hostility," and rivalries between Black African, Black American, and Black Caribbean populations in the U.S. (Okonofua, 2013, p. 8). For these reasons, Jackson and Cothran (2003) sought to understand the state of relations between Black African, Black American, and Black Caribbean populations in the U.S. context, taking interest in "how these groups relate to one another" (Jackson & Cothran, 2003, p. 580).

Although the authors did not mention a specific theory or framework that guided their study, Jackson and Cothran (2003) used a diasporic lens to frame their research. They specifically used literature on the African diaspora (broken down by each diasporic group: African, African American, and West Indian), literature on commonalities and perceived bonds across the diaspora (e.g., shared histories of slavery), and literature on differences in perceptions and interactions across the diaspora to shape the study (Jackson & Cothran, 2003). The authors

believed that a focus on differences between African peoples has led to a dearth of scholarship on the existing relationships between them. As such, they deemed it important to understand relationships, interactions, and communications of Black peoples across the African diaspora with a particular focus on their relationships within the U.S. (Jackson & Cothran, 2003).

To investigate the topic of interest, Jackson and Cothran (2003) conducted a pilot study before conducting a major study. In both the pilot study and the major study, Jackson and Cothran (2003) utilized survey methods to collect data, creating and administering their own surveys on both occasions. The authors described the participants in both the pilot study and the major study as a "convenience sample" of individuals who voluntarily and anonymously completed the surveys (Jackson & Cothran, 2003, pp. 582-3). The pilot study participants were thirty-two people of African descent who were either working at or studying at one university (Jackson & Cothran, 2003). The pilot study survey was a 20-item survey with open-ended questions focused on how education, interaction, and communication across the diaspora as well as thoughts about the diaspora may influence relationships between African diasporic peoples (Jackson & Cothran, 2003). The researchers used the participant responses from the pilot study to redesign their survey instrument for the major study. The redesigned questionnaire was a 40-item survey with select-all-that-apply type questions. Some questions focused on establishing the identity of participants (i.e., collecting demographic and biographic information such as age, gender, ethnic identity, place of birth) (Jackson & Cothran, 2003). Most questions focused on factors that may impact how African diasporic groups relate to one another (e.g., travel to countries of the diaspora, contact or friendship with other African diasporic peoples) (Jackson & Cothran, 2003). For example, Jackson and Cothran (2003) specified:

> Questions 7 to 40 had multiple responses from which participants could select whichever ones applied, with no restrictions on their choices. For example, Question 7 stated: "Under what circumstances have you come in contact with Africans, African Americans, and West Indians? (Circle all that apply) (a) fellow students, (b) students I teach/mentor, (c) community friends, (d) university colleagues, (e) friends/peers, (f) church members, (g) I have not known any personally, (h) other (specify)." (p. 583)

According to the scholars, the participants in the major study consisted of African diasporic individuals at a conference and African diasporic students, faculty, and staff from four universities (Jackson & Cothran, 2003). There was a total of 427 survey respondents in the major study. The researchers used groupings of types of participant responses and ethnic identities attached to responses to quantitatively analyze the data.

Jackson and Cothran (2003) found several things from the results of their study. Regarding relevant demographic results, they found that the majority of their 427 survey respondents were students (196 graduate students and 29 undergraduate students), followed by university staff (25 respondents), university faculty (24 respondents), and administrators (16 respondents) (the remaining 137 respondents did not give an answer to this question regarding their professional status) (Jackson & Cothran, 2003). They found that most of their respondents were born in the U.S. (247 respondents), followed by Africa (104 respondents), followed by the Caribbean (49 respondents). Likewise, they found that most of their respondents ethnically/racially classified themselves as African American (141 respondents), followed by Black (134 respondents), followed by African (99 respondents). Regarding relevant results from Questions 7 through 40 on their survey, Jackson and Cothran (2003) found information such as 1) the majority of participants across ethnic groups reported having contact with individuals from

their own ethnic group as well as the other two ethnic groups, 2) the majority of participants across ethnic groups reported having mostly negative relationships with the other two ethnic groups, and 3) the majority of participants across ethnic groups reported having mostly negative interactions or communication with the other two ethnic groups. According to Jackson and Cothran (2003), the negative responses for interpersonal relationships between Black African, American, and Caribbean groups included descriptive items such as "they think they are superior to other Blacks; preconceived notions and myths about one another; poor, not good" (p. 587). Similarly, the negative responses for communication among Black African, American, and Caribbean groups included descriptors such as "not good, lacking; myths and misconceptions; ignorance, stereotypes, communication gap" (Jackson & Cothran, 2003, p. 588).

Additionally, the majority of participants gave examples of negative stereotypes held about the other groups. There were general responses that resonated across groups, such as "they think they are better than other Blacks, negative identity and self-image, many are poor" (Jackson & Cothran, 2003, p. 590). There were also specific responses for each group. For example, stereotypes that were reported for Africans included ones such as "pompous" and "reluctant to move from Third World status," stereotypes that were reported for African Americans included ones such as "ignorant about other Blacks" and "materialistic," and stereotypes that were reported for Caribbeans included ones such as "loud, boisterous, ambitious, and tricky" (p. 590). While the majority of participants (345 respondents) stated that they believed most stereotypes originated from Western media, when describing their thoughts about the other ethnic groups, the majority of respondents from each group reported having negative perceptions of the other ethnic groups including sentiments of distrust across the board. For example, most participants thought of Africans negatively using words such as "conniving" and

"suffering from colonialism and war" to describe them, most participants thought of African Americans negatively using words such as "possess[ing] [a] 'slavery mentality'" to describe them, and most participants thought of Caribbeans negatively using words such as "aggressive" to describe them (Jackson & Cothran, 2003, pp. 589-90).

Overall, Jackson and Cothran's (2003) findings paint a somewhat bleak picture of the relationships and communication between Black diasporic peoples in the U.S. Nonetheless, there were some positive perceptions, thoughts, and relationships reported (few in comparison to the negative but they were existent in the study). As such, Jackson and Cothran (2003) were able to offer parting recommendations that suggest there is still hope for improving Black diasporic relationships and communication. The researchers stated:

> The outcome of this survey points to the need for more Afrocentric education in the curriculum (from elementary school to college) as a means of reeducating people to have a better perspective of the African diaspora and to dispel myths and negative stereotypes about African people. (Jackson & Cothran, 2003, p. 576)

Before stating their findings, the authors offered cautionary words about interpreting their results as "representing the viewpoints of the general populations from which these participants were drawn" (Jackson & Cothran, 2003, p. 583) given their perceptions of their sample as "convenient." However, much can be gained from the results of Jackson and Cothran's (2003) study. Considering that the topic under study was largely unexplored at the time of its execution, many of Jackson and Cothran's (2003) findings are still relevant in today's society. Simply put, there is much validity and veracity in the study's findings, as other scholars in the years before and after Jackson and Cothran's study have also reported tensions in the relationships between Black diasporic populations in the U.S. context (e.g., Awokoya, 2012; De Walt, 2011; George

Mwangi, 2016; Okonofua, 2013; Waters, 1999). That being said, the growing scholarly interest in exploring the relationships between Black diasporic populations also shows a willingness of higher education researchers to tackle discussion and comprehension of such complex relationship dynamics that will hopefully provide more insight into these relationships (and potentially how to improve them). Just as Jackson and Cothran (2003) opined almost two decades ago, the same holds true today: "There is much to be learned about the interaction and communication among people of the African diaspora" (p. 580). There has indeed been little scholarly study of cross-cultural interactions and perceptions across the African diaspora. The current study on the cross-ethnic relationships between Black immigrant and Black American college students seeks to contribute to the aforementioned knowledge base and to encourage more explorations of this topic to better understand Black diasporic communications and interactions. To help organize and scaffold the study's examination of Black diasporic communication and relationships, the theoretical lens being used to frame the study – communication theory of identity – is discussed below.

Theoretical Framework

Communication Theory of Identity

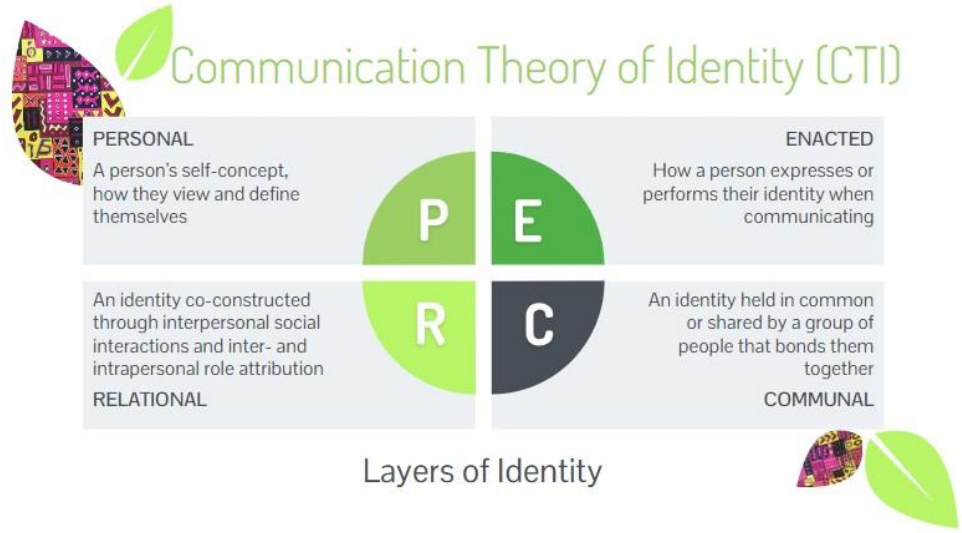
The guiding theoretical framework for this study is communication theory of identity (CTI). Communication theory of identity is rooted in the notion that identity is a multilayered experience (Hecht, 1993; Hecht & Lu, 2014; Jung & Hecht, 2004). CTI posits that there are four layers of identity: personal, enacted, relational, and communal (Hecht, 1993). The personal layer of identity is a person's self-concept, how they view and define themselves (Hecht, 1993; Hecht & Lu, 2014). The enacted layer of identity is how a person expresses or performs their identity

when communicating (Jung & Hecht, 2004). According to Jung and Hecht (2004), individuals "enact their identities and exchange the enacted identities in communication" (p. 266).

The relational layer of identity has four levels and is said to be co-constructed through a combination of interpersonal social interactions and both inter- and intrapersonal role attribution (Hecht & Lu, 2014). In the first level of relational identity, called "ascribed relational identity," an individual partially develops their identity based on how others perceive them (Jung & Hecht, 2004). In the second level of relational identity, a person develops or views their identities through the lens of their relationships with other people (e.g., cousin, friend, romantic partner) (Hecht & Lu, 2014; Jung & Hecht, 2004). In the third level of relational identity, there is acknowledgement that a person has multiple identities and these identities "exist in relation to each other" (e.g., a person can be both a doctor and a parent; a spouse and a student; a "teacher and [a] follower") (Jung & Hecht, 2004, p. 267). In the fourth level of relational identity, an individual's relationships themselves can be seen as identities (e.g., a couple as a unit of identity, or a parent-child relationship as a unit of identity) (Hecht & Lu, 2014). Lastly, the communal layer of identity involves identity at the group level. Hecht (1993) described communal identity as "something held by a group of people which, in turn, bonds [them] together" (p. 80). A brief capturing of the four layers of CTI along with their definitions can be found in the figure below (Figure 1).

Figure 1

Defining Four Layers of Communication Theory of Identity

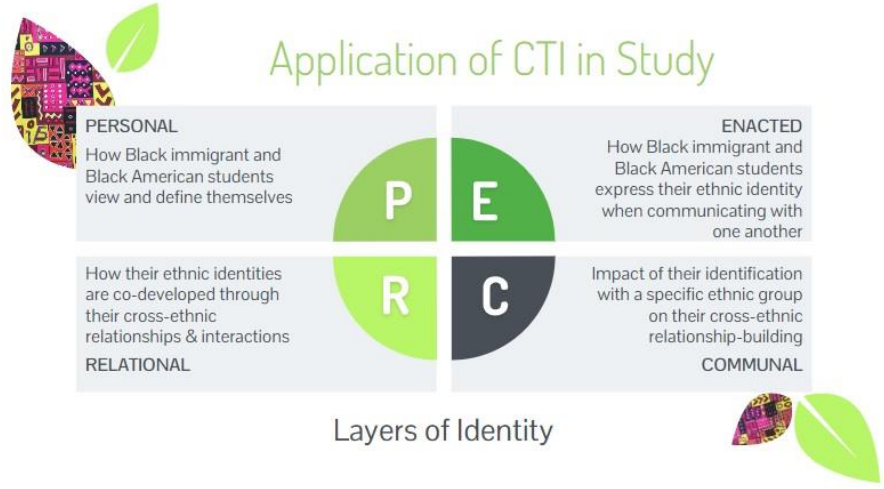


Relevance of CTI to the Study

With this explanation of CTI provided, I now detail how this theory related to my study. I specifically discuss how each layer – personal, enacted, relational, and communal – was relevant to my study. I conclude with the framework's overall contribution to my study and the holistic lens it provided for my study's focus on the cross-ethnic communication, interactions, and relationships between Black immigrant and Black American students. A brief capturing of how I applied the four layers of CTI in the study can be found in the figure below (Figure 2).

Figure 2

Application of Communication Theory of Identity to Current Study



Personal Layer of CTI

The personal layer of CTI considers how a person perceives and defines themselves (Hecht, 1993; Hecht & Lu, 2014). CTI's personal layer was relevant to this study because, as mentioned in the literature, a person's self-concept impacts how they interact with others (Bentley-Edwards, 2016). For Black diasporic students, how they view and define their racial and ethnic identities can affect who they interact with and how they interact (e.g., Charles et al., 2015; Fries-Britt et al., 2014a, 2014b; George Mwangi, 2016; George Mwangi et al., 2016; Griffin et al., 2016; Leath et al., 2022). From the previously cited literature (e.g., Fries-Britt et al., 2014a, 2014b; George Mwangi, 2016; George Mwangi et al., 2016; Griffin et al., 2016; Thelamour et al., 2019), it can be deduced that Black immigrant and Black American students' ethnic self-views can affect their cross-ethnic relationships and how they communicate with one another. I used the personal layer of CTI to gain insight into Black immigrant and Black American students' self-concepts and how their self-concepts affected their perceptions and descriptions of their relationships and interactions with one another.

Enacted Layer of CTI

The enacted layer of CTI deals with how a person performs their identity when communicating. It states that individuals "enact their identities and exchange the enacted identities in communication" (Jung & Hecht, 2004, p. 266). This layer was relevant to my study because students' performances of their identities were interchanged as they communicated with one another. Specifically, how Black immigrant and Black American students performed their ethnic identities impacted their communication and interactions with their cross-ethnic peers. In using the enacted layer, I considered how these students' identity performances affected their descriptions of their cross-ethnic relationships as well as the roles they believe their ethnic

identities play in these relationships. For example, one of the Black American students, Gloria, discussed how her household did not talk about ethnicity. Once she got to college, ethnicity started playing a more significant role in her interactions with her Black immigrant peers, as MU has a significant number of Black immigrant students. Relatedly, Gloria felt her ethnic identity and her lack of cultural knowledge about Black immigrant students posed a barrier to her cross-ethnic interactions with them.

Relational Layer of CTI

The relational layer of CTI posits that identity is co-constructed through a combination of interpersonal social interactions as well as interpersonal and intrapersonal role attribution (Hecht & Lu, 2014). As previously stated, there are four levels to the relational layer of CTI. In the first level of relational identity – "ascribed relational identity" – it is posited that a person develops their identity in part based on how others perceive them (Jung & Hecht, 2004). This level was relevant to the current study in the sense that students received messages about their ethnic identities from their parents and older community members that partly influenced their views of themselves and their cross-ethnic peers, thus, impacting their cross-ethnic communication.

According to the second level of relational identity, an individual also views their identities from a relationship standpoint, particularly developing identities in accordance with their relationships with others (e.g., friend, sibling) (Hecht & Lu, 2014; Jung & Hecht, 2004). This level was partially relevant to the current study because – as evidenced in previously cited research (e.g., Awokoya, 2012; De Walt, 2011) – how Black immigrant and Black American students viewed or described their relationships with one another somewhat affected how they interacted with one another. For example, Black American participants who had Black immigrant peers they viewed as "friends" (e.g., Renee and Vanessa) and Black immigrant

participants who had Black American peers they viewed as "friends" (e.g., Chidinma) reflected more positively on their relationships with their cross-ethnic peers overall. Chidinma identified that they had Black American friends and, despite identifying a few challenges to cross-ethnic communication between Black immigrant and Black American students, they did not see any challenges in their own cross-ethnic communication and described their relationships with their Black American peers as positive and valuable. However, this level of relational identity was not always relevant, as Black immigrant student, Zexell (who did not view himself as having Black American "friends"), did not point out many challenges in his own cross-ethnic communication with Black American students apart from limited time to interact. He felt that any barriers or challenges to cross-ethnic communication between Black immigrant and Black American students at MU were likely on the individual level and could not be scaled up to the overall groups.

The third level of relational identity was relevant to the study in several ways. In this level, the individual acknowledges that people have multiple identities and that these identities exist in relation to one another (e.g., an individual can be both a parent and a lawyer, a minister and a student, a spouse and a doctor, a leader and a follower) (Jung & Hecht, 2004). Related to the current study, students recognized the relationship between their racial and ethnic identities, acknowledging the complexity of their identities. This acknowledgement allowed me, as the researcher, to understand how the combination of students' racial and ethnic identities played a significant role in their cross-ethnic interactions and relationships with one another. This was an important multilayered lens for me to have both in my data collection and data analysis processes. Further, in acknowledging both their own multitude of identities and those of their cross-ethnic peers, both Black immigrant and Black American participants appreciated the role

that the intersection of their multiple identities played in their cross-ethnic communication as opposed to solely focusing on one aspect of their identity in their cross-ethnic communication. Students also discussed how their student identity layered onto their racial and ethnic identities, introducing another aspect of their identities they had to consider in their cross-ethnic communication with one another. As Black American and Black immigrant students described their cross-ethnic communication with one another, many touched on the different connection points they have with their cross-ethnic peers related to their diverse cultures and their shared racial identity, especially in the PWI context of MU. This consideration also affected what students perceived as beneficial about their cross-ethnic interactions. For example, all participants believed that there were valuable things to be gained from their cross-ethnic interactions with one another, including cultural knowledge and awareness.

In the fourth level of relational identity, a person can view their relationships in and of themselves as identities (e.g., a couple as a unit of identity, a set of friends as a unit of identity, a parent-child relationship as a unit of identity) (Hecht & Lu, 2014). This particular level of relational identity was not relevant to this study, as Black immigrant and Black American participants did not see their cross-ethnic friendships with one another as a unit of identity.

Communal Layer of CTI

The final layer of CTI – communal identity – is concerned with group-level identity. Communal identity is defined as "something held by a group of people which, in turn, bonds [them] together" (Hecht, 1993, p. 80). As far as its relevance to the current study, communal identity impacted how Black immigrant and Black American students perceived and described their cross-ethnic relationships with one another, particularly the importance of forming bonds with their cross-ethnic peers at the predominantly white institution of MU. Additionally,

communal identity in the PWI context increased Black immigrant and Black American participants' perceptions of themselves as being connected to one another. In the same vein, communal identity in the PWI influenced how Black American and Black immigrant students saw one another as a part of the same overall group (i.e., the Black diaspora). The extent to which students believe their ethnic group identification affects their relationships with one another also impacted their investment in their cross-ethnic communication. For example, Chidinma and Vanessa felt they had agency in facilitating communication with their cross-ethnic peers and all participants saw these cross-ethnic communications and relationships as valuable regardless of challenges.

CTI's Overall Contribution to the Study

Overall, I used CTI as a lens through which to unpack the perceptions of my study participants. I utilized the interpersonal and intrapersonal theoretical lenses that CTI provides to understand how various layers of identity affected the participants' cross-ethnic relationships with one another, how the students described the role their ethnic identities play in their relationships with their cross-ethnic peers, and how they identified benefits and challenges to their cross-ethnic interactions and relationship-building. Although all layers of the theory were not equally relevant to the participants' experiences, each layer provided important context to understanding the multitude of ways that ethnic and racial identities factored into what Black immigrant and Black American students shared regarding their cross-ethnic interactions, communication, and relationship-building with one another.

CTI posits that identity and communication are interconnected, meaning that identity impacts communication and communication likewise impacts identity (i.e., they are directly related to one another) (Hecht, 1993; Hecht & Lu, 2014; Jung & Hecht, 2004). Similarly,

previous research on Black immigrants and Black Americans posits that Black identity and Black cross-ethnic communication are interconnected (i.e., they impact one another) (e.g., Awokoya, 2012; De Walt, 2011). As such, examining the role that ethnic identity plays in cross-ethnic communication between Black immigrant and Black American students not only aligned with the theory framing this study but it also built on the minute scholarship base that has begun to examine the phenomenon of Black immigrant and Black American students' cross-cultural interactions in higher education (Awokoya, 2012; De Walt, 2011; George Mwangi et al., 2016; Jackson & Cothran, 2003). Because previous research studying Black immigrant and Black American cross-ethnic encounters in higher education has not used CTI as a lens through which to unpack participant narratives, the current study contributed greatly regarding the theoretical approach that future research (and researchers) can take to further understand the cross-ethnic relationships between Black immigrant and Black American students in higher education.

Chapter Summary

This chapter provided a review of relevant literature and an explanation of the theoretical lens framing this dissertation study. In the literature review, I outlined the historic and contemporary participation of Black peoples in the U.S. higher education system, from enslaved peoples building and working at early higher education institutions to students attending modern-day historically white and historically Black institutions. I also discussed how Black racial and ethnic identity are defined, constructed, and operationalized in the U.S. context, and how these constructions affect the understanding of Black identity in higher education research. Lastly, I examined existing scholarly narratives on Black peer relationships in higher education, investigating factors that impact Black cross-ethnic relationships, especially among Black immigrant and Black American students. Following the literature review, I provided detailed

insight into the theory used to frame this study – communication theory of identity – and its relevance and contributions to the study. The literature review and theoretical framework in this chapter impart critical insight needed to understand how and why this dissertation's population of interest, research site, and primary focus were chosen. These topics are the focus of the next chapter.

Chapter 3: Methods

The purpose of this study was to examine how Black immigrant and Black American students perceived and discussed the interactions and relationships between their ethnic groups at a predominantly white, public, state flagship institution. This study was guided by the following research questions:

- What do Black immigrant and Black American students at a predominantly white, public, state flagship institution perceive to be the role of their ethnic identities in their cross-ethnic interactions with one another?
- What do Black immigrant and Black American students at a predominantly white, public, state flagship institution perceive to be the benefits and challenges of Black cross-ethnic interactions and relationship-building?

This chapter outlines the methodological approaches and processes used to conduct this study. This chapter first comprehensively details the methodology used for this study – case study – and the rationale for using this methodological approach. The chapter then thoroughly describes the study's research site as well as a justification for the choice of research site. The chapter subsequently discusses the type of sampling used for this study and the rationale for the sampling choice, strategies for participant recruitment, criteria for participant selection, and the sample size goal for the study. Next, the data collection methods as well as data analysis strategies and approaches are described. The chapter then highlights the steps taken to ensure this study's credibility, transferability, and trustworthiness – all markers for assessing quality in qualitative research (Mertens, 2019). Lastly, the chapter concludes by addressing the limitations of the current study.

Methodology

This study was conducted as a collective, instrumental, embedded case study. First, I provide a detailed description of case study as a research methodology including the common components of case study research. I then provide definitions for each of the aforementioned terms "collective," "instrumental," and "embedded," and discuss what they mean in the context of conducting case study research. Case study is a qualitative strategy of inquiry (Creswell, 2014; Denzin & Lincoln, 2005) that, as a methodological approach, utilizes the idea of a case (i.e., a specific example, situation, or instance to be studied) to examine and "thoroughly describe complex phenomena" (Mertens, 2019, p. 252). Case study research typically focuses on a particular issue, group, setting, or context. Merriam (2009) described case study as "an in-depth description and analysis of a bounded system" (p. 40). The bounded system of a case study often refers to a unit that is restricted by time and/or place to set limits or parameters around the object of study (Creswell, 2002; Creswell & Poth, 2018; Merriam, 1998). According to Jones, Torres, and Arminio (2014), a bounded system can be "an individual, a specific program, a process, an institution, or a relationship" (p. 94). In case study research, the researcher examined a particular unit of analysis within the bounded system to understand the larger study phenomenon. The unit of analysis can be an individual, a group, an event, an organization, or a combination of units (Mertens, 2019).

Case study research is commonly defined by the following features or characteristics (Creswell & Poth, 2018) identified in the table below (Table 1).

Table 1

Key Characteristics/Features of a Case Study

Key Characteristics/Features of a Case Study	Identification of a case
	Case as a bounded entity
	Intent behind conducting a case analysis, (which dictates the type of case study being used)
	Collection of multiple forms of data to provide an in-depth understanding of the case
	Data analysis approach includes analysis of a single case or multiple cases
	Identification and description of case themes in findings section
	Researcher's conclusions regarding "the overall meaning" gathered or "general lessons learned from studying the case(s)" (p. 98)

Note. These are key characteristics/features of case studies as identified by Creswell and Poth (2018).

The goal of case study research is to understand the studied phenomenon in the particular context in which it is being observed. As a result, each facet of the study must be developed with the context in mind. For example, the choice of data collection items, triangulation of data sources, and highlighting of distinctions regarding the study phenomenon in the examined context are important considerations for researchers in the development of their case study design. Because case study is typically hyper-focused on context, it is paramount for researchers using case study to effectively set and describe the context in which the phenomenon of interest is being studied (Jones et al., 2014).

Case study research is defined by clear markers or attributes that distinguish it from other forms of qualitative research. According to Merriam (2009), a case study should be particularistic – focused on a specific phenomenon such as an individual, program, or situation; descriptive – focused on producing rich, thick description of a phenomenon; and heuristic – focused on new understandings and meanings of a phenomenon that can be discerned from the case analysis. As mentioned above, the intent of the case analysis or the purpose behind the case

research dictates the type of case study that should be used, which in turn impacts the procedures of the research (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Jones et al., 2014). A case study can be intrinsic, instrumental, or collective (Stake, 2000). An intrinsic case study focuses on a singular case chosen by the researcher to gain a deeper understanding of a particular issue (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Jones et al., 2014). In intrinsic case studies, the case itself is of particular interest to the researcher because of its uniqueness or unusual nature (Stake, 2000). An instrumental case study focuses more on developing in-depth understanding of an individual, issue, situation, event, or phenomenon than on the case itself (Jones et al., 2014). In other words, the case is not the central focus of an instrumental case study, but rather helps to facilitate comprehension of the larger issue of interest (Stake, 2000). In a collective (or multiple) case study, the researcher chooses multiple cases (e.g., individuals, programs, research sites) to examine and develop a deep understanding of an event, person, phenomenon, issue, or situation (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Jones et al., 2014; Stake, 2000).

One common quality of case study research is that multiple forms of data are collected to facilitate the creation of in-depth knowledge surrounding the subject of study. Regardless of the type of case study used, the researcher always utilizes various forms of data collection in their study, such as interviews, observations, artifacts, and documents (Creswell, 2009; Creswell & Poth, 2018; Jones et al., 2014). Additionally, data analysis can take one of two forms: holistic analysis or embedded analysis (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Holistic analysis is typically used in single-unit case studies (Yin, 2018) and involves analysis of the case as a whole (Creswell & Poth, 2018). On the other hand, embedded analysis is typically used in multiple-unit case studies (Yin, 2018) and involves analysis of a particular aspect of the case (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

The study was conducted utilizing a collective, instrumental, embedded case study design. According to Creswell and Poth (2018), case studies are typically used to "develop an in-depth description and analysis of a case or multiple cases" (p. 121). Case studies are often employed to gain insight into a specific phenomenon. With a goal to examine a complex phenomenon of interest in a specific bounded context, this study met the overall objectives of case study research, hence making case study an optimal research design choice for the study. In this study, I gained insight into the cross-ethnic perceptions, interactions, and relationships between Black immigrant and Black American students at a predominantly white, public, state flagship institution. The study involved examination of multiple cases, making it a collective case study. Each case consisted of an individual Black immigrant or Black American student at the selected research site – a predominantly white, public, state flagship institution in the Mid-Atlantic. Because I chose the cases for their value in providing insight into the phenomenon of Black diasporic relationality and relationship-building in the specified context, the study can also be described as an instrumental case study (Stake, 2006). Likewise, this case study used an embedded analysis approach given that my data analysis focused on specific aspects of the case (i.e., Black immigrant and Black American students' perceptions and experiences related to their cross-ethnic communication with one another at a public state flagship PWI) as opposed to focusing on the entire case (i.e., Black immigrant and Black American students at a public state flagship PWI).

Research Site & Institutional Context

The research site of the study is a predominantly white, public, state flagship institution in the Mid-Atlantic. Although the institutional context was not examined as far as its impact on each individual case, it provides a very important contextual backdrop overall to the types of

relational experiences and interactions that Black diasporic students describe having with one another. The chosen institutional context is especially relevant in that the relationship dynamics in this particular type of institution (i.e., public, state flagship) are not as mired by or entangled with the conversation of Black immigrant overrepresentation and Black American underrepresentation in admissions. The choice to study a public state flagship institution deviates from existing literature surrounding relationship dynamics between Black immigrant and Black American students, as existing literature often examines these two groups in the context of elite colleges, many of which are private (e.g., Charles et al., 2008; Byrd et al., 2014; Massey et al., 2007). Previous literature has rarely discussed the actual interactions and relationships between Black immigrant and Black American students in the public state flagship setting. As such, this site choice of the public state flagship institution is made primarily because – as was stated previously in Chapters 1 and 2 – the literature base and existing discourse surrounding dynamics and interactions between Black immigrant and Black American students has been overinformed by the private elite college setting. While the private elite higher education setting provides valuable insight into the experiences and relationships of Black immigrant and Black American students, the majority of Black students do not attend these types of institutions (National Center for Education Statistics, 2022). In terms of four-year institutions, most Black students attend predominantly or historically white, public moderately selective institutions (U.S. Department of Education National Postsecondary Student Aid Study, 2016, as cited in Espinosa et al., 2019). These characteristics directly align with public state flagship institutions, which are typically somewhat selective in their admission of students to their campuses and typically serve a predominantly white student population. As such, a predominantly white, public state flagship institution is chosen as this study's research site to gain a more informed understanding of the

relationship dynamics and interactions between Black immigrant and Black American students at one of the four-year institution types these students most frequently attend.

The broader state in which the research site is located – which is referred to as the "research state" – was chosen because of its large Black population and the diversity of its Black ethnic populations, particularly the state's Black immigrant population (Migration Policy Institute, n.d.). As of 2019, the research state's total population was estimated to be over 6 million (U.S. Census Bureau, n.d.-a). Of that population, approximately 31 percent are Black (U.S. Census Bureau, n.d.-a). Of the overall Black population, about 24 percent are identified as foreign-born while about 31 percent are identified as U.S.-born (George Mason University Institute for Immigration Research, 2022; Migration Policy Institute, n.d.). Regarding the Black immigrant population, the research state is one of the top five states in the U.S. with the highest Black immigrant population, containing a Black immigrant population of over 200,000 (George Mason University Institute for Immigration Research, 2022). Similarly, the research state is considered to host significantly large numbers of Black immigrants from both Africa and the Caribbean (George Mason University Institute for Immigration Research, n.d.-b; Thomas, 2012b).

As the focus of this study, the research site, which is referred to by the pseudonym Mid-Atlantic University (MU), was chosen because it is the state flagship institution of the research state. The county in which MU is located also contains a large Black population, with approximately 64 percent of the county's population identifying as Black or African American (U.S. Census Bureau, n.d.-b). The county similarly hosts some of the largest numbers of African and Caribbean immigrants in the research state (George Mason University Institute for Immigration Research, n.d.-b; George Mason University Institute for Immigration Research,

n.d.-c). Overall, the research site was chosen because it is a predominantly white, state flagship institution in the Mid-Atlantic around which a large representation of Black immigrant families is concentrated. The ethnically and culturally diverse representations of Blackness that encircle the research site by way of the Black population residing in the surrounding county provide increased access and opportunity for cross-cultural engagement between Black immigrant and Black American students even prior to them entering college. In fact, scholars like Bentley-Edwards and Chapman-Hilliard (2015) confirmed that Black students who come from predominantly Black environments precollege are more likely to seek out and find comfort in community with other Black students once they enter college. As such, the increased opportunity for cross-cultural engagement and the increased likelihood of Black students from predominantly Black environments seeking out Black connections make the research site an optimal choice for this study focused specifically on the cross-cultural engagement of Black immigrant and Black American students at a predominantly white, state flagship institution.

The research site's student population is comprised of over 30,000 enrolled undergraduate students. According to the research site's most recent institutional research data, the undergraduate student population is racially/ethnically broken down as follows: over 41 percent white U.S.-born students, 45 percent minority U.S.-born students, and over 3 percent foreign-born students (MU Office of Institutional Research, Planning & Assessment, 2022). The research site's foreign-born student data is not disaggregated by race and ethnicity, so it is not possible to know how many Black foreign-born students are included in that percentage. Nonetheless, of the 45 percent minority U.S.-born population at the research site, almost 12 percent are identified as "Black or African American" (MU Office of Institutional Research, Planning & Assessment, 2022). Given the data's distinction between "U.S." and "foreign"

students (MU Office of Institutional Research, Planning & Assessment, 2022), it can be assumed that the research site's U.S.-born Black student population includes children of Black immigrants (e.g., second-generation and 2.5-generation immigrants), which this study still considers as part of the Black immigrant population despite their U.S.-born status because of their rearing in an immigrant household.

Recruitment

Sampling

This study utilized purposeful sampling to recruit participants. Purposeful sampling involves strategically selecting research participants to be a part of the study's sample based on particular criteria set by the researcher to aid in achieving a specific purpose (Jones et al., 2014; Mertens, 2019). According to Jones and colleagues (2014), purposeful sampling provides "information-rich cases" that have "the greatest potential for generating insight about the phenomenon of interest" (p. 107). Through purposeful sampling and the selection of information-rich cases (Jones et al., 2014; Patton, 2002), researchers can gain tremendous insight into the phenomenon they are exploring by choosing a sample well-suited to address the purpose and research questions of their study. Scholars advocate for the use of purposeful sampling in such research instances where relevant insight or information on an issue can be gained by using a specific participant sample (Merriam, 2009). This study used purposeful sampling for these reasons. Purposeful sampling allowed me as the researcher to gain a profound understanding of the perceptions Black immigrant and Black American students held regarding their cross-ethnic interactions, relationships, and relationship-building with one another at the predominantly white, public, state flagship institution of MU.

While there are various types of purposeful sampling, this study used criterion sampling. Criterion sampling involves the researcher designating specific criteria that individuals must meet in order to participate in their study (Mertens, 2019). Once the researcher has established the participant criteria, they then identify and select cases that satisfy the determined criteria (Mertens, 2019). The criteria for the current study are detailed below in the recruitment methods section, but ultimately restrict participation in the study to Black immigrant and Black American undergraduate students who were enrolled at Mid-Atlantic University at the time of the study. The study had a sample of eight participants. A small sample is common in various forms of qualitative research given that qualitative research is often not concerned with generalizing findings across large groups of people (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Mertens, 2019). This is also relevant in case study research – this study's methodology. Scholars such as Creswell (2013) and Creswell and Poth (2018) highlighted the typical number of cases in a multiple case study as no more than four or five cases. Creswell and Poth (2018) shared the reason for limiting the number of cases in a case study, stating that "the more cases an individual studies, the less the depth in any single case can be" (p. 102). Other scholars such as Eisenhardt (1991), Dyer and Wilkins (1991), and Gustafsson (2017) confirmed the prioritization of depth over quantity, saying that the number of cases included in a case study are not as important as the quality of the cases. Eisenhardt (1991) emphasized that the number of cases included in a case study is dependent on the amount of knowledge on the topic that already exists as well as the amount of new information the cases would bring to the topic. In taking the words of these scholars into account, I included eight cases in my study: four Black immigrant cases and four Black American cases.

Recruitment Methods

To recruit students for my study, I created a recruitment flyer detailing the study's purpose, participation criteria, incentive/compensation for participation (a $40 Amazon gift card), and my contact information. To be considered for the study, students had to meet the following criteria:

1) Student is a current undergraduate enrolled at the research site (Mid-Atlantic University)
2) Student has been attending Mid-Atlantic University for at least one semester
3) Student is of Black immigrant background **OR** Black American background
    a) For the purpose of my study, a student of Black immigrant background is one who:
        i. Identifies as Black and was born outside of the U.S. to 2 Black parents

        OR

        ii. Identifies as Black and was born in the U.S. to 2 Black parents who were born outside of the U.S.
    b) For the purpose of my study, a student of Black American background is one who:
        i. Identifies as Black and was born in the U.S. to 2 Black parents who were born in the U.S.

As the researcher, I contacted student leaders of social and cultural undergraduate Black student organizations on Mid-Atlantic University's campus, such as the African Student Association, Caribbean Students Association, Black Student Union, and others. I reached out to these organizations via email (using each organization's e-mail address listed on MU's Student Center website) to share the purpose of my study and my study's recruitment flyer (see Appendix A for e-mail sent to Black student organizations and recruitment flyer). I asked the

student leaders of these organizations if they were interested in participating in the study and asked if they could also share the recruitment flyer with their organization members. I also contacted staff members at MU's Black cultural center (henceforth stylized as Black Cultural Center) as well as staff members at MU's multicultural office who work directly with the Black undergraduate student population. I asked them if they would be willing to disseminate the recruitment flyer to the Black students they serve, whether through listserv or newsletter (see Appendix B for e-mail sent to staff at MU's Black Cultural Center and multicultural office).

Despite multiple emails to both the student organizations and the staff at MU's Black Cultural Center and multicultural office, I received no responses regarding participant interest. I also reached out to my academic networks to ask for their help in disseminating my flyer. This resulted in recruitment of one participant. Still needing more participants, I reached out to my advisor to ask for her assistance in outreaching to the staff at MU's Black Cultural Center and multicultural office. After this successful third recruitment push working with MU's staff to reach the Black student body, I ended up with 28 students in total who filled out the demographic survey. From the 28 respondents, I made a series of decisions to help narrow down my participant pool to eight students.

Before the completion of my last recruitment push, I had already scheduled an interview with the student who previously filled out the demographic survey. As such, I searched the survey responses of the remaining 27 interested students to find seven more participants. As I examined the responses of these 27 interested students, what was most critical in my decision-making was how they described their cross-ethnic interactions (i.e., how they described the nature and frequency of their interactions and relationships with their cross-ethnic peers) because this marker gave me an indication of how much data I could obtain from each student. For

example, I did not choose students who said they had no cross-ethnic interactions because I would not have been able to get any data from them related to my study's research questions and purpose regarding students describing their cross-ethnic interactions.

Other considerations in my selection of participants were students' genders – as I wanted to include as much of a diverse gender pool as I could – and also how students described the importance of their ethnic identity to them. Namely, I reviewed their responses to see which students reported some level of reflection on their ethnic identity, even if it was to say that they did not have to think about their ethnic identity often because it was an active part of their upbringing. In terms of gender, 20 of the respondents identified as women, seven identified as men, and one identified as non-binary. Having a majority of women-identifying respondents made the task of using gender to diversify the participant pool a bit more difficult, so I pivoted to examining other aspects of identity in conjunction with gender.

For example, I looked at all respondents' ages, ethnic identities, and academic majors. Only two of the respondents identified as being over the age of 24. No Black American men filled out the demographic survey; only Black American women filled out the survey. Patterns such as these made me more intentional in examining how Black American women respondents described factors such as their ethnic identities and the nature and frequency of their cross-ethnic relationships with Black immigrant students. Additionally, not including a student who identified as having no cross-ethnic interactions, only one immigrant respondent identified as being of Caribbean descent. This Caribbean-identifying respondent was also one of the two respondents over the age of 24. Regarding major, only one Black American woman-identifying respondent identified as studying vocal performance and music education. Such multilayered identity considerations helped me to narrow down my participant pool.

Once I completed my narrowing process, I had eight participants, consisting of five women, two men, and one non-binary person. For a summary of participant characteristics, please see the table below (Table 2). I provide detailed case profiles for each participant in the next chapter (Chapter 4).

Table 2

Participant Demographic Information

Pseudonym	Gender	Race	Ethnicity	Country of Birth	Major	Age
Chris	Man	Black African	African American (Guinean/Sierra Leonean)	United States	Information Science	21
Stacy	Woman	Black	African-American	United States	Vocal Performance / Music Education	21
Gloria	Woman (Cis gender)	Black	Black	United States	Information Science	20
Amanda	Woman	Black Caribbean	Jamaican/Grenadian born in the US	United States	Psychology	25
Chidinma	Non-Binary	Black	Nigerian American	Nigeria	Biological Sciences	20
Vanessa	Woman	Black American	African American	United States	Business Management	19
Renee	Woman	Black American	African American	United States	Civil Engineering	20
Zexell	Man	African	Liberian	Liberia	History and Secondary Education	21

Note. The racial and ethnic identifiers in the table were selected by the participants. The researcher did not assign these identifiers.

Researcher Instrumentation

In conducting this constructivist, qualitative study, it is important for me to acknowledge my researcher position as an instrument through which I am influencing and facilitating each aspect of the study's design, from inception and implementation to analysis and implications. As such, it is imperative that I clearly articulate my background as the researcher, my closeness to the topic, my values, and other such aspects of my identity relevant to the topic of this study. I did so by providing the following statement regarding my positionality.

Researcher Positionality

As a researcher, it is important to acknowledge how my own salient identities may shape my research process during this study (Jones et al., 2014). Three of my most salient identities both inside and outside of higher education research spaces are my racial, ethnic, and gender identities. I identify as a Black, Nigerian American woman. As a Black-identifying woman, my race is constantly at the forefront of my mind. My racial identity guides my thoughts and shapes how I interact with others, both Black and non-Black. My Blackness also informs my identity expression. I walk proudly in my Blackness and this pride impacts the way I discuss my Blackness (i.e., very openly and happily) as well as how I speak on injustice faced by the Black community. I am intolerant of racism, discrimination, and oppression that the Black community faces because of the political and social structures tied to our skin color. For this reason, I never hesitate to bring up conversations about Black people and the societal issues we face because of our marginalized identities in classroom settings. In the same vein, I also express my pride in my Blackness by consistently and openly declaring my love for the Black community in both academic and social spaces.

How I express my Blackness is also rooted in my ethnic identity. I cannot and do not separate my Blackness from my Nigerian American identity. I am the child of Nigerian

immigrant parents; I am a second-generation immigrant. My upbringing was largely a reflection of my Nigerian Igbo background. From the foods I still eat to the style of clothing I still wear, my Nigerian Igbo culture has always been a critical part of my Black identity. It impacts my mannerisms, my language, my morals, my views on respect, and my views on community. My gender identity as a woman is also an inseparable part of my Black identity. As a Black woman, the people I have found the most support with are also Black women. Black women have been my constant confidants, companions, advisors, and friends. Throughout all the educational spaces I have occupied, Black women have always been central and critical to my retention and success. My connection with these three identities must be acknowledged and framed, so that I am open to students who do not find comfort and support in Black women, who do not walk proudly in their racial or ethnic heritage, and who do not speak up against injustice.

The intersection of my racial, ethnic, and gender identities has influenced my worldview and my outlook on knowledge. I have a constructivist epistemology: I believe that we know what we know as a result of the various societies and cultures to which we have been exposed and in which we have grown up. For this reason, I believe that the way we understand and discuss our racial identity, ethnic identity, and experiences in higher education are largely linked to our cultural and societal backgrounds. This belief impacts the current study on the relationships and interactions between Black diasporic individuals in higher education, particularly, Black immigrant and Black American students at a public state flagship institution.

Role of Researcher Positionality in the Study

Overall, I am aware of how my intersecting identities may impact my research process within this study. As a member of the Black community, I have a connection with the topic that is different than those who do not identify as Black. Likewise, being a part of the Black

immigrant diaspora myself, I am aware that I have prior knowledge that can inform my perceptions of this topic. It can also be perceived that I have a vested interest in wanting to see equitable and in-depth examination of Black diasporic students in scholarship as well as in practice. However, because I am cognizant that my identity ties in personally with my research, I am able to use this knowledge to the benefit of this study.

Because I am familiar with various understandings of race and ethnic identity in the Black diaspora and how these understandings can affect the relationship dynamics and interactions between Black diasporic populations, my familiarity with this concept will allow me to better understand the viewpoints represented in the literature and in my participants' narratives without the need for me to comment on my own Black cross-cultural communication experiences in higher education. While I may have shared commonalities with the participants in the study, I did not focus on how my own understanding of the multiplicity of Black identity and Black diasporic relationships aligns or does not align with the participants' as they share their narratives. Instead, my literary and experiential knowledge was particularly beneficial in the development of my interview and focus group protocols and during the data collection process. Given my understanding of Black identities and Black diasporic relationships, I believe I was better able to craft and refine questions for participants that focus on exploring the students' cross-cultural communication processes without being leading in my questioning. Likewise, I believe my knowledge made me capable of rephrasing protocol questions or asking relevant follow-up questions on-the-spot to draw out more of the participants' narratives during interviews and focus groups should the need arise. As opposed to my perspective clouding my judgment or ability to actively listen to participants' narratives, using my perspective to improve my research process with participants allowed their voices to inform the direction of the research

analysis and will also allow their stories to actively shape existing narratives on the relationship dynamics and interactions between Black immigrant and Black American students in higher education.

Data Collection

Data Collection Methods

I collected data from June to early July 2023. The methods of data collection I used in the study were demographic surveys, interviews, and focus groups. I discuss my use of each method below.

Demographic Surveys

The first aspect of the data collection process was the demographic survey. I created the survey using Google Forms. I utilized the demographic survey to determine participant eligibility by collecting data such as race, ethnicity, country of birth, institutional affiliation, and enrollment status. The survey served as a screening process that immediately let both myself and the student know whether they met the required eligibility criteria for participation in my study. Other types of background information collected in the survey included participants' genders, their parents' countries of origin and racial and ethnic identities, where the student was raised (if different from the place of birth), the current county in which they resided in the research state, and if they were born outside of the U.S., why they migrated to the U.S. (e.g., for school [K-12 or college]) (see Appendix C for demographic survey).

Interviews & Focus Groups

Each participant was asked to complete both an individual interview and a focus group interview. All interviews were conducted virtually using the virtual communication platform Zoom. Conducting interviews and focus groups virtually alleviated any travel burdens for

individuals interested in participating in the study and – given the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic – also ensured the participants and I (the researcher) were not unnecessarily put at risk of contracting COVID-19 due to prolonged in-person contact. Each interview and focus group were audio- and video-recorded via Zoom. Each interview lasted approximately 30-60 minutes. Each focus group lasted approximately 80-90 minutes.

Both interviews and focus groups followed a semi-structured protocol. Semi-structured protocols typically contain a list of pre-set questions the interviewer has developed to ask the interviewee(s) based on the research question(s) and objective of their study; however, the pre-set questions are adaptive to the interviewee's responses (Adams, 2015). Specifically, deviations from the protocol or question list are made at the discretion of the interviewer (Adams, 2015). This approach to data collection provided me with flexibility to incorporate follow-up questions, edit existing questions, or omit questions as needed based on the real-time responses of the interviewee(s). Bearing this semi-structured approach in mind, during interviews and focus groups, I asked each participant a series of open-ended questions and asked additional questions as they arose based on the flow of conversation.

The interviews were utilized to hear one-on-one accounts from Black immigrant and Black American students that detailed their perspectives and experiences regarding their personal interactions and relationships with other Black immigrant and Black American students as well as what role they saw their ethnic identity playing in these interactions and relationships. The focus groups were utilized to hear collective accounts from groups of Black immigrant and Black American students that detailed their overall perspectives on and descriptions of the existing interactions and relationships between Black immigrant and Black American students on their campus as well as what facilitators and barriers they noticed to cross-ethnic communication

between Black immigrant and Black American students. Specifically, the focus groups were comprised of students from each Black diasporic group of interest (i.e., a Black immigrant focus group, a Black American focus group) to avoid the possibility of creating an ethnically contentious environment for students. I conducted two focus groups in total (one per ethnic group): a Black immigrant focus group and a Black American focus group.

The interview and focus group protocols were informed by the study's research questions and guiding theoretical framework (see Appendix D for interview and focus group protocols). During interviews, students were asked questions such as: 1) How would you describe your interactions with other Black immigrant/Black American students [whichever aligned with the student's ethnic identity] on your campus? Could you explain why you would characterize/describe the interactions that way? 2) What role, if any, do you think your ethnicity plays in the types of interactions you have with other Black immigrant/Black American students [whichever aligned with the student's ethnic identity]? Why? 3) Overall, if you were to describe your relationship with other Black immigrant/Black American students [whichever aligned with the student's ethnic identity] in one word, how would you describe it? Why? After being asked about their perspectives and experiences with other Black students whose ethnic identities align with their own, the participants were then asked the same set of questions about Black students whose ethnic identities differed from their own. For example, in an interview with a Black immigrant student, the student was first asked the above set of questions about their interactions and relationships with other Black immigrant students, then asked the same set of questions about their interactions and relationships with Black American students. During focus groups, students were asked questions such as: 1) What are some stereotypes you believe are held about Black Americans? What are some stereotypes you believe are held about Black immigrants? 2)

What are some positive attributes you have heard about Black Americans? What are some positive attributes you have heard about Black immigrants? 3) How would you describe the relationship dynamics between Black immigrant and Black American students on your campus? What about the interactions between the two groups? 4) What do you think are some barriers or challenges to [cross-ethnic] communication between Black immigrant and Black American students? What do you think are some benefits to [cross-ethnic] communication between Black immigrant and Black American students?

Prior to each interview and focus group, I sent the participants an informed consent form (see Appendix E for informed consent form) to provide information on the project, its purpose, and their rights as participants. Before starting each individual and group interview, I also asked each participant's permission to record the interview, explained to them the purpose of the interview, and went over the informed consent form with them. I explained to them that the interview was completely voluntary and that they could choose to skip questions or to end the interview at any time. Each individual and group interview was also transcribed. I utilized human transcribers available through the transcription service, Rev. Once the Rev transcribers created an initial draft of each transcript, I then reviewed and edited the transcripts myself to ensure their quality. I further discuss my use of the Rev transcription service and my transcription process in the data analysis section below.

Data Analysis

Data Analysis Overview

In multiple case study research, two types of analysis are done: within-case analysis and cross-case analysis (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Once all data is collected, the analysis process for multiple case study research begins with an in-depth review of the data sources relevant to each

case (e.g., interviews, observations, fieldnotes, documents, artifacts) and the creation of themes to collate a distinct, descriptive narrative writeup of each case (Eisenhardt, 1989). This process, also known as within-case analysis, is then followed by cross-case analysis. In conducting cross-case analysis, the researcher compares each case in order to identify relevant, emergent themes across cases (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This step involves the researcher examining and detailing both similarities and differences across cases, paying close attention to differences in similar cases and similarities in seemingly different cases (Eisenhardt, 1989). The final aspect of case study analysis requires the researcher to detail the lessons that can be learned from each case and/or how the cases elucidate the topic or issue under study (Creswell, 2013; Creswell & Poth, 2018; Patton, 2015). My data analysis followed a multi-step process outlined below in the Data Analysis Procedure section. I also aligned parts of my data analysis process with common case study research analysis practices detailed above to ensure thorough analysis of each case.

In order to make meaning of my data, I used thematic coding (Mertens, 2019). In other words, I reviewed the data repeatedly to see what themes, commonalities, and differences were unearthed in the participants' stories. The coding and analysis techniques I used to make meaning of my data were multiple readings of the data, initial coding, and axial (or focused) coding (Charmaz, 2006; Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Jones et al., 2014). Performing multiple readings of the data aligned with case study approaches to data analysis in that it allowed me to break the data up into codes and find recurring themes within each case as well as across cases (Schoch, 2020). Initial coding entails coding the data either word-by-word or line-by-line (Jones et al., 2014). For this study, I read through the data, noting any codes I found as I read each line. Axial or focused coding involves the grouping of smaller, individual codes into larger themes (Charmaz, 2006; Jones et al., 2014). After coding initially, I engaged in focused coding by

grouping my smaller codes into broader categories based on topics each participant covered while discussing their experiences. I then moved these categories into themes that were relevant across the participants' experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Data Analysis Procedure

For data analysis, my process consisted of eight steps. In step one, I engaged in pre-, during, and post-interview memoing (both individual and group interviews). I wrote down my thoughts, feelings, and connections to the work throughout the data collection and analysis process. I started by noting my thoughts and perceptions going into each interview. This helped me to set aside my own preconceived notions prior to engaging with the participants, so that I was focused wholly on their narratives. I also made mental notes of thoughts I had during each interview and jotted them down immediately after the interview, so that I kept track of any thoughts that arose from the participants' stories. After each interview, I memoed by reflecting on my thought process throughout the interview, what I noticed in terms of my own behavior and that of the participants, as well as how I felt during the interview. In step two, each individual and group interview was transcribed using Rev, an external transcription service that ensures confidentiality. I paid for Rev to use human transcribers to create transcripts based on the participants' recorded interview and focus group files. I then went into the transcript drafts created by Rev's transcribers and cleaned up the transcriptions so that the transcripts accurately reflected the speakers and the conversation verbatim.

Steps three through six of my data analysis process demonstrate how I enacted my within-case analysis to align with common case study analysis methods. Step six also begins to detail how cross-case analysis was implemented in the study. In step three of my data analysis process, I read through the interview transcripts and perform initial coding (Charmaz, 2006).

Charmaz (2006) described initial coding as looking at the data line-by-line or word-by-word to create codes. In my initial coding, I looked at the data word-by-word and noted what concepts arose in the participants' stories related to my research questions. I did this as I performed my first read-through of the data. As recommended by Jones et al. (2014), I went into the coding process with an open mind so that my expectations of what I found in the data are did not bias my codes. In step four, I read through the transcripts a second time and coded using my theoretical framework, communication theory of identity (CTI). This second time, I read through the transcripts to see how the experiences participants shared tied into CTI. This allowed me to see how the data was linked to the theoretical framework by creating codes that captured the relationship between the framework and the participants' stories. In step five, I read through the interview transcripts a third time to capture any codes that were missing from the previous theoretical framework coding. In this read-through, I reviewed the transcripts to see if there were any codes that fell outside of the theoretical framework that I did not note in my initial coding. This helped me decipher whether any parts of the participants' stories could not be captured by the CTI framework.

In step six, I related my codes to each other in a process called axial, or focused, coding (Jones et al., 2014). I related the codes from each read-through (the initial, the framework, and the final) to one another. This allowed me to create broader, relevant categories that captured the individual codes in a larger context. From these categories, I looked for themes in the data, both within each transcript as well as across the transcripts (effectively beginning my cross-case analysis). The process of relating codes into larger categories and themes helped to give me a broader understanding of the data. This broader understanding helped me illustrate the participants' stories clearly in a way that accurately reflected the experiences they shared during

their individual and group interviews. In step seven, I further related the stories and themes from each participant's within-case data across all the cases. I noted how the participants' stories compared to one another, particularly identifying relevant themes and distinctions across the participants' cases. Lastly, in step eight, I detailed the lessons that can be learned from each case and how the cases related to the broader topic under study. This particular step in the data analysis process was added due to its importance in case study, this study's methodological grounding (Creswell, 2013; Patton, 2015). I executed this step by providing a discussion section based on my analysis of my findings (found in Chapter 6 of this dissertation).

Addressing Credibility, Transferability, & Trustworthiness

Defining Trustworthiness, Credibility, & Transferability

The term *trustworthiness* in qualitative research refers to the process undergone, or steps taken, to assure that a study is rigorous or high-quality (Jones et al., 2014). In assessing the quality of qualitative research, terms such as *credibility* and *transferability* have been used to establish the *trustworthiness* of the research (Jones et al., 2014; Mertens, 2019). In efforts to "break out of the shadow of quantitative research" (Jones et al., 2014), some qualitative scholars have chosen to use these terms to distinguish assessment markers of qualitative research from those of quantitative research. Specifically, some qualitative scholars do not want to use the same terminology of *validity* and *reliability* often used in – and sometimes equated with – quantitative research (Arminio & Hultgren, 2002). Other qualitative scholars choose to use the traditionally quantitative terminology of *validity* in their own assessment (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009) while other qualitative scholars use terms that are considered parallel or analogous to the quantitative language of *validity* (e.g., credibility, transferability) (Guba & Lincoln, 1989; Jones et al., 2014; Mertens, 2019; Morrow, 2005).

The *credibility* of a study is considered to parallel a study's *internal validity*, which assesses how closely the researcher's findings align with the realities or truth of the participants in the study sample (Guba & Lincoln, 1989; Mertens, 2019). In assessing qualitative research, the *credibility* criteria can be fulfilled through practices such as peer debriefing, member checks, and triangulation (Merriam, 1995; Mertens, 2019). The *transferability* of a study is considered to parallel a study's *external validity*, which assesses how applicable the results of a study may be to populations that differ from the study's sample (Guba & Lincoln, 1989; Mertens, 2019). The *transferability* criteria in assessing qualitative research can be fulfilled through practices including provision of thick description and multiple cases (Mertens, 2019). To establish my study's credibility, I utilized triangulation, member checks, and peer debriefing in my data collection and analysis processes. To establish my study's transferability, I utilized both thick description and multiple cases in my data collection, analysis, and reporting processes.

Addressing Credibility & Transferability in the Study

Triangulation involves using more than one method of data collection in a research design (Merriam, 1995). In using multiple data collection methods, triangulation helps the researcher to confirm their findings by allowing them to gain a better understanding of their investigated phenomenon from different perspectives (Merriam, 1995). I implemented triangulation in the study by collecting data via demographic surveys, individual interviews, and group interviews (i.e., focus groups). More detailed information on my data collection methods is provided in the plan for data collection section above. Member checking, which can be formal or informal (Mertens, 2019), typically involves the researcher providing study participants – whether verbally or in written form – with an initial summary of themes drawn from their data so that the participants can confirm the emergent findings or themes the researcher is highlighting in

their data report. Member checks are an important aspect of involving participants in verifying the meanings the researcher is constructing from the data (Mertens, 2019). For the study, I conducted member checks by sending each participant their interview transcripts so that they could review and confirm that I was effectively capturing their words and experiences. Through the process of conducting member checks, my participants were able to have a say in which parts of their narratives were shared in the data and were able to confirm that the data accurately reflected their words and their meanings (Merriam, 1995).

While all students were given the chance to engage in member checking by reviewing their transcripts for accuracy and narrative clarity, only one participant (Zexell) responded to my member check email inquiry to say that their narrative was presented correctly, and they had no changes. The remaining seven participants did not respond to the member check email. This may have resulted from the significant gap in time between participants completing the individual and group interviews and when I was able to send the transcripts to them for member checking. There was about a three-to-five-month gap between the final focus group and my member check email to the participants. Unfortunately, it took me longer to review each transcript than I expected. Prior to sending out the transcripts for member checks, I did a thorough review of the transcripts for accuracy, comparing each transcript to the corresponding audio-video recording of the individual and group interviews, and making necessary corrections. I was able to send some participants' transcripts out for member checks within three months of the last focus group. However, other transcripts took longer to review and, as such, were sent out for member checks four or five months after the last focus group. Given the length of each transcript, I specified in my email request for member checks that students did not have to read the entire transcripts, but rather I was asking them to confirm that their overall narrative was captured correctly. I did not

give students a deadline by which to send me back any transcript revisions to account for students' schedules. I planned to incorporate any revisions I received. However, I received no revisions. As such, I inferred that each student's narrative was presented accurately in their transcript and that they had no changes to make to the document.

I also utilized peer debriefing during my data analysis process. Peer debriefing typically involves the researcher engaging with a peer or peers who either have insider knowledge of the investigated topic or can pose critical questions "to help the researcher confront" their "own values and to guide next steps in the study" (Mertens, 2019, p. 281). I engaged with two peer debriefers – each debriefer representing one of the two communities (Black immigrant and Black American) that I interviewed – about the themes I pulled from my data. The peer debriefers were Black graduate students at MU who understood existing relationship dynamics between Black immigrant and Black American students more broadly given their own experiences attending predominantly white institutions as undergraduates. I conversed with the peer debriefers, providing them with my research questions, the purpose of my study, and a summary of my themes. The peer debriefers provided important insight and feedback as insiders to the two communities that constitute this study's demographic. I utilized the aforementioned practices – triangulation, member checks, and peer debriefing – to establish the credibility of my study.

Use of multiple cases, particularly in case study research, aids in strengthening the applicability of the study's results to populations outside of the study sample (Mertens, 2019; Yin, 2018). Given that I conducted a collective case study, I inherently used and analyzed multiple cases throughout my data collection and analysis processes. Thick description refers to an "[e]xtensive and careful description of the time, place, context, and culture" examined in a research study (Mertens, 2019, p. 283). I provided thick, rich description in the research by

providing detailed accounts of the institutional context, setting, and my research timeline as well as a detailed description of each case included in my study. I utilized the aforementioned practices – multiple cases and thick description – to establish the transferability of my study.

Additional Methods of Establishing Trustworthiness in the Study

Other methods I used to establish trustworthiness are reflective memoing and addressing my positionality as the researcher. The threat of researcher bias can be addressed and mitigated through the use of these two methods, which allow the researcher to state any background information, beliefs, assumptions, experiences, or other relevant aspects of themselves that can influence their design, implementation, and/or analysis of the research (Creswell, 2013; Jones et al., 2014; Mertens, 2019). I memoed before, during, and after my interviews and focus groups as well as during coding to ensure that I engaged in this reflective practice throughout my entire data collection and analysis process. By memoing, I was able to note my own thoughts, feelings, and subjectivities in relation to the work (Birks, Chapman, & Francis, 2008). This helped me to set aside my perceptions before engaging in the data collection and coding process so that I was wholly focused on the participants' narratives (Birks et al., 2008). To address my researcher positionality, I offered a positionality statement in the researcher instrumentation section above. By addressing my "orientation" and "biases" as the researcher, I was able to illustrate to readers how and why the data were interpreted and presented as they were (Merriam, 1995, p. 55).

Scope & Limitations

Regarding the scope of the study, generalizability is rarely the goal of qualitative research (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Mertens, 2019). Instead, the primary goal of qualitative research is often to gain a deep understanding of a phenomenon, event, group, organization, people, or topic of interest (Creswell, 2002; Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Mertens, 2019). As such, the scope of the

study aligned with the primary goal of qualitative research in that it aimed to provide a deeper understanding of cross-cultural Black communication, relationships, and relationship-building among Black immigrant and Black American undergraduate students at a predominantly white, four-year state flagship institution in the Mid-Atlantic. Each aspect of the study – including the study's purpose, research questions, data collection methods, and data analysis procedures – was crafted to meet this primary goal.

There were three key limitations of the study. First, there were no Black American men in the participant pool. As stated previously, no Black American men filled out the demographic survey to express interest in participating in the study. While this was unfortunate, the lack of Black American male representation in the study reflects a larger demographic pattern in higher education: Black American men attend college at lower rates than Black American women (Garibaldi, 2007, 2014; Slater, 1994). Second, there was only one Black Caribbean participant. This was a product of the small number of Caribbean students who expressed interest in the study by completing the demographic survey. Only two Caribbean students filled out the survey, one of whom is a participant. As mentioned previously, the other Caribbean student who filled out the survey indicated having no cross-ethnic interactions with Black American students whatsoever. Because the purpose of the study was to examine the cross-ethnic interactions and relationships between Black immigrant and Black American students, this student was not considered for the final participant pool.

The third limitation of this study was that one of the participants (Stacy) did not complete the focus group component of the study. Stacy completed the demographic survey and interview portion of the study but did not respond to further emails after indicating her availability to participate in the Black American student focus group. I continued to reach out to Stacy leading

up to the focus group; however, she did not join the focus group's Zoom meeting on the scheduled day. After the Black American participant focus group, I reached out to Stacy again, sending her a document containing the focus group questions and offering her an alternative option to completing the focus group component of the study. I informed Stacy that she could provide her written responses to the focus group questions she felt comfortable answering. Similar to the verbal instruction given to all participants to skip answering questions they did not want to answer or they did not feel comfortable answering, I offered Stacy the opportunity to leave blank responses under any questions she did not want to answer or felt uncomfortable answering. However, I still received no responses from her. Because Stacy gave very rich narratives during her interview, I did not want to exclude her data from my analysis. As such, I chose to compensate Stacy with a $25 Amazon gift card for completing two components of the study. This amount was reduced compared to the $40 gift cards I provided to the remaining seven participants who completed all three components of the study. While Stacy did not respond to the gift card email either, I received confirmation from Amazon that she collected her $25 gift card. Although this is simply speculation, I believe Stacy either had other summer commitments that ended up occupying her time or decided to step away from the study to enjoy her summer break.

One aspect of the study that could be perceived as a limitation but was an intentional decision on my part was its institution-type bounded setting. As mentioned in the previous chapter, comparative and combined research on Black immigrant and Black American student experiences is heavily concentrated in the private elite college setting (Bennett & Lutz, 2009; Charles et al., 2008; Jaschik, 2017; Massey et al., 2007). It may be perceived as a limitation to similarly situate my study in a singular college context: the public, state flagship institutional

setting. Nonetheless, examining Black immigrant and Black American student interactions and relationships in this singular context could be beneficial in expanding understandings of Black diasporic student relationships within a context that has barely been used to study the phenomenon of interest. Studying the phenomenon of interest in this singular setting could also aid in illustrating the importance and relevance of contextual differences when examining complex concepts such as relationships and relationship-building amongst Black diasporic student populations. Consequently, future researchers may be more inclined to consider such contextual differences more closely or to study Black diasporic relationships in another institutional context (e.g., an HBCU) that could provide additional insight into this complex phenomenon.

Chapter Summary

This chapter outlined the various data sources, methods, and analysis processes I employed to conduct my qualitative case study. I also introduced and contextualized the study's research site: Mid-Atlantic University (MU), a predominantly white, public, state flagship institution in the Mid-Atlantic region of the U.S. Additionally, I highlighted my constructivist epistemology and researcher positionality in relation to the study, identifying the various methods I used to ensure the trustworthiness, credibility, and transferability of my study. I concluded the chapter by addressing the scope and limitations of the study, which informed how I engaged in the research process. In the next chapter, I present case profiles that introduce each of the study's eight participants, their backgrounds, and their cross-ethnic communication experiences at MU.

Chapter 4: Within-Case Analysis

This chapter utilizes case profiles to present a within-case analysis of each of the eight cases included in the study. Given that each student participant constitutes a case, there are a total of eight case profiles. Each individual case profile has two main sections: 1) Background: Identity and Cross-Ethnic Communication Patterns and 2) Perceived Role of Ethnic Identity in Cross-Ethnic Interactions. Each case profile begins with the participant's background, including their academic major and student status, racial and ethnic identities, and cross-ethnic communication patterns. The cross-ethnic communication patterns are inclusive of the participant's descriptions of their interactions and relationships with their cross-ethnic peers at MU (i.e., how often their interactions occur and the context in which they occur) as well as examples of prominent cross-ethnic experiences they have had when engaging with their cross-cultural[7] counterparts. Each profile ends with the participant's perspectives on the role of their ethnic identity in their interactions with their cross-ethnic peers. The research questions guiding this study were:

- What do Black immigrant and Black American students at a predominantly white, public, state flagship institution perceive to be the role of their ethnic identities in their cross-ethnic interactions with one another?
- What do Black immigrant and Black American students at a predominantly white, public, state flagship institution perceive to be the benefits and challenges of Black cross-ethnic interactions and relationship-building?

[7] Within the context of the interviews, several participants noted that they better understood the use of the term "cultural identity" to refer to their non-racial ethnic background, as opposed to the term "ethnic identity" (which they viewed as more synonymous with racial identity in the U.S. context). As such, I use the terms "cultural identity" and "ethnic identity" as well as the terms "cross-cultural" and "cross-ethnic" interchangeably throughout Chapters 4-6 to accurately reflect a combination of the students' linguistic understandings of ethnic identity and my study's operationalization of ethnic identity.

This chapter particularly addresses the first research question regarding the perceived role of ethnic identity in students' cross-ethnic interactions with one another. Through surveys, individual interviews, and focus groups, students reflected on their communication experiences with their Black cross-ethnic peers at MU. In this chapter specifically, the data presented in the case profiles primarily originate from two sources: participants' demographic surveys and individual interviews. In the demographic survey, each participant provided detailed information about their background (i.e., academic major and student status, racial and ethnic identities, and description of cross-ethnic communication patterns). This information is presented in the first section of each participant case profile (i.e., in the section entitled "Background: Identity and Cross-Ethnic Communication Patterns"). In the individual interview, each participant shared more personal experiences and stories that expanded on the information they included in their demographic survey (i.e., details of how they came to understand their ethnic identity, examples of memorable communication experiences they have had with their cross-ethnic peers, and the perceived role of their ethnic identity in their interactions with their cross-ethnic peers). This information is presented in both the first and second sections of each participant case profile (i.e., in the first section entitled "Background: Identity and Cross-Ethnic Communication Patterns" and in the second section entitled "Perceived Role of Ethnic Identity in Cross-Ethnic Interactions").

In this chapter, I introduce the eight participants in this study: Chris, Stacy, Zexell, Gloria, Chidinma, Vanessa, Amanda, and Renee. The case profiles alternate between Black immigrant and Black American participants, beginning with a Black immigrant student, Chris.

Chris

Background: Identity and Cross-Ethnic Communication Patterns

Identity

Chris is a 21-year-old senior at MU, studying information science. In terms of gender, Chris identifies as a man. He was born in the U.S. to two Guinean immigrant parents. Aside from living in Guinea in 2004, Chris has lived most of his life (17+ years) in the research state. He racially identifies as Black African and ethnically identifies as African American, specifically Guinean and Sierra Leonean. Chris has lived on campus all four years of his time at MU. He is also involved in both the African Student Association and the Black Student Union as a general member of each student organization. He mentioned that he mostly attends each organization's large-scale social events, not their more frequent club meetings. He stated that this attendance pattern is "due to the time constraint of being a college student." He added that he only goes to events if his friends are also attending.

Throughout his interview and focus group, Chris used the term "African American" to refer to a first- or second-generation African immigrant living in the U.S. Typically "African American" is a term that is used to refer to Black Americans/African Americans in the U.S. context. Chris was one of the few participants who consistently used "African American" in a way that referenced African immigrants. This distinction was important to Chris, as he felt his ethnic identity was even more salient to him because of the limited way in which Black identity is often viewed in the U.S. He felt like Black identity terms in the U.S. were used almost synonymously and this bothered him. Responding to a question about the importance of his ethnic identity, Chris shared:

> I believe it's truly important to me that I identify myself with the more … African part [of my identity] because being Black and African American is almost synonymous in America. There's no difference. However, there is a cultural difference, and I think that

> coming to America, or at least growing up in America, Black men and Black people alike are somewhat pressured to conform to certain figurines [standards/expectations] of society or … to fit in a certain category … a certain identity within America for Black people. … So my identity at least is very important to me. I'd say it's important to me because it just helps me define who I am in my character and my upbringing and how fortunate I have been to be raised in an African household.

Further expanding on his point, Chris stated that he felt fortunate to be raised in an African household because of the opportunities he received being born in the U.S. that his parents did not have access to back on the African continent. He expressed feeling fortunate to "have both parents who didn't come from an education background that really wanted their children to pursue a secondary education or postsecondary education."

Cross-Ethnic Communication Patterns

Regarding his cross-ethnic communication with Black American students at MU, Chris self-described as interacting with Black American students often – i.e., at least once a week or once every two weeks – primarily as classmates. However, he mentioned that his Black friend group is diverse, stating "my friends aren't strictly African American. They vary from Caribbean American to Black American and African American."

Chris described his cross-ethnic interactions with Black American students specifically as a "mix of good and…bad, but most[ly] good." He explained that the "bad" can stem from incidents where he and other Black immigrant students allow cross-ethnic stereotypes or preconceived notions about Black Americans – notions "instill[ed]" in them by their parents – to cloud their perceptions of Black American students and their cross-ethnic interactions with them. However, Chris said this was no longer the case for him and described his cross-ethnic

interactions with Black American students as "pleasant." He also added that his cross-ethnic interactions with Black American students are "great and enlightening" because he and his Black American peers discuss topics such as "Black [American] history and African history," "issues within the Black [American] community and the African community," and the ethnic "divide" between Africans and Black Americans.

Perceived Role of Ethnic Identity in Cross-Ethnic Interactions

When describing the role he felt his ethnic identity played in his cross-ethnic interactions with Black American students, Chris discussed how – up until his first year of college – his ethnic identity made him somewhat wary of interacting with Black American students, specifically because of what his parents told him about Black Americans. He detailed how, as he was growing up, his African parents continually warned him not to conform to Black American identity because of stereotypical perceptions they had of Black Americans. Chris explained:

> …[B]eing raised in an African household, there's this stereotype of a Black American man that you're not supposed to fit into. In my case, you're not supposed to have ear-piercing. You're not supposed to do anything that might make you a target or make you seem suspicious or anything like that. Because, at least in African society, they view Black American style as a target or something that makes them look unapproachable. That's something that's been etched into a lot of African men.

He stated that it was not until he had conversations with Black American students his first year of college that he was able to let go of the preconceived notions his parents instilled in him about Black Americans. For example, when Chris asked a Black American student – a student who later became his friend – about why he engaged in certain behaviors that he perceived as "bad" because of his African upbringing (e.g., smoking recreational drugs, "doing things African

parents would tell their children not to do"), Chris detailed how his perspective was expanded, as his peer raised points he had never considered, such as why a person might choose to smoke recreational drugs. Chris reflected on the outcome of the conversation, saying, "I realized that not everyone had the same upbringing I did, and coping mechanisms for certain things may exist. And I hadn't opened my eyes to that perspective." Chris highlighted how he "grew out of" the negative perceptions he previously held "after coming to talk to people more and coming to realize that that's not the reality based off what my parents had instilled in me all my life."

As Chris engaged more with his cross-ethnic counterparts, he began to understand how his parents' views on Black Americans were limited. He recalled, "I came to realize that I can't live in my parents' viewpoint or perspective of the world. I have to find out what the real answers are for myself." From that point in his college journey, Chris made sure he got to know students individually instead of solely relying on the "closed-minded thoughts our parents might have had." When asked about his current relationship with Black American students at MU, he said:

> I'd say now, [the relationship is] more pleasant. But in the past, I may have been a bit standoffish towards it, only because my entire life I've been told, "Don't confine to that [Black American] identity, don't do this, stay by a certain path, be you, and don't assimilate to American culture," and so on and so forth.

As evidenced by Chris' statement, his parents' instructions to avoid assimilating to a Black American identity and to stay true to his ethnic identity as a Black immigrant significantly impacted his overall outlook on communicating with his cross-ethnic counterparts. However, after having his own social exchanges with Black American students during his first year of college, Chris made the conscious decision to no longer let his parents' warnings dictate how he

interacted with his Black American peers. Overall, as Chris gained more cross-cultural understanding of his Black American peers through his cross-ethnic interactions with them, he became much more open to and encouraging of having one's own cross-ethnic interactions to combat stereotypical thinking and increase positive relationships between Black immigrant and Black American students. He further elaborated on this idea as he described what he perceived to be the benefits and challenges of cross-ethnic communication between these two student groups at MU, a topic discussed in Chapter 5. Next, I introduce Stacy, a Black American student with an overall positive outlook on her cross-ethnic interactions despite her class schedule conflicting with several student-led opportunities for engagement with her Black cross-ethnic peers.

Stacy

Background: Identity and Cross-Ethnic Communication Patterns

Identity

Stacy is a 21-year-old senior at MU, studying vocal performance and music education. In terms of gender, Stacy identifies as a woman. She was born in the U.S. to two U.S.-born Black American parents. She racially identifies as Black and ethnically identifies as "African-American." Stacy has lived in the research state all her life. Regarding her involvement on campus, Stacy recently joined a historically Black sorority and feels "more tied into the Black community on campus" since joining. That being said, she mentioned that "time is not [her] best friend," so she rarely gets to attend the meetings and events of Black student organizations on campus (e.g., Black Student Union, African Student Association, Caribbean Student Association). She mentioned that her late class schedule often conflicts with the general body meetings and events these organizations host.

When discussing how she came into her ethnic identity, Stacy reflected on her upbringing and the role her family played in her understanding of this aspect of her identity. She said:

> Ethnically, I would identify as African American. And I think just growing up my family was very tied into just garnering that and holding that close to how we grew up. We would practice Kwanzaa, stuff like that. That was just very important to the Black community. And it wasn't difficult for me to come into it. I identify as African-American and was in [name of county in which MU is located] all my life. So … I feel very tied and glued to it.

Further expanding on the particular aspects of her upbringing that helped her come into her ethnic identity, Stacy said music was an integral part of her ethnic identity development. She explained:

> Growing up, my aunts and my grandma, we would always just play anything honestly, from Earth, Wind & Fire to Michael Jackson to Destiny's Child. It was just all of the lineage of Black musicians and, as a musician myself, … I want to be like them. I'm glad that that was an influence on my life too.

Stacy described her ethnic background as being "very important" to her and highlighted the effect that growing up in an all-Black community had on her relationship with her ethnicity. She stated:

> [My ethnicity]'s very important to me. Growing up, being in an all-Black community, it was never racism, but colorism happens, and you notice the things that happen to the people who are darker than you and things like that. And you try to … support. And those type of things just helped me realize that, at the end of the day, we're all African American and we should hold true to each other and help each other out in times of

> weakness and discomfort, y'know? So, I feel like those moments, as far as just battling the things that we have to go through on a day-to-day and how we internalize it, I feel like that growing closer to being more comfortable with helping and trying to solve, that brings me closer to who I am and how I feel like we should be as a community and grow.

In witnessing how certain isms (e.g., "colorism") functioned in her all-Black community, Stacy began to realize the importance of people with the same ethnicity as her sticking together. According to Stacy, her desire to uplift other African Americans and "help each other" as a community aided in building her comfortability with her ethnic identity.

Cross-Ethnic Communication Patterns

Regarding her cross-ethnic communication with Black immigrant students at MU, Stacy self-described as interacting with Black immigrant students often – i.e., at least once a week or every two weeks – primarily as acquaintances at campus social events. When describing her interactions with Black immigrant students, Stacy first provided context about the overall Black community at MU and the various student organizations available for Black students of different ethnicities. While pointing out the existence of ethnic organizations and programs for Black immigrant students at MU, she clarified that Black immigrant students' participation in these organizations did not "hinder" her interactions with them. She commented:

> So, MU, I feel like our Black community is very… everybody knows everybody despite which group you're in. … You have BSU and then you have ASA and then you have CSA. So, they're all the African Student Association, Caribbean Student Association. So, like, we're all tied together, but then there's still just programs designated for them, which is completely fine. Like, that's how you do it. But I feel like that doesn't completely hinder my interactions with them when they're in CSA and ASA.

Across her relationships with both Black American and Black immigrant students, Stacy felt that one of the main ways she becomes familiar with other Black students at MU is through Instagram. Stacy explained how the social media platform is a "hotspot" for many of MU's Black students, providing them the opportunity to see other Black students attending MU before ever meeting them in-person. That being said, Stacy also acknowledged that social media familiarity does not always translate to in-person interaction when students run into one another on campus. She stated:

> Instagram is kind of the hotspot on how you get to recognize people on campus. So, I feel like … I've never really met most people on campus. I've never really had to meet them like, "Hi, my name is Stacy." It's usually, "Oh, I know her from Instagram," or "I know him from Instagram." And then how you guys interact in public is either they say hello or they don't, or you speak or you don't. And … those experiences don't push me in a certain type of way. It's just that's the interactions, that's just how it is.

Stacy's outlook on her interactions with Black immigrant students specifically was similar. She again cited the role of Instagram in her recognizing some of the Black immigrant students she saw on campus and similarly summarized their interactions as "we either speak or [we] don't." This line of thinking was tied to Stacy's earlier statement about Black immigrant students' affiliation with their respective campus student organizations (i.e., ASA and CSA) and served as her rationale for why she felt their participation in these organizations "doesn't completely hinder [her] interactions with them." Providing her reasoning for this statement, Stacy remarked, "Going back to the Instagram thing. You know, we all kind of know each other, but it's not like interactions are different based on [ethnicity]."

While Stacy felt that her own interactions with Black immigrant students were no different based on ethnicity, she also expressed that Black immigrant students may relate more to other Black immigrant students because of their ethnicities. She introduced and expanded on this thought when describing the role she felt her ethnic identity played in her cross-ethnic interactions with Black immigrant students.

Perceived Role of Ethnic Identity in Cross-Ethnic Interactions

Stacy felt that the difference between her own ethnicity and the ethnicities of Black immigrant students at MU could cause a difference in the level of comfort some Black immigrant students feel when interacting with her as opposed to interacting with other Black immigrant students. She said:

> I'm pretty sure that some [Black immigrant students] may probably feel more comfortable with talking to their other Black immigrant friend or somebody who they can identify as that, if they could…. I see that all the time. Like ASA, it's not only them putting on events together, they [also] hang out together. … So I feel like – if … I'm not going to ASA meetings, … I wouldn't be at the little hangouts with them… But for saying [my ethnicity] played a major role [in my interactions with Black immigrant students], no. I think it's just like it is what it is, but I would still hang out with them for sure. If they invited me.

Stacy continued, saying she thought her ethnicity could affect her interactions with Black immigrant students, but "not [in] a major way [in which] [Black immigrant students] would never want to [interact with her]." She felt that, for Black immigrant students, ethnicity could "play a role" in their interactions "now that [they are] in college" and in an environment where they can get involved with various organizations and programs relevant to their ethnic identities.

Additionally, she pointed to the fact that Black immigrant students may have family, family friends, or "people they knew before [college]" who also attend MU who share their ethnic identity. In Stacy's words, "that all influences who you hang out with, period." Nonetheless, Stacy stood by her earlier statement that ethnicity does not play a significant role in her cross-ethnic interactions with Black immigrant students. She expressed that – over the course of her time at MU – she has developed the friendships she wants, regardless of ethnicity. She opined:

> …I definitely have a friend who is African and she's in ASA and I hang out with her plenty of times. … She's my best friend's roommate. So, we're always hanging out together. So, I feel like [ethnicity] doesn't play a particular role [in my interactions with Black immigrant students], like saying they're not going to reach out [to me] or I'm not going to reach out [to them]. It's just that's how I've grown these past three years. I've developed the friends that I truly want.

Reflecting on a time when her ethnicity made a difference in her cross-ethnic interactions with Black immigrant students at MU, Stacy described how her relationship with one of her sorority line sisters[8] developed. Stacy's line sister is Caribbean and is a member of the Caribbean Student Association at MU. Stacy said that, prior to them becoming line sisters, she had seen her line sister around "all [the] time." However, she never reached out to her because she felt she knew nothing about her. While she did not speak to her prior to becoming line sisters, Stacy saw her future line sister going to festivals and events celebrating Caribbean culture. In Stacy's words, when she saw her future line sister attending these events, she thought "okay, you are indulging your culture. That's really cool." While Stacy did not feel that she would have had "no

[8] The term "line sisters" typically refers to members of a historically Black sorority who joined the same chapter of the same sorority at the same time. Line sisters are on the same "line" because they went through the sorority chapter's member initiation process together (Western Carolina University Greek Glossary, n.d.).

way to relate to" her line sister prior to them becoming line sisters, she stated, "now that I know her, I feel like it's a segue for me to get to know more about her and have more interactions with her friends as well." Stacy summed up her opinion, saying, "So, I feel like [ethnicity] plays a role [in Black students' cross-ethnic interactions], but there's always a way to get over the hurdle." With a clear understanding of Stacy's cross-ethnic communication experiences and perspectives as a Black American student at MU, I now turn to Zexell's case profile to explore his unique journey and cross-ethnic interactions as a Black immigrant transfer student at MU.

Zexell

Background: Identity and Cross-Ethnic Communication Patterns

Identity

Zexell is a 21-year-old junior at MU, studying history and secondary education. In terms of gender, Zexell identifies as a man. He was born in Liberia to two Liberian parents. When he was one, Zexell's mom moved their family from Liberia to the U.S. Zexell has lived in the research state since his immigration to the U.S. 20 years ago. He racially identifies as African and ethnically identifies as Liberian. Zexell is a transfer student who, at the time of his interview, was in his third semester at MU after transferring from a local community college. Zexell is also a commuter student who lives off-campus and uses the bus as a main mode of transportation for getting on and off campus. According to Zexell, most of his time on campus is spent in classes or studying in a space within MU's student involvement center. As far as campus involvement, Zexell said he mostly "keep[s] to [him]self" because of his busy schedule. He said that his academic schedule and his reliance on the campus bus prevent him from attending Black student organization events at MU.

In discussing his ethnic identity, Zexell explained that he feels like he is "a mix of things," having been born in Africa but living in America for most of his life. While he sometimes feels "more American than African," he remarked that he is and always will be connected to his African roots because of his family's cultural connections to Cameroon and Liberia. Zexell said:

> I feel like I'm a mix of things, honestly … 'cause technically, realistically, I feel like I'm mostly American more than just African, in a sense. Because I left Africa at one year old, and that's because of the war in Liberia, civil war and stuff. But then growing up in an African family with my mom and my grandparents, … I still have connections to Africa. And so, [my ethnicity is] … in a way just family ties and stuff like that, especially [to] Cameroon. … I kind of grew up in two countries, so to say: Cameroon and Liberia. And so … that's why I'm still keeping connected to my African roots in a way. So technically … yes, … I'm Liberian, but really the way I feel inside, it is kind of like I'm more American than African in [a] sense, but just because of family ties … and family traditions and … how I was raised, I am always connected to my African roots.

Zexell then shared that his grandparents and most of his family come from Cameroon. However, his parents are Liberian. He shared more about his upbringing and his family's cultural dynamics, saying:

> My family, my grandparents, most majority is coming from Cameroon. So, I've been living with my grandparents for all my life and I kind of grew up in Cameroonian culture. And I kind of dabbled in Liberian culture as well just since my mom's here and my dad's back in Liberia. And I recently went back there…. So, I just kind of saw Liberia for the

first time [since leaving], because what I saw [before] was from, like, the wartime period. I'[d] never been there after the war.

While it was clear that Zexell's grandparents and other Cameroonian family members helped to shape his understanding of the Cameroonian aspect of his ethnic identity, his familiarity with the Liberian aspect of his ethnic identity did not just come from his Liberian parents. Zexell's high school experience also helped to shape the Liberian aspect of his ethnicity. He mentioned that high school was the first time he had been exposed to other Liberians outside of his parents. He said that when he saw there were other Liberians at his school, he naturally grew attached to them and got to know them. For Zexell, his high school experience – in which he was surrounded by other Liberian students – was when he began to develop his Liberian identity.

Responding to the question of how he came to understand his ethnicity, Zexell stated that he learned from "family gatherings, interactions with family," and simply observed his family members and how they retained a strong connection to their African identity. He explained the effect of his interactions with and observations of his family, saying:

> …[J]ust growing up, I think a big thing that's stressed in my family was like "we're going to raise you kind of African." … I think the way I see it is in the house, it's Africa, it's like "we're going to raise you not really by American standards." … And the biggest thing in my family is family. So, we kind of have close connections with each other…. And I've watched what my mom does, what my grandparents [do], and what my uncles and sister do and stuff like that. And it's just kind of like they themselves still have this close connection [to their African identity]. They … keep that identity with them. And it's

something I think I've also grown to understand. It's like, "yes, I'm African and this is something that's always going to be a part of me."

Zexell continued, stating that, because of his upbringing with his family, his ethnicity was a "normal" part of his identity that he did not have to think much about. He explained that his ethnicity was always present while he was growing up, and for that reason, there was "no struggle of … trying to figure out if [he was] really African or struggling with [his] African identity." He concluded, "It was always there, and it was like I didn't really need to come to grips with it." Overall, Zexell's understanding of his ethnic identity naturally developed through his exposure to Cameroonian and Liberian cultures within his family and household during his upbringing.

Cross-Ethnic Communication Patterns

In his demographic survey, Zexell self-described as 'always' interacting with Black American students (almost every day or several times a week) primarily as acquaintances at 'campus social events.' However, during his interview, Zexell explained more about the nature of his interactions with Black American students. As opposed to 'always' interacting with Black American students at 'campus social events,' Zexell clarified that he 'always' interacted with them briefly in MU's student involvement center when he would go there to study.

Zexell described his interactions with Black American students as "minimal," but "normal" when they occurred. In describing his cross-ethnic interactions he explained, "Because it's just like these are people you meet every day, you interact with them and stuff like that. So, it's just, it's something that comes normally to me and just be[ing] nice." Zexell cited his "tight" schedule as a main contributor to why he has little time to interact with other Black students in general (both Black immigrant and Black American students). He stated that most of his

interactions with Black students tend to happen in the student involvement center housed in MU's student union.

The purpose of the student involvement center is to support student leaders of student organizations, students interested in joining existing student organizations, and students interested in starting new student organizations. However, the center has a space that is open to all students and can be used to study and/or gather socially. Both Zexell and another participant described in their interviews that the space is utilized a lot by Black students, both Black immigrant and Black American alike. Zexell said that he primarily uses the space to study and do work, so when he does interact with other Black students there, it is mostly "small chitchat." He mentioned that, when he uses the student involvement center space, he does not go out of his way to talk to people.

When describing his interactions with Black American students in particular, Zexell described them as:

> Just a normal greetings, a basic level, friendly greetings and stuff like that. Chitchat, small chitchat and never really going beyond just greetings and small chitchat when we're in the [student involvement center] or pass each other in the hallway.

Zexell explained that between his classes, schoolwork, and the bus schedule he relies on to get home, he has very limited time to go to Black student organizations' events. For him, his interactions with Black American students are mostly confined to the student involvement center space and seeing them around campus. He stated:

> When it comes to like their events … what I was thinking … was like, 'yeah, I don't have the time to go' and stuff. But like when it comes to seeing them on campus or whatever, I would say hi. But again, it was small chitchat, kept to myself because I usually have

> music blaring in my ears so I wasn't really paying attention…. And I was also doing other things at the time. So it was just, again, I was just closed-off, [when] I see them at the [student involvement center], just minding my own business, doing my work and just cool, whatever. We had our small interactions, laughing with something funny, whatever. But again, interactions were kept at, like, a minimum.

Zexell's cross-ethnic communication with Black American students tends to be frequent in occurrence but also brief in nature. Summing up the impact his schedule has on his cross-ethnic interactions, especially when it comes to attending events, Zexell said, "with how busy my schedule is working this semester, I just couldn't really have the time."

Perceived Role of Ethnic Identity in Cross-Ethnic Interactions

When describing the role he felt his ethnicity played in his cross-ethnic interactions with Black American students, Zexell said he does not know because he has not "looked too far deep into it." Rather, he said his ethnicity does not play a role in his cross-ethnic interactions with Black American students. He briefly mentioned that it could be that when he interacts with Black American students, they are "connecting in a way" because of their shared African heritage. However, he reemphasized the fact that he keeps his interactions to "chitchat" and "small talk," so he does not really know or want to conclude whether that is the case. He said:

> I don't really know per se, but it's just I guess when [Black American students] see me, it's like "hey." I guess we're like connecting in a way 'cause we're both African in some sort of way and it's kind of like we can connect on that level and stuff like that. But again, I just keep it to chitchat and small talk and stuff like that. But I don't really know. I don't know.

When I explained to Zexell that he could say that his ethnicity plays no role in his cross-ethnic interactions with Black American students if he felt that way, he commented:

> … I would say like none for me personally, it'd be like "none." But it's just, again, I don't really know, but I'll just put "none" because, again, I don't really know. I haven't looked too far deep into it, so I don't know.

Throughout his interview, Zexell expressed hesitancy in answering such questions related to his interactions with other Black students because of the limited nature of his social life on campus. Nonetheless, despite his hesitancy, Zexell provided great insights into his own cross-ethnic communication experiences as well as the role he felt family and community members played in priming Black immigrant students' predispositions to cross-ethnic interaction with Black American students.

Overall, Zexell's experiences highlight how – despite his familial background and high school interactions shaping his sense of identity before college – his busy schedule has since been the primary factor influencing his cross-ethnic interactions on MU's campus, often limiting his engagement with Black American students to brief, casual exchanges. Transitioning to Gloria, we observe a shift in perspective, as her upbringing and sense of identity shape her approach to cross-ethnic communication with Black immigrant students at MU.

Gloria

Background: Identity and Cross-Ethnic Communication Patterns

Identity

Gloria is a 20-year-old junior at MU, studying information science. Gloria identifies as a cis-gender woman. She was born in the U.S. to two U.S.-born Black American parents. Gloria has lived in the research state all her life. Gloria describes herself as "not really much of a social

person." She did not mention being a member of any student organizations on campus, but she did mention that she has been to a few Black Student Union events during her time at MU. She had not attended any event hosted by the African Student Association, but she was in proximity. Talking about her experience she described having "peered" in or "looked from the outside" of meetings or events hosted by the African Students Association. She explained that she "never actually went in" to attend this organization's social events. She did not go into these events because she "made [a] conclusion about not understanding or fitting in because it was music I've never heard before or they talk about things that I don't really understand regarding … food and culture."

Gloria racially identifies as Black. Regarding her ethnic identity, Gloria said, "I don't know my ethnicity. My mother's ancestry is vague and says Southern Africa." In her demographic survey, when asked if her ethnicity is an identity she thinks about often, Gloria responded:

> When people ask me my ethnicity, I just say Black. I don't know anything other than the fact that my parents are Black, their parents are Black, and so on and so forth. There ha[ve] been instances where I felt strange about not knowing my ethnicity around my friends who knew what country they were from because their parents are from there. I've come to acknowledge that Black Americans have a unique situation.

She further elaborated on this point in her interview, stating that when she is asked about her ethnicity, she "never really know[s] what to say" and tells people she is "just Black" or is "just a regular Black American." Gloria reflected on the role her upbringing played in her lack of clarity surrounding her ethnic identity. She explained:

> We never really talk about ethnicity. Often our parents would just say like, "Oh, just say you're Black. Say you're African American." But then in the same voice, my mother told me we're not necessarily African American in the same way that someone who was born in Africa and came to America would be. So that's [what] I mean [when] I say I don't know my ethnicity, I don't know what country that I'm from. Besides the fact that we might be from Africa at some point. But I don't know anything other than that.

Now that she is at MU, Gloria described having more encounters related to her ethnic identity. She detailed how such instances have made her "reflect" on her ethnicity more than she did prior to college. Gloria recounted an experience she had at a MU event where she felt slightly disconnected from her ethnicity in a way that her immigrant peers did not. She shared:

> [I]t's definitely making me reflect now because — like, for example, I went to the [MU] Fair and there was a section with a bunch of flags and all of my friends were going to Brazil or Yemen or Nigeria. And I didn't really have anywhere to [go]… Because they were taking pictures with the flags, and I didn't really know where to go. So I just stood next to the American flag, which in itself I don't… I just didn't know where to identify and, even though I am American, I don't know if that's what I really wanted to do. So that did feel a little strange, it felt like a disconnection a bit. But growing up, I never really had an issue with it because I grew up in an all-Black school, so we never talk[ed] about ethnicity. Unless we met other Latino kids. They know they were from Columbia or Ecuador or that type of thing, but I never really questioned it.

Gloria explained how the experience she had at MU's fair event was a comparatively new one for her, given that ethnicity was not really discussed at the all-Black and predominantly-Black schools she attended growing up. She shared that she never paid close attention to her ethnicity

and that it has not been as relevant an identity to her as it has been for her friends from places like Nigeria or Jamaica who "know their ethnic backgrounds." This thinking likely contributed to why Gloria felt a bit of "disconnection" when she attended a campus event where her ethnicity was relevant to one of the activities. While Gloria stated "it does feel a little strange" not having the same level of familiarity with that aspect of her identity, she also said it is not concerning for her since she "[doesn't] have any background on that."

Cross-Ethnic Communication Patterns

Regarding her cross-ethnic communication with Black immigrant students at MU, Gloria self-described as interacting with Black immigrant students occasionally – i.e., maybe once or twice a semester – primarily as acquaintances at campus social events. Notwithstanding these occasional interactions, during her interview, Gloria referenced a few Black immigrant friends she has at MU (e.g., a Nigerian friend and a Jamaican friend), providing examples of conversations she has had with those friends about their cultural backgrounds. Despite not seeing herself as very involved on campus, Gloria offered valuable insights and comments about Black cross-ethnic communication, including her personal experiences communicating with Black immigrant students. Gloria described her interactions with Black immigrant students as mostly "positive," saying she feels "positive feelings and feelings of… interconnectedness" towards them. She also expressed curiosity about getting to know Black immigrant students and their cultures.

While she described her cross-ethnic interactions with Black immigrants as fairly positive, Gloria did touch on one "negative" incident in which she felt two Black African students had "denied [her] Blackness." She explained how she was showing the students her mother's ancestry results, excited that she had some knowledge of where on the African

continent she could trace her ancestry. However, the students only focused on the portion of her mother's ancestry results that were "white," teasing that they did not know Gloria was "white." Gloria recounted this negative experience, explaining:

> It was in an instance where we were in a conversation and ancestry came up and I was like, "Oh yeah, my mom recently got back her ancestry." The ancestry test that you send in your DNA. And I was showing it to them and I was like, "Oh look, I kind of know [my ancestry]." It wasn't that specific it just said South African, that's all it said. … But in that same screenshot, you see that her ancestry has 30% British, 10% Irish, something along those lines. There's whiteness in it, and they go, "Oh my gosh, I didn't know you were white." And I'm like, "I'm not white." And it kind of hurt….

Gloria expressed a desire to explain to the two African students that "a lot of Black Americans probably have white in them" because of the history of slavery in the U.S. However, she mentioned that she did not take the time to explain to them because they likely already knew or were joking with her. "But it did kind of rub me the wrong way," she said, "Especially since, in the past, they kind of denied if I even looked Black at all." Gloria said that while she took these two students' comments as somewhat of a joke, she also took them seriously. She stated that regardless of whether the students knew about Black Americans' heritage in the U.S., she "didn't know how to feel" about the situation. Nonetheless, Gloria reflected on the positive perspective she gained from the incident, saying "that's when I had to acknowledge that Black Americans have somewhat of a unique experience." She went on to say that her overall communicative experiences with African students at MU should not be judged based on this isolated incident involving only two students. Despite the negative experience, Gloria maintained that her typical interactions with and feelings toward Black immigrant students were largely positive.

Perceived Role of Ethnic Identity in Cross-Ethnic Interactions

When describing the role she felt her ethnic identity played in her cross-ethnic interactions with Black immigrant students, Gloria said her ethnicity causes her to feel "a sense of curiosity, but also [a] hope for more connectedness" with Black immigrant students. Mentioning Africans specifically, she said, through talking with them, she hopes that she can "understand more about what it means to actually be African, and not just African American." Attempting to put this feeling into words, Gloria stated that she hopes she can "be closer to" her own cultural background and that of her Black immigrant peers through her cross-ethnic interactions with them. She expressed:

> Like I hope that when I talk, I can understand more or I can … be closer to it. Because I find myself, whenever I do encounter someone who's actually from another country, I ask them a lot of questions or what their experiences are or anything in hopes to understand more or be more connected to it.

Although she is interested in learning about Black immigrant students and their various cultures, Gloria also stated that her ethnic background makes her "more meek" or "cautio[us]" when interacting with Black immigrant students because she does not want to offend anyone with her questions. Gloria shared that she struggles with how her Black immigrant friends may perceive her when she talks to them.

> I think that [my ethnicity] often causes me to be more meek or … I come with caution when I ask things. 'Cause … I try to come [from] like a place of like 'I don't know anything about you, and I don't want to be offensive or I don't want to be rude,' but I ask questions. 'Cause like what if they [Black immigrant students] think I'm asking these questions or I say things or I complain about things that I've experienced as a Black

> student and it sounds like I'm coming from a place of privilege and it's not as serious to them. But that, in itself, is problematic because … me assuming that I might be coming from a place of privilege might be assuming that they *don't* … So I've been kind of struggling with that when talking to my international friends.

Gloria expressed that while she wants to come across as someone who is interested in learning more about another person's culture because she genuinely lacks knowledge about it, she fears that her Black immigrant peers may perceive her questions or comments as privileged. This fear contributes to how Gloria asks questions and has discussions with her Black immigrant student counterparts.

Despite struggling with how to broach certain conversations with her Black immigrant peers born outside of the U.S., Gloria described her overall relationship with Black immigrant students as "distant family." She mentioned that she does not "feel as connected" to Black immigrant students because they "have a very distinct culture," which can sometimes make her "feel a little out of place" in certain cultural spaces created for Black immigrant students (e.g., in the African Students Association where Black immigrant students may have a "shared language or food or culture"). Nonetheless, she stated that while she feels she may not fit in as much in these cultural spaces, she still recognizes Black immigrant students as similar to her and, as such, still feels some connection. She said, "I still feel fondness…like kinship." As she described this feeling of "kinship" with her Black immigrant peers, Gloria also acknowledged that her lack of knowledge of Black immigrant students' cultures posed a personal barrier to her cross-ethnic communication with them.

In summary, Gloria's experiences underscore her evolving exploration of her ethnic identity at MU, where despite occasional challenges, she seeks greater connection and

understanding in her interactions with Black immigrant students. Next, I introduce Chidinma, a Black immigrant student whose navigation and negotiation of both their Nigerian and American identities profoundly shape their approach to cross-ethnic interactions with their Black American peers.

Chidinma

Background: Identity and Cross-Ethnic Communication Patterns

Identity

Chidinma is a 20-year-old senior at MU, studying biological sciences. In terms of gender, Chidinma identifies as non-binary. They[9] were born in Nigeria to two Nigerian parents. When Chidinma was one, they moved with their parents from Nigeria to the U.S. "for a better life and living conditions, not having to deal with Nigeria's political unrest." Chidinma racially identifies as Black and ethnically identifies as Nigerian American. They have lived in the research state since their immigration to the U.S. as an infant.

Chidinma described themselves as a "shy person" who "[doesn't] approach people much," and therefore "get[s] really excited … and happy" when they get approached by others, "especially Black people." They are a general member of both the African Student Association and the Black Student Union. They solely attend these organizations' events because their schedule "prevents [them] from going to [more frequent general body] meetings." Chidinma did not perceive themselves as a "traditional" Black immigrant student in the sense that they "[are] not super, super involved when it comes to cultural things" like their friends are.

Chidinma stated that their community is mostly Nigerian but that they grew up with both Nigerian and Black American cultural influences having been raised in the predominantly-Black

[9] Chidinma uses they/them pronouns. As such, all references to "they" and "them" used in conjunction with Chidinma's name are singularly referring to them.

county in which MU is located. Chidinma shared what they called the "unique experience" of being raised in two cultures, saying:

> Most of my community is Nigerian and I think it's a very strong part of how I think about things, and just my upbringing. I've gone to the same Nigerian church almost the entire time I've lived here. I mostly have Nigerian friends. But I feel like also living here — and especially I'm from [MU's county], so not only is there a large Nigerian population, there's a large Black American population there as well, so I feel like I've grown up with both influences coming from school as well as the community base. So, I think … there's like a unique experience that comes with not even just being born [outside of the U.S.] but even being, like, first-generation born here.

Chidinma began to understand the dual nature of their ethnicity in middle school, when they felt they were "coming into [their] own." They described having mixed interests in both Nigerian and American culture but also coming to the realization that, culturally, they were able to name more "American things" than Nigerian things despite still identifying as Nigerian. They felt that both aspects of their ethnic identity significantly influenced their upbringing.

> [I began to understand my ethnicity] maybe in middle school where I [was] sort of like coming into my own and realizing that while I am Nigerian, … most of my interests lie outside of that. I've got a mix of things going on; like, not only was I into [Nigerian] food and everything but … I [also] know a lot more American music than I do Nigerian artists by name. And I think that's moreso just maybe the type of person that I was at the time but it was coming to realize that I know a lot more American things by name, even though culturally I still identify as Nigerian and I have that upbringing and I was raised

there. It's like because I grew up here, I know a lot more American things in general and I feel like that's influenced me a lot, as well as being Nigerian.

Discussing the importance of their ethnic identity, Chidinma believed it was imperative to understand and value their Nigerian ethnicity, especially because their name was reflective of their Nigerian background. Chidinma highlighted how they previously struggled to appreciate the history and heritage of their name, finding it difficult to explain its pronunciation to others. Nonetheless, over time, they grew to understand that their name is an important cultural representation of their identity and Nigerian origins. Noting the significance of their identity, Chidinma shared:

> I think [my ethnicity is] very important because I feel like there's never a point where it doesn't follow me. Especially mostly because of my name and just having that, especially throughout elementary school, like just having the pronunciation and … having to explain that everywhere I go. I just always have that and it's just always going to follow me so it's, like, very important that I understand. And it's taken a lot for me to become very appreciative of my name and where it comes from and, like, my culture. So, it's just become very important for me to understand … that's part of my identity and that's part of where I come from, and like I shouldn't be ashamed of that.

Now, Chidinma is more appreciative of both the Nigerian and American aspects of their ethnicity. They believe that the Nigerian and American influences on their life "have intersected in multiple ways that shape the way [they] view being Nigerian" in the U.S.

Cross-Ethnic Communication Patterns

Chidinma described themselves as 'always' interacting with Black American students (almost every day or several times a week) primarily as friends, hanging out with them inside

and outside of school. They described their cross-ethnic interactions with Black Americans as "very communal" and "very friendly." They also explained the overall communal vibe of the Black community in the predominantly white academic context of MU, saying:

> I'd say [my interactions with Black American students are] very communal, and everyone here, they kind of have like a 'look out [for each other]' vibe for everyone, especially because we go to a PWI. And I definitely say that, regardless of background – like me being between Africans and African Americans [ethnically] – there's always, like, a learning curve and … we want to learn about each other's cultures and struggles and there's always an open dialogue, we're always willing to help each other out. So that's why I'd say [my interactions with Black American students are] very communal, very friendly as well, and just very social because we also … want to help each other have a good time because school is hard.

Chidinma also provided an example of how they have been able to connect with Black American students, citing their pre-health fraternity as a space in which they found support from many Black American students in the organization.

> So, I'm in a pre-health fraternity and … I think that's also helped me [interact with Black American students]. I've come into contact with a lot of Black Americans through that [fraternity]. I have a lot of close friends and I've just learned that there's other people that I can rely on who are at the same place, even in those smaller settings and not just in a big group.

Chidinma detailed having positive encounters with Black American students in the fraternity that were tied to the very thing they previously struggled with: their name. They shared how several Black American students have complimented their name and how such interactions have helped

them to feel more connected to the Black student community at MU, regardless of ethnic background. They opined:

> … I also think that there have been times where people have come up to me, like [students who are] Black American have come up to me and complimented me. Like I'll just be minding my business, sitting on my own, and they'll say nice things and they'll say, "Oh, you have a beautiful name." Things like that, and a friendship will form through that and that's really interesting, and that happened to me and I love when that happens, so that definitely makes me feel a lot more connected to people at school, even if we aren't from the same cultural background.

Perceived Role of Ethnic Identity in Cross-Ethnic Interactions

When describing the role their ethnic identity played in their cross-ethnic interactions with Black American students, Chidinma said it contributed to the "communal … vibe" they felt with Black American students. They learned that communal orientation from their parents and other family members and want to intentionally continue that practice at MU. While they appreciated their family instilling this communal orientation in them, Chidinma also pointed out that their parents "have always taught [them] to see school as a competition." They discussed the process of breaking away from the competitive mindset their parents instilled in them and focusing on being compassionate towards others, building relationships with other Black students regardless of ethnicity, and focusing on commonalities and shared cultural experiences between Black immigrant and Black American students instead of cultural differences. Chidinma stated:

> …[I]n trying to come away from [my parents'] idea [of seeing school as a competition], I really wanted to be more friendly towards people and help each other out and not see

> school as so competitive, so I think that's also taught me to have a lot more compassion for others and things like that. And I think it's helped me to be a lot more understanding of what other people are going through and be willing to connect with people even if we don't share the same 100% cultural background. But there's other things that we connect on, like growing up in [MU's county], music that we've grown up with, so I think it's not just being Nigerian [that] has helped but also being Black in [MU's county] has also helped me navigate and interact with [Black American students].

Chidinma also believed it was important for them to understand "the difference between [them] being born in Nigeria and knowing part of [their ethnic] history" and potentially not understanding their ethnic origins on the African continent, which can be the case for some Black American students. Chidinma felt sympathetic towards Black American students who did not know much about the African continent outside of what is negatively portrayed in the media. Chidinma also emphasized the importance of cross-cultural sharing, believing that African immigrant students possess valuable cultural knowledge and connections to the African continent that they can share with Black American students. Chidinma's experiences illustrate their dual cultural upbringing and their proactive approach to fostering communal bonds with Black American students at MU, emphasizing shared experiences and cultural exchange as keys to building meaningful cross-ethnic relationships with their Black American peers. Now, I introduce Vanessa, a Black American student whose approach to and outlook on cross-ethnic interactions with her Black immigrant peers mirror Chidinma's.

Vanessa

Background: Identity and Cross-Ethnic Communication Patterns

Identity

Vanessa is a 19-year-old sophomore at MU, studying business management. Vanessa identifies as a woman. She was born in the U.S. to two U.S.-born Black American parents. She racially identifies as Black American and ethnically identifies as African American. Vanessa has lived in the research state for two years, having moved from another state in the Mid-Atlantic region to go to MU. Vanessa is very involved on campus; she serves as a student leader for two Black-centered organizations, one of which focuses on supporting Black and Latine women in her major and the other is a social justice-oriented organization. Although she is not a student leader in any of MU's Black ethnic student organizations – including the African Student Association, the Black Student Union, and the Caribbean Student Association – she does attend many of the events hosted by these organizations, as she has friends on BSU's and CSA's student executive boards. She explained that she cannot be more involved in ethnic organizations like BSU because she is already "involved in a lot of Black-centered organizations."

Vanessa reflected on the role her parents played in shaping her understanding of her ethnic identity.

> …[S]o, growing up, so my mom and my dad, they're both African American. They always taught me and my siblings about our history and help[ed] us to remember where we came from. Because [if] you don't know where your past is, if you don't remember your history, your history can repeat itself. So, they would always teach me and my siblings about Black culture, especially in February. I remember they would have us watch all the [Black] documentaries and do homework on it and read these different books…. So, they would always have us do that every February. And my mom was a lover of African art, so even growing up — like I grew up in [another Mid-Atlantic state],

there weren't really too many of us — but growing up she would always have me surrounded by Black culture. Whether it was a piece that talked about the trans-Atlantic slave trade or pieces done in … various parts of Africa that she had bought. I was always surrounded by it. So, I grew up just knowing who I am.

Vanessa's ethnicity "was always embedded" in her familial environment, so she felt she never had to come to an understanding of her ethnic identity. Because her parents instilled a love of Black culture and a sense of Black identity in her at an early age, Vanessa has had a strong connection to her ethnicity for as long as she can remember.

Explaining the importance of her ethnicity, Vanessa recounted one particular incident in which she was starkly reminded of the ever-present threat Black Americans face both historically and currently. She candidly shared:

> I would say there's been multiple times [when my ethnicity has been important to me], but one that I can remember was [in] 2020. So, after everything that happened with George Floyd, my brother actually had an incident [when] he was in New York. He used to live in New York and he was jogging in a park. And th[is] white couple, I don't know if he was looking over at them or something, but they got offended and they were about to call the cops. So, he ran out the park because he was scared. And this was right after everything with George Floyd happened. And I remember being terrified because I'm like, George Floyd, me and my family were saying, "Well, that could have been one of us," but that happened to my brother. …[T]hat was my brother. So, in that instance, I remember I wrote a poem about everything going on 'cause my thoughts were just everywhere. It reminded me [of] being Black in America, the history of everything, and how it really has been threatened. You are threatened walking down the street and you

> don't even know what could happen to you. I was reading something as well … on Instagram, it was just different stories of how Black people back in the day were lynched, like the reasons why. And some of them were just because they made a white girl feel scared or they looked somebody in the eye or the [white people] thought they looked at them the wrong way. It reminded me, it was just like, "Wow, being Black in America, I have to remember these things. I can't forget what happened to my ancestors 'cause, again, we are seeing it coming back." So that time in my life, it really helped me to remember like 'remember who you are and know this is America.'

This terrifying experience of racial profiling that her brother experienced made Vanessa more conscious of her ethnic identity in the U.S. context. For Vanessa, the incident highlighted the unfortunate reality that simply existing as a Black American in the U.S. can sometimes result in being perceived as a threat by white Americans.

Cross-Ethnic Communication Patterns

Vanessa self-described as interacting with Black immigrant students often, primarily as friends, hanging out with them at least once a week or every two weeks both inside and outside of school. She described her cross-ethnic interactions with Black immigrant students as "educational." She compared the larger Black immigrant population at MU to the smaller Black immigrant population in her hometown and the additional opportunities she has at MU to learn about Black immigrant cultures.

> I would say [my interactions with Black immigrant students are] educational. Because again, back home there wasn't a huge African, Caribbean…, [or] …[other] diaspora population. But coming here [to MU], there is. So, a lot of the times, they join together and they can talk about certain things culturally that I can't because I'm not African, I'm

> not Caribbean. But they're not necessarily [ex]clusive [because] of that. They're not going to be like, "Oh, you're not this, you can't talk to us." So, there'll be times where I'm talking [with Black immigrant students], [and] it's like, "Oh okay, I never knew that. I never knew about this food or about this song." So, it's very educational every time I talk to them."

Vanessa shared an example of an "educational" encounter she had with Black immigrant students in her campus ministry.

> …so I'm Christian and I'm in this organization, like a ministry on campus, called [a campus ministry]. So, it's a huge … and it was started by a Nigerian man. So, there's a huge … Nigerian … population, just Africa[n] diaspora all throughout. So, I've gone since freshman year, so I would visit and see [Black immigrant] people there. So, they put me onto music, they put me onto food, they put me onto so many different things I didn't know about before. So, with that, I see them frequently and it's been a good experience.

Through her cross-ethnic interactions with Black immigrant students, Vanessa was exposed to music, food, and other cultural elements that were previously unfamiliar to her.

Vanessa characterized her relationship with Black immigrant students at MU as a process of "continuing to grow together" and "wanting to learn." She acknowledged that there is still much for her to learn about Black immigrant students' cultures, given that "there's a lot [she] didn't know before coming [to MU]." Vanessa emphasized her willingness to engage in events and conversations where she may encounter new cultural perspectives, such as ASA and CSA events. She recalled being invited to the CSA's Carnival event by one of her friends who is on CSA's executive board. She looked forward to attending the event because it was an opportunity

to experience something different and expand her knowledge of other cultures in the Black diaspora. Commenting on the importance of attending such events, Vanessa believed they present significant opportunities for her to develop and to build relationships with Black immigrant students.

> [It is about me] just wanting to learn and continuing to grow, looking past, "Okay, you're an immigrant student, but again, at the end of the day we're still Black, so I'm going to talk to you. I'm not going to let … your ethnicity stop a connection." So, just continuing to want to grow and pursue building my relationships with others.

Vanessa described a few encounters she had with Black immigrant students in which she was reminded of some of the ethnic differences between them. Specifically, Vanessa reflects on instances where Black immigrant students have inquired about her cultural heritage, assuming she knows where on the African continent her family traces their heritage. She expressed a bit of frustration at the difficulty of explaining her American identity to them and the sense of disconnect that can arise due to cultural differences.

> There's been times where I'll talk to somebody who's not a Black American, [whose] from [the] Black diaspora and they'll be like, "Oh, what country are you from?" And I'm like, "America." And they'll be like, "Oh." And it's like I can't explain it any different. So sometimes it's hard 'cause it's like they have their own cultures and things that they can relate to in being immigrant that I can't relate to in a sense.

These instances resulted in the lingering reservation Vanessa feels when meeting Black immigrant students, wondering if she will be able to connect with them and if they will treat her differently after learning that she does not know her cultural history beyond her U.S. American heritage.

> Sometimes that thought would come to my mind before I meet somebody, but I'll still say, "Hi," and treat them as a person. But it lingers sometimes… that thought [of] 'will I be able to connect with them as much and will they ask me that question [about where I'm from]? If they do, are they going to treat me differently after I [answer] the question?'

Despite these uncertainties, Vanessa remained committed to treating everyone with respect and addressing them as individuals. Overall, Vanessa's approach to interacting with Black immigrant students is characterized by a desire to build connections beyond ethnic differences, recognizing that, despite differing backgrounds, they share a common identity as Black individuals. She expressed a commitment to ongoing growth and the pursuit of stronger cross-ethnic relationships with Black immigrant students at MU.

Perceived Role of Ethnic Identity in Cross-Ethnic Interactions

Vanessa described the role her ethnic identity played in her cross-ethnic interactions with Black immigrant students as a two-way exchange of cultural education. She said, "at the same time as they're educating me on their cultures, I can do the same [in educating them on my culture]." She touched on how this mindset towards cross-ethnic interaction helped her to overcome a slight worry she had about Black immigrant students not wanting to interact with her because she does not share their ethnic background.

> I would say the role [my ethnicity] plays [in my interactions with Black immigrant students is], at the same time as they're educating me on their cultures, I can do the same. So that's what helps me to overcome the thought of 'what if they won't talk to me the same because I'm not an immigrant student.' So with that [educational outlook towards interacting with Black immigrant students], I'll be able to be like, "Oh, hi." Even though

> we have different backgrounds, we're all still Black at the end of the day. So, [my ethnicity] allows me to tell them like, "Hey, I want to learn about you, you want to learn about me, you want to learn about my culture, I got you." So, [my ethnicity] really helps me to connect in a sense.

Vanessa felt that shared cultural knowledge also plays a role in helping Black immigrant and Black American students connect with one another. She shared an example of how the popular song Dreams and Nightmares by Philadelphian rapper Meek Mill played at a Black student-led event and connected Black students across ethnic lines. All the students who knew the song joined in singing it regardless of whether they were a Black American student or Black immigrant student. She recounted:

> This actually happened at one of the Black events on campus and there's this tradition where undergrad students … they'll shout out what city you're from and when they shout you out, they're going to play a song based on your city. So, most times it's rap. So, every time, people don't care if they're from the city or not; if it's a song they like, they're going to get up, they're going to dance. So, …[with] one song … [they played during the event], … you [would] think [everybody was] from Philadelphia [with the way they responded], every time 'Dreams and Nightmares' comes on, people are singing it like the national anthem. …[E]very single time. So that song specifically, it don't matter if you're African, don't matter if you're Caribbean, it don't matter if you are American, we're all coming together and singing that song.

Overall, Vanessa believed that the role her ethnic identity played in her cross-ethnic interactions with Black immigrant students was a positive one. She espoused that shared experiences and cultural knowledge-sharing across ethnic lines prompt positive interactions and relationship-

building between Black American and Black immigrant students. Vanessa's commitment to fostering cross-ethnic understanding and connection across communities exemplifies her proactive approach to building meaningful relationships with Black immigrant students at MU. Next, I delve into the cross-cultural perspectives of Amanda, a Black immigrant student who preferred engaging with her Black American peers in the classroom context specifically.

Amanda

Background: Identity and Cross-Ethnic Communication Patterns

Identity

Amanda is a 25-year-old junior at MU, studying psychology. Amanda identifies as a woman and was born in the U.S. to a Jamaican immigrant mother and a Grenadian immigrant father. She racially identifies as Black Caribbean and ethnically identifies as "Jamaican/Grenadian born in the U.S." Amanda has lived in the research state for four years. Before that, she lived in the Southeastern region of the U.S. Amanda is a transfer student who, at the time of her interview, was in her third semester at MU. She is a military transfer, meaning she earned credits through various military training courses and transferred the credits to MU. Amanda was in the Air Force branch of the military for seven years prior to attending MU and ended her service with the Air Force four months prior to participating in the study.

Amanda described herself as "not super social," citing this as the reason she does not attend many school events. According to Amanda, she attended "a couple [of] Caribbean Student Association meetings," but counts those meetings as "the only other time [outside of her classes] that [she] really interacted with other minorities on campus, intentionally." She voiced that until recently, she "struggl[ed] to make friends in general" given that she is "a lot older than most of [her] classmates" and that she is "relatively new [to campus] because [she is] a transfer

[student].” Since she does not consider herself a social student, Amanda appreciated meeting and interacting with other Black students in her classes where she did not have to intentionally seek them out. Reflecting on meeting other Black women in one of her classes, she expressed:

> Organically meeting these people has not been easy for me, but I just felt grateful in that moment to say that I had met someone at all without having to go out of my way and go to these specific groups and these specific organizations.

Compared to Black student organization events and meetings where she would have to intentionally attend to find other Black students, Amanda was grateful that she could strike up conversations with other Black students who were in her class.

In discussing her ethnicity, Amanda conveyed that her Jamaican identity was one she did not have to think about because of the predominantly Caribbean makeup of her community growing up. However, when she transitioned to a predominantly white middle school, she not only became more aware of her racial identity as a Black student in a classroom full of white students but also how her ethnic identity was more layered than she initially thought. Reflecting on her ethnicity, she shared:

> It was just who I was more or less and how everyone else was around me. So, it wasn’t really something I had to think about as being different. Like I didn’t think of myself different as any of my peers, because we were all some mix of Caribbean, or even if they were Black Americans, it was like, “Okay, they understood.” It wasn’t really anything to differentiate us by until I got to middle school, and that’s when I was in class with Jewish people. I was in class with Colombians, more white-presenting Hispanic people. And that’s when I started to realize, “Okay, there’s a much bigger cultural divide than just me

being Jamaican. It's a lot different than the little things we could pick out about ourselves when I was younger."

Amanda detailed how her experience in middle school made her more cognizant of the distinction between the immigrant aspect of her family's Jamaican identity and the "American" aspect of her Jamaican identity. She expressed that being not only Black in a "white school" and being "American" in an immigrant household added another layer of context to her identity. While she did not see herself as "American," her Jamaican family members who were born in Jamaica made her aware of the difference between their stronger ties to Jamaica and her looser ties to Jamaica having been born in the U.S. To Amanda, she was just as Jamaican as her family until told otherwise.

Amanda was raised by her mother and grandmother. Describing the impact her household had on her understanding of her ethnic identity, Amanda observed:

> … In some ways, the only divide I had as a person was being born in America as opposed to the rest of my family being born overseas. So that was, for me, the only more cultural confrontation I had when I was little, … that I didn't have a Jamaican accent because I wasn't born there, and the rest of my family was. And so, that was the biggest thing for me until there was a whole 'nother aspect of 'I'm in a Caribbean family but I'm American.'

Upon transitioning to middle school, Amanda realized that there was another layer of her identity she had not yet explored: her racial identity. According to Amanda, understanding her racial identity as a Black student in a predominantly white school helped her to contextualize her ethnic identity as a Jamaican American in a Jamaican immigrant household. She remarked:

> Then going to [middle] school being like, "Well, I'm in a white school but I'm Black." That became the next step of my identity there. I would say that's probably when I realized, 'okay, even my family made me feel other[ed] being American as opposed to them being born in Jamaica with the accent and they have these memories and all this other stuff and I don't have that.' So … I want to say [that] was probably the first step of me realizing that I was even American. Like, you couldn't have told me anything [about my Jamaican identity]. I wouldn't have been able to tell the difference before [my family] brought it up.

Amanda mentioned that her family often referenced her "American" identity in a "joking manner." These experiences led her to notice certain differences between herself and her Jamaican-born mother. For instance, her mother displayed a skill in "code-switching her accent" – turning it on and off – especially when Jamaican relatives visited, a skill Amanda did not possess. Sharing how this cultural difference impacted her ability to communicate with her relatives, she stated:

> It's not a big deal. But when other people would come around, I'm like, "I can't code-switch with you. I can't jump from one [accent to another], this is just who I am. I understand what you're saying, the accent isn't that big of a deal, but I can't all of a sudden turn that on or off the way [my mom] can." Then it became like, "Okay, well, I'm the different one here and I don't partake in the conversations the same way you can."

These distinctions were "not a big deal" to Amanda because other aspects of Jamaican culture such as the food and music did not make her feel different from her family. However, her interactions with her Jamaican-born relatives made her feel distinct, as her relatives often attributed any differences in their preferences to Amanda's "American" identity. She stated:

> [Being unable to code-switch] was not really a big deal, because everything else was fine. The food, the culture, the music, that wasn't anything that made me feel different. It was mostly just those interactions where I would stand out more or less as being different. Or if I dare say I didn't like some food, [my family would say] "Oh, it's because you're American." I'm like, "Okay, no, it's because I just don't like that. It's nothing to do with [me being born in America]."

Overall, because of her early exposure to Jamaican culture in her household, Amanda's ethnic background was already embedded in how she grew up. She did not think about her ethnicity much and simply enjoyed the food, music, and other aspects of Jamaican culture. She did not have to interrogate her ethnicity or the "American" aspect of her identity until her relatives came from Jamaica and made jokes about her being "American." It was not until her relatives pointed out her "Black American" identity that Amanda began to unpack her identity as a U.S.-born Jamaican.

> I was definitely always aware [of my Jamaican identity], and I had to more [so] learn my Black identity. I was always aware I was born into being Jamaican. That wasn't a question. It's how everyone talked around me, it was the food I ate, it was the things we would do as a family, that wasn't an issue. But then I … had to socially learn the Black American side [of my identity] more than anything. I was raised in the Jamaican side and I had to learn the Black American side.

Despite occasional jokes from her family about the "American" aspects of her Jamaican identity, Amanda herself maintains a strong connection to her Jamaican ethnicity. Amanda explained that her Jamaican ethnicity is often an important consideration in her dating patterns because she

wants to raise her children in Jamaican culture. Discussing the significance of her ethnicity, Amanda shared:

> I find [my ethnicity to be] really important to me when I have to think about how I'm going to raise my children. That's a really big deal for me, because I do often date outside of my culture and my race. So that's always something that becomes a really big deal to me when I start to think about that. It's like, "Wow, I want to raise my kids with this kind of food, with this kind of culture, with going to these places, because that's important to me." … Jamaican culture, Jamaican food, and activities. … And dealing with someone who doesn't necessarily identify the same way that I do makes [the importance of my Jamaican ethnicity and passing down Jamaican culture] come up for me a lot. That conversation has to happen for me and for that understanding [to be clear].

Additionally, Amanda highlighted that the precarious nature of being a Jamaican immigrant in the U.S. makes her Jamaican identity even more important for her romantic partner to understand. She shared that her cousin had been deported from the U.S. to Jamaica and emphasized that such incidents were critical for her partner to understand and empathize with, saying:

> Because I have a cousin right now, he was deported. So, it's a big deal that … whoever I'm with understands that and knows that [my Jamaican identity is] a big part of my life. Going back there [to Jamaica] is a big part of my life, and what I want to do … in general. That is probably when [my ethnicity] becomes the most important to me, when it comes up a lot for me.

Cross-Ethnic Communication Patterns

Amanda self-described as interacting with Black American students occasionally (once or twice a semester) as classmates. Amanda mentioned that she has not had any "strong" or "significant" interactions with Black American students. She elaborated that when such cross-ethnic interactions occur, they tend to be "basic," often limited to collaborating on class projects without delving into deeper connections or conversations. Providing an example of an in-class interaction she had with a Black American lab partner, Amanda stated:

> One lab partner I had last semester, … we talked, we sat in front of each other for like the whole semester. So, our interaction was pleasant. It wasn't bad or anything like that. There was a different level of conversation that we could have [with each other] … outside of talking to my two other lab partners [who were white]. So that always feels more comfortable, I would say, talking to someone that's Black in general, and I wouldn't say him being Black American made any difference.

Amanda described her relationship with Black American students as "lacking," expressing a desire for more interactions not only with Black American students but also with Black students in general. When asked why she used the term "lacking" to characterize her relationship with Black American students, Amanda explained:

> I think I would … describe it as lacking, just because without having to actively seek out these relationships and go out of my way to find these relationships, I would love for them to happen more. I don't know if that's a super easy thing to ask for in a college setting, but that would be my preference. If I could have more of these interactions, I would be happy.

In elaborating on her desire for increased interactions with both Black American students and Black students more broadly, Amanda highlighted her preference for these relationships to develop naturally, without requiring active pursuit on her part.

Perceived Role of Ethnic Identity in Cross-Ethnic Interactions

Amanda felt her ethnicity did not play a role in her cross-ethnic interactions with Black American students. She expressed an inclination to seek out more engagement with other Black students in general as opposed to differentiating by ethnic identity, especially in the predominantly white context of MU. Amanda compared MU's predominantly white context to the predominantly white context of the military, stating that she subconsciously seeks out other Black people in predominantly white spaces despite her familiarity with navigating them. She explained:

> [I had no predispositions about engaging with Black American students at MU.] In fact, I would more [so] seek [engagement with other Black students regardless of ethnicity], and I think that's just something that I'm used to [seeking out]. Being in the military, that's also a predominantly white space, … [Black people] we see each other from across the room and it's just like, "I know you're there; you know I'm there." And so, it's really like a subconscious thing. So, I actually welcome [interactions with other Black students overall] a lot more than any other interaction, because I've been in spaces where I was the only Black person and I don't enjoy that necessarily. I can handle it, I can deal with it, I make friends no matter where I go, it's not really an issue. But there is some subconscious connection that I would like to know that I'm in a more diverse space, so I would look for another Black person in that space.

Amanda's ethnicity did not affect her interactions with Black American students at MU because her racial identity took precedence over her ethnic identity in the predominantly white institutional context. Similar to her experience in the military, Amanda subconsciously sought out other Black students in her classes, emphasizing a preference for "diverse" environments where she could readily identify with others who shared her racial background. Despite not wanting to go out of her way to search for Black students within Black student organizations, Amanda emphasized the significance of connecting with other Black students at MU, regardless of ethnicity.

Overall, Amanda's narrative highlights the significance of both ethnic and racial identity in communication for Black students within the predominantly white context of MU. For Amanda, navigating her Black racial identity alongside her Jamaican ethnicity was necessary as she engaged with her Black peers in predominantly white classroom spaces. Lastly, I introduce Renee, a Black American student whose strong cross-ethnic relationships with her Black immigrant peers positively influence her perspective on the potential for and importance of cross-cultural connections between Black immigrant and Black American students at MU.

Renee

Background: Identity and Cross-Ethnic Communication Patterns

Identity

Renee is a 20-year-old junior at MU, studying civil engineering. Renee identifies as a woman. She was born in the U.S. to two U.S.-born Black American parents. She racially identifies as Black American and ethnically identifies as African American. Renee has lived in the research state for one year. Prior to that, she lived in another state in the Mid-Atlantic region of the U.S. She is on the executive board of the Black engineering society at MU. While she is

not a student leader in any of MU's Black ethnic student organizations – such as the African Student Association, the Black Student Union, and the Caribbean Student Association – she does attend the events of these organizations.

Like Stacy, family and music played significant roles in Renee's development of her ethnic identity. Renee shared:

> Both sides of my family are very musical. Everyone can sing and play instruments. So, music is a big, big, big part of [my ethnic identity], especially being raised, it's like it's in my blood. So, a big part of my cultural identity is R&B and … gospel music and rap music. That started when I was young. You know, you're in the car and your parents were playing a song, and you're like, "Oh, this is lame." But now that I'm older, I'm like, "This is actually really good!" And I just associate [music and my ethnicity] with a lot of memories: cookouts and learning all the line dances and just being in the same places and you hear the same songs over and over. I've always associated [music and my ethnicity] with very positive memories, whether I'm in the car with my friends or at a family event or in church, wherever. … It just makes me feel good. So, I've always had very positive memories of [my ethnic identity].

In middle school, Renee had an experience in her predominantly white classroom that helped her to understand that her ethnicity was different from her white peers.

> I would say it was probably … in middle school [when I came to understand my ethnicity], and [we did an activity called] 'all about me' [on] the first day of school. We were talking about ourselves, and one of the things they asked was … 'What's your favorite music?' And … I think I said … R&B. And you know, I was a middle schooler, and no one knows what that is. I knew what it was, but my [white] counterparts … didn't

know. So, I think that was the first time I realized that [R&B] was different because it's not familiar to everyone. So that's when I realized that because it was different, it was a part of me [and my culture], because a lot of people had no idea what I was talking about. So, when I had to explain it, I kind of realized, okay, this is something that is me, that *makes* me. … I'm from [another state in the Mid-Atlantic], and the neighborhood [I grew up] in … was predominantly white. We had a good amount of minorities, but it was definitely predominantly white. So that probably was the main reason why [no one else knew what R&B was].

Renee's cultural background is extremely important to her. According to Renee, she defines herself by her ethnicity, as it represents who she is. Renee became acutely aware of the implications of both her ethnicity and her racial identity during fourth grade, immediately following the murder of Trayvon Martin.

> Ooh, my cultural background is very important to me. It's who I am. That's the way I … define myself. The first time I can think of that is, I'm pretty sure I was in fourth grade and it was when Trayvon Martin was killed. And that was a big thing. A lot of people knew about it, but I remember at school we didn't really talk about it. And I would always go home and ask my parents, "This is something that's important. Somebody got killed, this is on the news, why are we not talking about it?" Also, during that time, I remember we were in the store, my parents and I were in the store. I had a hoodie on and I had my hands in my pocket because it was winter in [my home state], and I was cold. And my dad was like, "Take your hands out of your pocket, take your hood off." I was like, "Why? I'm cold." Then, the white people walking past me, everyone has hoodies on. And I was like, "Why can't I do that?" So, I think that was the first time I realized

> because of my skin color, because of what's associated with that, I am going to be seen differently and treated differently at times. So, I have to not necessarily be scared of that, but I definitely have to think a little bit more than someone else who doesn't look like me, who wouldn't have to think that way.

Cross-Ethnic Communication Patterns

Renee described herself as "always" interacting with Black immigrant students – i.e., almost every day or several times a week – primarily as friends, hanging out with them both inside and outside of school. She characterized her interactions with Black immigrant students as "very, very positive" because of how much she has learned about Black immigrant cultures through her cross-ethnic interactions.

> I would describe my interactions [with Black immigrant students] as "very, *very* positive" instead of just "positive." … I don't know if this is a [research state] thing, but being from [my home state], there was a lot of Black people obviously, but no one really repped their country. Like some people would be like, "Yeah, I'm Jamaican. Wear the colors. We eat beef patties." Okay, okay. Then I came to MU, and [on] day one, everyone was like, "Oh, what are you? What are you?" And I was like, "No, I don't know." And I heard all about the Afrobeats and the food and the different tribes and everything. So, from then, [my interactions with Black immigrant students have] been very positive, because my roommate who I lived with my freshman year – and I actually lived with her sophomore [year] and this year, too – she is Nigerian, so she really helped me. She really helped expose me to a lot. And then from there, [my interactions with Black immigrant students] kind of just kept happening. Most of our friend group, actually, my entire friend group is African. And I currently live with three other girls. One is Nigerian, two are Ghanaian.

> So, I'm very into [West African culture]. So [my experience has] been very positive I think because it's a different culture. I really haven't been exposed to it that much, so it's kind of something new for me.

Renee also described her interactions with Black immigrant students as "natural." She chose this descriptor because she believed that her early exposure to cross-ethnic interactions with Black immigrant students and their cultures during the early stages of her college journey – primarily through her roommates – has quelled her hesitation to engage with other Black immigrant students.

> I would describe [my interactions with Black immigrant students] as … "natural." I think because I was exposed to it so early on at the beginning of my college career that now, … I'm not hesitant about it anymore. [Now, when I interact with Black immigrant students, especially West Africans,] I'm kind of just like, "Oh my gosh, so is my roommate. She's from this tribe." … I think … now that I have all my [Black immigrant] friends who have taught me a lot [about their cultures], it's kind of like I can show that to other people. … I have a lot more knowledge, so I don't have to think … or *over*think about [my cross-ethnic interactions] anymore.

Similar to Vanessa, Renee shared that, when she first came to MU, she thought Black immigrant students would not want to interact with her because she did not share their ethnic identity and did not know much about their culture.

> I just thought that [Black immigrant students] wouldn't want to talk to me 'cause I didn't know about their culture as much. Obviously, I wasn't … ignorant, but I didn't know as much as I thought I should have. So, I thought they'd be like, "Oh … you can go. You're an American, you can leave," but it wasn't like that at all. Except for one person, he

always is reminding me [that I'm culturally different from Black immigrant students], but I'm okay. I don't need to be his friend, so it's okay.

While Renee was pleasantly surprised by the welcoming atmosphere of most of the Black immigrant students she encountered at MU, she named one student who continually excluded her from conversations or made her feel incapable of contributing to conversations about Black immigrant students or their cultures. She explained her interactions with him, saying:

> [H]e's from Ghana, … I think he came here a few years ago or straight from high school, then he came to college here at MU [from] Ghana. And … he'll ask all my other friends questions, and then to me he'll be like, "Oh, you're not African. I forgot, I'm sorry." I'll be like, "It's not that deep. You can still ask me." You know?

Despite these interactions, Renee did not think the student disliked her; she just thought he favored her African friends more. Nonetheless, she did not let such encounters with the student negatively affect her.

> It feels a little different. It's not like he dislikes me, but I can tell he kind of gravitates towards my [African] friends, which, again, it doesn't hurt my feelings or anything. I'm just like, "okay, you're missing out. That's okay."

Renee also reflected on the relevance of her ethnic identity in her interactions with Black immigrant students at MU in her demographic survey. She mentioned that she frequently reflects on her ethnicity, "especially [while] at MU," due to the university's sizable population of Black immigrants. She detailed how Black immigrant students are "always asking [her] where [she is] from, and when [she] tell[s] them [she doesn't] know, they give [her] a look and tell [her that she] should find out." These encounters have prompted Renee to contemplate her ethnicity

further and she discussed previously feeling a slight sense of obligation to learn more about her cultural heritage outside of the U.S. She further elaborated on these encounters in her interview.

Renee described feeling pressure during her freshman year at MU when Black immigrant students frequently asked about her ethnicity. Initially, she did not feel bothered by these questions, simply identifying as Black. However, as the inquiries persisted, she began feeling a sense of obligation to know her precise ethnic background. Despite recognizing the potential significance of knowing her heritage, Renee also acknowledged that it may not drastically change her identity, given her upbringing.

> I would probably say, especially my freshman year when I first came here and everyone was asking me what I am, I definitely felt pressure to figure it out. I didn't go home and ask my parents, but everyone was just asking me. And, at first, I didn't care, especially in high school and where I grew up, I wasn't really bothered by it. I just knew I was Black. And then now [at MU] everyone would ask me more, and I'd tell people, "Oh, I don't know." Some people would be like, "Dang." And I'd be like, "What do you mean, 'dang'? I'm Black. It doesn't matter." It does matter, but it's not, like, life-changing. Especially, I think at this point in my life, … if I found out, it can't make a difference because … my parents also didn't grow up that way. So, it's not like if I found out I'm a hundred percent Nigerian, then all of a sudden I just flip the switch. I would embrace it, but it's like I can't do that much, because it's not what is embedded in my household.

Renee voiced that this desire to learn more about her ethnic background in the face of her Black immigrant peers' questions made her slightly wary when interacting with them about that topic.

> …[T]hat feeling of, 'dang, maybe I should know [my ethnic background],' that kind of pushed me for a while. I don't want to say I was afraid when [Black immigrant students]

would ask, but I definitely was like, "Oh, here we go." And I have to be like, "Yeah, I don't know, I'm sorry." And they'd be like, "What do you mean?"

Renee has since stopped worrying about those types of cross-ethnic interactions with Black immigrant students, stating that although she must "think about [her response] a little more when [she] answer[s] [their question], … it's okay." She shared a humorous anecdote about receiving a DNA test kit as a Christmas gift from her aunt to help her discover her ethnic background and stop her peers' questions about it. While initially feeling uneasy about not knowing her ethnic background outside of the U.S. context, Renee has come to terms with the uncertainty and plans to take the DNA test to provide definitive answers in the future.

Perceived Role of Ethnic Identity in Cross-Ethnic Interactions

Renee felt her ethnic identity plays a significant role in her cross-ethnic interactions with Black immigrant students. Renee explained that there are a lot of similarities in the experiences of Black American and Black immigrant students but there are also cultural differences. She did not see these differences as a complete hindrance to cross-ethnic conversation between the two groups, but rather a way that the groups can connect and share their cultures with one another.

> I would say [my ethnicity] plays a large role [in my interactions with Black immigrant students] because, yes, we have a lot of shared common experiences – you know, skin tone, certain music – but at the same time, [our experiences are] also different, especially when it comes to food. So, I think it's cool because we teach each other things. I don't want to say "teach," but [there are] … things that you [as a Black American student] see as natural or … normal that [Black immigrant students] might not, and vice versa. So, it kind of helps us bond and get even closer because we're both doing things that we might not have done before.

Renee shared an example of how she had introduced her Black immigrant peers to several gospel artists they did not know. She saw this experience as a culture-sharing opportunity where she and her Black immigrant peers could learn more about one another and connect on cultural differences in an informal way. She recalled:

> I think this was … the beginning of my sophomore year, which [was] last year, I was with … a group of random people [many of whom were African] and everyone was talking about church and all that. And I was listing off the [gospel] artists I listen to, and they were like, "Who's that? Who's that?" And so, I had to teach them. They knew gospel, but it's like a different version in their churches. So I go to a predominantly Black [American] church, where they might go to a predominantly African one. So even though, yes, we're both Black, it's different. So that was kind of my time of putting them on [to something they didn't know], and I was like, "Okay, you listen to this song, and listen this song, go to this artist," and they would do the same for me. So, I think that, again, … kind of helped us connect and we learned more about each other that day. … I think we were just in [the student union]. It wasn't even like anything religious. Or I think it was one of the dining halls, so everyone was just talking, and it just came up and then just went from there.

To Renee, this informal opportunity in which Black American and Black immigrant students were able to culturally connect with one another represented the possibility of these two groups engaging in positive cross-ethnic interactions and embracing cultural differences in positive ways. Broadly, Renee's experiences illustrate the profound impact of cross-ethnic interactions on fostering mutual cultural understanding and appreciation between Black immigrant and Black American students at MU.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I introduced the eight participants in the study: Chris, Stacy, Zexell, Gloria, Chidinma, Vanessa, Amanda, and Renee. While their cross-cultural involvement on campus varied, there were indeed common threads in their cross-ethnic communication experiences and the perceived role their ethnic identities played in those experiences. Only one student, Zexell, said his ethnic identity played no role in his cross-ethnic interactions; however, he emphasized that he said his ethnicity played no role because he had never delved into that thought before. The rest of the participants who said their ethnic identity played a role in their cross-ethnic interactions perceived their ethnic identity to play a mostly positive role in their communication with their cross-ethnic peers. Although most participants could recall one or two incidents in which they felt their ethnicity negatively affected their communication with their cross-ethnic peers, they largely looked favorably upon their cross-cultural encounters. Regardless of their primarily positive assessment, the eight participants encountered a series of related obstacles and advantages to their cross-ethnic communication. The benefits and challenges Black immigrant and Black American students identified are discussed in the next chapter.

Chapter 5: Cross-Case Analysis

This chapter outlines the findings that emerged from a thematic analysis of the eight participants' experiences and perspectives regarding cross-ethnic communication and relationships between Black immigrant and Black American students at MU. The research questions guiding this study were:

- What do Black immigrant and Black American students at a predominantly white, public, state flagship institution perceive to be the role of their ethnic[10] identities in their cross-ethnic interactions with one another?
- What do Black immigrant and Black American students at a predominantly white, public, state flagship institution perceive to be the benefits and challenges of Black cross-ethnic interactions and relationship-building?

This chapter particularly addresses the second research question regarding the perceived benefits and challenges of cross-ethnic interactions and relationship-building among Black immigrant and Black American students. The data presented in this chapter primarily come from the two focus groups conducted with the study's eight Black immigrant and Black American student participants. In the focus groups, the participants discussed the existing interactions and relationships between Black immigrant and Black American students at MU, stereotypes they believed are held about Black immigrants and Black Americans, and facilitators and barriers they noticed to cross-ethnic communication between Black immigrant and Black American students at MU. The overarching commonalities in participants' perspectives related to these topics are presented as themes in this chapter.

[10] As noted in a previous footnote, the terms "cross-cultural" and "cross-ethnic" are used interchangeably to reflect participants' linguistic understanding of "ethnic identity." Likewise, the terms "interethnic" and "cross-ethnic" are used interchangeably.

To address the study's second research question, I present six themes, which examine three challenges and three benefits to cross-ethnic communication and relationship-building as described by the participants. The six themes include: 1) Challenge #1: "I Don't Really Have Time": How Students' Schedules Limit Their Cross-Ethnic Engagement; 2) Benefit #1: "For the Sake of Community": Developing Strong Cross-Ethnic Bonds to Support One Another at the PWI; 3) Challenge #2: "Instilled from Childhood": The "Cycle" of Passing Down Cross-Ethnic Stereotypes and Preconceived Notions; 4) Benefit #2: "Breaking Generational Curses": Combatting Instilled Interethnic Stereotypes through Cross-Ethnic Communication and Relationship-Building; 5) Challenge #3: "Trying to Reach and Understand the Other Side": How Lack of Cultural Knowledge Limits Cross-Ethnic Interactions and Relationships; and 6) Benefit #3: "There's So Much to Learn and Love": Building Cross-Cultural Understanding through Cross-Ethnic Interactions and Relationships. Each challenge and benefit are written as a set. The cross-case analysis alternates between challenges and benefits, reflecting Black immigrant and Black American participants' thinking of the correlation between the difficult and advantageous aspects of their cross-ethnic communication.

Challenge #1: "I Don't Really Have Time": How Students' Schedules Limit Their Cross-Ethnic Engagement

One of the main challenges students identified to cross-ethnic communication and relationship-building between Black immigrant and Black American students was their academic schedules. Five of the eight participants pointed to the demands of their schedules as a hindrance to their ability to attend weekly or biweekly meetings and events hosted by Black student organizations or staff at MU's Black cultural center. This barrier was prevalent for participants across varying levels of cross-ethnic engagement – from those who self-described as having

frequent cross-ethnic interactions with their peers (e.g., Chidinma, Vanessa) to those who self-described as having brief cross-ethnic interactions with their peers (e.g., Zexell). According to these participants, students have limited time to engage in more frequent Black student programming because of their academic loads and responsibilities as college students. Instead, many try to attend the large-scale social events hosted by Black student organizations that occur less frequently (e.g., events that happen annually or once a semester) to support their Black peers.

Chris, who is a member of both MU's African Student Association and Black Student Union, opined, "I'm mostly just a member [of ASA and BSU] and I go to their large social events, not necessarily their weekly events or club meetings or things like that due to the time constraint of being a college student." Chidinma, who is also a member of both ASA and BSU, shared a similar sentiment, "I'm a member of both [ASA and BSU] and I just go to events. A lot of the time, it's just my schedule that prevents me from going to meetings and things like that." Stacy, who described herself as interacting with Black immigrant students often as acquaintances, expressed that she is in her program's academic building "all the time." She added, "time is not my best friend, so I can't usually go to the BSU events and stuff like that to connect." Not only was Stacy's time on campus mostly spent in her academic building, but her later class schedule also conflicted with most Black student organizations' recurring general body meetings, leaving her no way to attend these events. Stacy explained:

> Well for me, my school schedule… doesn't even allow me to go to many things before 6:30. So if your GBM [general body meeting] is at 5:00, I unfortunately can't go. And most of them are at 5:00. They usually put them at those earlier times before people have to do homework and things like that, before people have to get out [of campus].

While Black student organizations likely try to tailor the time of their general body meetings to when most students are available – or as Stacy said, "before people have to do homework" or leave campus – students like Stacy who have evening classes may not be able to participate in these events. Vanessa, who self-described as having frequent cross-ethnic interactions with Black immigrant students and having many Black immigrant friends, summarized students' struggles with their schedules very well. She said:

> So, you get the most attendance from the [student org] events, but I do know there's some people, like when they have the time [they go to regular general body meetings]. Nine times out of ten [when they don't attend regular general body meetings], it's 'cause people, like, just their schedule [doesn't allow them to go]. But when they do have the time, they'll go to the other person's regular general meeting.

Vanessa is involved in two Black-centered campus organizations as a student leader. One organization is focused on the success of women students in her academic discipline and the other is focused on social justice. However, she is not a student leader of any of the Black ethnic organizations mentioned by the other participants (i.e., African Student Association, Black Student Union, and Caribbean Student Association). She shared that her active involvement in her current organizations does not leave her enough time to take on leadership roles within ethnic organizations like the Black Student Union or the Caribbean Student Association, wherein she has friends who serve on the organizations' executive boards. Despite the schedule challenges, Vanessa tries to go to as many Black ethnic organization events as she can. However, Vanessa did raise an issue with the events that the staff at MU's Black Cultural Center sponsor. She felt the time of these events prevented many Black students from going.

> [The Black Cultural Center staff host an event] every Wednesday … they'll have a speaker come out and speak on an issue in the Black community or they'll have someone come out as a speaker or just speak on something. But the only issue that I have with those events is that they're always in the middle of the day when people have classes. So it's like something's got to give. If you do want students to come, please put it in later in the day, like think of the students.

While smaller events that happen later in the day can be inaccessible to students like Stacy, for students like Zexell, attending both large-scale social events and even smaller campus events is not an option. Zexell, who noted having frequent but brief interactions with Black American students, outlined how his schedule dictates whether he goes to any type of Black event space, whether hosted by MU's Black student organizations or their Black Cultural Center staff. He stated:

> I [have] never gone into Black spaces or these African spaces like that, because [of] my schedule and just how things work out for me. And it's just kind of like … most of my time on campus, when I'm [on] campus I'm at classes and, also, I do other stuff.

As mentioned in his case profile, part of the "other stuff" Zexell does while on campus is study or do work in the student involvement center housed within MU's student union. However, even when he spends time in the student involvement center, Zexell said he is "mostly just focused on doing work or doing something else." For this reason, he said he "[doesn't] really have time to interact" cross-ethnically when he uses the space. More than just deciding whether to go to Black events to interact with Black American students, Zexell said he sometimes "actively avoid[s]" going to Black student or staff-led events because of his schedule. He disclosed:

> I just kind of don't put myself in those spaces. …I guess in a way I'd be saying like actively avoid [engaging at Black campus events] by just kind of like, when I see them… I kind of like [ask myself], "do I want to go there?" Stuff like that. "Look at the time" and "maybe, maybe not." And then just like "if it works out, it works out."

For Zexell, between his classes, his studies in the student involvement center, and his commute to and from campus via bus, he "[didn't] really have time" to attend Black social events, let alone focus on interacting with Black American students intentionally to build cross-ethnic relationships with them.

Vanessa described this phenomenon as a type of "tunnel vision" that Black MU students have where they prioritize focusing to achieve their academic goals above all else – in this case, Black cross-ethnic relationship-building.

> …I feel like it's just a MU thing in general. I feel like a lot of students have what I call 'tunnel vision.' We're all very focused on achieving our goals and getting to where we want to be in life. So, I feel like a lot of students, yes, we have times where we can talk with each other, but many times we're studying, we're doing other things. We don't really necessarily have the time to explain or take the time out to talk about our cultures and have these [cross-ethnic] conversations [about culture], unless it comes up. So, I feel like that can be an issue as well. It's good that we're focused, but I feel like we need to talk more.

Relatedly, Chris spoke about the importance of time in building Black cross-ethnic relationships and understanding. He described how Black cross-ethnic conversations can be difficult to have if you are not accustomed to communicating cross-ethnically with other Black people. He felt establishing effective cross-cultural communication between Black immigrant and Black

American students takes time and effort. Using his experience as an example to illustrate not just the importance of having cross-ethnic conversations, but also the time these conversations can demand, Chris recounted discussions he had with his Black American peers about Black Americans' experiences in the U.S. He described having a lack of understanding prior to engaging in these cross-ethnic conversations with his peers. After these conversations, Chris felt he was better able to understand the perspectives of his Black American peers. However, he noted that it took time for him to reflect on and process the discussions to reach this heightened cross-cultural understanding.

> This goes back to where I truly didn't understand … the struggles that Black Americans go through. So, I've had discussions with my peers about it. Like, why can't — "Well, my parents … like were literally in a different continent where they had less and so on and so forth and they came to America and they struggled all their lives. Why couldn't someone that's Black American that already has citizenship do these things?" So on and so forth. And we discussed. It took time to really sit down and understand that there are systems of oppression against Black Americans, for me to understand that maybe the world isn't black and white as I truly saw it as.

Chris' conversations with his Black American peers took time. Not only did it take time for his Black American peers to explain to him the experiences of Black Americans in the U.S. and the oppressive systems they face, but it also took time for Chris to understand what implications these revelations had on his view of the world. According to Chris, "it takes time to be able to facilitate those educated discussions about what the barriers are [between Black immigrants and Black Americans] and truly understand another person's viewpoint." Unfortunately, as pointed out by many of the participants, time is not a luxury that students possess.

Theme Summary

In this theme, Black immigrant and Black American participants revealed that their demanding academic schedules posed a significant barrier to intentional engagement with their cross-ethnic peers. This challenge affected participants across varying degrees of cross-ethnic interaction, from those with frequent interactions to those with brief encounters. Their academic responsibilities restricted their participation in weekly or biweekly meetings and events hosted by Black student organizations or staff at MU's Black Cultural Center. Some students, like Chidinma and Chris, expressed their inability to attend recurring general body meetings hosted by the Black ethnic student organizations due to time constraints. Instead, they emphasized their participation in larger social events hosted by these organizations. Stacy, whose schedule was filled with academic commitments, found it challenging to attend events earlier in the day or before 6:30 PM, as her classes often conflicted with these timings. Vanessa highlighted the conflict between such academic commitments and attending events, especially events hosted by MU's Black Cultural Center, which often overlapped with class hours. For students like Zexell, balancing academic requirements, extracurricular activities, and commuting left little room for attending Black events or interacting with Black American students intentionally. Vanessa described this phenomenon as "tunnel vision," where students prioritize academic goals over intentional cross-ethnic relationship-building. Chris also emphasized the time and effort required for effective cross-cultural communication between Black immigrant and Black American students, citing personal experiences that underscored the gradual process of understanding and reflecting on diverse Black perspectives. Overall, participants highlighted the scarcity of time as a pervasive challenge that limited their ability to engage deliberately and meaningfully with cross-ethnic peers.

Benefit #1: "For the Sake of Community": Developing Strong Cross-Ethnic Bonds to Support One Another at the PWI

Despite several participants facing challenging time constraints that restrict their cross-ethnic communication, all eight agreed on the significance of fostering communication between Black immigrant and Black American students for the sense of community it can cultivate. The students felt that an established or enhanced sense of community is one of the main benefits to cross-ethnic interactions and relationship-building between Black immigrant and Black American students. Seven of the eight participants (all except Zexell) felt that their presence as Black "minorities" in the majority-white environment of MU increased the need for a unified Black student community.

Although he did not name the effect of MU's predominantly white context on Black student unification, Zexell believed that one of the most significant benefits of cross-ethnic communication between Black immigrant and Black American students is fostering a "sense of community" between the two groups. This perspective stemmed from his observation of numerous Black students actively utilizing and engaging in communal spaces such as the Black Student Union. Zexell said, "The sense of community is probably one of the big things [that can be gained]. 'Cause I think for many African students, we have stuff like Black Student Union, stuff like that. I think that's very popular with African students." While Zexell indicated that he does not make use of such spaces, he still maintained that he understood why such spaces are "popular."

Chris also felt that cross-ethnic communication between Black immigrant and Black American students would establish a close connection between the two ethnic groups. Likewise, he stated that this cross-ethnic relationship-building would allow for more freedom of identity

expression within the Black community, with students neither conforming nor perceiving that one ethnicity is better than the other.

> Definitely a sense of community would've been established. And by "community," I mean there'd be a more tighter bond and there wouldn't be essentially a need for people to just differentiate themselves in a sense that like, "Oh, I'm better" or … things like that. There wouldn't be a hierarchy either. I think that the other thing is that no one would have to conform to a certain identity. I think people could actually be themselves and not feel pressured by society's standards to conform to a certain identity.

When discussing his vision for a stronger Black community at MU, Chris expressed that he believes the key to "enhancing the community" lies in facilitating open conversations where both Black immigrant and Black American students can share their differing viewpoints.

When unpacking the rationale behind participants' emphasis on community, it was revealed that one of the main drivers of community among Black students was the predominantly white institutional context of MU. Although Chris felt a stronger sense of community among Black students could be established at MU, he also believed that the relationship dynamics between Black immigrant and Black American students at MU was already fairly positive because of the fact that MU is a predominantly white institution (PWI). When describing the cross-ethnic relationship dynamics between MU's Black immigrant and Black American students, Chris observed:

> …[T]hey're pretty much positive. …[C]ertain hobbies [and commonalities] [such as music, favorite music artists, hair, and braiding] bring communities… [together] … Especially since MU's a PWI, it teaches us to appreciate each other more and really put

> aside whatever preconceived notions we came to the university with and form good relationships.

Comparing the relationship between Black immigrant and Black American students at MU to the relationship between the two groups at his predominantly Black high school, Chris stated that there is "more unity" and "open-mindedness" at MU, whereas at his high school, there was "more … negative slandering of each ethnic group respectively." He explained that while he initially "did come in [to MU] with this closed-mindedness of what [his] parents instilled in [him] even in high school," his perspective changed during his time at MU. Citing the reason for this change in perspective, Chris said "because I realized that people at MU weren't like … the people that I was surrounded by in high school." Compared to his Black immigrant and Black American high school peers who engaged in more negative cross-ethnic communication, the Black immigrant and Black American peers Chris encountered at MU were more desirous of positive, open-minded communication between the two groups.

Amanda – who described herself as interacting with Black American students occasionally as classmates – shared a similar assessment, saying that MU's Black community was less divided compared to the predominantly Black spaces in which she grew up in the Southeastern region of the U.S. Amanda attributed this difference to being a "minority" in a predominantly white environment.

> Personally, … compared to my childhood growing up in predominantly Black spaces, they aren't as divided [at MU]. And I feel like that's more or less something you see when we're the minority, is that we're closer together or closer knit. Of course there are cultural differences, but I would say as far as being Black in general, there isn't a divide.

Moreover, Amanda felt that "being a minority within an already marginalized group" made it "really important" for Black students to "advocate for each other," regardless of ethnicity. Directing this sentiment towards her fellow Black immigrant students specifically (whom she considered "a minority within an already marginalized group"), Amanda felt it was important for Black immigrant students – especially those born outside of the U.S. – to not only hold on to their cultures, but also "see themselves as a part of the bigger Black community on campus." She emphasized that Black immigrant students must avoid "separat[ing]" themselves from Black American students and acknowledge their shared identity within the broader Black community – especially in the context of MU's predominantly white campus. Chidinma concurred, saying, "I feel like being a minority here just intensifies the need to maintain relationships and be kind to each other."

Additionally, Chidinma emphasized the importance of Black immigrant students "mak[ing] an effort" to be more welcoming of and open to Black American students. They highlighted the necessity of creating intentional spaces where Black immigrant students can teach Black American students about their culture, or simply have them participate "for the sake of community" and cultural understanding. To Chidinma, such intentional spaces would open the door for Black immigrant students to "continue to invite [Black American students] and just have … community with them."

Stacy also stressed the importance of fostering a healthy sense of community across ethnic lines, particularly in the predominantly white context where any internal division among Black students could undermine group unity.

> [Regardless of ethnic identity], despite being immigrant or not, like [just us] being the minority [as Black students], I feel like [it's] important in itself to make sure that we have

> [a] sense of community within ourselves because it can be … It's hard enough to have division in common areas, but to hold that true, especially when we can all just be a big family because we really are, why not just do that in a healthy way?

For students like Gloria and Vanessa, the idea of Black students being a "family" rang even truer in the PWI context of MU. Gloria, who described herself as interacting with Black immigrant students occasionally as acquaintances at campus social events, highlighted the immediate sense of connection and kinship she feels when she encounters another Black student on MU's campus. She described seeing fellow Black students as part of a larger family unit, regardless of their ethnic backgrounds.

> I think, to some degree, no matter what stereotypes you might have about each other, … you can see that we're … more alike than different, or we're like … connected in some way. I've never felt like I looked at someone who wasn't Black American, and didn't think anything other than, "Oh another Black person." I just think Black before I think, "Oh, immigrant or American." I think Black first. I think family first, and that's just my personal opinion.

Vanessa echoed Gloria's sentiment, emphasizing that seeing Black students on campus reassures other Black students that they are "not alone." In this moment of visual reassurance, the most important thing is not the ethnicity of the other Black student, but rather the fact that there is another Black student.

> [If you are] walking to class, or if you have a class and you see someone Black in your class besides you, you're not going to think, "Oh, they're an immigrant, they're from the Caribbean, they're from Africa." No, you're thinking, "Yes, I'm not alone."

Similarly, Renee expressed that cross-ethnic interactions and relationship-building in the predominantly white institutional context help Black immigrant and Black American students overcome cultural differences that could otherwise lead to communication barriers (e.g., food and music), especially when one group is unfamiliar with certain aspects of the other group's culture. Renee described herself as having very frequent (i.e., almost daily) cross-ethnic interactions with Black immigrant students and having many Black immigrant friends. Reflecting on the benefits of cross-ethnic communication between Black immigrant and Black American students, she shared:

> …[I]t kind of breaks those barriers that I just listed before. It helps us be like, "Okay, yeah, we might eat different food sometimes, we might listen to different music sometimes, but we're all Black at the end of the day somewhere. We all have that blood in us." And I think that kind of helps bring us together, especially at a PWI, nobody has time to be clashing with each other, especially within our race.

While many participants highlighted MU's predominantly white context as fostering solidarity and unity among Black students, some of the aforementioned participants discussed how the sense of community formed through cross-ethnic communication can contribute to Black students' success in college. Gloria stated that cross-ethnic communication and sharing about one another's cultures could "create bonds and friendship and familyship" among Black immigrant and Black American students. Additionally, Vanessa emphasized the need for Black immigrant and Black American students to unite, especially when dealing with the difficulties of college life. She asserted, "We all need to come together and know we're all here for each other. College can be hard, so we really need that sense of community and relationship to continue on."

Integrating both the social aspect of Gloria's statement and the academic aspect of Vanessa's statement, Chidinma shared the importance of cultural exchange and community-building in enhancing the overall success of Black students at MU. They highlighted the enjoyment and camaraderie that come from Black immigrant and Black American students learning about each other's cultures, fostering a deeper sense of community and mutual understanding among peers. Chidinma said:

> I also think it's just a lot of fun to learn about each other's cultures and dances and have fun that way and just gain another level of community that we have with each other so that we can understand each other, understand each other's cultures, and ultimately just help each other … succeed on campus.

Chidinma's comment aptly illustrates the cycle of how cultural learning encourages a sense of community among Black students and how that sense of community reciprocally primes Black immigrant and Black American students for more cultural learning and understanding. This positive cycle Chidinma described ultimately aids in the success of Black immigrant and Black American students at MU. However, in the next section, I discuss a different type of cycle, one that poses a significant challenge to cross-ethnic communication between Black immigrant and Black American students: the cycle of preconceived notions and cross-ethnic stereotypes, passed down from generation to generation of Black immigrant and Black American students.

Theme Summary

The participants unanimously recognized the importance of fostering communication between Black immigrant and Black American students at MU to cultivate a stronger sense of community, despite facing challenging time constraints. Notably, they emphasized the heightened significance of community-building within MU's Black student population due to

their racially minoritized status within the predominantly white institutional context. While some participants, like Zexell, highlighted the immediate benefits of cross-ethnic communication in fostering a sense of community between Black immigrant and Black American students, others, such as Amanda and Chris, delved deeper into the potential long-term impacts of cross-ethnic communication, advocating for more open conversations and cultural exchange to enhance unity and understanding between the two groups. The predominantly white environment of MU was cited as a catalyst for greater unity among Black students, fostering a sense of belonging and solidarity across ethnic lines. This sentiment was echoed by various participants, including Chidinma, Gloria, Renee, Stacy, and Vanessa, who emphasized the importance of Black students at the PWI coming together to support each other academically and socially. Ultimately, the theme underscores the transformative power of cross-ethnic community-building in navigating the challenges of college life and promoting the overall success of Black immigrant and Black American students at MU.

Challenge #2: "Instilled from Childhood": The "Cycle" of Passing Down Cross-Ethnic Stereotypes & Preconceived Notions

Participants identified cross-ethnic stereotypes and preconceived notions as significant barriers to communication and relationship-building between Black immigrant and Black American students. Gloria, Renee, and Vanessa mentioned cross-ethnic stereotypes they heard about Black immigrants, such as they are "uncivilized," "underdeveloped," "unintelligent," and "crooked with money." Stacy brought up how such stereotypes appear in movies such as *Scary Movie*, where she recalled an African man being depicted with a "funny accent" and being told to "Go back to Africa." According to Stacy, while filmmakers portray such cross-ethnic stereotypes about Black immigrants as "entertaining" for comedic purposes, these stereotypes

"can sometimes be in the back of your mind unknowingly," subsequently impacting cross-ethnic communication between Black immigrant and Black American students. Amanda, Chidinma, Chris, and Zexell mentioned cross-ethnic stereotypes they heard about Black Americans, such as they are "loud," "self-centered," "privileged," and "violent." Chris and Zexell brought up how some Black immigrants see such stereotypes of Black Americans as "gangsters" depicted in movies like *Boyz n the Hood* and believe these stereotypes are the reality of how Black Americans act.

While participants agreed that cross-ethnic stereotypes and preconceived notions could pose an issue in cross-ethnic communication between Black immigrant and Black American students, they emphasized that the most daunting aspect of these cross-ethnic stereotypes and preconceived notions was the fact that they were passed down to them from older family and community members. They specified that the way these stereotypes were intergenerationally passed down to them by influential people in their communities had an impact on their cross-ethnic communication. This cycle of passing down cross-ethnic stereotypes and preconceived notions from older generations of Black immigrant and Black American parents and community members to younger generations of Black immigrant and Black American students reflects the central focus of this theme.

Vanessa had this to say about the transmission of cross-ethnic stereotypes, "I feel like a lot of the stereotypes are from the older generations and have been passed down to the children, just generation after generation." Chris agreed with this notion and provided context as to how this transmission worked in his Black African household. He stated:

> [A challenge is] definitely the preconceived notions of Black Americans and [simultaneously] the preconceived notions of Black immigrants as well. I believe it's the

> preconceived notions that are instilled from childhood that Black immigrants shouldn't be like Black Americans. To basically quote things my parents would've said is that, "Oh, they aren't imbued in their culture, they don't know where they're from. Because of that, they don't know discipline or certain things or how hard it is." When in truth, it's not the reality.

Speculating on the origins of his parents stereotypical thinking, Chris pointed to depictions of Black Americans in media. He said:

> … I also came from a predominantly Black high school as well, and I think the rhetoric that my parents instilled in me was based off what they saw in Black media. We'd see things like *Boyz n the Hood* or various Black movies that just portrayed Black Americans in a sense where they were … engaging in activities that were harmful to them or just harmful in general, and that became the stereotype for it.

Chris emphasized that these stereotypes and preconceived notions his parents transmitted to him were "instilled from childhood." He shared that, "being raised in an African household, there's this stereotype of a Black American man that you're not supposed to fit into." Giving examples of things that his parents considered improper of an African man, Chris mentioned that he was not allowed to have ear piercings. He elaborated, saying, "You're not supposed to do anything that might make you a target or make you seem suspicious. … Because, at least in African society, they view Black American style as a target or something that makes them look unapproachable." Chris said that this thinking has "been etched into a lot of African men." While these preconceived notions were instilled in him at a young age, Chris mentioned that they impacted his thinking of Black Americans until his first year of college, where he was able to

have cross-ethnic interactions that made him realize his parents' thinking about Black Americans was "not the reality."

Providing another example of how cross-ethnic stereotypes and preconceived notions are instilled at a young and impressionable age, Zexell recalled an incident that occurred in middle school in which his aunt warned him to avoid acting like the "American" children in his school. While Zexell did not think much about his aunt's warning at the time, now reflecting on her words as a college student, Zexell realized that his aunt's words had a "double meaning." According to Zexell, in warning him to avoid acting like the American children in his school, his aunt was actually warning him against acting like the *Black* American children in his school. He explained:

> … I still remember a line that my aunt told me once, because she said something about not being like these American kids here. And it's like, but me looking at it now, I can tell it has a double meaning. Because yeah, "you don't want to be like these American kids." And by "the Americans," … she also means don't be like the American Black kids here, since I also went to a school that was majority Black. And it's kind of another way of [saying] they still … want you to achieve higher and stuff like that, but they just don't want you to become, in a sense, a troublemaker. … They just don't want you to blend in too much with … the Black [American] kids here. … And this was back in … middle school …, so it was just during my formative years, and it's something that's stuck around with me even through high school. I'm realizing now what she meant by it. So yeah, I think it's a little bit of a degree of separation [between the two groups].

Reflecting on the lingering impact that this transmitted stereotype had on his thinking, Zexell said:

> Now … I'm also getting that degree of separation as well for myself, because when people see I'm Black, I'm just like, "But wait. I think of myself as African first before I … put myself as a Black person."

For Zexell, the preconceived notions of separation that his aunt introduced to him as a child persisted into his adulthood, causing him to fall into similar patterns of drawing distinctions between his African identity and the stereotypical idea of Black American identity.

Chidinma also reflected on how stereotypes are often passed down from family members through "word of mouth." Speaking about perceptions of Black Americans within the African immigrant community, Chidinma noted that many African immigrants view Black Americans as "privileged," believing that they do not fully utilize the resources available to them in the U.S. Relatedly, Chidinma stated that African immigrants often perceive Black Americans as unserious about their futures and unaware of the opportunities they possess. They said:

> I think that a lot of African immigrants definitely view [Black Americans] as privileged and not taking advantage of the resources that they have here, and they have the idea that they aren't serious about their futures, or that they are privileged and don't really understand what they have or what they're able to do. Even if they do still acknowledge that there's racism and oppression in America, they still think [Black Americans] have it a lot better, that they're not using the resources…

Chidinma voiced that these stereotypes are often raised in discussions among African immigrants about their experiences in America. Noticing that such discussions often occurred among family members and other close community members, Chidinma observed:

> … I think there's a lot of the culture shock when immigrants come here and they just see how different even living standards are and they're discussing with their friends that have

> also immigrated here. I see it come up in conversations like that when they're talking with other African immigrants about their struggle after immigrating here. Even just trying to motivate their children to do better, they'll say that "Oh, there's so many resources here we didn't have back home, and people aren't taking advantage of them." Things like that. So, it's discussions between family, or people who have also immigrated. Thats where I see it the most. And their kids.

Chidinma emphasized that parents and older community members "motivat[ing]" younger generations of Black African immigrants to succeed often involves contrasting the perceived abundance of resources in the U.S. with the challenges faced in their home countries. According to Chidinma, in their attempt to "motivate their children to do better," many African immigrants warn their children away from being like Black Americans – who they believe are "not taking advantage of the resources that they have" in the U.S. Chidinma's perspective helps shed light on the intergenerational transmission of cross-ethnic stereotypes within the Black immigrant community, particularly regarding perceptions of Black American privilege. Such transmitted stereotypes and preconceived notions can shape younger Black immigrants' understanding of Black American experiences, potentially hindering their cross-ethnic relationships with Black Americans on college campuses like MU.

Gloria also shared a cross-ethnic stereotype she heard from her parents, specifically about African men. She said that while she has now gained her own understanding about the "newer generation" of Black immigrants, she was told by her parents to "beware" of African men and their dislike of Black American women. She said, "There's a stereotype that I've grown up with that African men don't like Black women. And I've heard that before and I've always heard 'just be careful, they may look down on you' type of thing." Although she was warned, Gloria said

she never experienced that herself and mentioned it could have happened to a "[much] older generation." Deciding that the stereotype was something the older generation experienced and tried to pass down to the younger generation, Gloria said:

> … I've come to make my own conclusion that I think it's just your older parents' experiences trying to put them on you. But I really don't think that, but I did have a predisposition to be careful of that or like just be mindful of it. Other than that, I have a pretty positive idea of African or Black international students. But I did notice that one little thing that I've been told.

To Gloria, her parents' preconceived notions and warnings about African men were based on a stereotype that she herself had never experienced. Because she never saw this stereotype manifest in her reality, Gloria assumed the negative experiences Black American women had with African men may have been more prevalent in an older generation of Black Americans. Nevertheless, Gloria saw this instance as a vivid illustration of older generations of the Black community perpetuating the cycle of transmitting cross-ethnic stereotypes and preconceived notions to the younger members of their ethnic community.

Theme Summary

In this theme, participants recognized cross-ethnic stereotypes and preconceived notions as prominent obstacles to interactions and relationship-building between Black immigrant and Black American students at MU. These stereotypes, ranging from perceptions of Black immigrants as "uncivilized" to Black Americans as "privileged," were often passed down from older family (e.g., parents) and community members. Some participants, such as Vanessa and Gloria, pointed out the overall influence of older generations in perpetuating these cross-ethnic stereotypes. Others, such as Stacy, Chris, and Zexell, delved into the impact of media depictions

on older generations' cross-ethnic understandings, perceiving these media depictions as key contributors to the stereotypes older generations learn and pass down to the younger generation. In their community, Chidinma observed similar patterns of cross-ethnic stereotypes being passed down generationally during cultural discussions. These discussions involved African parents talking to their children, as well as other immigrant parents, about Black Americans' perceived underutilization of resources. Chidinma highlighted how such discussions among African immigrants reinforced stereotypes about Black Americans being privileged and not taking advantage of opportunities, effectively shaping younger immigrants' perceptions of their cross-ethnic counterparts.

Chris also reflected on his upbringing in an African household where stereotypes about Black Americans were instilled from childhood, influencing his cross-ethnic beliefs until college. Similarly, Zexell recalled his aunt's warning to avoid acting like American children, which he later realized referred specifically to Black American children. Gloria shared her experience of being warned by her parents about African men's attitudes towards Black American women, illustrating how older generations transmit stereotypes to younger ones. Overall, this theme highlighted the pervasive influence of intergenerational transmission of cross-ethnic stereotypes and preconceived notions, impacting the perspectives and interactions of Black immigrant and Black American students at MU.

Benefit #2: "Breaking Generational Curses": Combatting Instilled Interethnic Stereotypes through Cross-Ethnic Communication & Relationship-Building

Students acknowledged how interethnic stereotypes passed down from older generations of Black immigrants and Black Americans could negatively affect cross-ethnic communication and relationship-building between Black immigrant and Black American students. However, the

same participants who pointed to the challenge these stereotypes pose also emphasized the power that Black immigrant and Black American students have to "break generational curses" by refuting these stereotypes and resisting their intergenerational transmission. For participants, the intentional act of communicating and building relationships across ethnic lines allows for cultural sharing that could combat instilled cross-ethnic stereotypes and preconceived notions. They perceived the ability to debunk instilled stereotypes and preconceived notions as one of the key benefits of cross-ethnic communication between Black immigrant and Black American students.

Vanessa described the effect that Black cross-ethnic communication can have on both the current generation as well as future generations of Black immigrant and Black American students.

> A benefit of … cross-cultural communications between Black immigrants and Black Americans … is breaking generational curses. When we were talking about stereotypes earlier, I was thinking, I feel like a lot of the stereotypes are from the older generations and have been passed down to the children, just generation after generation. So, with these [cross-ethnic] relationships that we're forming, I feel like it can break these generational curses and break that cycle of passing down these stereotypes. Because as this generation starts to form more cross-cultural relationships, you can pass that down to the next generation, and so on and so forth, so that these stereotypes start to become more and more obsolete.

Vanessa believes that fostering cross-ethnic communication would help make generational stereotypes "more obsolete," enabling present-day Black immigrant and Black American students to forge relationships across ethnic lines. This, in turn, would set a precedent for future

generations to follow suit. Zexell also pointed out how cross-ethnic communication can help "end misconceptions" that Black immigrant and Black American students have "heard about each other." He explained how ending cross-ethnic misconceptions could help build a bridge between Black immigrants and Black Americans, as it would minimize the influence of unconfirmed stereotypes on the cross-ethnic communication between Black immigrant and Black American students. Using an example of stereotype-based warnings Africans give about Black Americans to discuss the benefit of ending cross-ethnic misconceptions, Zexell explained:

> [A benefit of cross-ethnic communication between Black immigrant and Black American students is] just trying to end misconceptions [that] you heard about each other. Because I know when Africans come to America, [they say] stuff like, "oh don't be around Black [American] people." … I always found that kind of weird … Something that's said but you just don't know how much that it's true. So … getting rid [of] misconceptions … is probably a good thing when we try to bridge the [cross-ethnic communication] barrier.

Similarly, Chris provided an example of how his own cross-ethnic communication with Black American students helped him to reframe his perspective on building cross-ethnic relationships. He focused on the "reality" of his cross-ethnic communication experiences instead of his parents' views. Reflecting on the shift in his mindset from being affected by his parents' preconceived notions of Black Americans to being influenced by the real communicative experiences he had with his Black American peers, Chris observed:

> I've reached a point where [my parents' stereotypes and preconceived notions about Black Americans don't impact my cross-ethnic communication anymore]. So, in the past, it might have [affected it]. Up until my freshman year of college, it was like that. But then eventually, I came to realize that I can't live in my parents' viewpoint or perspective of

> the world. I have to find out what the real answers are for myself. And seeing how convincing those other answers from my peers — being Black Americans and Black immigrants themselves — were, … it all … tied together essentially what the real reality was rather than what the preconceived notions [were] that two continents have about each other.

Chris' perspective is that the "real answers" about cross-ethnic communication between Black immigrant and Black American students come from intentionally interacting with one another, and not from preconceived notions inherited from the older generation. As such, he felt that "debunk[ing]" these instilled stereotypes would allow for more cross-cultural understanding. Specifically, Chris asserted that if students work to "debunk stereotypes," they will gain "a mutual understanding of each other's … upbringings and standpoints."

Gloria, who described herself as "scared" of entering Black immigrant spaces because of a lack of cultural knowledge of these groups, also emphasized the importance of cross-ethnic communication to dispel instilled stereotypes. She noted the stereotypes that Black Americans have of Black immigrants and vice versa, explaining how these stereotypes are "indoctrinated" into both groups.

> Despite everything I said about being scared of entering the [Black immigrant] spaces, I think it's important to learn about each other. Because I know that there are stereotypes or like mis-ideas about international Black people that might not be true or … [might exist] because we've been indoctrinated to think certain things about places like Africa. I think it's important to actually learn about it and vice versa as an international student learning about Black Americans. 'Cause, from both sides, I've heard some strange

> stereotypes or strange ideas that are like "I think you should take the time to educate yourself about it."

Reflecting on the stereotypes she heard about both Black immigrant and Black American students, Gloria continued:

> For example, … a Black American [student] might say about a Black international student … something along the lines of some weird stereotype about Africa, like wondering about how they live. You know, some people still think Africa's a desert, that type of thing. But on the other side, I've heard African students imply that Black people are ghetto or they're lazy, like I've heard that stereotype before.

Despite the existence of such cross-ethnic stereotypes, Gloria stressed the significance of each group learning the cultural history of the other. She said, "I think it is important to know about both sides of why things are the way they are or vice versa. I think it's important to communicate those things."

Like Gloria, Chidinma also highlighted the idea that lack of knowledge about each group's cultural history can lead to misconceptions of each group. Chidinma underscored the role of cross-ethnic communication in mitigating these instilled cross-ethnic misconceptions. Discussing the perceptions of older African immigrants specifically, they shared:

> I think what happens a lot with a lot of older African immigrants is that they misjudge Black Americans and the history that they have here with America, where it's systemic racism and a lot of other issues. So, I feel like through those [cross-ethnic] conversations, a lot of understanding can be gained so that we [as African immigrants] can also understand how to navigate oppression in America.

Chidinma also conveyed the sentiment that some Black Americans perceive African immigrants as "stuck up" and uninterested in "get[ting] to know them." They attributed this perception to the behaviors of African parents and older immigrants toward Black Americans. However, Chidinma expressed that the notion of African immigrants being stuck up and disinterested in building connections with Black Americans is "not true." They stated that many African immigrants, especially the younger generation, are "very open people" who want to learn about Black American culture and want to "teach" Black Americans about their culture as well. Chidinma said:

> … I feel like there's a lot of animosity that comes from older immigrant generations that look down on Black Americans, and I don't want that to prevent [Black Americans] from interacting [with] the [Black immigrant] youth because we're very interested and we're also very connected to Black American culture. So, I feel like in that sense, we should be able to talk to each other and communicate and talk about different issues.

Chidinma empathized with the limited perspectives Black Americans have about Africa, saying, "… at the end of the day, I feel like a lot of people's preconceived notions about Africa aren't their fault." They also emphasized the way Black Africans' cross-ethnic communication with Black Americans can increase Black Americans' cultural knowledge, stating that Black Americans "have to learn [about Africa] one way or another" and that "a good way of [helping their learning] would be [Africans] talk[ing] to other people about [their] culture in an open and in a listening and respectful way."

Although Chidinma acknowledged that there was more that could be done to mitigate cross-ethnic stereotypes and increase cultural understanding between Black immigrant and Black

American populations, they also felt that Black students at MU were already actively trying to dismantle these stereotypes. They stated:

> I think most Black people here [at MU], immigrants are … very progressive, and we don't really [believe] those [stereotypical] perceptions as much. So, I don't think it's that big of a problem or it's that influential. I think we do better at trying to dismantle those stereotypes than letting that interfere with the way that we talk to people and interact with them.

Chidinma believed that there is more openness to communicating cross-ethnically at MU. They attributed this openness to the county in which MU is located.

> As someone who grew up here, I've done all of my schooling, K through 12, in [the county in which MU is located], and I definitely think that just growing up with Black people of different backgrounds, you learn to interact, and that these stereotypes aren't true, and you end up dispelling stereotypes that other people have about your ethnicity as well. I feel like that definitely helps when you get here [to MU], when you get here and you're interacting with different kinds of Black people, a lot of the times.

For Chidinma, the diversity of the Black population in MU's county facilitates interaction between Black immigrant and Black American students, ultimately aiding in dispelling cross-ethnic stereotypes that they may encounter. When prompted to discuss the active efforts of Black students in combating cross-ethnic stereotypes, Chidinma responded:

> I think it just looks like basic camaraderie. I've seen it within [academic] majors and within friend groups, giving each other resources, talking about certain events, talking about things going on culturally in ASA or in BSU and sharing that with other people and just being open to learn about other people's culture.

Chidinma ultimately felt that their experiences interacting with other Black students at MU have been "very positive" because of the Black student community's efforts to support one another, regardless of ethnicity.

Theme Summary

The participants in the study recognized the detrimental impact of intergenerationally transmitted cross-ethnic stereotypes on communication between Black immigrant and Black American students. However, they also highlighted the agency and power that students possess to challenge and break these cycles. By engaging in intentional cross-cultural communication and relationship-building, participants believed they could debunk cross-ethnic stereotypes and preconceived notions inherited from older generations. Vanessa and Zexell emphasized how fostering cross-ethnic relationships between Black immigrant and Black American students could render generational stereotypes obsolete, setting a precedent for future generations. Chris recounted a transformation in his approach to building cross-ethnic relationships with Black American students, shifting from reliance on inherited stereotypes from his parents to embracing genuine communicative experiences with his cross-ethnic peers. Gloria and Chidinma stressed the importance of Black immigrant and Black American students learning about each other's cultural histories to dispel misconceptions and animosity. Despite acknowledging ongoing challenges, Chidinma expressed optimism about the proactive efforts of Black students at MU to dismantling instilled cross-ethnic stereotypes. They highlighted camaraderie, resource-sharing, and cultural exchange, as key actions Black immigrant and Black American students are taking to foster a positive environment for cross-ethnic interaction and understanding on their campus.

Challenge #3: "Trying to Reach and Understand the Other Side": How Lack of Cultural Knowledge Limits Cross-Ethnic Interactions

One of the challenges participants highlighted about cross-ethnic interactions between Black immigrants and Black Americans is clique-ish behaviors among Black students. However, a deeper examination revealed that the underlying issue of ethnic cliquing stemmed from a perceived lack of cultural understanding among students, hindering their ability to engage effectively in cross-ethnic communication. This perception was evident among several Black American students, some of whom expressed current or previous feelings of inadequacy regarding their knowledge of Black immigrant cultures, thereby hindering their participation in Black immigrant spaces. Conversely, Black immigrant students noticed their Black American peers' hesitation to participate in Black immigrant spaces, which they attributed to Black American students' lack of experience navigating cultural environments dominated by Black immigrants. This hesitation seemed particularly pronounced when contrasted with the Black immigrant participants' familiarity navigating cultural spaces dominated by Black Americans. This theme explores the challenge that a lack of cultural knowledge poses, which impedes cross-ethnic interactions between Black immigrant and Black American students at MU.

The Issue of Black Ethnic Cliques at MU

Chidinma, Stacy, and Vanessa each described how cliques and clique-ish behaviors can negatively impact cross-ethnic communication between Black immigrant and Black American students at MU. Specifically, they touched on how Black students find their friend groups early on in their college careers, then stay in these same friend groups with minimal exploration or relationship-building outside of this "inner circle" of friends. Chidinma observed, "I think [barriers or challenges] might just come from people having cliques that they aren't moving out of and just having the same friend groups."

Stacy agreed with this notion, stating that students sometimes "find their people before exploring" and become comfortable with their friend groups to the point that they barely move out of them. She explained that students go from seeing each other a lot in person and getting to know one another to building friendships where they naturally seek one another out to go to events or simply hang out. She expressed that these students become "your inner, inner circle" as you find the people with whom you can be your full self or "hold yourself true." Stacy then pointed to how this idea of "comfortability" and "finding [your] people early" is not an intentional barrier, but is a barrier, nonetheless.

> … I feel like that's the main barrier of just people finding their people before exploring really. And then it's just like we're stuck. It's up and it's stuck and they're just together and they're just having fun together. And not on purpose. … I just think [it's] by chance … So, I think that's the main barrier is just like, not so [much] clique-ish[ness] but just like comfortability.

Stacy did not see comfortability as a "bad thing" but noted that it could pose a barrier to cross-ethnic relationship-building between Black immigrant and Black American students. She mentioned that, in finding their friend groups, students connect with "people they want to be around." To Stacy, if the friends that students naturally gravitate towards or connect with happen to share the student's cultural identity or are "by chance in the same [ethnic] group," then that is simply "how it is." Stacy emphasized that she "[doesn't] think the barrier is there … willingly," where students consciously exclude others from their friend group based on ethnicity. Instead, she believes that students prioritize comfort and naturally gravitate toward those with whom they feel a connection. Hence, if students' friend groups happen to share an ethnic identity, Stacy sees it as an additional, yet coincidental point of connection rather than a deliberate exclusion.

Vanessa also mentioned that students frequently remained within their established friend circles; however, she perceived a more prominent ethnic separation between Black immigrant and Black American students at MU. She explained that although Black students from different ethnic backgrounds attend Black student organization events, they tend to stick to their own cultural groups outside of these events.

> So … even though we're together at times at events, at the end of the day or when it's school, regular school, [it's] the Black American kids with the Black Americans, the African kids with the Africans, the Caribbeans with the Caribbeans, like we're all separate.

Offering a rationale as to why she believes this ethnic separation exists, Vanessa continued:

> So, it's like, but why? Again, at the end of the day, we're all still Black…. So, I feel like those preconceived notions, maybe it comes to what parents might have taught them or they feel more comfortable with people who understand their culture more. I feel like we need to get past that to strengthen these relationships.

Vanessa highlighted that preconceived notions learned from parents and preferences for peers who share a deeper understanding of their culture can influence students' inclination to form cross-ethnic relationships. This comfortability factor often leads students to primarily seek connections with others who share their cultural identity. Vanessa observed this dynamic at MU, where Black American, African, and Caribbean students tend to congregate within their respective ethnic enclaves. She emphasized the importance of overcoming these barriers to foster stronger cross-ethnic relationships between Black immigrant and Black American students.

The Discomfort of Cultural Ineptitude

Vanessa also reflected on how clique-ish behavior could stem from a lack of exposure to other ethnic communities. She brought up the experience of one of her Black immigrant friends who grew up in the research state. Vanessa shared how her friend frequently tells her that "he grew up being around … both the [Black] immigrant community as well as [the] African American community." While she thought about her friend's experience as "a mix of both" Black immigrant and Black American, she realized that his exposure to both ethnic groups' cultures provided him with cultural insights that he may not have had otherwise. Specifically, Vanessa reflected on how other students' *lack* of exposure to other ethnic groups, likely due to growing up in ethnically homogenous areas, could unintentionally force them into a pattern of only interacting with individuals who share the same cultural identity as them. Explaining her thinking, Vanessa stated:

> So maybe it's just people not being exposed to other communities. It might be an issue. Because even like your hometown, you're probably going to hang with [people who have the same cultural background as you], like your families might know the other immigrant families or the African American family knows the other African American families. So, I think it's just the exposure to other people in the Black diaspora.

Renee shared a similar perspective regarding the homogenous nature of certain Black ethnic communities in the research state. She stated that, although she is not from the research state, she has a lot of extended family there. As such, she noticed a "trend" or pattern regarding the Black ethnic demographic of particular counties in the research state. Specifically, she noticed that the county in which MU is located is predominantly Black American while two other counties in the research state are predominantly African. Relatedly, she explained that most

of MU's Black American student population comes from the county where MU is located, while most of the African students she has met at MU are from the other two counties she mentioned.

Like Vanessa, Renee felt that if a student grew up in an ethnically homogenous place, it could stifle students' cultural knowledge of other ethnic groups. Renee felt that this cultural knowledge gap could cause students to feel a sense of discomfort when entering cultural spaces with which they are unfamiliar. She provided an example of this lack of cultural knowledge leading to discomfort. Renee discussed an experience in which she went to an event with a Black American friend who did not know the Afrobeats music being played at the event, which led to a feeling of awkwardness.

> I would probably say a large [barrier to Black immigrant and Black American student communication] is where they grew up…. There have been a few times [when] one of my Black American friends, we'd be at an event, and then Afrobeats will come on, and I knew the songs, but she didn't, so it was kind of awkward for her. … I don't know if she just didn't know it, so she didn't like it, or she tried and she just wasn't feeling it, like it wasn't for her. But I think I've seen that in other times where it's kind of a barrier, because you don't know the words, you don't really know the artist that much, and it's a different sound. So, I think that's been a barrier sometimes.

Similarly, Renee expressed that the reverse had happened too where some of her Black immigrant friends were uncomfortable when they were not familiar with the hip-hop music being played at an event.

> And vice versa, where my [immigrant] friends and I will be at some Afrobeats party, and then hip-hop comes on, and sometimes people don't know that, so then they're a little

awkward standing around. So … I think that definitely has created a little bit of a barrier. Obviously not intentionally, but I think it's just where people have grown up.

Renee suggested that these instances reflect a broader barrier stemming from the homogenous cultural backgrounds in which students were raised.

Renee offered a similar example regarding food. In this encounter, she was the one who was unfamiliar with the cultural aspect of Black immigrant culture. She mentioned having an idea of what jollof rice was before coming to MU but stated that she did not know what "malt" was until recently. Her lack of exposure to this cultural drink posed a barrier to her understanding of what her friends were discussing. She stated, "I just didn't grow up around it, so I really didn't know." She then expressed how such experiences can create a communication barrier for other students, saying:

> [E]very now and then someone will talk about a food or something, and someone will be like, "What?" So, I think sometimes that creates that barrier, when they're like, "Oh, you don't know what this is? You never had this? How do you not know?" And it's like "I've just never been exposed to it, so I don't even know what I'm missing out on."

In these examples, Renee is alluding to the idea that, without certain cultural knowledge (e.g., food, music), your ability to interact with your cross-ethnic counterparts is limited. In other words, you can only contribute so much to a conversation if you do not understand the cultural aspects being discussed. Similarly, you might feel uncomfortable interacting with your cross-ethnic counterparts due to a lack of knowledge about their culture. Gloria provided an example of this perspective.

Gloria described feeling ill-equipped to enter Black immigrant student organization spaces because of her lack of knowledge about the group's culture.

> Speaking just for myself … I feel like a barrier, only in my mind, [is] I feel that because I'm not from that specific background that I can't really relate or join in in the way that I feel would be good. For example, … I don't know how broad African Student Union is but sometimes it's very specific to [the] country. Like you'll see Nigerians together, they'll have the Caribbean[s] [in the Caribbean Student Association], they'll have these very specific groups that I don't know if I can [join in]… I'm sure I could, but I don't feel like I can just walk into and take part in [the space] 'cause that's not my particular background, especially since I don't know much about it because it's very specific groups of people.

While Gloria could go to these student organizations' meetings to listen and learn about another group's culture, her presumptions about "not understanding or fitting in" within the space is "what kept [her] from engaging fully."

Vanessa provided language to support this notion of feeling culturally out of place or left out. She regarded it as a type of cultural "imposter syndrome." She explained:

> Like you're in an area where there's mostly Black Americans or mostly Black immigrants, and they're celebrating something related to their culture, and you're the only one who's not, I feel there's a sense of being left out until you learn more about what their cultural thing is and try to learn more about it. But I feel in the beginning, there's a sense of … like imposter syndrome.

Renee provided a detailed example of this phenomenon, drawing on her own experience of gaining knowledge about Nigerian culture. She described how having this increased cultural knowledge changed her level of comfort and confidence in interacting cross-culturally. Specifically, her proximity to Nigerian culture through her Nigerian roommate helped her to

"build a bridge" between her and Black Nigerian students who may have felt she did not know about or understand their culture because she is American.

> … Because you usually tell people that [you don't know what your ancestral cultural heritage is] and then they automatically assume, "Oh, she … doesn't know much about my culture. She probably won't understand it. She won't understand the jokes." So, I feel like when I first reached that change [in my cultural knowledge and security in my own identity], I'd be like, "Yeah, I don't know where I'm from, but my roommate's Nigerian." I would always say that, and everyone would be like, "Oh, really?!" and then, boom, it was like I was basically telling them I was African. So, it kind of built a bridge a little bit. So … I'm kind of showing another way that I may not know [my ancestral cultural heritage], but … there's other things that I *do* know.

Evident in Renee's experience, feelings of cultural aptitude and comfortability can serve as bridges in cross-ethnic interactions. Yet, the need for a sense of cultural aptitude to enter cross-ethnic spaces was more prevalent for the Black American study participants than the Black immigrant study participants. Living in the U.S. and being exposed to U.S. American culture, led Black immigrant students to feel inherently comfortable entering Black American spaces, especially since many grew up in predominantly Black American environments. Conversely, they observed that Black American students were not similarly socialized to feel comfortable entering Black immigrant spaces.

The Role of Cultural Socialization and Comfort in Navigating Cross-Ethnic Spaces

Both Black immigrant and Black American participants noted a distinct attendance pattern at events hosted by Black student organizations such as ASA, BSU, and CSA. They observed that Black immigrant students were more likely to attend BSU events in addition to

ASA and CSA events, while fewer Black American students attended ASA and CSA events in addition to BSU gatherings. Notably, BSU, although open to all Black students, is primarily led and attended by Black American students, while ASA and CSA are primarily led and attended by African and Caribbean students, respectively. In essence, the event attendance pattern that students observed was that Black immigrant students were more likely to attend the events of their cross-ethnic peers than Black American students were.

On the topic of event attendance, Renee remarked, "… I think sometimes when a certain club is sponsoring a certain event, then it kind of determines who is going to be there." She further explained, "I've seen a lot of Africans at a Black American event hosted by one of those [Black American] clubs, but not really the other way around." Chris also noticed a similar pattern. He stated:

> [Black American students] do [support Black immigrant student org events], but it's just that the distribution is broken down very small. So [for an African Student Association event], it may be a large portion … like 90% African American students and maybe 7% of Black American students. … That's typically how it goes.

Although Chris noted that this pattern does not deter students from attending events, it remains a noticeable trend. Considering what Black American participants such as Gloria, Renee, and Vanessa expressed above, the lower likelihood of Black American students attending Black immigrant student events could be attributed to the levels of cultural aptitude and comfortability they feel in Black immigrant-dominant spaces.

Chidinma felt that, as a West African, there were no barriers to their cross-ethnic communication with Black American students. However, they clarified that this perception might differ for Black American students, who may not be as accustomed to entering

predominantly Black immigrant spaces as Black immigrant students are to entering predominantly Black American spaces. Chidinma shared their thoughts on the subject, stating:

> [Cross-ethnic communication] could be different for Black Americans, because I feel like [as West Africans] we're more socialized to be okay with entering Black American spaces than Black Americans are to entering West African spaces.

Chidinma highlighted the contrast between Black immigrants' comfort in entering Black American spaces and Black Americans' potential apprehension about entering Black immigrant spaces. They attributed this difference to variations in students' upbringing and exposure to Black cultures distinct from their own. They reflected on their Nigerian-American upbringing specifically, voicing:

> I think … growing up in [this part of the Mid-Atlantic U.S.], you can definitely see how heavily influenced the kids of Black immigrants are by Black American culture just by living here. We see it as part of our culture as well because we grew up here and that's the way we've learned to live here. … I guess I don't know personally, but … I don't see the same type of thing when it comes to Black Americans coming into like Nigerian spaces. I feel like there's a little bit more apprehens[ion]… Not that that's bad, … I understand that, but I think it's because we grew up in that [Black American] culture and they haven't grown up in ours that there's not that [comfortable cultural] exchange. Even though I feel like … we're very open people to teaching other people and including them. I just feel like because we [Black immigrants] haven't had th[e] same experience [as Black Americans] growing up, there's not much of that [socialization of Black Americans comfortably entering Black immigrant spaces] in turn.

Amanda agreed with Chidinma's point, saying, "… the door is open for Black immigrants to take part in Black American culture, but it's never necessarily flipped." Amanda felt that the demographics of MU's Black community could play a role in this pattern.

Reflecting on the "Caribbean-dominant area" in which she grew up, Amanda believed it was "a lot easier for Black Americans to step into [Caribbean] culture" in her hometown "because it was everywhere." Comparatively, she said that Black immigrant culture at MU is "much harder to find" and "not as widely celebrated" in the MU community "as it would be in certain areas of the country where there are more immigrants." While she highlighted this barrier as significant, she said she "[doesn't] really know how to change it." Amanda emphasized the differences in cross-ethnic exchange between Black immigrants and Black Americans in predominantly Black immigrant spaces compared to the opportunities for cross-ethnic exchange at a predominantly white institution like MU.

> I definitely notice [more cross-ethnic exposure] in places that are more [ethnically] diverse, like probably [the area where I grew up in the Southeast U.S.], parts of New York, where [Black immigrant and Black American] cultures are so close-knit for Black people. Specifically, like in Queens or something where there's a heavy Caribbean population and heavy Black American population and they intermingle. I don't see that as much here [at MU]. It just seems like when Black immigrants celebrate themselves, they do it in small spaces, and then the rest of their life they don't celebrate it as much everywhere else.

Expanding on Chidinma and Amanda's points, Zexell suggested that the infrequent presence of Black Americans in Black immigrant spaces may potentially "lead to … problems."

He contrasted this with the more common occurrence of Black immigrants entering Black American spaces, stating:

> … I think when you flip it towards Black [Americans] coming into African spaces, that's where I think things get iffy or messier in a way. Because I think … the easier reverse is what you normally see … Africans com[ing] into Black [American] spaces and putting their twists on things, … they spread their cultures. When it comes to Black … Americans coming into African spaces, it gets kind of weird, and that's where you see a little bit of the divide coming into play, so to say.

Zexell found this dynamic interesting because, although he had never consciously considered it before, he had "always noticed" it, especially among African students who immigrate to the U.S. He stated:

> … I always noticed, especially from African kids coming over [to] America, there's always an integration into Black [American] culture and we're bringing our culture and mixing that to create something like some fusion of both cultures. But then you never really see [the] same with Black [Americans] going into African cultures and stuff like that.

Overall, the observed pattern of Black immigrant students being more likely to engage in Black American spaces with their cross-ethnic peers compared to the reverse suggests a complex interplay of cultural aptitude and comfortability. While Black immigrant students feel socialized to comfortably enter Black American spaces due to their exposure to and experience with Black American culture, Black American students may lack similar socialization to enter Black immigrant spaces. This disparity in cross-ethnic communication underscores the importance of cultural familiarity in fostering meaningful connections between Black immigrant and Black

American students. As Chidinma, Amanda, and Zexell demonstrated, a student's upbringing, their exposure to diverse cultures, and the demographic makeup of their university community can influence cross-ethnic dynamics.

Despite the challenges these observations may present, there is an opportunity for cultural dialogue and exploration to bridge the gap and promote greater understanding and inclusivity within the Black student community at MU. Participants expressed this sentiment as they highlighted the immense cultural knowledge to be gained from cross-ethnic interactions between Black immigrant and Black American students at MU, emphasizing the pivotal role such interactions play in fostering cross-cultural understanding and unity within the university community. The following theme builds upon this topic and explores how participants perceived these cross-ethnic interactions contributing to the cultivation of mutual understanding and unity among Black immigrant and Black American students at MU.

Theme Summary

The interactions between Black immigrant and Black American students at MU encounter considerable hurdles stemming from the establishment of ethnic cliques and discomfort arising from cultural unfamiliarity. Chidinma, Stacy, and Vanessa detailed how Black students often gravitate towards familiar friend groups early in their college years, leading to insular social circles that hinder cross-ethnic engagement. According to Vanessa, this trend is particularly evident outside of events hosted by Black student organizations. She explained that Black immigrant and Black American students try to support one another by attending Black events hosted by the various Black ethnic student organizations (ASA, BSU, and CSA). However, outside of these events, Vanessa noted that Black immigrant and Black American students often revert to their separate ethnic groups during regular school days.

The discomfort stemming from cultural ineptitude further exacerbated this divide, with some Black American participants such as Gloria and Renee expressing current and previous feelings of inadequacy regarding their knowledge of Black immigrant cultures. On the other hand, Black immigrant participants like Chidinma perceived their cross-ethnic peers' hesitation to engage in Black immigrant spaces to be a product of cultural unfamiliarity. Vanessa reflected on how this discomfort could stem from a lack of exposure to other Black ethnic communities, sharing the experience of her Black immigrant friend who grew up in a predominantly Black American environment.

Both Black immigrant and Black American participants believed the implicit issue of ethnic cliquing was deeply intertwined with a perceived lack of cultural understanding, which inhibited effective cross-ethnic communication. Amanda, Chidinma, and Zexell, discussed how Black immigrant students often feel inherently comfortable navigating Black American spaces, having been socialized in predominantly Black American environments. However, they felt the reverse was not as prevalent, with Black American students, such as Gloria and Renee's friend, exhibiting hesitance to enter Black immigrant spaces. This discrepancy helped to illustrate the importance of participants' cultural socialization and comfort in navigating cross-ethnic spaces.

In spite of these difficulties, participants expressed optimism about the potential for cultural dialogue and exploration to bridge the gap between Black immigrant and Black American students. They emphasized the vast cultural insights that both groups could acquire through their interactions across ethnic lines and reiterated the critical role these interactions play in promoting cross-cultural understanding and unity within the Black student community at MU. The participants believed that increasing cross-ethnic interactions between Black immigrant and Black American students would help to combat any feelings of cultural ineptitude among these

undergraduates. For example, Renee became more confident in interacting with her Nigerian peers after deepening her knowledge of Nigerian culture. Her experience demonstrates the capacity for students to develop comfort in navigating cross-cultural spaces through increased cross-ethnic interactions. As a whole, this theme underscores the complexities inherent in cross-ethnic interactions and the need for intentional efforts to promote mutual understanding among Black students at MU.

Benefit #3: "There's So Much to Learn and Love": Building Cross-Cultural Understanding through Cross-Ethnic Interactions

In exploring the dynamics of cross-ethnic interactions between MU's Black immigrant and Black American students, it becomes evident that amidst the challenges of cultural unfamiliarity lies a significant opportunity for cultural exchange and mutual growth. Participants emphasized how cross-ethnic interactions offer a platform for dialogue and exploration that can bridge cultural divides and foster greater understanding within the Black student community at MU. Building upon the previous theme, this section delves into the enriching experiences and perspectives students shared regarding how cross-ethnic interactions contribute to the cultivation of cross-cultural understanding and unity within the university setting.

All eight participants felt that one of the main benefits of cross-ethnic communication between Black immigrant and Black American students was the opportunity for both groups to gain knowledge about each other's cultures, backgrounds, and perspectives. Zexell stated that cross-ethnic interaction could help students gain "more of an understanding of each other and where each other comes from." Similarly, Gloria perceived cross-ethnic interaction as a two-way street or reciprocal relationship in which both sides could learn from one another. For example, she explained that Black immigrant students could gain insight from Black American students

regarding racial disparities and the historical context of being Black in the U.S. Likewise, she pointed out that Black American students could gain insight from Black immigrant students regarding the diverse family structures within immigrant communities, some of which may be adaptable in Black American households. Overall, she felt these cross-ethnic conversations could be both "beneficial" and "educational" to Black immigrant and Black American students alike.

Chidinma agreed that, through cross-ethnic conversations with Black Americans, Black immigrants could learn more about the history of systemic oppression in the U.S., how it has affected Black Americans, and how they can help fight oppressive systems. They also expressed that Black immigrants could "better understand their own experience in America through talking to Black Americans and learning what they've lived through and … talking about the history." In highlighting why such cross-ethnic discussions are important, Chidinma referred to the previous example they gave about stereotypes West African immigrants have about Black Americans (i.e., Black Americans not utilizing their resources in the U.S.).

> …[L]ike we were talking about stereotypes [earlier], I think … like a big stereotype … West Africans [have] about Black Americans is that they don't use their resources. But a lot of times you find … that there's been systems in place to prevent them from using them, or even knowing about these resources in the first place. It's not that they're willingly trying to not progress or they're taking advantage of the government. I think [cross-ethnic conversations] can just help us [Black immigrants] to … more clearly understand [Black Americans'] experience in America and help them fight oppression as well. Because I feel like a lot of West African immigrants don't even realize that there is oppression here, even though it looks different than it did back home.

In addition to learning cultural history to acknowledge and combat oppression, Chidinma felt that Black immigrant and Black American students could also learn more about the similarities and differences in their cultural backgrounds through their cross-ethnic interactions. They articulated:

> I think a lot can be gained [from cross-ethnic interactions between Black immigrant and Black American students]. I think a lot of understanding [can be gained]. I think we can learn a lot from each other's cultural backgrounds and see there's similarities and there's differences and learn how to respect those differences.

Chidinma also expressed that there is "a lot of fun" to be had in "learn[ing] about each other's cultures," learning dances, music, and the like.

Renee also touched upon music and how cross-ethnic interactions could help break the barrier of cultural unfamiliarity, allowing Black American students to engage more fully when in Black immigrant spaces.

> I think [cross-ethnic interaction] would be very beneficial just to break that barrier down a little bit, especially from the Black American side where we don't always … feel comfortable when everyone is singing 'Last Last' [by Burna Boy, a Nigerian Afrobeats artist], and you don't know the lyrics. I knew it, though. … I was ready, I was prepared. But … a lot of people didn't [know it]. So, it's moments like that, I think just those spaces and those events and those opportunities really could just help merge [or bridge] that [communication gap between Black immigrant and Black American students] … I feel like … some people probably just don't know where to start, or they just don't know 'cause they just don't know. So, I think that [Black cross-cultural environments] could be a good space to help them know a little bit more.

Renee believed that cross-ethnic interactions could help both Black immigrant and Black American students "learn more about each other's cultures" for the sake of gaining new cultural knowledge. She mentioned that, through learning about one another's culture, "you might find a new music taste or a new food that you like that you wouldn't have tried before." She believed college was the optimal time for students to learn new things.

> … I think it just helps exposing each other to different things. Especially as college [students], that's what you want to do [while in college]. You just want to learn as much as you can, see what you like, see what you don't like, learn new things. So, I think that [cross-ethnic communication] definitely helps us do that.

Similarly, Amanda believed that cross-ethnic interactions between Black immigrant and Black American students could help students learn about a culture in which they may not have grown up. Amanda also noted that cross-ethnic environments such as cultural student organizations offer a space in which students can reflect on their own identities in a "setting where everyone's a little bit more open and celebratory of their own identities."

> Like … me, for example, I was born in America, so I am Black American in that sense, but culturally I am Caribbean. And if I never had that experience when I was younger to actually come into my Caribbean identity, it would be amazing to be able to seek that while still having my Black American association. To be able to lean into both [identities] right now is why it's important, I think, for … all of these communities to really interact with each other.

Vanessa also felt students could learn a lot about other Black cultures through cross-ethnic interactions. She believed that, because students have so much cultural knowledge, they should take the initiative to share that knowledge with others. She stated:

> The first thing that comes to my mind is just knowledge is power. So, [with] those communities' [cross-ethnic] relationships, the amount of knowledge that the Black community, in general, has – [about] different experiences, different cultures, different backgrounds – [grows]. [T]here's so much that people bring to the table and all we got to do is just share across the table. Like, don't keep it to one side.

Vanessa described the impact that such cross-cultural sharing has on MU's Black student community as a whole, saying, "…when people do that, [when they share across the table], our knowledge grows as a community, and we can really make an impact on this campus if we come together." Anecdotally, Vanessa also shared an example of how she learned a lot about Nigerian culture since being on MU's campus and talking with Nigerian students.

> And, also, just culturally speaking, … specifically Nigerian, the amount of things I've learned about Nigerian culture being on this campus. Wow. And Afrobeat! I love me some Afrobeat! It's just … the culture, there's so much people can gain just from talking with each other. We just got to talk to people more.

Like Vanessa, Chris emphasized the importance of Black immigrant and Black American students talking to one another more. He discussed what could be gained from cross-ethnic communication between the two student groups, highlighting both the "mutual understanding of each other's upbringings" and "perspectives" as well as the "sense of unity" that can result from these interactions. While Chris believed Black student unity was already present among Black immigrant and Black American students at MU as a result of being at a PWI, he felt that taking the relationship a step further involved creating intentional spaces where both groups could learn about one another's cultures and discuss their differences. He shared:

> I think what [can be gained from cross-ethnic interaction is] a … better understanding of each other's perspectives and more sense of unity. I think we already have unity, being that we're Black students at a PWI and that alone ties us together. But I think to understand each other's differences culturally, it'd be best if there was some sort of forum [where] we'd be able to converse on those things, or just something to educate more people on that [cultural diversity].

Gloria agreed with the creation of intentional cross-cultural sharing spaces. She felt that such spaces would emphasize the unity among Black students, "mak[ing] it clear that [they're] all together." She discussed the importance of cultural representation within the Black student community and having thoughtful conversations about cultural differences in which Black immigrant and Black American students can "acknowledg[e] everyone's differences so [they] can learn about each other while also getting closer to each other." Gloria felt the best way to orchestrate these conversations was through intentional cross-ethnic spaces that express to Black students across ethnic lines, "Hey, we're all together, we're all united, we're … friends, we're allies to each other."

Additionally, Stacy detailed how cross-cultural sharing between Black immigrant and Black American students could strengthen their relationships with one another. She discussed the different perspectives Black immigrant and Black American students can have and how these differences can only be learned through cross-ethnic communication. Stacy opined:

> I feel like there's so many things that can be gained, so much knowledge that can be learned, so many relationships that can blossom from just learning about somebody else. And not [just] learning about somebody else, you learn about somebody else's culture and just understanding how they feel about life, period. 'Cause me as a Black American

> can feel completely different than a Black immigrant as far as how they feel in this country or … even on MU's campus. So, I feel like [there]'s so many benefits that… [cross-ethnic interactions] should happen more, for sure.

Stacy further asserted that students should "want to get to know other cultures for the benefit of just [gaining] more knowledge-based experience" and "to feel like [they] have something in [their] back pocket to understand about something else [culturally]." She provided an example of how such cultural insight could diversify her performance as a vocalist. She explained:

> As a performer, I feel like that [Black cross-cultural communication is] important. I can learn how to do different things in different styles … And to learn it authentically from somebody who could possibly get me a certain type of sound or explain to me what things mean.

Stacy reflected on a pivotal moment during her college career when she recognized the profound impact of cross-cultural exposure on her social and academic journey. She recounted a memorable culture-sharing experience with her Zimbabwean immigrant friend. During this encounter, her friend hosted a cultural night, introducing Stacy to various aspects of Zimbabwean culture. She fondly recalled the wonder she felt being exposed to a culture she knew nothing about, saying:

> I remember one day, me and my friend, she did this night. Her friend from … her homeland came and visited and was visiting for … spring break or something. And it was like their night, that's what they called it, "their night." They were going to show us everything [about their culture]. So, they showed us dances from church, they sang [Zimbabwean] church songs, they showed us dances and said what the dances mean, and then said what the songs mean. And you're like, "What?" Because you don't understand

it, but you can [learn it through them sharing the meaning with you]. They'll tell you, "This is the story about this song." You're like, "Wow, that is so cool." They made us the drinks from there too and just different things. It was a beautiful time.

Stacy reflected on the personal and academic lessons she gained from this experience. She described how it broadened her musical perspective, igniting her desire to share this newfound cultural knowledge with others and fueling her curiosity to delve deeper into learning about different cultures. She expressed:

> … I feel, internally, [that culture-sharing experience] taught me a lot… And I'm a music education major too, so with all of that knowledge, I can teach that to other people and they can also benefit from learning about other cultures or just other people's way of living, period. So… internally that's what I'd love to gain. Every time I [was exposed to different cultures] … it just made me feel like, "Wow, there's so much more to learn and love."

Stacy concluded that cross-ethnic interactions between Black immigrant and Black American students are important. She discussed the impact that gaining cross-cultural knowledge in college could have on students once they graduate and enter into the post-undergraduate world where they will encounter diverse people. Stacy felt the cultural knowledge one gains in college could be valuable in helping others, especially if a person encounters an individual who shares a similar cultural background to one of their friends.

> So culturally, it's important [to communicate across ethnic lines] 'cause one day we'll be … true adults [post-college] and … we're going to come across … somebody who could possibly be the same as one of your friends. And now you have an immediate connection between the two because you also know somebody who's just like them or from … the

> same place as them. And say, for example, they don't speak English, you got somebody that you could call to maybe help them out if they're able to. So, I feel like you can also always be a helping hand or just to know more things and just to be more equipped.

Stacy also encouraged people to travel if they have the means. Using her own experience learning about Zimbabwean culture, Stacy imagined the enjoyment that traveling could offer to students, especially if they learned about the country from their cross-ethnic peers before visiting.

> Like imagine going to Africa or Zimbabwe and you're not learning. Literally, [after that culture-sharing experience with my Zimbabwean friend] I was like, "I want to go next week. Oh my God, this is amazing." So, learning about that stuff and then being able to go there and experience it in real-time, eat the food, feel the atmosphere, those are just things that you should want to experience in life. And I feel like it's so beneficial for everyone.

Stacy ended with a call to action for both Black immigrant and Black American students to engage with and learn from their cross-ethnic peers. She said, "[with all the benefits of cross-ethnic communication in mind], I would tell that person, 'Talk to [your peers], get to know something.'" Thus, Stacy's comment captures the overall sentiment of all eight participants: Black immigrant and Black American students *need* to communicate and get to know one another across ethnic lines, as there is much to gain from their cross-ethnic interactions and relationship-building.

Theme Summary

In this final theme, all eight participants delved into the profound benefits of cross-ethnic interactions between Black immigrant and Black American students at MU, highlighting a rich

tapestry of cultural exchange and mutual growth. According to Zexell and Renee, Black immigrant and Black American students can bridge cultural divides and foster greater understanding within MU's Black community through cross-ethnic dialogue and relationship-building. Chris and Vanessa also emphasized the significance of Black immigrant and Black American students learning about each other's ethnic backgrounds, cultivating mutual respect, and appreciating each other's cultures. Additionally, Amanda, Chidinma, and Gloria discussed how cross-ethnic conversations enable students to confront stereotypes, acknowledge systemic oppression, and gain new perspectives on their shared experiences. Stacy underscored the transformative power of such interactions, citing personal experiences and advocating for continued engagement and learning across ethnic lines. Overall, the participants championed cross-cultural understanding as essential for building wisdom and cohesion within the Black student community, both on campus and beyond.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I analyzed six themes that cut across participants' narratives: 1) Challenge #1: "I Don't Really Have Time": How Students' Schedules Limit Their Cross-Ethnic Engagement; 2) Benefit #1: "For the Sake of Community": Developing Strong Cross-Ethnic Bonds to Support One Another at the PWI; 3) Challenge #2: "Instilled from Childhood": The "Cycle" of Passing Down Cross-Ethnic Stereotypes and Preconceived Notions; 4) Benefit #2: "Breaking Generational Curses": Combatting Instilled Interethnic Stereotypes through Cross-Ethnic Communication and Relationship-Building; 5) Challenge #3: "Trying to Reach and Understand the Other Side": How Lack of Cultural Knowledge Limits Cross-Ethnic Interactions and Relationships; and 6) Benefit #3: "There's So Much to Learn and Love": Building Cross-Cultural Understanding through Cross-Ethnic Interactions and Relationships. In the first theme,

participants discussed how their academic schedules limit their opportunities for intentional interactions with their cross-ethnic peers. The second theme addressed how students emphasized the need for Black students to be in community with one another on MU's predominantly white campus amid their busy schedules.

The third theme addressed the role of parents and older community members in passing down cross-ethnic stereotypes to students. The fourth theme revealed that Black immigrant and Black American participants believed they had the power and agency to break the cycle of these intergenerationally transmitted stereotypes through their cross-ethnic engagement with one another. The fifth theme unpacked how a perceived lack of cultural knowledge limited students' abilities to engage deeply with their cross-ethnic peers. Finally, the sixth theme highlighted that, despite the barrier that limited cultural knowledge creates, Black immigrant and Black American participants expressed enthusiasm about building their cross-cultural knowledge and understanding through their cross-ethnic interactions and relationships with one another. The participants thought of these challenges and benefits as interrelated, moving from one to the other and back again, underscoring the complex nature of cross-ethnic interactions and relationship-building between Black immigrant and Black American students.

Chapter 6: Discussion, Implications, & Conclusion

This study centered the cross-ethnic communication experiences of eight Black immigrant and Black American students attending a predominantly white, public, state flagship institution in the Mid-Atlantic region of the U.S. In this chapter, I present an overview of the study, including its research questions and objectives, a synopsis of the problem statement, literature review, theoretical framework, research methods, and data analysis. I then provide a discussion of the findings, focusing on 1) the desire and need for students to build cross-ethnic community amid their busy schedules, 2) the intergenerational transmission of cross-ethnic stereotypes and students' agency to break the cycle, and 3) the impact of students' cross-cultural knowledge and excitement on their cross-ethnic engagement. In this portion of the chapter, I analyze and connect the study's findings to extant literature and the guiding theoretical framework, communication theory of identity (CTI). Lastly, I offer implications for future research, theory, and practice related to this work.

Overview of Study

The purpose of this study was to examine how Black immigrant and Black American students perceive and discuss the relationships between their ethnic groups in the institutional context of a predominantly white, public, state flagship university. The study addressed the following research questions:

- What do Black immigrant and Black American students at a predominantly white, public, state flagship institution perceive to be the role of their ethnic identities in their cross-ethnic interactions with one another?

- What do Black immigrant and Black American students at a predominantly white, public, state flagship institution perceive to be the benefits and challenges of Black cross-ethnic interactions and relationship-building?

Background, Context, & Problem Statement

This study specifically examined the Black diaspora in the U.S., including Black immigrant and Black American student populations. The term "Black diaspora" refers to the dispersion of African and African-descended peoples worldwide, with a focus on understanding the experiences of Black populations across different regions (Hall, 2021). The Black immigrant population in the U.S. has seen exponential growth, particularly from African and Caribbean regions (Anderson & López, 2018). This demographic exhibits varying levels of educational attainment, with factors such as socioeconomic status and parental expectations influencing outcomes (Onuma, 2021). While Black immigrants generally demonstrate higher educational attainment compared to Black Americans, this varies by region of origin (Anderson, 2015; Boundless, n.d.).

Within U.S. higher education, Black students are diverse in their enrollment patterns; however, discussions often center on the representation of Black students at private elite colleges (Jaschik, 2017; Massey et al., 2007). Black immigrant students are frequently overrepresented at these institutions, leading to debates about admissions policies and the definition of Blackness (Bennett & Lutz, 2009; Charles et al., 2008). These discussions have highlighted tensions between Black immigrant and Black American populations, particularly regarding admissions practices and perceptions of privilege (Ndlovu, 2017; Schaefer Riley, 2017). They have also underscored the need to understand the complexities of Black diasporic student experiences within higher education more broadly and the implications for their cross-ethnic communication.

Existing literature on cross-ethnic communication within the Black diaspora has tended to emphasize differences between Black-identifying groups rather than exploring their interconnectedness (Jackson & Cothran, 2003). Similarly, language choices in promotional materials designed to invite both groups' participation in programs use terms like "versus," inadvertently fostering competition rather than facilitating community-building (Jackson & Cothran, 2003; Owino, 2014). The overall narrative about Black diasporic students often revolves around tensions between Black immigrant and Black American populations, particularly in elite college contexts, without thoroughly analyzing their actual interactions and relationships (Jaschik, 2017; Massey et al., 2007). This oversight has significant implications for Black relationality and community-building in higher education, highlighting the need for a more nuanced exploration of Black intragroup communication and relationship dynamics (Daoud et al., 2018; Thelamour et al., 2019). Thus, this study aimed to address this gap in the literature by examining the relationships and interactions of Black diasporic student populations, shedding light on the complexities of Black intragroup connections and community-building efforts on college campuses.

The research site selected for this study was Mid-Atlantic University (MU), a predominantly white, public, state flagship institution located in the Mid-Atlantic region of the U.S. This choice of institution was significant, as it offered a distinct backdrop for understanding the relational experiences and interactions of Black diasporic students. Unlike private elite colleges, where much of the existing literature focused, public state flagship institutions were less entangled in discussions of Black immigrant overrepresentation and Black American underrepresentation in admissions (Byrd et al., 2014; Charles et al., 2008; Massey et al., 2007). Previous research rarely delved into the interactions between Black immigrant and Black

American students within the public state flagship setting, making this study's approach innovative.

The research site's student population comprised over 30,000 enrolled undergraduate students, with a significant proportion identifying as minority U.S.-born students, including Black or African American students (MU Office of Institutional Research, Planning & Assessment, 2022). While the exact number of Black foreign-born students was not disaggregated, it could be inferred that the institution hosted a diverse mix of Black diasporic students, including children of Black immigrants. This intraracial diversity aligned with the study's focus on examining cross-cultural engagement among Black diasporic students in a predominantly white institutional setting.

Overview of Theoretical Framework

The theory employed to frame this study and address the research questions was the communication theory of identity (CTI). CTI, as outlined by Hecht (1993), focuses on the multifaceted nature of identity, delineating four layers: personal, enacted, relational, and communal. These layers elucidate how an individual's identity is shaped by internal and external factors, emphasizing the role of both interpersonal and intrapersonal communication in their identity development. In CTI, the personal layer of identity is how a person perceives and defines themselves (i.e., their self-concept) (Hecht, 1993; Hecht & Lu, 2014). The enacted layer of identity is how a person performs their identity when communicating with others (Jung & Hecht, 2004).

The relational identity layer is an identity that is co-constructed through a combination of a person's social interactions, how others view them, and how they view themselves as far as the role they play in their relationships (i.e., their inter- and intrapersonal role attribution and their

interpersonal social interactions) (Hecht & Lu, 2014; Jung & Hecht, 2004). According to Hecht and Lu (2014), the relational layer of CTI has four levels of identity. The first level of a person's relational identity describes how their identity is partly developed based on how other people perceive them (Jung & Hecht, 2004). The second level of relational identity describes how a person develops or perceives their identities through the lens of their relationships with other people (e.g., friend, sibling, significant other) (Hecht & Lu, 2014; Jung & Hecht, 2004). In the third level of relational identity, a person acknowledges that they have multiple identities and that these identities "exist in relation to each other" (e.g., a person can be both an engineer and a parent; a spouse and a student) (Jung & Hecht, 2004, p. 267). The fourth level of relational identity discusses how a person's relationships can be seen as units of identity (Hecht & Lu, 2014). For example, a couple can be viewed as a unit of identity; likewise, a parent-child relationship can be seen as a unit of identity (Hecht & Lu, 2014).

Finally, the last layer of identity – according to CTI (Hecht, 1993) – is communal identity. The communal layer of identity is a group affiliation or a shared identity which bonds a person to a group of people (e.g., Black students share a racial identity; at a PWI, this relationship can bond Black students together). CTI served as a valuable framework for understanding the complexities of ethnic identity and interpersonal dynamics among Black immigrant and Black American students. By examining how participants' identities influenced their relationships and interactions, CTI provided insights into the nuances of cross-ethnic communication and relationship-building.

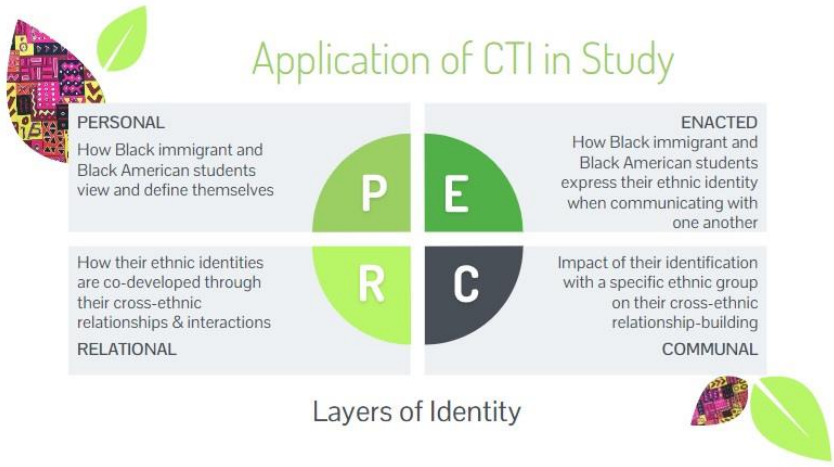
Throughout my study, CTI was utilized to explore Black immigrant and Black American participants' communicative perceptions and experiences. The theory's interpersonal and intrapersonal lenses facilitated an in-depth analysis of how different identity layers influenced

students' interactions and how they navigated their ethnic identities within these interactions. While not all layers of CTI were equally applicable to the participants' experiences, each layer offered valuable context for understanding the intricate ways in which ethnic and racial identities intersected with their cross-ethnic communication and relationship dynamics.

Furthermore, CTI's premise of the interconnectedness between identity and communication resonated with previous research on Black immigrant and Black American students' cross-ethnic communication patterns that also emphasized the interplay between students' ethnic identities and their cross-ethnic communication (e.g., Awokoya, 2012; De Walt, 2011; George Mwangi et al., 2016). By aligning CTI's theoretical perspective with existing literature, my study not only deepens higher education's understanding of Black immigrant and Black American students' interactions and cross-ethnic relationships, but it also contributes a model for future research on operationalizing communication-based frameworks in investigations of same-race, cross-ethnic interactions between immigrant and domestic college students. A brief capturing of how I applied the four layers of CTI in the study can be found in the figure below (Figure 2).

Figure 2

Application of Communication Theory of Identity to Current Study



Overview of Methods & Data Analysis

The study utilized demographic surveys, semi-structured interviews, and focus groups. These methods were employed to uncover findings related to the perceived role of Black immigrant and Black American students' ethnic identities in their cross-ethnic communication with one another, as well as their perceptions of the challenges and benefits of their cross-ethnic communication and relationship-building. Demographic surveys were employed to ascertain participant eligibility by gathering information such as race, ethnicity, country of birth, institutional affiliation, and enrollment status. These surveys also collected background information, including participants' upbringing, current county of residence in the research state, and reasons for migrating to the U.S., if applicable. Interviews and focus groups were conducted virtually via Zoom, with most participants completing both individual and group interview formats. Only one student, Stacy, did not participate in a focus group. She was given a decreased participant compensation amount to account for the two study components she completed. All interview and focus group sessions were audio- and video-recorded for later analysis. Semi-structured protocols (Adams, 2015) guided both individual interviews and focus groups, allowing for flexibility in questioning based on participants' responses. Interviews delved into individual experiences and perspectives, while focus groups provided collective insights into intergroup dynamics and interactions.

The interview and focus group protocols were developed in line with the study's research questions and theoretical framework, ensuring alignment with the study's objectives. Participants were asked open-ended questions, exploring topics such as their interactions with other Black immigrant or Black American students, the perceived role of their ethnicity in these interactions, cross-ethnic stereotypes, relationship dynamics, and communication barriers and benefits. Prior

to each session, participants received informed consent forms detailing the study's purpose, procedures, and their rights as participants. Consent was obtained before commencing each interview or focus group, with participants given the option to decline participation or withdraw at any time. All sessions were transcribed through the transcription service Rev, with transcripts then being reviewed and edited for accuracy. Overall, the data collection methods employed in this study facilitated a comprehensive exploration of the perspectives and experiences of Black immigrant and Black American students regarding their interactions and relationships within a higher education context.

My data analysis process followed the guidelines of multiple case study research. In multiple case study research, analysis involves two main stages: within-case analysis and cross-case analysis (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Initially, the researcher conducts within-case analysis by thoroughly reviewing data sources relevant to each case, such as interviews and documents, to develop descriptive narratives for each case (Eisenhardt, 1989). Subsequently, cross-case analysis compares and contrasts different cases to identify emerging themes across the cases, highlighting both similarities and differences (Creswell & Poth, 2018). I conducted both within-case and cross-case analysis, using each participant's demographic survey response, interview, and focus group to develop their individual and collective narratives. Ultimately, participants' individual cases helped to answer my first research question while the cross-case themes helped to answer my second research question.

To analyze the data collected for this study, I used thematic coding (Mertens, 2019). This involved iterative reviews of the data to identify recurring themes, commonalities, and differences in participants' narratives. The analysis techniques included multiple readings of the data, initial coding, and axial/focused coding (Charmaz, 2006; Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Jones et

al., 2014). Multiple readings allowed for the identification of codes and themes within and across cases, aligning with my case study methodology (Schoch, 2020). Initial coding involved segmenting the data into smaller codes, while axial coding grouped these codes into broader categories based on participants' discussed topics (Jones et al., 2014).

In the data analysis process, I undertook a series of steps. Initially, I engaged in pre-, during, and post-interview memoing, noting my thoughts, feelings, and relevant connections during data collection and analysis (Birks et al., 2008). Following memoing, transcripts of individual and group interviews were transcribed using an external transcription service Rev, with subsequent refinement for accuracy conducted by me. Next, aligned with common case study analysis methods, I conducted initial coding to identify emerging concepts (Charmaz, 2006). This was followed by coding using the theoretical framework, communication theory of identity, to link participant experiences to the framework. I then used axial coding to relate codes to broader categories and themes, facilitating a comprehensive understanding of the data (Jones et al., 2014). Afterwards, I engaged in cross-case analysis by comparing stories and themes across participants, identifying commonalities and distinctions (Schoch, 2020). This comprehensive, multi-level approach ensured a thorough examination of my participants' experiences and perspectives on their cross-ethnic interactions and relationships. Lastly, lessons gleaned from each case were detailed (in my discussion and implications), aligning with the study's methodological grounding in case study research (Creswell, 2013; Patton, 2015). Following initial and axial coding, themes were derived by relating the categorized data within and across cases, facilitating both within-case and cross-case analysis (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This comprehensive approach ensured a thorough examination of participants' experiences and perspectives on the study topic.

To address credibility and transferability in my study, I engaged in triangulation, member checks, and peer debriefing during the data collection and analysis processes (Merriam, 1995; Mertens, 2019). Triangulation involved collecting data through demographic surveys, individual interviews, and focus groups to confirm my findings from different perspectives (Merriam, 1995). Member checks allowed my participants to review their transcripts to ensure accurate representation of their experiences (Merriam, 1995; Mertens, 2019). Peer debriefing involved engaging with peers familiar with the study topic of Black immigrant and Black American student cross-ethnic communication to provide critical feedback and insights (Mertens, 2019). Multiple cases and thick description were utilized to enhance the study's transferability (Mertens, 2019; Yin, 2018). As I conducted a collective case study, the utilization and analysis of multiple cases were integral to my data collection and analysis processes (Mertens, 2019; Yin, 2018). I incorporated thick description by providing detailed accounts of the context, setting, and cases in my study (Mertens, 2019). Reflective memoing and addressing researcher positionality were additional methods I employed to mitigate researcher bias (Creswell, 2013; Jones et al., 2014; Mertens, 2019). Specifically, reflective memoing allowed me to note my thoughts and subjectivities throughout the data collection and analysis processes (Birks et al., 2008) while addressing my researcher positionality involved my provision of a statement explaining my research orientation and biases (Merriam, 1995).

Discussion

The findings of this study contribute to existing literature as well as theoretical and practical insights regarding the dynamics of cross-ethnic interactions and relationships among Black immigrant and Black American students at the undergraduate level. Specifically, the findings shed light on how these Black students perceive the influence of their ethnic identities

on their communication across ethnic lines as well as the advantages and obstacles they encounter in such cross-cultural interactions and relationships. I identified several major contributions of my study to the extant literature that help to expand research, theoretical, and practical understandings of Black diasporic students' cross-ethnic communication experiences with one another. The discussion starts with a recap of the key findings and examination into the correlation or deviation between my cross-case findings, the extant literature, and other relevant research. Throughout the discussion, I concurrently align my findings with the study's chosen theoretical framework (CTI), offering important insights into the usefulness of its application for this study.

The Desire & Need to Build Cross-Ethnic Community Amid Busy Schedules

The findings of my study revealed that Black immigrant and Black American students' schedules and academic demands posed a significant barrier to their cross-ethnic communication. Several Black immigrant and Black American participants voiced that they have limited time to intentionally engage in cross-ethnic interactions and relationship-building with one another. This is illustrated in the comments observed by Chidinma, Chris, Stacy, and Zexell, all of whom indicated that their busy schedules do not allow them to attend many student organization meetings and other similar cross-ethnic engagement opportunities on campus. Chidinma and Chris are both members of the African Student Association and Black Student Union. However, they both described their academic schedules as a constraining factor that limited their time in these organizations to attending larger events rather than recurring general body meetings. Stacy stated that "time is not [her] best friend," as her class schedule and academic responsibilities do not allow her to attend regular BSU events. Zexell pointed out that his classes, studying habits, and bus schedule as a commuter student restrict his time on campus, leaving him little leeway to

participate in cross-ethnic engagement opportunities hosted by Black student organizations and MU's Black Cultural Center staff alike. Renee and Vanessa also explained that limited time is a cross-ethnic communication barrier for many Black students at MU, as they tend to focus more on their studies, academic goals, and student responsibilities than seeking out opportunities to socialize with their cross-ethnic peers.

There is no available literature that identified Black immigrant and Black American four-year college students' academic demands as a barrier to their cross-ethnic interactions and engagement with one another. As it stands, literature specifically exploring the intraracial interactions and relationships between Black immigrant and Black American students (George Mwangi et al., 2016; Jackson & Cothran, 2003) as well as literature focusing on Black identity with key findings on intraracial communication and relationships between these groups (Awokoya, 2012; De Walt, 2011) is very limited. Likewise, none of the articles in the small body of literature on this topic identify students' academic demands as a barrier to their cross-ethnic engagement with one another. Studies such as Jackson and Cothran's (2003) point out negative cross-ethnic perceptions and stereotypes (e.g., "they think they are better than other Blacks, negative identity and self-image, many are poor"; p. 590) as barriers to cross-ethnic relationships and interactions between Black immigrants and Black Americans. Similarly, studies like De Walt's (2011) describe tensions between first-generation U.S.-born African students and generational African American students resulting from generational African Americans possessing anti-African sentiments or drawing clear distinctions between their Black identity and the African/African American identity of their first-generation U.S.-born African counterparts. While these studies set a foundation for understanding some of the key barriers and challenges to cross-ethnic communication between Black immigrant and Black American students, neither of

them mentioned a communication barrier related to Black immigrant and Black American students' academic demands and resulting campus involvement. Hence, my study contributes to this important gap in the literature, as it actively names limited time as a hindrance to Black immigrant and Black American students' overall campus involvement in student organizations such as the African Student Association, Black Student Union, and Caribbean Student Association as well as their interactions across ethnic lines.

Moreover, in reviewing the literature on academic responsibilities hindering student involvement, I was surprised to learn that there were very few studies that discussed the relationship between the academic schedules of full-time students at four-year institutions and their campus involvement (e.g., Greene & Maggs, 2015). Particularly, there is minimal literature that names the trade-off students make between time spent on their academics and time spent engaging in student organizations and other organized campus activities during college (Greene & Maggs, 2015). Existing literature addressing students' constrained time for campus engagement and involvement tends to center around community college attendees (e.g., Chang, 2002; Mitchell & Hughes, 2014), transfer students (e.g., Zilvinskis & Dumford, 2018), working students (e.g., King, McQuarrie, & Brigham, 2021), or commuters (e.g., Jacoby & Garland, 2004). Amanda and Zexell were the only transfer students in my study. Additionally, only Zexell specifically mentioned his commuter status. Amanda and Zexell's cases would require further examination to understand whether they align with the existing literature on this topic. I say this because Amanda did not mention limited time to engage cross-ethnically as a barrier to her own social relationship-building on campus. While she did mention her transfer identity in describing her issue with making friends, she placed more emphasis on her age being a barrier. Amanda's perspective aligns with existing literature on the topic of older undergraduate students forming

social bonds with other students on campus (Townsend & Wilson, 2006). However, more intentional questions would need to be asked of Amanda related to her transfer identity to investigate whether she has ever perceived her transfer identity as a constraint that has limited her time for campus engagement and involvement. Since she only mentioned her transfer identity briefly, it is difficult to assess whether that is the case. She may have chosen not to focus on her transfer identity given the study's focus on her Black immigrant identity.

In Zexell's case, he readily mentioned that his time on campus was limited because he primarily focused on classes and studying when on campus. One can assume that his commuter identity plays a significant role in limiting his time for campus engagement. However, Zexell also mentioned that he typically walks around MU's campus somewhat detached from the opportunity for conversation, given that he usually has music playing loudly in his ears while walking. He also alluded to the idea that he is not regularly the type of person to go to many campus events. I believe that Zexell's commuter status plays a role in constraining his time on campus. Moreover, Zexell's personality likely plays a role in what he chooses to do with his limited time on campus as well. At one point during his interview, Zexell mentioned that Black student organization events are a popular way for Black students to engage with one another but that the method has never been popular with him. This statement insinuates that, even with his limited time on campus, Zexell may have had past opportunities to engage with his Black peers on campus but chose not to prioritize having those interactions. As such, more conversation would be needed with Zexell to understand how much of his time is constrained by his commuter and transfer student identities compared to his more reserved personality.

Connecting the first theme of limited time to the second theme on the importance of Black community building at MU, my study's findings show that there was not a lack of desire

for Black immigrant and Black American participants to communicate with each other cross-ethnically. In fact, the findings of my study indicate that most students had both an interest and a desire to interact cross-ethnically, but simply did not have enough time to intentionally engage in this way. Both students who were highly engaged in cross-ethnic interactions, such as Chidinma, Renee, and Vanessa, and those who were less cross-ethnically engaged, like Zexell and Stacy, expressed that limited time was a significant barrier to interacting with their cross-ethnic peers. For instance, Stacy explained that her social circles tend to naturally form with primarily other Black American friends because she lacks the time to actively seek out cross-ethnic spaces or friendships. Stacy's approach to building cross-ethnic relationships can be summarized as 'if it happens, it happens,' indicating that while she values such interactions, she lacks the time to strategically place herself in environments conducive to fostering Black cross-ethnic relationships. Moreover, Stacy's class schedule directly conflicted with the general body meetings of Black ethnic student organizations, further restricting her opportunities for intentional cross-ethnic engagement.

Regardless of their time constraints, participants believed that Black cross-ethnic interaction and relationship-building were critical to establish in the predominantly white institutional environment of MU. All eight participants recognized the value and importance of Black cross-ethnic interactions between Black immigrant and Black American students in building their community at the PWI. In the larger context of MU where their Black racial identity was very prominent, the participants valued unification with other Black students regardless of ethnic identification. The collective sentiment was that, although Black immigrant and Black American students may not completely understand one another and may have different cultural experiences, the two groups need one another. For example, Stacy reinforced

the importance of fostering a healthy cross-ethnic community among Black immigrant and Black American students at MU. She emphasized how this diasporic sense of community can help all Black students feel incorporated into a supportive Black "family" dynamic within the larger PWI context. Similarly, Gloria discussed how cross-ethnic communication can "create bonds and friendship and familyship" among Black immigrant and Black American students at MU. Chris talked about how the predominantly white setting of MU makes Black immigrant and Black American students "appreciate each other more and … put aside whatever preconceived notions [they] came to [MU] with and form good relationships [with one another]." Vanessa and Amanda foregrounded the importance of solidarity among Black immigrant and Black American students, underscoring the need to support one another through the trials of college life in general and at the PWI specifically. Chidinma further highlighted the importance of cultural exchange and community-building among Black immigrant and Black American students, emphasizing how these efforts contribute to the overall success of Black students at MU.

My study indicates that Black student communities are trying to find each other around both racial and ethnic connections. As Stacy expressed, students are looking for places to be their full selves, places to "hold [themselves] true." Although Black immigrant and Black American students in the study had limited time to engage cross-ethnically with the intention of doing so, they very much saw the utility and need for building and sustaining community with one another within the predominantly white environment. They viewed these cross-ethnic connections as another layer of intentional support they can receive from other Black students.

My study's findings around the importance of Black students building community with one another in the predominantly white institutional context affirms what existing literature has said on the topic. Previous literature pointed to the importance of Black students forming and

sustaining Black peer relationships to counteract the challenges they face as racial minorities at PWIs, such as feelings of isolation (e.g., Allen, 1992; McCabe, 2015; Thelamour et al., 2019). Black students desire Black spaces in which they can develop community and be their full selves (Griffin & McIntosh, 2015; Guiffrida, 2003; Harper & Quaye, 2007; McClure, 2006; Thelamour et al., 2019). This point was echoed in Stacy's above comment that Black students are looking for places to "hold [themselves] true" at MU. Similar to what Black students in existing literature have said about needing one another and unifying around their shared racial identity in the predominantly white institutional context (e.g., Allen, 1992; McCabe, 2015; Thelamour et al., 2019), the undergraduates in my study agreed that they need one another because of their shared racial identity as a minoritized group in a predominantly white space.

The importance of Black students building intraracial solidarity in the predominantly white institutional context cannot be understated. Previous research has shown that anti-Blackness in U.S. higher education is rampant, relentless, systemic, and historic, having been present in U.S. colleges and universities since their inception (e.g., Brooms & Druery, 2023; Dancy et al., 2018; Wilder, 2013). Predominantly white institutions in particular have been found to embed and uphold white supremacy and anti-Blackness in various aspects of the school system, including curriculum and instruction, hiring, and campus climate (e.g., Harper, 2013; Jashnani, 2024; Ohito & Brown, 2021). Given the prevalence and pervasiveness of anti-Black racism on predominantly white campuses, it has been imperative that Black students find ways to support one another to ensure their survival and success in the predominantly white institutional environment (e.g., Allen, 1992; McCabe, 2015; Ohito & Brown, 2021; Thelamour et al., 2019). Indeed, the need for Black student connection in the predominantly white institutional context has become even more vital in the current racial and sociopolitical climate of the U.S. (e.g.,

Anand & Hsu, 2020; Brooms & Druery, 2023; Jashnani, 2024; Sonsteng-Person et al., 2024). My study affirms these findings, highlighting the shared sentiment among both Black immigrant (e.g., Amanda and Chidinma) and Black American students (e.g., Renee and Stacy) in the study.

However, deviating slightly from the current literature's primary focus on Black racial unity, my study's Black immigrant and Black American participants *also* emphasized that they want to intentionally build cross-ethnic community with each other, expressing that there is a lot they can learn about one another ethnically and culturally to increase their community-building at MU. Few articles have similarly underscored this point that there is something to be gained from cross-ethnic interactions between Black immigrant and Black American students (e.g., George Mwangi et al., 2016; Griffin & McIntosh, 2015). The cross-ethnic interactions between these groups of students are not typically intentionally cultivated. However, as exemplified by all eight participants in my study, there are several Black immigrant and Black American students who believe there is much to be gained from their cross-ethnic interactions with one another. Whether it is finding "a new music taste or a new food that you like that you wouldn't have tried before" like Renee said or connecting on "hobbies [and commonalities] [such as favorite music artists, hair, and braiding] [that] bring communities … [together]" like Chris stated, both Black immigrant and Black American participants highlighted several benefits to Black student community-building at MU. As it relates to the intersection of their racial and ethnic identities at the predominantly white institution, Chidinma said it best: it is important for Black immigrant and Black American students to "make an effort" to teach and learn about each other's cultures "for the sake of community."

Mapping on CTI

Regarding CTI's relevance to these themes, the relational and communal layers of identity were significant in how participants prioritized their time while also identifying the importance of sticking together in the PWI context. CTI suggests that the relational identity layer is formed through a collaborative process, blending an individual's social interactions, external perceptions of them, and their own self-perception regarding their role within their relationships. Specifically, in the third level of relational identity, a person recognizes that they have multiple identities and that these identities "exist in relation to each other" (Jung & Hecht, 2004, p. 267). Within the current study, this level of relational identity was evident in that participants had to negotiate between their academic responsibilities as students and their identities as members of Black student organizations on campus. Due to their academic schedules, several participants, including Chidinma and Chris, had limited time to engage in their ethnic student organizations as more than general body members who attended occasional events. Such students positioned their relational identities in a way that prioritized their student identity over their social identity as student organization members.

Despite participants having minimal time to intentionally engage with their cross-ethnic counterparts, they still maintained a desire to engage with their fellow Black peers because of their shared racial identity on MU's predominantly white campus. This finding correlates with CTI's communal layer of identity. According to the framework, the communal layer of identity is a shared identity that bonds a person to a larger group of people (Hecht, 1993). In this case, the participants shared a Black racial identity. Seven of the eight participants (all except Zexell) actively named that their shared Black identity bonded them together in the predominantly white racial context of MU. Zexell did not name this facet but still believed it was beneficial for Black

immigrant and Black American students to develop cross-ethnic relationships with one another. As such, all eight participants believed that it was important for Black immigrant and Black American students to build cross-ethnic relationships to enhance the sense of unity and community among MU's Black student body, while also positioning them for further success in the rigorous academic environment through their same-race, cross-ethnic connections.

The Intergenerational Transmission of Cross-Ethnic Stereotypes & Students' Agency to Break the Cycle

My study amplifies the significant influence of intergenerationally transmitted or generationally inherited Black cross-ethnic stereotypes, particularly the role of parents and older community members in passing down these stereotypes. While there was not much research on the topic of inherited Black cross-ethnic socialization messages, the literature that did exist affirmed that Black students can receive negative cross-ethnic socialization messages from their parents (Thelamour & George Mwangi, 2021). In their article examining Black immigrant students specifically, Thelamour and George Mwangi (2021) espoused that Black immigrant students received anti-Black American socialization messages from their parents and subsequently had to navigate whether to accept or reject these messages (Thelamour & George Mwangi, 2021). Although Thelamour and George Mwangi (2021) solely focused on the cross-ethnic socialization messages Black immigrant students receive from their parents, my study's finding aligns with their research, as some of my study's Black immigrant participants, such as Chris, described receiving anti-Black American socialization messages from their parents that encouraged them to remain distant from their Black American peers. They then had to navigate whether to accept or reject these passed down negative sentiments.

My study's findings expand on Thelamour and George Mwangi's (2021) work by sharing how other older members of Black immigrant students' communities also play a role in passing down negative cross-ethnic socialization messages to Black immigrant students. For example, when he was growing up, Zexell's aunt warned him not to act like the "American kids" in his school which – given that the school Zexell attended was predominantly Black – was coded language used to refer to the Black American students there.

Previous research has shown that one of the reasons Black immigrants may choose to distinguish themselves from their Black American counterparts is to avoid the negative stereotypes associated with Blackness in the U.S. (Awokoya, 2012; English, 2019; Ludwig, 2019; Manguvo, 2013; Pierre, 2004; Waters, 1999). The findings of my study partly aligned with this research finding; however, it was the Black immigrant participants' parents and older community members who encouraged the Black immigrant students to distinguish themselves from their Black American peers, not the students themselves. For Black immigrant participants like Chris and Zexell, their parents and older relatives encouraged them to ethnically distinguish themselves and their behavior from their Black American counterparts to avoid being viewed as "troublemakers." In encouraging their Black immigrant students to socially or reputationally distance themselves from their Black American counterparts, these Black immigrant parents and older community members were reinforcing anti-Black-American sentiments (Thelamour & George Mwangi, 2021) in the younger generation.

My study also expands on Thelamour and George Mwangi's (2021) work in that I also found that Black American parents and older community members can pass down negative socialization messages about Black immigrants to their Black American students. While more research is needed to examine this phenomenon in depth, at least one Black American student in

the study – Gloria – mentioned that she received a stereotyped warning from her parents to "beware" of African men because they "look down on" Black American women. Similar to what Thelamour and George Mwangi (2021) described with the Black immigrant students in their study, Gloria then had to make a decision to accept or reject her parents' cross-ethnic socialization message. Gloria chose to reject it.

Additionally, my study highlights how students' agency in their own cross-ethnic interactions can empower them to challenge and overcome these intergenerational stereotypes. For example, many of the Black immigrant participants in my sample described having to distinguish their own cross-ethnic views and experiences with Black American students from their parents' cross-ethnic perceptions of Black Americans. Chris shared how his thinking about Black Americans changed once he got to MU and had the opportunity to engage in cross-ethnic interactions with Black American students that were not marred by his parents' limited mindset toward Black Americans. Chris described his own process of breaking away from his immigrant parents' stereotypical thinking, saying he "[could not] live in [his] parents' viewpoint or perspective of the world" and that he "ha[d] to find out what the real answers [were] for [him]self" through his interactions with his Black American peers.

While there is some literature that discusses the role of parents and older community members passing down stereotypes to their students and the challenge that these passed down cross-ethnic stereotypes pose to students' own thinking (e.g., Awokoya, 2012; Clark, 2008; Ludwig, 2019; Thelamour & George Mwangi, 2021), none go into depth about the process that both Black immigrant and Black American students must go through to intentionally distinguish themselves from what their parents and older community members have instilled in them regarding their cross-ethnic perceptions of the other group. Only Thelamour and George

Mwangi's (2021) study centers Black immigrant students' agency in accepting or rejecting the anti-Black American socialization they receive from their parents. My study's findings align with those of Thelamour and George Mwangi (2021) in this way.

Furthermore, because the cross-ethnic stereotypes and preconceived notions students heard came from their parents or older community members, students may be more inclined to listen to and trust their judgment, especially if they do not have their own cross-ethnic communication experiences to reference. In fact, participants expressed that if they did not have their own cross-ethnic communication experiences and solely relied on the cross-ethnic preconceived notions they learned from parents or older community members, they were bound to repeat some of the same stereotypical cross-ethnic judgments. My study contributes to the existing literature base by showcasing that Black immigrant and Black American students believe they have the agency to challenge and break the cycle of intergenerationally transmitted cross-ethnic stereotypes and preconceived notions both for themselves and for the generations coming after them. I further explain this point below.

Both Black immigrant and Black American participants felt they had the ability to actively educate others who hold stereotypical views with the cultural knowledge they gained through their cross-ethnic interactions with one another. Chidinma and Vanessa contended that students at MU have the power to combat and dismantle the cross-ethnic stereotypes they learned from older generations through their cross-ethnic interactions. Vanessa even added that students have the ability to mitigate the transmission of cross-ethnic stereotypes to generations that come after them. No existing literature has expressed this sentiment of power and agency among Black immigrant and Black American students to break what Vanessa called the "generational curses" of cross-ethnic stereotypes that are passed down from generation to generation. Vanessa shared:

> A benefit of … cross-cultural communications between Black immigrants and Black Americans … is breaking generational curses. … I feel like a lot of the stereotypes are from the older generations and have been passed down to the children, just generation after generation. So, with these [cross-ethnic] relationships that we're forming, I feel like it can break these generational curses and break that cycle of passing down these stereotypes. Because as this generation starts to form more cross-cultural relationships, you can pass that down to the next generation, and so on and so forth, so that these stereotypes start to become more and more obsolete.

While studies such as Okpalaoka and Dillard's (2012) highlight the importance of intragroup dialogue between Black immigrant and Black American students in addressing cross-ethnic tensions and stereotypes, they do not emphasize students' sense of agency and power to disrupt these stereotypes inherited from older generations. As such, this finding is a new contribution to the literature base on Black immigrant and Black American students' cross-ethnic interactions and relationship-building.

Black immigrant and Black American students felt that, through increased cross-ethnic interaction with one another, both student groups could gain real cultural knowledge of one another that would allow them to push back against the stereotypical thinking that has been instilled in them from older generations. More than just hoping to lessen the relevance of passed down cross-ethnic stereotypes for themselves, Black immigrant and Black American participants also appreciated the significance of passing down the knowledge they gain through their cross-ethnic interactions to the next generation. In disrupting the generational cycle of transmitting cross-ethnic stereotypes and preconceived notions learned from the older generation, the participants felt they could positively influence future generations by creating a new cycle of

cross-cultural perspectives to pass down that were rooted in their own cross-ethnic communication experiences.

Mapping on CTI

The aforementioned themes were in line with CTI's enacted and relational layers of identity. The enacted layer of identity is how a person performs their identity when communicating with others (Jung & Hecht, 2004). Enacted identity can be evident in who a person chooses to interact with and how, as it can be seen as a communicative expression of their identity. In this case, participants such as Chris admitted to previously enacting an aspect of their ethnic identity by choosing to limit their interactions with their cross-ethnic peers.

Such actions were also related to the relational layer of participants' identities. As a reminder, relational identity is an identity that is co-constructed through a combination of a person's social interactions, how others view them, and how they view themselves as far as the role they play in their relationships (Hecht & Lu, 2014). The first level of relational identity in particular states that a person's identity is partially developed based on how other people perceive them. Continuing with Chris' example, related to the first level of relational identity, his parents perceived Chris to be ethnically distinct from his Black American peers. Consequently, they socialized Chris to believe that Black American students "were not imbued in their culture" and were troublemakers he needed to avoid. These early anti-Black American socialization messages played a key role in influencing Chris' cross-ethnic perceptions of his Black American counterparts prior to college, causing him to initially follow similar patterns of drawing distinctions between his own ethnic identity and that of his cross-ethnic peers. These distinctions initially primed Chris to either limit or avoid interactions with his cross-ethnic peers. However, once Chris had his own cross-ethnic communication experiences with Black American students

at the collegiate level, he described shifting away from relying on his parents' preconceived notions and cross-ethnic perspectives towards referencing his own interethnic interactions and relationships with his Black American peers at MU. In this shift, Chris chose to enact his ethnic identity by engaging in more cross-ethnic interactions with his Black American peers (enacted layer of CTI) and viewed himself as more connected to his peers through these cross-ethnic interactions (relational layer of CTI).

From Ineptitude to Aptitude: The Impact of Students' Cross-Cultural Knowledge & Excitement on Their Cross-Ethnic Engagement

My study's finding on how a lack of cross-cultural knowledge can hinder cross-ethnic interactions and relationship-building between Black immigrant and Black American students is also a new contribution to the literature. In both their individual interviews and their focus group, several Black American participants expressed concern about their lack of cultural knowledge of their cross-ethnic peers and how that lack of knowledge impacted their ability to engage with their peers in cross-ethnic communication spaces. In her individual interview, Gloria expressed feeling like she would not fit in if she went to meetings or events hosted by the African Student Association because she lacked knowledge of African immigrant cultures. As mentioned in her case profile, Gloria had a few Black immigrant friends, one of them being Nigerian. While Gloria enjoyed learning about her Nigerian friend's culture through asking questions, she hesitated to join predominantly African immigrant spaces like ASA. She felt she would not be able to contribute reciprocally to the knowledge-sharing that would occur in the space, viewing herself only as a learner in such environments. Gloria's example emphasizes how a student's perception of their own cultural knowledge (or, in this case, lack thereof) can affect the Black cross-ethnic interactions and cultural spaces they seek out. In Gloria's case, she felt she lacked

adequate cultural knowledge to engage in a predominantly African immigrant space. Consequently, she experienced unease in an environment where she believed cultural familiarity was necessary to navigate and contribute. Although limited, research has shown that cultural intelligence – a person's capacity to function, navigate, and adapt effectively within diverse cultural environments and cross-cultural situations (Ang, Rockstuhl, & Tan, 2015; Ang & Van Dyne, 2008; Earley & Ang, 2003) – affects an individual's sense of comfort and familiarity in a new cultural environment (Kadam et al., 2021).

Kadam and colleagues (2021) found that cultural intelligence positively impacted the cross-cultural adjustment (i.e., a person's "level of comfort and confidence in their ability to adjust to" a new cultural context, p. 34) of information technology sector employees in India who were transferred to a different, culturally heterogenous state within the country. While the study was neither situated in the higher education context nor in the U.S. context, Kadam and colleagues' (2021) findings aligned with my study's findings. Specifically, Black immigrant and Black American students in my study who felt they had gained cultural knowledge that allowed them to effectively navigate cross-ethnic spaces (e.g., Chidinma, Renee) felt more comfortable engaging with their cross-ethnic peers in cross-cultural spaces than those students who did not feel confident in their cross-cultural knowledge and ability to navigate cross-ethnic spaces (e.g., Gloria).

Like Gloria, Renee shared reflections on her early college career, when she had minimal knowledge about Black immigrant cultures. She recalled how lacking cultural knowledge of African immigrant cultures restricted her ability to contribute to certain conversations with her cross-ethnic peers. For example, Renee explained her cultural unfamiliarity with malt, which hindered her ability to participate in a conversation her peers were having about the drink.

Because she did not grow up in a culture in which malt was consumed, Renee felt limited in the interaction. She touched on how such encounters can make students feel awkward or out of place. She described a similar instance that happened when she attended an event with a Black American friend. This encounter occurred after Renee had become more familiar with and appreciative of African immigrant cultures. She and her friend were at an African event in which the music genre Afrobeats were being played. Renee recalled how uncomfortable her friend was in the setting because she was not familiar with the music. While Renee was able to sing along and enjoy herself, her friend stood around awkwardly because she lacked the cultural knowledge necessary to join in. Vanessa described this feeling of being culturally out of place or left out as a type of cultural "imposter syndrome." Given Kadam et al.'s (2021) finding that cultural intelligence positively impacted cross-cultural adjustment to new environments, it can be assumed that a student's perceived lack of cultural intelligence would negatively affect their confidence and comfort in a culturally unfamiliar setting (i.e., their cross-cultural adjustment to a cross-ethnic space they have little knowledge of).

Renee and Vanessa attributed this deficiency in cultural knowledge to a student's background, particularly whether they grew up in an ethnically homogeneous environment. They believed that if a student was raised in such a community, they may not have been exposed to people from diverse cultural backgrounds. For instance, Renee and Vanessa described how, if you are a Black American raised in a predominantly Black American environment, or if you are a Black immigrant from a predominantly Black immigrant community, you might lack cultural knowledge about other Black groups. According to Renee and Vanessa, this cultural unfamiliarity may consequently make you feel uncomfortable engaging in cross-ethnic spaces, interactions, or relationship-building. The homogeneous nature of your ethnic community might

limit your exposure to other cultures, which could limit your cross-cultural adjustment (Kadam et al., 2021) to a new cultural environment. While there is minimal research that explores this topic, Thelamour and George Mwangi (2021) briefly considered how ethnically homogenous environments could impact Black immigrants' exposure to counternarratives about their Black American counterparts (Thelamour & George Mwangi, 2021). The authors suggested that, for Black immigrant families living apart from Black Americans, "having few [cross-ethnic] interactions that might disrupt stereotypical perceptions may confirm existing biases about Black Americans, which would be reflected in ethnic-racial socialization practices" (Thelamour & George Mwangi, 2021, p. 33). This concept may also apply to Black American families living apart from Black immigrants. However, both ideas would need intentional research to confirm their validity.

Conversely, Black students raised in ethnically heterogeneous communities may possess a greater familiarity with diverse cultures that makes them more adept at engaging in cross-cultural interactions. This viewpoint is reflected in the narratives shared by Black immigrant students such as Chidinma, Amanda, and Zexell. Having been born in the U.S. or arriving in the U.S. at a young age, these three participants articulated how their experiences as Black immigrants in the U.S. have immersed them in Black American culture. Hence, they believed they had developed a nuanced understanding and comfort in navigating Black American spaces. In contrast, as evidenced by Gloria's earlier example, Black American students may lack comparable exposure and familiarity with predominantly Black immigrant environments. As a result, they may not feel as at ease entering such spaces or engaging in cross-ethnic interactions.

Thus, growing up in a culturally heterogeneous environment increased the likelihood of participants feeling comfortable in diverse spaces and facilitated their ability to learn and interact

effectively within them. Although Kadam and associates (2021) did not examine whether the employees they studied grew up in culturally heterogeneous environments, they found that cultural differences within an employee's environment "activate the trait of CQ [cultural intelligence]," which in turn facilitates better adjustment to a new cultural environment (p. 46). The authors noted, "when individuals are a part of a culturally different environment, it provides them with contextual cues that further activate the trait of CQ [cultural intelligence] and enable their adjustment within the new environment" (p. 46). In this way, Kadam and colleagues' (2021) finding aligns with my study's finding. However, my study extends this work by incorporating perspectives from U.S. undergraduate students on how being raised in, rather than just currently existing in, a culturally heterogeneous environment might impact cross-cultural engagement. For example, Black immigrant participant Amanda, who grew up in a predominantly Caribbean community, illustrated how Black Americans in her area were regularly exposed to Caribbean cultures as a result of their upbringing there.

In the southeastern region of the United States, Amanda grew up in a community heavily populated by individuals of Black Caribbean descent. Because of their exposure to Caribbean cultures in the area, Black American students in this environment naturally acquired knowledge of and became adept at navigating the nuances of Black Caribbean cultures. This immersion in a predominantly Caribbean community facilitated their familiarity with and understanding of the cultural dynamics within this group. This example illustrates the significance of exposure to diverse cultural backgrounds in fostering cultural aptitude and comfortability among both Black immigrant and Black American individuals in my study. Specifically, increased exposure to Black American culture enhanced several Black immigrant participants' knowledge of Black American culture and their ability to navigate spaces shared with cross-ethnic peers, providing

these students with a greater sense of cross-cultural aptitude and comfort. This finding aligns with Thelamour and George Mwangi's (2021) finding that cross-ethnic friendships with their Black American peers helped the authors' Black immigrant student participants to increase their knowledge of Black American culture and history, to "understand race and culture in different ways," and to develop "new understandings of Blackness that encompassed their own ethnic backgrounds" (p. 33).

Early exposure to diverse Black cultures can indeed help students feel more comfortable navigating cross-ethnic spaces. However, even those who have not had such exposure can still become more at ease with cross-ethnic interactions during their undergraduate years. Renee and Vanessa's experiences illustrate this well. Both mentioned that their understanding of Black immigrant cultures expanded significantly after they arrived at MU. For Renee, this newfound knowledge came through her Nigerian roommate, who introduced her to various aspects of Nigerian culture. With this cultural insight, Renee felt more confident engaging with Nigerian students, as she now had shared cultural references to draw upon in conversations. Similarly, Vanessa's cultural horizons expanded through her involvement in a campus ministry and overall time at MU, where she learned about Nigerian music and traditions. This exposure sparked her interest in elements like Afrobeats and Nigerian weddings, adding depth to her understanding of Black immigrant cultures. Existing literature has not extensively explored or clearly identified the influence of such cultural knowledge and exposure on the ability of Black immigrant and Black American undergraduates to navigate cross-ethnic environments alongside their same-race peers from diverse ethnic backgrounds. Thelamour and George Mwangi's (2021) article comes the closest in explaining that Black immigrant students' cross-ethnic friendships with Black Americans helped them to expand their perceptions and understanding of Blackness as it relates

to race and culture. However, the article only examined Black immigrant students' perspectives. The authors did not examine Black American students regarding this topic. As such, my study contributes to extant literature by highlighting the importance of cultural knowledge and exposure in shaping Black immigrant and Black American students' abilities to engage in cross-ethnic interactions with one another confidently and effectively. Next, I connect this theme on the impact of students' cross-cultural knowledge to the theme on the impact of students' excitement for cross-ethnic learning on their cross-ethnic engagement.

Despite some participants expressing concerns about their past or present cultural knowledge, all unanimously recognized the value of cross-ethnic communication between Black immigrant and Black American students, highlighting its role in fostering mutual understanding and cultural exchange. Zexell emphasized cross-ethnic communication's potential to deepen understanding of each other's backgrounds, while Gloria described it as a reciprocal learning experience. She noted that Black immigrant students could gain insights into racial disparities and historical contexts from Black American peers, while Black American students could learn about diverse family structures within immigrant communities. Chidinma emphasized the importance of such discussions in understanding systemic oppression and bridging cultural divides. Vanessa echoed this sentiment, underscoring the benefits of sharing cultural knowledge within the Black student community. She shared her experience of learning about Nigerian culture at MU and emphasized the collective growth that occurs through cross-cultural sharing. Chris and Gloria advocated for intentional spaces where Black immigrant and Black American students can explore cultural differences and build unity. Stacy highlighted the transformative impact of cross-ethnic interactions on personal and academic growth, emphasizing its role in fostering empathy and broadening perspectives. These insights underscore the significance of

cross-ethnic interactions in promoting unity and mutual understanding within the Black student community at MU. Literature on intercultural competence in higher education highlight such benefits of increased learning, empathy, cross-cultural understanding (e.g., Feng, 2016; Riley, 2007; Riley et al., 2016; Williams, 2013). However, this body of literature primarily explores these benefits across race. My study contributes to extant literature by examining such benefits within race and across ethnicity, specifically for Black students.

Overall, participants expressed enthusiasm for gaining cultural knowledge through interactions with their cross-ethnic peers. Stacy, for instance, highlighted the potential benefits of learning about her Zimbabwean friend's culture. She envisioned how this knowledge could prove advantageous when meeting other Zimbabweans or traveling to Zimbabwe herself, anticipating the profound impact of learning about the culture and then experiencing it firsthand. Stacy's perspective, coupled with the previously mentioned instances of enhanced cultural understanding through cross-ethnic interactions, underscores the belief among participants that such engagements enrich one's life. This sentiment resonates with Renee's observation about the collegiate experience, emphasizing how encounters with diverse peers and the opportunity to delve into each other's lives, cultures, and worldviews contribute to personal enrichment. For Black immigrant and Black American students in this study, these interactions not only expand cross-cultural knowledge but also foster a deeper sense of community on campus.

Although existing literature acknowledges the importance of Black immigrant and Black American students sticking together within predominantly white institutional contexts (e.g., George Mwangi et al., 2016; Thelamour et al., 2019), few studies delve into the depth of excitement demonstrated by these students in engaging cross-ethnically. Whereas works like those of George Mwangi and colleagues (2016) and Thelamour and colleagues (2019) introduced

the notion of mutual gain from such connections, my study pushes further. It places a spotlight on the challenges and benefits identified by Black immigrant and Black American students in their cross-ethnic interactions. Drawing parallels to De Walt's (2011) exploration of tensions and harmonies among various Black ethnic groups, including continental Africans, first-generation Americans with African parents, and generational African Americans, my research expands the scope to encompass Black immigrants more broadly, beyond just Africans. In doing so, it rejuvenates existing literature, which tends to focus more so on the challenges of cross-ethnic communication (e.g., Jackson & Cothran, 2003; Okonofua, 2013) or examines interactions solely between *African* immigrant groups and Black Americans (e.g., De Walt, 2011, which does not discuss other Black immigrants like Caribbeans).

As I stated in the introduction of this dissertation, there are instances in which we enter the cross-ethnic space for discussion negatively, setting the space up for conflict. It could be the result of something as simple as putting Africa on one side of a flyer and the U.S. on the other (O. Ajetunmobi, personal communication, October 26, 2022) or having the title of a work meant to evoke cross-ethnic dialogue and discussion contain the word "versus" (e.g., Jackson & Cothran, 2003; Owino, 2014). It could also be the result of primarily focusing the narrative of Black cross-ethnic communication on circumstances outside of Black immigrant and Black American students' control, such as their representation at elite institutions (e.g., Bennett & Lutz, 2009; Charles et al., 2008; Jaschik, 2017; Massey et al., 2007). Regardless of the cause, it is more realistic to focus on both the bad *and* the good, the negatives *and* the positives, the challenges *and* the benefits.

One of the final things several of my participants (e.g., Chris, Renee, Stacy, Vanessa) said to me upon concluding their interview was "Thank you for doing this. This topic is so

important, and I hope we see some change come out of this." These students *wanted* more opportunities to connect with one another cross-ethnically. They not only saw the value of their Black ethnic communities coming together but were also excited about the prospect of the communities doing so. Several participants were ecstatic about the opportunity to share their cross-ethnic experiences, smiling throughout the interview at the chance to discuss both the negatives and the positives of their interactions and relationships with their cross-ethnic peers.

After my questions on the challenges and benefits of Black cross-ethnic communication at MU, Vanessa commented, "I appreciate that question. Thank you for bringing this up" before even answering the questions. Similarly, Renee smiled and said "Oooo that's a good question" before responding to questions about her ethnic identity, its role in her cross-ethnic interactions with her Black immigrant peers, and the benefits and challenges of her cross-ethnic interactions. Chris nodded multiple times, saying "Thank you for that question" before responding to questions about what he would recommend to MU's Black Cultural Center and multicultural office staff as well as Black ethnic student organizations regarding facilitating opportunities for cross-ethnic communication between Black immigrant and Black American students. The participants' words and behavior not only helped to express their excitement about Black immigrant and Black American cross-ethnic interactions and relationship-building, but also their care for this topic as it relates to enhancing MU's Black student community for both student groups.

Mapping on CTI

In relation to CTI, all elements of the model (personal, enacted, relational and communal layers) were relevant in these themes. Hecht (1993) and Hecht and Lu (2014) described the personal layer of identity as a person's self-concept, how a person perceives or defines

themselves. Again, the enacted layer of identity refers to how a person performs their identity when communicating with others (Jung & Hecht, 2004). An individual's enacted identity can become apparent through their choice of interactions (e.g., who they interact with and about what) and the way in which they engage (e.g., how they interact), serving as a form of communicative self-expression. These two layers of CTI were relevant to the study in that participants' perceptions of their ethnic identities (personal layer) affected how they chose to interact with their cross-ethnic peers (enacted layer). Several participants believed that their ethnic identities and their knowledge of other ethnicities and cultures either helped or hindered their cross-ethnic interactions with their fellow Black peers.

Regarding cultural knowledge hindering cross-ethnic interactions, Black American participants, including Gloria, Renee, and Vanessa, initially felt limited in their knowledge of Black immigrant cultures. They believed their ethnic identities as Black Americans (i.e., personal layer of identity) made them more familiar with engaging with their own culture as opposed to Black immigrant students' cultures. While Gloria still maintained that she lacked cultural knowledge to engage deeply with Black immigrant students, Renee and Vanessa grew in their knowledge of African immigrant cultures. Both Renee and Vanessa expressed being able to engage in reciprocal cultural learning with their Black immigrant peers in which they could learn from their Black immigrant counterparts while also teaching them about Black American culture through their own Black American lens.

Renee recalled becoming more comfortable with her own ethnic identity in her cross-ethnic interactions with Nigerian immigrant students after she gained more cultural knowledge about Nigerian culture. Related to CTI, Renee's ethnicity and her comfort in interacting with her Nigerian peers are representative of the personal and enacted layers of her identity respectively

(Hecht, 1993; Jung & Hecht, 2004). In comparison, relational identity is an identity that is co-constructed through a combination of a person's social interactions, how others view them, and how they view themselves as far as the role they play in their relationships (Hecht & Lu, 2014; Jung & Hecht, 2004). Renee's increased knowledge of Nigerian culture through her interactions with her roommates caused her to become more confident in her interactions with other Nigerian students. As a result of Renee being knowledgeable about Nigerian culture, her Nigerian student counterparts opened up to her in such a way that it seemed "like … [she] was basically telling them [she] was African." This multilayered identity in which Renee's ethnicity and cultural knowledge, her interactions with her Black immigrant peers, and her Black immigrant peers' perceptions of her effectively represent the co-construction of relational identity (Hecht & Lu, 2014; Jung & Hecht, 2004). In becoming more confident in sharing her identity and cultural knowledge with her Nigerian counterparts (enacted layer), Renee no longer believed that her ethnicity as a Black American (personal layer) would limit her cross-ethnic interactions with her Nigerian peers (enacted and relational layers).

Conversely, Black immigrant participants such as Amanda, Chidinma, and Zexell believed that their knowledge of Black American culture and experience navigating Black American spaces as Black immigrants allowed them to engage comfortably with their Black American peers when they chose to do so (enacted and relational layers). Through their immigrant upbringing in the U.S. context, they learned how to negotiate both the immigrant and American aspects of their identity (i.e., the personal layers of their identity; Hecht, 1993) while also maintaining a sense of connection to each. Their sense of connection to both their immigrant and American identities reflect the communal layer of their identity (Hecht, 1993), as they felt their Black immigrant background bonded them with other Black immigrants and their

upbringing in the Black American context bonded them with Black Americans. Chidinma even described how they perceived their knowledge of Black American culture to be greater than their knowledge of Nigerian culture. They expressed more familiarity with listening to Black American hip-hop and R&B than Afrobeats, more familiarity in Black American colloquialisms than Nigerian ones. This reflected the enacted layer of Chidinma's identity (Jung & Hecht, 2004), as they expressed the Black American aspect of their identity through the music they listened to and their overall knowledge of Black American culture, which helped them to relate more to their Black American peers.

Regardless of their feelings of cultural adequacy or inadequacy in engaging with their cross-ethnic peers, both Black immigrant and Black American participants valued their shared racial identity (reflecting the communal layer of identity) as well as their ability to educate one another on their respective cultures (reflecting the personal and relational layers). Both groups expressed excitement about the possibility of learning from one another and building another layer of connection in MU's Black student community. They believed the cultural knowledge they already possessed as well as the cultural knowledge they would gain through their cross-ethnic communication with one another would benefit them and their peers, allowing them to engage or enact their own identities in new ways.

Implications

Implications for Research & Theory

Although education research has historically overlooked intraracial differences and perspectives among Black students (Charles et al., 2015; George Mwangi & English, 2017; Hernandez & Murray-Johnson, 2015; Thelamour et al., 2019), a growing body of scholarship has begun to unpack the diverse intraracial perspectives of Black immigrant students in particular

(e.g., Charles et al., 2015; George Mwangi & English, 2017; Hernandez & Murray-Johnson, 2015; Griffin et al., 2016; Thelamour & George Mwangi, 2021). As the literature on Black immigrant perspectives has continued to grow, there has also been a slow-growing interest in the relationship dynamics among Black students (e.g., Awokoya, 2012; De Walt, 2011; George Mwangi et al., 2016; Jackson & Cothran, 2003). I characterize this research interest as slow growing because higher education research examining students' intergroup relationships has typically focused on students' interactions and relationship *across* race (e.g., Antonio, 2001; Bowman & Park, 2015; Gurin et al., 2002; Hurtado, et al., 2012), not within. As such, the aforementioned body of literature examining Black intraracial relationships – particularly the relationship dynamics between Black immigrant and Black American students (Awokoya, 2012; De Walt, 2011; George Mwangi et al., 2016; Jackson & Cothran, 2003) – is a literary departure from the norm.

While this small body of literature intentionally centers the cross-ethnic communicative experiences between Black immigrant and Black American students, it is limited in that it either focuses on the interactions between Black American students and particular groups of Black immigrant students (i.e., Black Africans) or its findings largely capture the challenges of Black immigrant and Black American cross-ethnic interaction with minimal discussion of benefits. My study contributes to the literature base by examining the role of Black immigrant and Black American students' ethnic identities in their cross-ethnic interactions with one another as well as their perceptions of the challenges *and* benefits of their cross-ethnic interaction. Based on my findings and analysis, I have several suggestions for future research that hopes to build on this topic of study.

I recommend that future researchers conduct a similar study with an intentional examination of how cross-ethnic communication and engagement differs across various levels of student involvement on campus. While I did intentionally select students with a variety of self-described levels of cross-ethnic interaction, I did not intentionally focus on their involvement in Black student organizations on campus. Several participants did share if they were involved in Black student organizations on campus; however, there may have been student organizations that participants were involved in that did not deal with race or ethnicity. Consequently, they may not have mentioned their involvement in such organizations. As such, future research would benefit from a holistic analysis of Black immigrant and Black American students' involvement in ethnic and non-ethnic student organizations alike and how their involvement in these organizations impacts their cross-ethnic communication. Likewise, I did not examine differences in students who lived on campus versus those who lived off-campus. As such, there may have been a difference in the organizational involvement or cross-ethnic engagement of students who lived on campus as opposed to those who lived outside of campus that was not captured in my study.

On the topic of Black student involvement, although previous literature identified Black student organizations as spaces where Black students seek and find community and support (e.g., Guiffrida, 2003), there is no literature that explores ethnic-based Black student organizations – such as the African Student Association, Black Student Union, and Caribbean Student Association – as spaces for facilitating cross-ethnic interaction and community-building between Black immigrant and Black American students. Interestingly, all participants in my study named these Black ethnic student organizations when discussing existing opportunities for Black immigrant and Black American students to connect at MU. For this reason, future research

should explore this connection, investigating if and how Black ethnic student organizations serve as conducive spaces for cross-ethnic interaction and relationship-building.

I also suggest that future research empirically examine this topic in different institutional contexts. For example, conducting a similar study at an HBCU, at a highly selective PWI (e.g., Ivy League institutions), at other institutions with a smaller Black population than MU, or at institutions that do not have the same demographic of Black immigrants and Black Americans in the surrounding county or state may yield different results. At such institutions, researchers could examine whether the number or demographic makeup of Black students affect how students self-describe their cross-ethnic interactions. Likewise, scholars could investigate if and how feelings of bondedness between Black immigrant and Black American students differ in non-PWI settings. In changing the institutional context, the researcher may encounter a completely different set of dynamics happening between Black immigrant and Black American students.

Future research should also observe what efforts state flagship institutions are putting into creating intentional opportunities for cross-ethnic engagement between Black immigrant and Black American students. For example, institutions like MU that have a larger Black student population compared to other state flagship institutions may commend themselves for simply having a larger Black student population than their peer institutions. However, it is important to examine what institutions like MU are doing to unpack the diversity within the Black student population as well as what they are doing to support cross-ethnic engagement between Black immigrant and Black American students. Researchers should study whether institutions like MU have intentional Black cross-ethnic engagement initiatives in place or if the onus falls on Black student organization leaders to create these cross-ethnic engagement opportunities. While several of the students in my study appreciated that most of the cross-ethnic engagement initiatives were

coming from Black student leaders because they were viewed as the ones who were directly plugged into the Black student community, there are ways that staff can still help support Black student-led initiatives. For example, having a staff member serve as a facilitator or moderator for the cross-ethnic forum that Chris suggested would allow staff to still be involved in student-led cross-ethnic engagement initiatives.

Researchers should also consider the ethnic diversity of the community students grew up in. Several of the Black immigrant participants in this study (i.e., Amanda, Chidinma, Zexell) identified a shared comfortability among Black immigrant students in navigating Black American spaces. They attributed this comfortability to their experience growing up in and navigating Black American culture as a Black immigrant. They comparatively perceived Black American students as being more uncomfortable navigating Black immigrant spaces as Black Americans. Relatedly, Black American participants who felt they previously lacked cultural knowledge of Black immigrant students (i.e., Renee and Vanessa) believed that Black American students who grew up in ethnically homogenous environments with other Black Americans may be unfamiliar with Black immigrant cultures and unaccustomed to navigating Black immigrant spaces. Hence, future research should delve into this dynamic to understand whether the ethnic diversity of Black immigrant and Black American students' home communities impact their cross-ethnic interaction and comfortability navigating cross-ethnic spaces. Because participants in this study believed cultural familiarity in negotiating cross-ethnic spaces impacted their cross-cultural communication, future research should seek to understand how Black students' feelings of cultural competence or ineptitude affect their cross-ethnic interactions and relationships.

Scholars should also investigate the cross-ethnic communicative perceptions and experiences of Black international students in the U.S. (i.e., those Black students who

immigrated to the U.S. for school and intend to go back to their home countries after finishing). They should also examine the cross-ethnic communicative perceptions and experiences of Black immigrant students who lived in their home country context longer before immigrating to the U.S. The Black immigrant participants in this study were either born in the U.S. or immigrated to the U.S. at the age of one. Having been raised in the U.S. context as Black immigrants, these students' outlook on cross-ethnic communication may differ from those who were raised in a predominantly Black, ethnically homogenous country and developed their cultural identity in that context.

Future research should examine the role of media (e.g. movies, news, television, etc.) in communicating cross-ethnic stereotypes and stereotypical perceptions of one another to both Black immigrant and Black American students. Black immigrant participant Chris mentioned that he and his parents had watched *Boyz n the Hood* together and that these gangster depictions of Black Americans partially informed his parents' stereotypical perceptions of Black Americans. Black immigrant participant Zexell expressed that, before coming to the U.S., some Africans see movies that depict Black Americans as "gangsters" and assume that is how all Black Americans act. Similarly, Black American participant Stacy described mentioned a stereotypical depiction of an African character in *Scary Movie* and how such depictions could influence Black Americans' views of Africans (i.e., making them think Africans act similarly in real life). Given the relevance of media depictions to several of the study participants, it would be beneficial for future research to investigate the role that media plays in exposing Black immigrant and Black American students to stereotypical depictions of one another and, consequently, the role media plays in Black immigrant and Black American students' perceptions of their cross-ethnic counterparts. In understanding if and how stereotypical media

depictions affect Black immigrant and Black American students' cross-ethnic perceptions of one another, researchers can begin to inform practice on effective ways for Black immigrant and Black American students to combat these stereotypical perceptions.

Lastly, I recommend that future research should study how intergenerational or passed down preconceived notions and stereotypes impact Black immigrant and Black American students' cross-ethnic interactions and relationships as well as their desire to engage in cross-ethnic communication. Specifically, scholars should examine the cross-ethnic preconceived notions and stereotypes students learn from their parents and older members of their ethnic community. While Thelamour and George Mwangi (2021) began to explore this socialization process, they only did so for Black immigrant students. More research needs to be done on these intergenerational socialization messages for both Black immigrant and Black American students. Several Black immigrant students in this study (e.g., Chris, Zexell) actively named their parents or older community members as the individuals who passed down certain cross-ethnic stereotypes and preconceived notions to them about Black Americans (e.g., Black Americans as troublemakers). While Black American students like Vanessa acknowledged the role that intergenerational cross-ethnic stereotypes play in Black immigrant and Black American students' perceptions of one another, Gloria was the only Black American student in the study to actively name her parents as individuals who passed down a cross-ethnic stereotype to her about her Black immigrant counterparts (i.e., 'African men do not like Black American women'). Consequently, researchers should study both Black immigrant and Black American students to understand whether this occurrence (i.e., Black immigrant students being quicker to name their parents and older community members as contributors to the cycle of passed down cross-ethnic

perceptions and stereotypes compared to their Black American student counterparts) is reflective of a larger pattern or simply a chance occurrence.

In exploring this topic of intergenerational socialization messages, researchers should aim to learn what cross-ethnic stereotypes and preconceived notions Black immigrant and Black American students' parents and community elders instilled in them and from where these parents and community members learned these stereotypes and preconceived notions. Previous research has speculated that, in addition to their own cross-ethnic interactions, Black immigrants may learn or develop anti-Black American sentiments based on their exposure to stereotypes of Black Americans through media (Thelamour & George Mwangi, 2021). Given that such exposure to cross-ethnic stereotypes can impact the cross-ethnic socialization messages Black parents pass on to their children (Thelamour & George Mwangi, 2021), researchers should intentionally explore this topic to pinpoint exactly where both Black immigrant and Black American parents receive their cross-ethnic rhetoric from, whether from media (e.g., news, television, movies), their own cross-ethnic interactions, other sources, or a combination of the aforementioned. Likewise, researchers should examine whether the Black immigrant and Black American students themselves believe they have moved past these inherited cross-ethnic stereotypes and preconceived notions. If students respond affirmatively, researchers should inquire about how the students accomplished it (e.g., by having their own cross-ethnic communication experiences). If students respond negatively, researchers should inquire about students' experiences with cross-ethnic engagement (i.e., have they had their own negative experiences or are they heavily basing their opinions on their parents' or older community members' judgments of their cross-ethnic counterparts).

Regarding theory, my recommendation is that scholars begin to incorporate communication-based theories into their empirical examinations of Black immigrant and Black American students' cross-ethnic interactions and relationships. The body of literature that examines the cross-ethnic communication between these two groups (e.g., Awokoya, 2012; De Walt, 2011; George Mwangi et al., 2016; Jackson & Cothran, 2003) primarily uses identity-based theories. While these theories are a very significant component of understanding Black students' ethnic identities, they do not prioritize understanding how these identities operate in the context of cross-ethnic communication.

The framework used in this study, communication theory of identity, posits that identity (in its various forms) is built, sustained, and evolved through relationships and communication – whether in self-expression of identity, in communication of individual identity to others, or in group identification (Hecht, 1993; Hecht & Lu, 2014; Jung & Hecht, 2004). The theoretical framework employed in this study, communication theory of identity, posits that identity – in its multifaceted manifestations – is cultivated, perpetuated, and transformed through interpersonal relationships and a combination of intra- and interpersonal communicative processes (Hecht, 1993; Hecht & Lu, 2014; Jung & Hecht, 2004). These processes encompass self-expression of identity, interpersonal communication of individual identity to others, and the identification of group affiliations (Hecht, 1993; Hecht & Lu, 2014; Jung & Hecht, 2004).

Although CTI does not solely examine the racial or ethnic identities of Black students, it can help to provide a basis from which scholars can explore the relationship between Black immigrant and Black American students' ethnic identities and their cross-ethnic communication with one another. For example, while all four identity layers described in CTI proved relevant in this study's findings, the personal, enacted, and relational layers were particularly relevant in the

individual participants' case profiles. These layers were critical in unpacking participants' sense of ethnic self as well as the co-development of their ethnic identity through their interactions with family and friends who shared their ethnicity and their own cultural understandings of their identity. Additionally, the relational and communal layers of identity were particularly relevant in the cross-case themes where participants' collective narratives were detailed. These layers aided in understanding the Black immigrant and Black American participants' experiences navigating their ethnicities in cross-ethnic communication spaces as well as understanding their perceptions of their intraracial and cross-ethnic connectedness with one another. Scholars could either use CTI in a similar fashion to this study or can further build out the theory's connections to Black identities. At times, the layers of CTI were a bit difficult to parse out in relation to this topic. Specifically, given the interconnected nature of CTI's layers, it was a bit challenging at times to distinguish whether one layer was more relevant than another when mapping CTI onto the discussion of my findings. In the future, researchers should be mindful of this issue and aim to clearly state how they will operationalize the various layers of CTI. By adopting this approach, researchers can deepen their understanding of the complexities inherent in the interactions between Black immigrant and Black American students and further elucidate the dynamics of their ethnic identities in institutional settings.

Implications for Practice

There were several practical implications that resulted from my study's findings, one of which was related to Black ethnic student organizations (e.g., African Student Association, Black Student Union, and Caribbean Student Association) and their timing of general body meetings for members. In considering a more inclusive time for their meetings, student organizations like ASA, BSU, and CSA could consider rotating their meeting times to accommodate the diverse

schedules and academic commitments of Black students. For instance, organizations could try alternating between holding meetings at 5:00 PM one month and 7:00 PM the next month to ensure that students with different class schedules or extracurricular activities have the opportunity to attend. Additionally, organizations could explore the option of recording their general body meetings to provide access to all interested students, especially those who may have conflicting commitments or obligations. These student organizations could ensure that all members receive minutes or recordings of the meetings. This action would help students stay informed and engaged, regardless of their availability. By implementing such strategies, Black ethnic student organizations can promote inclusivity and ensure that all students have the opportunity to participate and contribute to campus community events and initiatives.

Staff for MU's Black cultural center and multicultural office can also work to make events more inclusive of students' schedules and ideas to enhance engagement among Black students. One strategy is for staff to incorporate virtual attendance options for events, allowing students to participate remotely if they are unable to attend in person due to scheduling conflicts or other commitments. By offering virtual attendance options, staff can broaden the reach of their events and ensure that all students have the opportunity to participate regardless of their location or availability. Furthermore, staff making event recordings available to students can be another valuable approach. As with the recommendation for student organizations, recording events and making the recordings available allow students who are unable to attend the live event to access the content at a later time, promoting accessibility and accommodating diverse class schedules. Staff can also consider adding a component to events where students can submit questions or comments related to the event topic ahead of time. This ensures that students' perspectives and concerns are still included in the discussion, even if they are unable to attend the event in person

or virtually. By proactively soliciting student input, staff can create more inclusive and student-centered events that address the needs and interests of the Black campus community.

University administrators can also play a role in creating intentional opportunities for Black immigrant and Black American students to learn about each other's cultures. Specifically, universities could find ways to fund Black student study abroad opportunities. The field of study abroad is largely white-dominated (Institute of International Education, 2019). The Institute of International Education's Open Doors report (2019) found that approximately 70 percent of U.S. students studying abroad in the 2017-18 academic year were white. Europe was the leading host region for study abroad opportunities in both the 2016-17 and 2017-18 academic years, hosting 54.4 percent and 54.9 percent of opportunities, respectively. In contrast, Black students comprised only 6.1 percent of study abroad participants in the 2017-18 academic year (Institute of International Education, 2019). Sub-Saharan Africa hosted just 4.2 percent of study abroad opportunities, while "Latin America and [the] Caribbean" – a combined category that did not distinguish between Latin American and Caribbean study abroad opportunities – hosted 14.9 percent (Institute of International Education, 2019). These statistics show that Black students rarely have the opportunity to travel to places in the Black diaspora on study abroad trips. However, Stacy, a Black American participant in my study, expressed a desire to visit Zimbabwe after learning about its culture from a Zimbabwean friend. This suggests that there could be significant interest among Black students in study abroad programs specifically designed for them and hosted in predominantly Black countries. Therefore, it would be worthwhile for universities to fund study abroad programs where Black students can visit countries in the Black diaspora to learn about diverse Black cultures and engage in Black cross-cultural interactions.

Another practical implication yielded from the study was related to the role Black ethnic student organizations play as cross-ethnic community-building spaces. Participants perceived organizations like ASA, BSU, and CSA as spaces that present increased opportunities for cross-ethnic interaction between Black immigrant and Black American students at MU. As such, participants desired more event collaboration between the Black ethnic student organizations. When discussing what sentiments she wanted to share with Black ethnic student organizations, Renee encouraged the leaders of these organizations to collaborate and know that they do not have to organize events alone. She underscored the importance of collective efforts among Black ethnic student organizations in creating a sense of belonging and solidarity in MU's Black student community. Many students echoed this thought, emphasizing that collaborative events between Black ethnic student organizations such as ASA, BSU, and CSA could significantly enhance unity across ethnic lines and strengthen the sense of community among Black students at MU, irrespective of their ethnic backgrounds.

Relatedly, participants also wanted Black ethnic student organizations to host intentional events that provide space for cross-ethnic dialogue and interaction. Participants believed there was a need for more opportunities to increase cross-cultural understanding between Black immigrant and Black American students through such intentional communication about their respective cultures and their collective perspectives on cross-ethnic communication. These student organization events can serve as platforms for fostering meaningful exchanges and building bridges between Black students of different cultural backgrounds. By facilitating such interactions, Black ethnic student organizations can contribute to breaking down barriers, dispelling stereotypes, and promoting mutual understanding among Black immigrant and Black American students at MU. Moreover, it is essential to recognize that building a deeper sense of

unity and community among Black students goes beyond shared racial identity, particularly within the context of predominantly white institutions. To achieve this goal, participants felt that Black student organizations should prioritize initiatives that go beyond surface-level similarities and actively work towards addressing the nuanced experiences and identities within the Black student community. By embracing Black diversity and fostering cultural inclusivity, these organizations can play a vital role in creating a more supportive and inclusive campus environment for all Black students at MU.

Although participants shared that most cross-ethnic interaction and relationship-building efforts should come from student organizations like ASA, BSU, and CSA – especially given these student leaders' knowledge and awareness of the Black student community at MU – I believe that staff at MU's Black cultural center and multicultural office can play a key role in facilitating cross-ethnic conversations that require a more nuanced knowledge of Black immigrant and Black American cultures. For example, Chris mentioned that Black immigrant and Black American students should have a forum in which they can talk about the differences in their cultures, discuss the cultural diversity present across the Black diaspora, and share cultural insights with one another so that both sides can gain cultural knowledge about one another. For such conversations, a good facilitator is needed, one with knowledge of cultures across the Black diaspora as well as background in intergroup dialogue and conflict resolution. It can be triggering for students to hear certain cross-ethnic viewpoints without adequate context, so these conversations require a facilitator skilled enough to help maintain a collaborative, non-competitive, and non-defensive atmosphere to help both groups of students understand why Black immigrants and Black Americans have certain impressions of one another to begin with. I believe that, with effective facilitation, these cross-ethnic forums could provide space for Black

immigrant and Black American students to begin having conversations on the role of anti-Blackness and colonialism in cross-ethnic relationships between Black immigrants and Black Americans. Research has shown that good, effective facilitation promotes empathy among participants, inclusion of diverse perspectives, and opportunities for all participants to contribute to the conversation (e.g., Beauvais, 2017; Silva & Ferreira, 2021; Yaylaci & Beauvais, 2017). Hence, an effective facilitator would greatly contribute to fostering an empathetic and inclusive space that encourages dialogue between Black immigrant and Black American students, rather than heated debate.

I believe the systemic ways in which anti-Black racism, colonialism, and anti-African sentiments show up have disproportionately affected Black immigrant and Black American groups' ethnic regard towards one another, leading to cross-ethnic stereotypes and preconceived notions that tell incomplete stories. In Kendi's (2016) book *Stamped from the Beginning*, he stated that the stereotype Black Americans have about Africa being a backwards dark continent historically stems from slavery times. When enslaved Africans and recently freed Africans expressed the desire to go back to the African continent from where they were taken, the white slave owners feared losing the labor of enslaved Africans. Consequently, the enslavers lied to them, convincing the enslaved and recently freed Africans that the enslavers saved them from a backwards land and a backwards people by bringing them from the African continent to the U.S. Similarly, De Walt (2011) discussed an anti-African mindset that Black Americans had of African participants in his study, perceiving African students as dissimilar to them with some even expressing a desire to stay away from Africans ("You can be African, but that's not me at all. I don't know anybody in Africa. I don't want to know anybody in Africa" as stated in De Walt, 2011, p. 492).

On the immigrant side of Black cross-ethnic communication, Thelamour and George Mwangi (2021) pointed out that many of the anti-Black American socialization messages Black immigrants receive come from their parents and similar community members. While Black immigrant perceptions of Black Americans have been discussed more broadly in literature, it is still important to understand and discuss both sides. There is currently little work that teaches us – as researchers and practitioners – how to deal with and dismantle these negative lines of cross-ethnic thinking that have been systemically and historically ingrained in both Black immigrant and Black American populations. My study shows that we already know a great deal about the negatives (i.e., the issues and challenges that hinder cross-ethnic communication). As such, talking about how we make these cross-ethnic relationships work while also understanding the origin of the negatives is very important. Such feats can be accomplished through intentional and well-facilitated conversations on cultural similarities and differences and overall cross-ethnic relationships between Black immigrant and Black American students.

The primary focus of my study was to let the participants' voices and experiences be at the forefront of the work. I believe this focus is evident in my findings, as the themes give voice to Black immigrant and Black American students' opinions of their cross-ethnic relationships with one another through their own words and storytelling. As I reflect on my own positionality and experiences navigating cross-ethnic communication through my undergraduate, graduate, and professional careers, I can see the systemic nature of colonial systems and how they have impacted cross-ethnic interactions and relationships across the Black diaspora and particularly between Black immigrants and Black Americans in the U.S. While not a direct implication of this study, this work is connected to a deeper implication of how colonialism and anti-Black sentiments in predominantly white spaces affect Black cross-ethnic sentiments both inside and

outside of the predominantly white environment. I believe work needs to be done to teach both groups how to dismantle these historically negative lines of cross-ethnic thinking that have been systemically ingrained in us. As such, both future research and future practice must consider the larger context in which we are trying to develop these cross-ethnic relationships between Black immigrant and Black American students.

Finally, a practical implication of this work involves faculty understanding this study's findings, particularly as it relates to students' time dedicated to their academics. As previously indicated, Black immigrant and Black American participants described having limited time to intentionally engage with their cross-ethnic peers because of their student responsibilities. Because classes are a critical part of students' undergraduate careers, faculty should consider ways in which they can build opportunities for cross-ethnic interaction between Black immigrant and Black American students into their group class assignment structures. Just as faculty have been asked to think of racial group affiliation in class assignments to intentionally diversify groups for these assignments (e.g., Devine & Ash, 2022), faculty should also be aware of the ethnic diversity *within* racial groups.

Research has shown that Black students often do not get picked for group assignments or study groups in predominantly white academic spaces (e.g., Solórzano et al., 2000). Consequently, the recommendations for faculty are often for them to be aware of that data, so they can organize students in group work and group assignments accordingly. This can result in faculty spreading out Black students so that they are represented across groups, but there could be a benefit to connecting Black immigrant and Black American students together in a group. A Black immigrant and a Black American student together in one group could be just as

meaningful in a cross-cultural exchange as a Black student in a group with a non-Black student (e.g., George Mwangi et al., 2016).

Such findings also have implications for intergroup dialogue, how we think about group structures, who is in these groups, and who benefits from them. By making judgments about Black students' familiarity with one another based on their phenotypical characteristics, faculty may be missing ways to build impactful connections between Black immigrant and Black American students. For example, while Amanda mentioned that she does not attend many of the Black ethnic student organizations' general body meetings and events at MU due to her preference for less social activities, she expressed enthusiasm at the chance to interact with other Black students in her classes without actively having to seek them out. This example helps illustrate that if faculty were to intentionally place Black students in groups in which they are able to interact across ethnic difference, they would appreciate the opportunity to learn about one another culturally.

Creating in-class opportunities for Black immigrant and Black American students to engage with one another would allow for them to have at least one space on campus in which they are able to have intentional cross-ethnic communication experiences and engagement opportunities. If MU students have "tunnel vision" – as Vanessa described – in which they are primarily focused on their academic goals, they may see attending Black cultural student organization events as non-priorities. Hence, creating intentional opportunities for Black cross-ethnic interaction within the classroom would allow for Black students who do not prioritize frequenting existing social spaces for cross-ethnic interaction between Black immigrant and Black American students to still have those cross-ethnic engagement opportunities. This would be beneficial for commuter students like Zexell whose time on campus was more so focused on

his academics, transfer students like Amanda who preferred in-class interactions because her age and newness to campus made it difficult for her to "organically" make friends with other Black students outside of the classroom, and students with late classes like Stacy whose class schedule directly conflicts with some of the Black student organizations' general body meetings. Hence, having more intentional cross-ethnic engagement opportunities for Black immigrant and Black American students in the classroom would help the aforementioned students to take part in cross-ethnic interactions without feeling as though they are detracting from their academics or stepping too far out of their comfort zones.

Additionally, a way that faculty could create intentional spaces for Black immigrant and Black American students to interact, connect, and engage within the classroom is to create an intergroup dialogue course specifically focused on building cross-cultural knowledge, understanding, and awareness between Black immigrant and Black American students. This course would be especially beneficial and attractive to students if they could take the course to fulfill one of their core requirements. An intergroup dialogue course focused on Black immigrant and Black American student dialogue would allow for students to have intentional spaces to engage with one another. Similarly, in being its own course section, students would have sufficient and dedicated time to unpack the complexities of cross-cultural communication and relationship-building across the Black diaspora with a knowledgeable facilitator to guide the dialogues. In seeking a knowledgeable facilitator for these dialogues, I recommend that faculty partner with staff and other leaders who work with Black cultural student organizations, such as the African Student Association, the Black Student Union, and the Caribbean Student Association, to co-facilitate this intergroup dialogue course. Given their direct work these student populations, these leaders can provide valuable insight into the relationship dynamics between

Black immigrant and Black American students on campus, enabling them to effectively facilitate conversation between the two groups. Additionally, they can utilize their connections with the students they serve to promote and increase interest in the course.

Conclusion

In this study, I examined the role Black immigrant and Black American students perceived their ethnic identities played in their cross-ethnic interactions with one another as well as what they perceived to be the benefits and challenges of their cross-ethnic interactions and relationship-building. I specifically employed case study methodology to interrogate these ideas in the context of a predominantly white public state flagship institution in the Mid-Atlantic region of the U.S. I also utilized communication theory of identity as a theoretical lens through which to unpack the relationship between Black immigrant and Black American participants' ethnic identities and their cross-ethnic interactions with one another. Participants' responses to the role of their ethnicities in their cross-ethnic interactions varied from playing a significant role to playing somewhat of a role to playing no role. For those participants who said their ethnicities played a role in their interactions with their cross-ethnic peers, some believed their ethnic identity affected their comfort and familiarity with navigating cross-ethnic interactions and relationships as well as their perceptions of their cultural knowledge of their cross-ethnic peers. Others stated that their ethnic identity allowed them to share a unique cultural perspective when conversing with their cross-ethnic peers or to share their own cultural knowledge with their cross-ethnic counterparts in reciprocal, cross-cultural learning exchanges.

Participants' ideas of challenges and benefits to Black immigrant and Black American cross-ethnic interaction and relationship-building centered around six interrelated themes. The challenges students identified were: 1) limited time to intentionally engage and build

relationships with their cross-ethnic peers, 2) passed down cross-ethnic stereotypes and preconceived notions instilled in them by their parents and other older members of their ethnic community, and 3) a lack of cultural knowledge of their cross-ethnic counterparts that restricted their interactions with them. The benefits students identified were: 1) a strong desire to build cross-ethnic community among Black immigrant and Black American students in the predominantly white context of MU, 2) a sense of agency to break the cycle of intergenerational transmission of cross-ethnic stereotypes and preconceived notions passed down by their parents and older ethnic community members, and 3) a strong desire to foster cross-ethnic interactions and relationships between Black immigrant and Black American students to increase cross-cultural learning and understanding between the two groups.

Black immigrant and Black American students' cross-ethnic communication experiences need further empirical and practical exploration by higher education stakeholders with an interest in fostering Black diasporic relationships or increasing Black diasporic students' sense of community more broadly. This is especially relevant in the predominantly white institutional context where the racial identity of Black students places them at risk for negative experiences such as racial isolation, discrimination, microaggressions, and decreased sense of belonging (Allen, 1992; Apugo, 2017; Beasley, 2016; George Mwangi et al., 2018; Harper, 2009; Patterson, 2021; Sinanan, 2012; Smith et al., 2007; Solórzano et al., 2000). By understanding how Black immigrant and Black American undergraduates interact and build community with one another, higher education scholars and practitioners can strategically develop individual and collaborative initiatives aimed to increase Black immigrant and Black American students' belonging and support on college campuses.

Appendices

APPENDIX A: RECRUITMENT EMAIL TO STUDENT LEADERS & RECRUITMENT FLYER

Dear [Student],

I hope this email finds you well. My name is Ashley Ogwo, and I am a Ph.D. student at the University of Maryland. I am contacting you because I am conducting a research study on Black immigrant and Black American students' cross-ethnic relationships and interactions at MU. I am writing to see if you and/or your organization members might be interested in participating in this study. Should you agree to participate, you will receive a gift card in the amount of **$40.00** as compensation at the conclusion of the study.

Participation in this study includes:

- Completing a demographic survey (10 minutes),
- Completing one individual interview via Zoom (45-60 minutes),
- Participating in a focus group via Zoom (60-90 minutes),
- Agreeing to be audio- and video-recorded.

To be eligible for participation in this study, you must:

- Be 18 years of age or older,
- Be a current undergraduate enrolled at MU,
- Have been attending MU for at least one semester,
- Be of Black immigrant background **OR** Black American background.
    - Students of Black immigrant background: (a) identify as Black and were born outside of the U.S. to 2 Black parents **OR** (b) identify as Black and were born in the U.S. to 2 Black parents who were born outside of the U.S.
    - Students of Black American background: identify as Black and were born in the U.S. to 2 Black parents who were born in the U.S.

To express interest in the study, please complete the demographic survey. The demographic survey will take about 10 minutes to fill out. After you complete the survey, I will reach out to you to schedule an individual interview.

If you have any questions about this study, please contact me at aogwo@umd.edu. Also, please feel free to forward this email and the attached recruitment flyer directly to your organization members or any other students you think may be excellent candidates for the study.

Thank you in advance for your time and consideration.

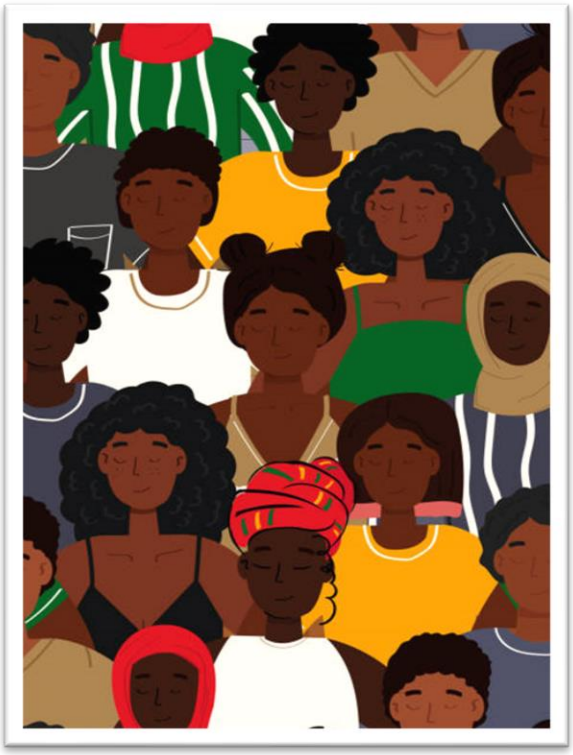
Kindest regards,

Ashley Ogwo

Research Study Participants Needed

If you are a MU undergraduate and are of Black immigrant or Black American origin, you may be eligible to participate in this dissertation research study.

Cross-Cultural Relationships Between Black Immigrant and Black American Undergraduates



Purpose of Study

The purpose of this research study is to examine how Black immigrant and Black American students perceive and discuss the interactions and relationships between their ethnic groups at Mid-Atlantic University – a predominantly white, public, state flagship institution.

Participant Eligibility Criteria:

To participate in this study, you must:

- Be 18 years of age or older
- Be a current undergraduate enrolled at MU
- Have been attending MU for at least one semester
- Be of Black immigrant background **OR** Black American background
    - Students of Black immigrant background: (a) identify as Black and were born outside of the U.S. to 2 Black parents **OR** (b) identify as Black and were born in the U.S. to 2 Black parents who were born outside of the U.S.
    - Students of Black American background: identify as Black and were born in the U.S. to 2 Black parents who were born in the U.S.

Participation Requirements:

Participation in this study includes:

- Completing a demographic survey indicating interest (10 minutes)
- Completing one individual interview via Zoom (45-60 minutes)
- Participating in a focus group via Zoom (60-90 minutes)
- Agreeing to be audio- and video-recorded (Required)

Participants will receive a $40 Amazon gift card as compensation for participating in this study.

For more information on this dissertation study, please contact Ashley Ogwo at aogwo@umd.edu.

CLICK HERE TO COMPLETE THE DEMOGRAPHIC SURVEY AND DETERMINE YOUR ELIGIBILITY.

This study is IRB-approved - 2038005-1

APPENDIX B: RECRUITMENT EMAIL DISSEMINATION REQUEST TO STAFF

Dear [Staff Member],

I hope this email finds you well. My name is Ashley Ogwo, and I am a Ph.D. student at the University of Maryland. I am contacting you because I am conducting a dissertation research study on Black immigrant and Black American students' cross-ethnic relationships and interactions at MU. I am writing to see if you could send my study's recruitment email and recruitment flyer (see attached) to the students you serve, either through listserv or newsletter. Thank you so much for your consideration. Please let me know if you have any questions about the study.

Kindest regards,

Ashley Ogwo

[Body of Student Recruitment Email & Flyer]

APPENDIX C: DEMOGRAPHIC SURVEY

Dissertation Study: Cross-Cultural Relationships Between Black Immigrant and Black American Undergraduates

Thank you for your interest in participating in this dissertation study. The purpose of this study is to examine how Black immigrant and Black American undergraduates perceive and discuss the interactions and relationships between their ethnic groups at Mid-Atlantic University – a predominantly white, public, state flagship institution.

Please take some time to complete this demographic survey. The first part of the survey will help determine your eligibility. The second part of the survey contains more specific demographic questions. The entire survey should take approximately 10 minutes to complete. Should you be eligible, agree to participate in the study, and complete all the participation requirements of the study (demographic survey, individual interview, and focus group), you will receive a $40.00 Amazon gift card.

If you would like to participate in this research study, please complete the survey. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact Ashley Ogwo at aogwo@umd.edu.

The first part of the demographic survey is an eligibility form. This eligibility form is expected to take no more than 90 seconds to complete.

The first part of the demographic survey is an eligibility form. This eligibility form is expected to take no more than 90 seconds to complete.

If upon completion of the form, you are deemed eligible to participate in this dissertation study, you will automatically be prompted to complete the next part of the survey's demographic questions.

If you are deemed ineligible to participate in the study, the survey will end prior to the additional demographic questions.

Selecting "I Agree" below suggests that 1) you have read the above description or have had it read to you, 2) you understand the primary intent of the eligibility form, and 3) you voluntarily agree for your eligibility for participation in this dissertation study to be assessed.

Eligibility Questions

- Are you 18 years of age or older?
- Are you an undergraduate student?
- Are you currently enrolled at **[name of research site]**?
- Have you been attending **[name of research site]** for at least one semester?
- Do you racially identify as Black?
- Do BOTH of your parents racially identify as Black?

[Consent Information]

Demographic Questions

- Please provide your email address.
- Please provide your full name.
- Are you currently enrolled at **[name of research site]**?
- What is your student classification?
- In what semester and year did you start attending **[name of research site]**?
- What is your current major?
- Please provide your gender identification.
    - Example: Woman, Man, Non-binary, Transgender, Gender-queer, Two-spirit
- How do you identify racially?
- Is your race an identity that you think about often? Why or why not?
- How do you identify ethnically?
- Is your ethnicity an identity that you think about often? Why or why not?
- What is your mother's racial identity?
- What is your mother's ethnic identity?
- Please indicate your mother's country of birth.
- What is your father's racial identity?
- What is your father's ethnic identity?
- Please indicate your father's country of birth.
- Please indicate your current age.
- Please indicate the country in which you were born.
- If you were born outside of the United States, please indicate the age at which you moved to the United States.
    - Example: 10, 16, 18
- If you have lived in a country (or countries) other than your birth country or the United States, please list the country (or countries), starting from the most recent country. If possible, also indicate the age at which you moved to and from that country.
    - Example: Canada: moved to Canada in 2005 (aged 5); moved from Canada in 2012 (aged 12)
- If you were born outside of the United States, why did you migrate to the U.S.?
    - Example: Work, College, My parents moved us here
- How long have you lived in the state of **[name of research state]**?
- Did you complete any part of your K-12 education in the state of **[name of research state]**? If so, which grades?
    - Example: 2nd-5th grade, 9th-12th grade, All K-12
- What is the current **[name of research state]** county in which you reside?
- How often do you interact with Black students at **[name of research site]** who have a similar cultural identity to you?
    - *(i.e., If you are a Black student of immigrant background, how often do you interact with other Black immigrant students? If you are a Black student of U.S.

American background, how often do you interact with other Black American students?)*

- What is typically the nature of these interactions?
- How often do you interact with Black students at **[name of research site]** who have a different cultural identity than you?
    - *(i.e., If you are a Black student of immigrant background, how often do you interact with Black American students? If you are a Black student of U.S. American background, how often do you interact with Black immigrant students?)*
- What is typically the nature of these interactions?
- Please indicate the pseudonym (fictitious name) by which you would like to be identified in this study.
    - **This name should NOT be your actual first or last name.**
- What days and times generally work best for you for an interview and/or focus group?
    - *Please look at your schedule for the next 2 weeks to get an idea.

APPENDIX D: INTERVIEW & FOCUS GROUP PROTOCOLS

Individual Interview Protocol

Opening Statement & Introduction to Interviewee

Thank you so much for taking time out of your day to take part in this interview. The purpose of this interview is to discuss your personal interactions and relationships with Black immigrant and Black American students on MU's campus as well as the role of your ethnic identity in these interactions and relationships.

This interview will be recorded for the purpose of being transcribed and analyzed later. As a reminder, being recorded is a requirement for participation in this study. Are you still comfortable with being recorded? Great, thank you. As a note, both you and your institution will be referred to by a pseudonym, which will be used for any research reports, presentations, or publications from this study.

Now, this interview should be between 45 and 60 minutes long. But it may go over by a few minutes, maybe 5 or 10, depending on how much you want to share in response to the questions. If you have to leave right at the 1-hour mark, please let me know. I want to be respectful of your time. As a reminder, participating in this study is completely voluntary. Remember that you can withdraw from participating in the study at any time. Also, if there are any questions you do not feel comfortable answering, we can skip them. There will be no penalties for withdrawing from the study or for skipping questions you feel uncomfortable answering. Do you have any questions for me before we begin? Great, if you need me to repeat any questions, just let me know. Happy to do so. I am going to start recording now.

Individual Interview Questions

- I would love to learn about how you came into your ethnic identity. What is a story you can share about how you identify ethnically/culturally?
- Tell me how often you think about your ethnicity/cultural identity. What is a time that you can share with me about how important your ethnicity is to you?
- How would you describe your interactions with other Black immigrant/Black American students [whichever aligns with the student's ethnic identity] on your campus? Why would you describe the interactions that way? (*Probe for example)
- What role, if any, do you think your ethnicity/cultural identity plays in the types of interactions you have with other Black immigrant/Black American students [whichever aligns with the student's ethnic identity]? Why or how so? (*Probe for example)
- Overall, if you were to describe your relationship with other Black immigrant/Black American students [whichever aligns with the student's ethnic identity] in one word, how would you describe it? Why?
- How would you describe your interactions with Black immigrant/Black American students [whichever differs from the student's ethnic identity]? Why would you describe the interactions that way? (*Probe for example)

- What role, if any, do you think your ethnicity/cultural identity plays in the types of interactions you have with Black immigrant/Black American students [whichever differs from the student's ethnic identity]? Why or how so? (*Probe for example)
- Overall, if you were to describe your relationship with Black immigrant/Black American students [whichever differs from the student's ethnic identity] in one word, how would you describe it? Why?
- What do you think are some challenges to cross-cultural communication between Black immigrant and Black American students on your campus? What about benefits?
- To your knowledge, does MU have any formal opportunities for Black immigrant and Black American students to interact with one another? Like organizations, events, initiatives, centers/offices, etc.?
    - If so, what types of initiatives or spaces exist? If not, why do you think that is the case? Would those events or spaces be something you are interested in?
- Do student orgs put on events where Black immigrant and Black American students can interact with one another?
    - If so, what types of events? If not, why do you think that is the case? Would those events be something you are interested in?
- Is there anything you would want to say to the staff at at offices and centers like **[name of MU Black Cultural Center]** or **[name of MU Multicultural Office]** about facilitating opportunities for Black immigrant and Black American students to connect at MU?
- Is there anything you would want to say to the Black student orgs about facilitating opportunities for Black immigrant and Black American students to connect at MU?
- Is there anything else you want to share with me about your experiences communicating with Black immigrant and/or Black American students at MU?

Closing

Okay, I am going to stop recording. Thank you again for agreeing to be a part of this study and for sharing your experiences with me. Your time is much appreciated! Remember that the next and final component of the study is the focus group. I reached out a few days ago to provide some potential date and time options for the focus group. I just need you to reply to that email letting me know what dates/times do not work for you **at all**. Not the dates where you may have to join 5 minutes late or leave 5 minutes early, but the dates where you wouldn't be able to join most or all of the focus group. What I will do is I will take the date with the least number of conflicts in people's schedules, and I will schedule the focus group for that day. So please reply to the email stating any conflicts you have. If all of the dates and times happen to work for you, then please reply to the email saying that you have no conflicts.

Focus Group Protocol

Opening Statement & Introduction to Focus Group Participants

Thank you so much for taking time out of your day to take part in this focus group. The purpose of this focus group is to discuss your overall perspectives on and descriptions of the existing interactions and relationships between Black immigrant and Black American students at MU as well as what facilitators and barriers you have noticed to cross-ethnic communication between Black immigrant and Black American students.

This focus group will be recorded for the purpose of being transcribed and analyzed later. As a reminder, being recorded is a requirement for participation in this study. Are you still comfortable with being recorded? Great, thank you. As a note, both you and your institution will be referred to by a pseudonym, which will be used for any research reports, presentations, or publications from this study.

Now, this focus group should be between 60 and 90 minutes long. It may go over by a few minutes, maybe 5 or 10, depending on how much you want to share in response to the questions. If you have to leave right at the 1 hour 30-mark, please let me know. I want to be respectful of your time. As a reminder, participating in this study is completely voluntary. Remember that you can withdraw from participating in the study at any time. Also, if there are any questions you do not feel comfortable answering, we can skip them. There will be no penalties for withdrawing from the study or for skipping questions you feel uncomfortable answering. Do you have any questions for me before we begin? Great, if you need me to repeat any questions, just let me know. Happy to do so. I am going to start recording now.

Focus Group Protocol Questions

- What are some stereotypes you believe are held about Black immigrants?
- What are some stereotypes you believe are held about Black Americans?
- Do you think those stereotypes affect how Black immigrant and Black American students on your campus interact? Why or why not? If so, can you give an example?
- What are some positive attributes you have heard about Black immigrants?
- What are some positive attributes you have heard about Black Americans?
- Do you think those positive attributes affect how Black immigrant and Black American students on your campus interact? Why or why not? If so, can you give an example?
- How would you describe the interactions or relationship dynamics between Black immigrant and Black American students at MU?
- What do you think are some barriers/challenges to cross-ethnic communication between Black immigrant and Black American students at MU?
- What do you think are some benefits to cross-ethnic communication between Black immigrant and Black American students at MU?
- What would you say is needed in order to foster/increase interactions and relationship-building between Black immigrant and Black American students?

APPENDIX E: INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Institutional Review Board
1204 Marie Mount Hall ● 7814 Regents Drive ● College Park, MD 20742 ● 301-405-4212 ● irb@umd.edu

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE

Project Title	*Examining the Cross-Ethnic Interactions and Relationships between Black Immigrant and Black American Students at a Predominantly White, Public, State Flagship Institution*
Purpose of the Study	*This research is being conducted by **Ashley Ogwo** at Mid-Atlantic University. I am inviting you to participate in this research project because you are a Black-identifying student at Mid-Atlantic University. The purpose of this research project is to examine how Black immigrant and Black American students perceive and discuss the cross-ethnic interactions and relationships between their ethnic groups at a predominantly white, public, state flagship institution. To participate in this study, you must meet the following criteria:* • *Be 18 years of age or older* • *Be a current undergraduate enrolled at Mid-Atlantic University* • *Have been attending Mid-Atlantic University for at least one semester* • *Be of Black immigrant background **OR** Black American background* ○ *Students of Black immigrant background: (a) identify as Black and were born outside of the U.S. to 2 Black parents **OR** (b) identify as Black and were born in the U.S. to 2 Black parents who were born outside of the U.S.* ○ *Students of Black American background: identify as Black and were born in the U.S. to 2 Black parents who were born in the U.S.*
Procedures	*The remaining procedures of this research project involve the following: 1) an individual interview and 2) a focus group.* *1) An individual interview* *a. You will first be asked to participate in one 45- to 60-minute individual interview conducted virtually via Zoom. The interview will be audio- and video-recorded. During the interview, you will discuss your personal interactions and relationships with Black*

	immigrant and Black American students on your campus as well as the role of your ethnic identity in these interactions and relationships. An example of one of the interview questions is: How would you describe your interactions with Black immigrant/Black American students? *2) A focus group* *a. After completing an individual interview, you will then be asked to participate in one 60- to 90-minute focus group conducted virtually via Zoom. The focus group will be audio- and video-recorded. You may choose to keep your camera off during the focus group if you wish. The focus group will include participants who share your ethnic background (i.e., if you identify as a Black immigrant student, you will participate in a focus group with other Black immigrant-identifying students; if you identify as a Black American student, you will participate in a focus group with other Black American-identifying students). During the focus group, you will discuss the nature of the existing interactions and relationships between Black immigrant and Black American students at Mid-Atlantic University as well as what you believe are facilitators and barriers to cross-ethnic communication between Black immigrant and Black American students. An example of one of the focus group questions is: How would you describe the relationship dynamics between Black immigrant and Black American students on your campus?* ***Please note that agreeing to be audio- and video-recorded is required for participation in this study.***
Potential Risks and Discomforts	*There are minimal risks associated with participation in this study. You may experience mild discomfort or frustration related to recalling and sharing personal experiences of difficult communication with Black students whose ethnic identities differ from your own. However, you will not be required to answer any questions you do not feel comfortable answering. There is also a risk of data breach due to the nature of focus groups. However, you will be required to use pseudonyms in focus groups. Your participant pseudonym and a pseudonym for your institution will be used in any reporting. To protect your privacy, all data and information provided will be kept under lock-and-key and secured on password-protected computers.*
Potential Benefits	*There are no direct benefits from you participating in this research. However, possible benefits include contributing insight into the cross-ethnic perceptions, interactions, and relationships between*

	Black immigrant and Black American students in higher education.
Confidentiality	*Any potential loss of confidentiality will be minimized by storing data in a password-protected computer. Only Ashley Ogwo (the principal investigator) will have access to this information.* *To protect your identity, you will be given the opportunity to select a pseudonym, and all private details will be masked. An identification key will be created to link your real name to your pseudonym and this key will be securely stored in a password-protected folder on a personal password-protected laptop that only I have access to. Your true name will not be connected to any audio files or transcripts. Your contact information will only be stored on a password-protected computer for compensation purposes.* *All interview audio files and transcripts will be stored within 24 hours to the principal investigator's personal and password-protected computer. Any access to participant contact information, audio files, and transcripts will be limited to Ashley Ogwo. All data will be destroyed once it is no longer needed or upon a maximum storage period of two years.* *Lastly, you are requested not to share anything said during the focus group after the session has ended in order to maintain confidentiality for fellow participants.* *If I write a report or article about this research project, your identity will be protected to the maximum extent possible. Your information may be shared with representatives of the University of Maryland, College Park or governmental authorities if you or someone else is in danger or if I am required to do so by law.*
Compensation	*After completing the three components of the study (demographic survey, individual interview, and focus group), you will receive a $40.00 Amazon gift card for your participation. Since you will not earn over $100, only your name and address will be collected to receive compensation.*
Right to Withdraw and Questions	*Your participation in this research is completely voluntary. You may choose not to take part at all. If you decide to participate in this research, you may stop participating at any time. If you decide not to participate in this study or if you stop participating at any time, you will not be penalized or lose any benefits to which you otherwise qualify.* *If you are a student, your grades, standing or employability at your institution will not be positively or negatively affected by your participation or non-participation in this study.*

	If you decide to stop taking part in the study, if you have questions, concerns, or complaints, or if you need to report an injury related to the research, please contact the investigator: **Ashley Ogwo** **aogwo@umd.edu** **313-742-8748**	
Participant Rights	*If you have questions about your rights as a research participant or wish to report a research-related injury, please contact:* University of Maryland College Park Institutional Review Board Office 1204 Marie Mount Hall College Park, Maryland, 20742 E-mail: irb@umd.edu Telephone: 301-405-0678 *For more information regarding participant rights, please visit:* https://research.umd.edu/research-resources/research-compliance/institutional-review-board-irb/research-participants *This research has been reviewed according to the University of Maryland, College Park IRB procedures for research involving human subjects.*	
Statement of Consent	*Your signature indicates that you are at least 18 years of age; you have read this consent form or have had it read to you; your questions have been answered to your satisfaction and you voluntarily agree to participate in this research study. You will receive a copy of this signed consent form.* *If you agree to participate, please sign your name below.*	
Signature and Date	**NAME OF PARTICIPANT** **[Please Print]**	
	SIGNATURE OF PARTICIPANT	
	DATE	

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