



An Examination of Sense of Belonging in Second Generation Afro-Caribbean College Women at a Hispanic-Serving Institution

Emmanuela P. Stanislaus
Miami CodePath Local, USA
Amanda Wilkerson
Lynell Hodge
University of Central Florida, USA

ABSTRACT

Hispanic Serving Institutions (HSIs) are classified by the percentage of the institution's student population who self-identify as Hispanic (US Department of Education, 2021). While HSI designations are supposed to further support minoritized students, researchers studying HSIs have identified the need for more direct support. To further the conversation about the role HSIs play in the larger educational landscape we facilitated a case study that examined the experiences of second-generation Afro-Caribbean female students attending an HSI. This project aimed to analyze thoughtfully and intentionally in the hopes of highlighting the impact students' sense of belonging can have on their connection to campus. This qualitative case study evaluated the experiences of second-generation Afro-Caribbean female students and was guided by the following question: How can HSIs create a sense of belonging for second-generation Afro-Caribbean female students? Results highlight assessing sense of belonging among African Diasporic college at HSIs often may be excluded.

Keywords: Afro-Caribbean, Hispanic Serving Institution (HSI), intersectionality, second generation, sense of belonging

INTRODUCTION

As the access to higher education continues to expand, institutions are faced with the challenge of critically assessing the delivery of services. In a 2019 Education data report, it was found that college enrollment rates increased among Black and Hispanic students (Muniz, 2021). Institutional shifts to leverage diversity and inclusion have opened the door to classifications such as Minority Serving Institutions (MSIs) and Hispanic Serving Institutions (HSIs). Most recently, HSI Black student enrollment is 16% compared to 10% of Black students attending HBCUs (Nunez et al., 2015), yet there is limited scholarship that explores the experiences of Black students attending HSIs.

Thoughtfully discussing Black women college students' unique identity development while addressing issues commonly ignored in research, could bolster the Black female experience in education. Porter (2017) laid the groundwork to explore personal foundations, pre-collegiate socialization, collegiate socialization, and articulation of identity, that inform the development of Black undergraduate women. Scholarship suggests, when Black women in college are given an opportunity to create their own definitions of collegiality their success becomes more relevant to their lives and forms new meaning that may be counter to the dominant narrative (Steele, 2017). Similarly, researching Black women college students within an intersectional framework helps capture the complexities of their lived experiences while making explicit connections between their intersecting female identity and their blackness within the larger structures of inequality (Jones, 2016). The purpose of this study is to highlight second generation Afro-Caribbean college women's experiences who attend an HSI. We articulate a need for researchers to disaggregate participant ethnicity which allows for a more nuanced approach to exploring the experiences of Black college students. This study was guided by the following research question: *How can HSIs create a sense of belonging for second-generation Afro-Caribbean female students?*

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This paper underscores the importance of exploring African Diasporic college students and their sense of belonging within education settings. Black women particularly have complicated experiences in the college environment, ranging from exclusion to the financial burden of attaining higher education (Walkington, 2017). Utilizing a sense of belonging framework allowed for the experiences of these Black women to be viewed and analyzed in a critical manner. Additionally, it accounts for the various systems that continue to oppress and marginalize Black women in unique ways and contribute to conversations about campus climate for diverse students in urban/metropolitan institutions.

Sense of Belonging

Discussing a sense of belonging is often applied in the context of relatedness, membership, acceptance, and support. Accordingly, the most widely applied definition is “a feeling that members matter to one another and to the group, and a shared faith that members’ needs will be met through their commitment to being together” (Osterman, 2000, p. 324). The key distinction is to focus on students’ psychological experiences and their understanding of the level of integration they perceive occurs in the collegial setting and is critical to student success. Higher education is keen to foster a sense of belonging for students because the literature suggests it is critical to have a positive, prosocial, and productive outcome in college environments (Osterman, 2010). Conversely, when a sense of belonging is not fostered, students are found to have a decreased or diminished interest and engagement (Strayhorn, 2012); their motivations are diminished, development is impaired, and they perform poorly on tests and assignments (Ryan & Deci, 2000). These findings are particularly true for students of color and for this reason imperative to contemplate when discussing second generation Afro-Caribbean female students. Why? Sense of belonging accounts for the cases of students who perceive themselves as marginal to campus life; it is equated to mattering (Strayhorn, 2012). In Strayhorn’s research, he identified seven core elements of a sense of belonging which include sense of belonging is a basic human need, drives human behavior, contextual importance, mattering, social identities intersect and affect college students, engenders other positive outcomes, and finally must occur on a continuous basis (Strayhorn, 2019). These elements are relevant to student success in retention and strategic planning; however, they can be abstract. With this in mind, we also integrated an intersectional framework.

Intersectionality

Crenshaw's (1989) work was a secondary theoretical and processing underpinning. Thus, as part of our advanced analysis, we drew on her seminal work, in which she defines intersectionality as a theological bridge to understanding individuals with multiple identities. Intersectionality acknowledges isolated identified identities and the identities that overlap with one another (Crenshaw, 1989). Though, Crenshaw (1989) warns that defining a person just by race, gender, or economic position is inadequate in recognizing the importance of each category in understanding a person's lived experience. Taking Crenshaw's work into account, as well as the research question that inspired our study, we reframe the narrative by no longer examining student participants via a single label, but rather through an intersectional lens. An intersectional approach to participants' lived experiences tries to contextualize the provided experiences within the context of the research participants' shared experiences as students. We focused on all

three pillars to help structure ways in which an intersectional approach could better support a sense of belonging on college campuses.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Women learners' experiences in postsecondary educational environments are generally characterized according to their ethnicity and ethnic origin, gender, and academic interests, to mention a few (Kalmakis et al., 2020; Karaman, 2019; Mwangi et al., 2018). It is critical to note, however, that the experiences described above do not necessarily reflect those of all women, particularly second-generation Afro-Caribbean women who attend HSIs (Stanislaus, 2020).

On the other hand, conceptualizations of student categories such as second-generation, an explanation of Afro-Caribbean as an ethnic depiction, and an examination of emerging data about who is served at HSIs lay the technical groundwork for processing the direction that this research will take. To explain, while a considerable amount of interest is invested in students with a first-generation status, researchers have begun to explore conceptions of the experiences of second-generation students as a praxis for developing broader bands of student development support (Deutscher, 2018; Gist-Mackey, 2018; Nguyen & Nguyen, 2018). In college, a student is labeled "Second Generation" if one of their parents or guardians has a bachelor's degree or above (Pike & Kuh, 2005). A critique of recent empirical data on second generation students is the manner in which the data is disaggregated by race, or not (McNair et.al, 2020). For instance, the nuances of Black representation do not entirely account for Afro-Caribbean students (Thelamour et al., 2019). Additionally, these limitations are further exacerbated when gender and race intersect with school types to include HSIs.

Until now, researchers such as Garcia (2019) have pushed for cultural changes in understanding the federal HSI classification in light of how post-secondary institutions operationalize the activities associated with HSIs. Furthermore, given the proximity to metropolitan centers, HSIs serve various minoritized non-Hispanic students (Garcia & Dwyer, 2018). Despite these compartmentalized understandings of second generation students, female college students, and HSIs, we argue that there is a dearth of empirical evidence addressing the interconnections of those populations mentioned above. Additionally, we re-examine these areas to document the experiences of second generation Afro-Caribbean women college students to educate the field on how to best assist their achievement.

METHODOLOGY

In this qualitative case study, we conducted semi-structured interviews to investigate the experiences to get a comprehensive grasp of the perspectives of second generation Afro-Caribbean female undergraduate students enrolled

full-time at an HSI (Merriam, 1998). Case studies are a methodological approach that can be employed to explain a phenomenon within a particular context (Merriam, 1998). The usage of a case study research approach enabled analytic probing to gather a rich and contextualized understanding of the experiences of an underrepresented population of students at a Minority Serving Institution. That is to say, this study was conducted at a large, public, four-year HSI situated in the southern region of the United States. The Latinx student population of Bluff University (pseudonym) is over 60% which well exceeds the 25% needed to become an HSI. At the same time, Bluff University also serves a Black student population, which they do not disaggregate to delineate between race and ethnicity. In total, the aforementioned Black student population is about 12%.

This study more closely examines who these students are, second generation Afro-Caribbean female students, and what are their experiences. The selected research participants challenged the notion that HSIs serve only one type of student and also expand their understanding of Black women. In order to establish a representative population sample, the first author of this paper devised research inclusion criteria based on the following characteristics: second-generation Afro-Caribbean women with both parents being born in the Caribbean who were also undergraduates. The original study included 9 participants while this study focuses on 5 who were chosen given their deeper insight into the intersectionality framework that was used to analyze the data. The following is a description of the approach used to contact eligible individuals and select them for participation.

Data Sources

A purposeful sample was utilized to recruit undergraduate women who identified as Black and as second-generation Afro-Caribbean. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with each of the five participants (See Table 1). Interviews were chosen as the method to collect data as individuals' realities are constructed by their interaction with their social worlds (Merriam, 1998). A two-interview scheme was devised to gather data from the participants. The first interview centered on the life history of each participant while the second interview focused on the participants' experiences navigating an HSI. All interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim for analysis. As an example of data visualization, Table 1 lists the demographic information of the participants.

Table 1
Participant Demographic Information

Pseudonym	Institution (Pseudonym)	Ethnicity	Gender
Nadine	Bluff University	Guyanese	Female
Yolette	Bluff University	Haitian	Female
Danai	Bluff University	Haitian	Female
Xiomara	Bluff University	Dominican	Female
Serenity Selene	Bluff University	Jamaican	Female

Note. Ethnicity refers to what the participants identify as and may not be exclusive to one ethnicity alone.

Analytical Plan

The transcripts were analyzed using In Vivo coding for the initial scheme to keep the voice of the participants intact. In Vivo coding fit within the constructivist approach of this study as it privileged the words of the participants. Second-cycle coding was conducted using the intersectionality framework to group and sort codes into categories and then develop themes. The three dimensions of intersectionality identified by Haynes et al., (2020) which includes structural intersectionality, political intersectionality, and representational intersectionality were used as the framework for the second cycle coding. Following the initial interviews, the recordings were transcribed verbatim, and transcripts were shared with participants for member verification. Once the transcript contents were corrected and verified, the first author began analytic coding of the data then segmenting codes into themes utilizing the coding scheme mentioned above. After data coding, the researchers utilized additional triangulation methods to strengthen this study. Patton (2002) contends that triangulation permits the use of multiple analyses to evaluate the study's findings. Consequently, we use Patton's framework to construct and interpret the interviewees' responses. The first author initially coded the data, while the third author used subsequent interactions for the development of meaning-making to verify or dispute findings within the context of both the reviewed literature and the presented theoretical concepts.

Limitations

Qualitative research is conducted in a manner that provides an exhaustive, detailed description of the unit of analysis being studied. However, there are limitations to the use of this methodological approach. Specifically, qualitative research is not generalizable. The restricted

population size of this study prevents the generalizability of the results to the same group of students who have attended HSI-designated postsecondary institutions. However, access to this demographic is crucial, and the purpose of our study was to broaden the higher education community's understanding of participants, which we problematized mattering at HSIs (2019).

FINDINGS

The five participants shared experiences that speak to their unique experiences attending an HSI. We present the findings using the intersectionality framework and the three dimensions - structural, political, and representative intersectionalities. While the data is displayed in distinct themes, it is important to note that the work of intersectionality and critical analysis is not neat, clear, and cut. The process is in fact messy, and data could be assigned to overlapping and/or multiple themes. In the following sections, we share the data in individual themes according to the three dimensions and then provide data that could not be neatly assigned to one theme.

Structural Intersectionality

Structural intersectionality explains the multiple systems of oppression that erase Black women. The participants were aware of the systemic oppression that defined their lives. This awareness was underscored by Nadine when she shared, “it’s hard to not think about it [my race] when that’s what’s shoved down my throat every day.”

Additionally, Yolette explained that many of the Black students attending Bluff University sought to live on campus because it, “gives us a freedom that we necessarily didn’t have at home. For me it was like I always felt like there was an eye watching me or like there was just, it was very suffocating at home.” Yolette’s words speak to the sense of being surveilled by her parents but also by larger forces that were stifling and limited her opportunities. Yolette also believed that the need to escape surveillance was attributed to the large representation of Black students living on campus.

Nadine shared that one of the deciding factors in choosing to attend Bluff University was its status as an HSI. She believed that attending a minority-serving institution would provide her with a more inclusive experience when compared to attending a predominantly white institution. However, Nadine’s reflection about an experience serving on a Bluff University student focus group conflicted with her initial thoughts. She discussed,

I’ll hear people talking about how proud they are of the diversity of Bluff University and stuff like that. But then I’m like, it’s great that, you know, this is a diverse school and all but then at the same time a lot of I feel like us that are not Hispanic like we don’t feel all of this great positive diversity. Like, we don’t feel like we’re seen or heard sometimes.

Nadine illustrates how diversity can mean different things to different people. As an Afro-Caribbean woman, she does not believe that her particular needs are acknowledged or being addressed at the institution, which was surprising to her given that Bluff University is a minority-serving institution.

Several participants discussed the desire to meet and get to know others who do not share their racial identity but had apprehensions that were tied to structural systems of oppression. Serenity Selene explained,

And I wanted to change that, like, branch out more...And I don't know how their friends are going to react. Like if I went out today with one of the people that I know that are white and said, Hey, I want to go to this party with y'all and my hair is looking like this. And somebody does something to me. I'm not gonna have a good time. Like that's another thing I guess that's holding me back. I'm not sure how all the interactions will go. So, I'm okay like with that one person I know. But I don't know how the other people around are...

What Serenity Selene expressed her concern about and also discussed is an example of how the rhetoric of being might impact her safety or comfort in new/unknown situations.

Xiomara, who self-identifies as Black Hispanic, explained that she has friends who do not acknowledge and at times attempt to erase her race. She explained,

I probably would be seen mostly as like Hispanic only because people know me. And they know that I'm Hispanic. And so, it's like, okay, I'm just like Hispanic, obviously, people, but I think that a lot of the people here, they don't consider me as like black, like, or African American or whatever. They just see the Hispanic side of me...I have some friends who are like, oh, no, you're not really black. So, I think people see me like as Hispanic at Bluff University because of the large amount of Hispanic students that are in this major and like school.

Xiomara goes on to explain,

It makes me feel kind of a little bit uncomfortable or weird. Only because I'm literally physically like, black like, I appear as a black person. So, I don't know why you wouldn't consider me as a black person even though I'm physically black you know.

On the other end of the spectrum, Nadine identifies as Latinx, Guyanese, and Belizean American. However, her identity as Latinx is often challenged because she is Black as well as their ignorance of the languages spoken in Guyana and Belize which are located in South America and Central America, respectively. Both countries have official languages of English. Nadine is often asked if she speaks Spanish to which she responds no. This experience leaves her feeling othered and challenges her Latinx identity.

Political Intersectionality

Political intersectionality relates to the particular needs of Black women. In the present study, the political intersectionality dimension and theme highlight how the intersecting identities of race, gender, and ethnicity converge to illuminate gaps in meeting the needs of the participants.

Xiomara lives at home while commuting to Bluff University. She explains,

I feel like it's [Bluff University] very diverse already. Outside of Bluff University, like during my internship, I do feel like my race and ethnicity and gender is an important part of how I feel because I don't feel out of place, I don't feel uncomfortable at school here. Because, you know, I'm from [this city] and this is like, where I've been born and raised, and this is like what I'm used to being around outside it's where I feel maybe uncomfortable.

Conversely, Serenity Selene who identifies as Jamaican-American, also grew up near Bluff University but not in the immediate surrounding area of campus. When she discussed being from around the city, she makes it clear that she is from the northern part of the city which is demographically very different from where the main campus is located. Serenity Selene explained,

And my sister does hair, so I don't have to really struggle for that. And I remember one time, not one time, a few times someone's like I want to go to the hair store to get this and I'm like okay, where's the closest hair store? And she's like I don't know I'm like okay go Google it because they were asking me like I'm from here. I told y'all multiple times. I'm from here but I'm like, not this part.

Serenity Selene expressed what most of the participants shared during their interviews. There were times when they needed products that were specific for their hair type and texture but were not able to locate them either on campus or close to campus. Not being able to locate these items added another layer of invisibility to their experiences. Nadine further explained,

The majority of the people that live on campus are black like if you look at the statistics... But it's like, there wasn't really anything on campus that caters to us . . . I don't even know if I can find anything for my hair at the closest Walmart you know, or the CVS or the Walgreens when it was on campus. Most of the time I buy stuff for my hair, or things that I need as a black woman when I go home.

Nadine also shared that there were many Hispanic/Latinx food options on campus however, "there's nowhere that I can eat anything that seems like something from back home...I will be okay with a super whitewashed version of Jamaican food somewhere." Both Nadine and Serenity Selene's comments highlight some of the frustrations felt by the participants while attending this HSI.

While Xiomara felt a sense of belonging on campus, she believed that improvements could be made to increase the presence of Afro-Latinx students at Bluff University. While attending conferences, she meets other students with her shared identity which has fostered connections and validation that she does not get at her home campus. She shared, “I don’t really see other people who are Afro-Latina...I want to see more representation of me. That’s maybe a concern that I have.”

Nadine tried to work through her feelings of isolation and invisibility while attending an institution that is not a PWI. She explained the following,

I don’t feel like I go to a school that’s a school full of people of color. But then it’s weird, because they’re not white. So, it’s like, you know, I mean, if I went to a PWI and I felt excluded or I felt like I was being treated differently, I was being othered, or I was being judged, or looked down upon, it would kind of make sense. Because I’ll be like, well it’s a PWI and this is what happens. This is what we fight against and like this or that. But here, it’s like, you can’t really say like, oh, like I feel like I’m being treated weird. Because like, we’re all supposed to be like, you know, black and brown people and people of color. I don’t feel I don’t really feel 100% like solidarity. It feels like us and them which is really weird.

Nadine expresses the expectation of solidarity among Black students and Latinx students but was surprised that it did not exist.

Representative Intersectionality

Representative intersectionality describes the ways in which Black women are depicted in the media and how that informs how Black women are viewed, how they are treated, and what is expected of them. Danai described a time in which she was attracted to a Hispanic/Latinx classmate whom she had the opportunity to get to know through a group project. She considered him to be kind and nice so she asked him if he would be interested in meeting outside of the class environment to which Danai said he responded, “I like white girls.” She further explained,

I was like, oh okay cool. Which was like very shocking to me. I’ve never heard somebody say it like that, you know?...He has a preference...And then I started dating, hanging out with this Black Haitian man, and this guy comes along, and he’s like, oh, I’ve broadened my horizons. And oh, you’re such queen. Oh, my Nubian.

Danai shared that her experience with this classmate as well as other white men who have approached her made her feel fetishized. Stereotypes were also challenges that our participants faced while navigating Bluff University. Danai shared,

So then when I first came here, and I lived on campus, I was like, let me tone it down. Let me not, you know, be, you know, that crazy

person, cause sometimes I like being loud. But then if I am loud this gonna be like, Oh, my God, this black girl is so ghetto...I used to try to censor myself so much more. And to try to, you know, fit in that box again. It's like, you know, you have to continuously watch what you're doing and how you're acting or how you're talking. And, you know, my accent sometimes comes out, and then I'm like, I'm sorry, but why am I apologizing? You know, it's like, so I feel like you're just more aware of who you are.

Eventually, Danai questioned why she felt the need to adjust herself to counter stereotypes of Black women held by others. She has become more comfortable with who she is and does not concern herself with what others think. Similarly, Yolette shared frustrations with the limited views of Black women. She shared,

I identify with the weird black girl movement, like allow black girls to be weird. Allow black girls to be authentic, allow them to be themselves and like the things that you're like...I'm very different.

Particularly, Yolette discussed enjoying anime and alternative music among other things. Enjoying these things was seen as weird and didn't align with the expectations of those within and outside her racial group.

Despite feeling isolated, some of the participants hoped to forge relationships with students from different backgrounds. However, Serenity Selene expressed some anxiety about these relationships. She discussed,

I want to step outside of that comfort zone but it's hard because I want to make sure you're not going to like disrespect me or anything like that and a lot of times people do, and it gets into that thing where like you don't want to be seen as that black girl of course she's gonna say that because she's black.

Serenity Selene's sentiments speak to the challenges of the desire to be open while also protecting yourself from potential expressed oppression tied to misogynoir.

The participants also experienced expectations that centered on their appearances. Danai shared,

I'm not nonbinary, but I don't think of my gender as being fixed. Right? So, it's like, if, you know, I want to chop my hair, and I'm going to chop my hair, you know, and then it's like, it becomes this big deal with people. It's like, oh my gosh, she's a bald, you know, like, it was like, I remember when I first chopped my hair. Like, the people I knew they were like...oh my God, you're so brave. And I was like, I just don't understand why that's a conversation. So, I feel like womanhood is kind of like, at Bluff University. It's kind of like, you know, if you do something that's out of the norm, just like in the world, you know, becomes like, Oh my gosh, Wow, you're so you

know, you're someone to look up to or your, I don't know. I just feel like why am I put on a stage because I chopped my hair?

Danai's comments illuminate the ways in which Black women are expected to perform femininity. In her case, she believes that society views long hair as tied to femininity, and any behaviors that go against that are viewed as taboo. Cutting her hair was not just experimenting but an indictment of her gender expression.

A couple of the participants also shared experiences where they faced racial stereotypes while navigating the campus' surrounding community. Nadine explained,

I'm not mad at you for not speaking English. And I know that's like, maybe you had a lot of experiences where people are rude cause you don't speak English. But it's like, I don't know it's awkward, like when it's like you already are tired of me or interacting with me before we even have any type of interaction if that makes sense. It's like, as soon as you come to the register, it's like, here we go. Like, we don't have to speak the same language till I just get through this transaction, you can still say like, hola, and smile at me.

Nadine illustrates receiving negative responses before she interacts with an employee at a local grocery store. Her interaction is one that she can only explain as due to stereotypes about her race.

Significance

With 16% compared to 10% of Black students, HSIs enroll more Black students than HBCUs (Nunez et al., 2015). Our preliminary findings indicate that study participants set out to attend HSIs or MSIs to shield themselves from racist experiences commonly highlighted in research related to predominantly white institutions. Participants explained how their experiences attending an HSI were often influenced by stereotypes of Black women, hyper-invisibility, and visibility. While this was the case, the participants continued to find ways to foster connections that validated their existence on campus. These initial findings are powerful because it presents campuses, particularly HSIs, and MSIs, with an opportunity to thoughtfully apply an intersectional lens to understand this population's experiences and needs. As such, institutions must not rely on the distinction alone but rather forge meaningful support for students. Utilizing an intersectional framework allowed for the experiences of these Afro-Caribbean women to be viewed and analyzed in a critical manner. Additionally, it accounts for the various systems that continue to oppress and marginalize Black women in unique ways and contribute to conversations about campus climate for diverse students in urban/metropolitan institutions.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Throughout the course of the interviews, it was documented that the participants firmly felt that establishing themselves in the environment in which they were living and learning presented obstacles. The timing and revelations of the findings coincide with a number of empirical and programmatic initiatives that fit into two categories of higher education changes. First, fundamental changes to the demographic makeup of institutions. Second, modifications to initiatives that are central to establishing a competitive environment as a whole are evaluating how to serve a likely multiethnic student body. While we have identified a specific population, the recommendations that follow are intended to provoke thoughts regarding the questions we pose about the student experience. Then, we highlight observations regarding accelerating training frameworks that demonstrate a commitment to serving diverse student populations, and we conclude this section with parallel provisions that we believe postsecondary institutions should consider at the system level to elevate empirical discourses for continuing research on the topics presented in this work.

Recommendations for Research

Student success, as well as how to support the success of students on the path to earning a post-secondary credential at a university, has been studied in higher education, but primarily in areas of student development and primarily focusing on the voices of students who are commonly heard, such as students who identify as white and cis-gendered. This is because these students are the ones whose voices are most often heard. In spite of this common approach, we believe that the existing body of research needs to have a more in-depth understanding of how to best serve students whose voices are rarely elevated. Administrators can foster student growth to ensure no students have direct contact with them and connect outcomes to higher education, specifically concerning credential completion. When it comes to student populations that are second generation Afro-Caribbean descent who attend institutions that serve people of minoritized backgrounds but are not in the majority, researchers should think about appropriate support methods. To take this line of inquiry one step further, HSIs, are expanding across the country, and this status implies minoritized status dictates that there be increased knowledge about how to serve them best. Thus, HSIs should further explore the needs of non-Hispanic students. The scant literature on the experiences, needs, achievements, and challenges faced by second generation Afro-Caribbean female HSI students may then give insight into areas of the student experience that not only enhance knowledge but also change behaviors concerning support and development. We stop here to recommend six questions to continue moving the context of this work forward:

1. Has the term “mattering” become misunderstood?

2. Are all students, particularly second generation Afro-Caribbean students, included in the concept of mattering at HSIs?
3. How can professionals working in the field of student affairs become aware of the subtleties in the area of student identity within the context of mattering at HSIs?
4. Do student affairs preparation programs focus aspects of preparation on the modernity of minoritized institutions?
5. Do programs that train individuals to work in student affairs employ a variety of theoretical frameworks to attempt to understand what it means to be a student in the twenty-first century?
6. Whose perspectives are prioritized in HSI-related research?

All of the above are merely suggestions, but it is hoped that when we return to these issues in the future, we will also take into account the major debates in the field of higher education concerning the excessive use of the servingness without questioning who we are serving and to what extent the people who are serving students are effectively prepared to do so. Different ideas are used to help the students we singled out succeed. Strangely, these ideas are seldom implemented in academic settings. To better comprehend the student experience, we feel it will be helpful for future academics to explore using a theoretical framework such as intersectionality and a sense of belonging.

Recommendations for Practice

As our results show, there is room for rethinking how professionals are trained to better support students' educational goals when they are ignored, feel isolated, or note how their success in college was or can be achieved with little or no support from the professionals who are there to help them. The context of our suggestions will mostly concentrate on student affairs personnel, and university administrators, however, we recognize assistance may come from a number of sources on campus including professors and staff. We focused on these two subsets because it is the responsibility of student affairs professionals and university administrators to evaluate the state of the student body and adjust as necessary to foster an atmosphere conducive to learning. Furthermore, we know that financial mechanisms that affect the circumstances for programming activities typically have a significant impact on student accomplishment and the degree to which students may be successful. That's why our suggestions include administrative matters too. We did not include professors as a component of the support system to which we want to draw attention when making our suggestions, but that does not mean that future work should not focus on this group.

As a first step, experts in the field of student affairs have worked hard to break down the demographics of those who benefit from various forms of assistance. In the framework of higher education, students from all walks of

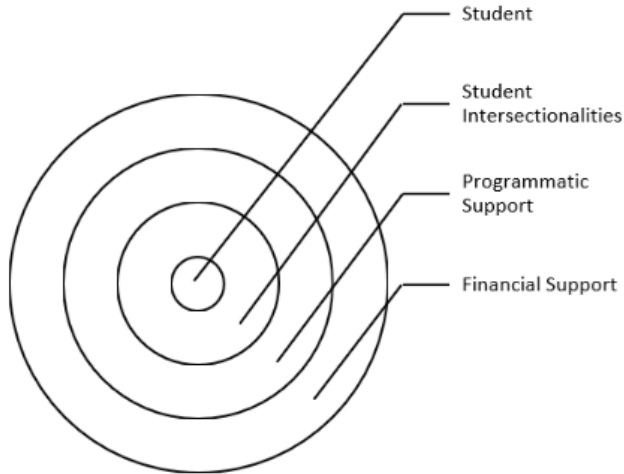
life and walks of experience may find a helping hand. So, an obvious and maybe very challenging topic is how this assistance works and what it means for second generation Afro-Caribbean students at an HSI. First, we think that our results suggest that the participants' unfulfilled needs may be satisfied via further targeted and general interaction by administrators. The ideas we discussed in our student interviews may also be used to get insight into students' lived experiences. This called for a new method of helping students succeed. We think this new strategy has to be intersectional in character to account for the fact that students have varying needs and the institution itself may have varying statuses.

A conceptual model for what we call an "intersectional model for student success" is shown below. The social, cultural, and ethnic identities of students are crucial to this approach because of their probable influence on students' academic and personal success. First, we emphasize the importance of relying on the information provided by participants, as demonstrated through our findings. For clarity, we propose that the Student Success Intersectional Model (SSIM) should be a concept explored regarding the experiences of college student learners. While the concept of student-centeredness is not novel, we have incorporated it into our model to emphasize that expanding student support services must be structured through the lens and practice of student experiences and their sense of belonging.

Second, we incorporate intersectionality into the SSIM concept to adequately convey that students' identities are rarely articulated in a manner that is not unidimensional. In other words, the majority of the studies we examined may have classified students as learners, first-generation, by ethnicity or gender. However, researchers are just beginning to incorporate the numerous variables that contribute to comprehending who the student is in totality. Nonetheless, it would be beneficial to analyze the interrelationships between environment, heritage, experiences, personal orientation, and other characteristics so that those who support student achievement have a broader, more in-depth, and more comprehensive understanding of the students.

Figure 1

Student Success Intersectional Model Concept



Note. This figure provides an illustration to accompany the explanation offered regarding a conceptual model related to the explanation the Student Success Intersectional Model (SSIM). The figure was created by the authors of this presented research work.

We believe that explicitly addressing the notion of supporting a student's sense of belonging can only be incorporated into programming once students are placed at the center and their intersecting identities are understood. We contend that it is impossible to improve a student's sense of belonging if the steps to comprehend who they are not emphasized. Therefore, the next level of the SSIM concept is to deliver programmatic support that invests in students by utilizing the identities of students. None of the preceding can be accomplished without financial support. While the conventional model for student affairs programmatic initiatives is to use tuition funds designated for student enrichment activities, we propose that university administrators in academic and student affairs make financial commitments to the well-being of students. Moreover, we believe that the university's financial commitment to sponsor programming incorporating the SSIM concept could improve the sense of belonging among HSI students. Heuristically, we hope this conceptual model will assist student affairs professionals consider both the people they serve and the services they provide.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the findings from this study found that the participants were proud of their identity but found it difficult to connect with the greater HSI community. Participants said they felt othered, had apprehensions regarding structural systems of oppression, and had to perform femininity as second generation Afro-Caribbean women as part of the campus community. Though participants cited several concerning barriers at Bluff University they continued to find ways to foster connections that validated their existence on campus. This finding is powerful because it presents campuses but particularly HSI campuses an opportunity to thoughtfully cultivate a sense of belonging to understand this population's needs. We found the participant's narrative as an opportunity to fill a gap in HSI research by serving the unique needs of students from the African diaspora.

What we learned was institutions were in some ways complicit in making participants feel inferior or perhaps to word it differently never considered as the central focus for diversity and inclusion efforts. As a result, the participants experienced limited support or accessing support services were minimal. As a consequence of this, the participants felt compelled or important to separate themselves from their identities, rather than integrating their identities into campus. This particular finding warrants further exploration of the impact on mental health, student success, and connection to the university. The participants' comments specifically were critical of the practicability or struggled with seeing any benefits of assimilating into campus culture. This study's result suggests that universities can and should continue to broaden the conversation to support students, particularly in a manner that is more intersectional as students represent interlocking identities that may detour their sense of belonging on campus.

REFERENCES

- Crenshaw, K. (1989). Demarginalizing the intersection of race and sex: A black feminist critique of antidiscrimination doctrine, feminist theory and antiracist politics. *University of Chicago Legal Forum*, 1(8), 139–167.
- Deutscher, N. (2018). What Drives Second Generation Success? The Role of Education, Culture and Social Context. <https://doi.org/10.1111/ecin.12899>
- Garcia, G. A. (2019). *Defining “servengness” at Hispanic-Serving Institutions (HSIs): Practical implications for HSI leaders*. American Council on Education. <https://www.equityinhighered.org/resources/ideas-and-insights/defining-servengness-at-hispanic-serving-institutions-hsis-practical-implications-for-hsi-leaders>
- Garcia, G. A., & Dwyer, B. (2018). Exploring college students’ identification with an organizational identity for serving Latinx students at a Hispanic serving institution (HSI) and an emerging HSI. *American Journal of Education*, 124(2), 191–215. <https://doi.org/10.1086/695609>
- Gist-Mackey, A. N., Wiley, M. L., & Erba, J. (2018). “You’re doing great. Keep doing what you’re doing”: Socially supportive communication during first-generation college students’ socialization. *Communication Education*, 67(1), 52–72. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03634523.2017.1390590>
- Haynes, C., Joseph, N. M., Patton, L. D., Stewart, S., & Allen, E. L. (2020). Toward an understanding of intersectionality methodology: A 30-year literature synthesis of Black women’s experiences in higher education. *Review of Educational Research*, 90(6), 751–787. <https://doi.org/10.3102/0034654320946822>
- Jones. (2016). Authenticity in leadership: Intersectionality of identities. *New Directions for Student Leadership*, 2016(152), 23–34. <https://doi.org/10.1002/yd.20206>
- Karaman, M. A., Lerma, E., Vela, J. C., & Watson, J. C. (2019). Predictors of academic stress among college students. *Journal of College Counseling*, 22(1), 41–55. <https://doi.org/10.1002/jocc.12113>
- Kalmakis, K. A., Chiodo, L. M., Kent, N., & Meyer, J. S. (2020). Adverse childhood experiences, post-traumatic stress disorder symptoms, and self-reported stress among traditional and nontraditional college students. *Journal of American College Health*, 68(4), 411–418. <https://doi.org/10.1080/07448481.2019.1577860>
- McNair, T. B., Bensimon, E. M., & Malcom-Piqueux, L. (2020). *From equity talk to equity walk: Expanding practitioner knowledge for racial justice in higher education*. John Wiley & Sons.
- Merriam, S. B. (1998). *Qualitative research and case study application in education: Revised and expanded from case study research in education*. Jossey Bass.
- Muniz, H. (2021). *How many college students are in the U.S.? Best Colleges*. <https://www.bestcolleges.com/blog/how-many-college-students-in-the-us>
- Mwangi, C. A., Thelamour, B., Ezeofor, I., & Carpenter, A. (2018). “Black elephant in the room”: Black students contextualizing campus racial climate within US racial climate. *Journal of College Student Development*, 59(4), 456–474. <https://doi.org/10.1353/csd.2018.0042>

- Nunez, A. M., Hurtado, S., & Galdeano, E. C. (2015). *Why study Hispanic-Serving Institutions?* In A. M. Nunez, S. Hurtado, & E. C. Galdeano (Eds.), *Hispanic-Serving Institutions: Advancing research and transformative practice* (pp. 1–22). Routledge.
- Nguyen, T. H., & Nguyen, B. M. (2018). Is the “first-generation student” term useful for understanding inequality? The role of intersectionality in illuminating the implications of an accepted—yet unchallenged—term. *Review of Research in Education, 42*(1), 146–176. <https://doi.org/10.3102/0091732X18759280>
- Osterman, K. F. (2000). Students’ need for belonging in the school community. *Review of Educational Research, 70*, 323–367.
- Osterman, K. F. (2010). Teacher practice and students’ sense of belonging. *International research handbook on values education and student wellbeing*, 239–260.
- Patton, M. Q. (2002). Two decades of developments in qualitative inquiry: A personal, experiential perspective. *Qualitative social work, 1*(3), 261–283.
- Pike, G. R., & Kuh, G. D. (2005). First-and second-generation college students: A comparison of their engagement and intellectual development. *The Journal of Higher Education, 76*(3), 276–300.
- Porter, C. J. (2017). *Articulation of identity in Black undergraduate women: Influences, interactions, and intersections*. In L. D. Patton, & N. N. Croom (Eds.). *Critical perspectives on Black women and college success* (pp. 88–100). New York, NY: Taylor & Francis.
- Ryan, R. M., & Deci, E. L. (2000). Self-determination theory and the facilitation of intrinsic motivation, social development, and well-being. *American Psychologist, 55*(1), 68–78.
- Stanislaus, E. P. (2020). *We're here, we Exist: An exploration of how second-generation Afro-Caribbean college women make meaning of their race, ethnicity, and gender* (Publication No. 4486) [Doctoral dissertation, Florida International University]. Higher Education Commons.
- Steele, T. (2017). Retaining Black female college students: The effects of meritocracy on their ideas of success. *College Student Affairs Leadership, 4*(1), 1–10.
- Strayhorn, T. (2012). *College students’ sense of belonging: A Key to educational success for all students*. Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203118924>
- Strayhorn, T. (2019). *College Students’ Sense of Belonging* (2nd ed.). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315297293>
- Thelamour, B., George Mwangi, C., & Ezeofor, I. (2019). “We need to stick together for survival”: Black college students’ racial identity, same-ethnic friendships, and campus connectedness. *Journal of Diversity in Higher Education, 12*(3), 266–279. <https://doi/10.1037/dhe0000104>
- Walkington, L. (2017). How far have we really come? Black women faculty and graduate students’ experiences in higher education. *Humboldt Journal of Social Relations, 39*, 51–65. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/90007871>

EMMANUELA P. STANISLAUS, PhD, is the founder of Dr. Emmanuela Consulting. Prior to starting Dr. Emmanuela Consulting, she spent over 17 years in higher education administration with progressive professional experience within large research I and Hispanic Serving Institutions. Her research centers on the experiences of Black college women; campus climate; first-generation students; and examining intersections of race, ethnicity, and gender. Email: hello@dremmanuelaconsulting.com

AMANDA WILKERSON, EdD, is a dynamic force in academia, relentlessly probing the depths of K-20 education to elevate human potential. A beacon for equity and excellence, she's reshaping the higher education landscape through her unwavering commitment to collaboration, community engagement, and transformative action. At the University of Central Florida's College of Community Innovation and Education, Dr. Wilkerson shines as an Assistant Professor, pushing boundaries and igniting change. Email: amanda.wilkerson@ucf.edu

LYNELL S. HODGE, EdD, Lynell Hodge is a practitioner-scholar with two decades of higher education experience. Her research focus includes stress, vicarious/secondary trauma, mentoring, and culturally responsive pedagogical practices. Dr. Hodge has published several peer-reviewed articles, book chapters, and presents at conferences regularly. Dr. Hodge earned her Doctorate from the University of Central Florida in Higher Education and currently serves as a Training Specialist who champions professional development for university faculty and staff. Email: lynell@ucf.edu

Manuscript submitted: May 31, 2023

Manuscript revised: September 16, 2023

Accepted for publication: January 4, 2024
