

GENDER DIFFERENCES IN BLACK AND WHITE STUDENTS' ADJUSTMENT TO  
COLLEGE AT A PREDOMINANTLY WHITE UNIVERSITY

by

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## ABSTRACT

The present study explored whether there are significant differences between Black and White college freshmen students regarding factors related to retention (i.e., self-efficacy, perceived racism, cross-cultural communication difficulty, academic demands, career direction, social isolation, GPA, employment, familial responsibilities) at a predominantly white institution (PWI). Participants completed (a) *The General Self-Efficacy Scale* (GSE) (Schwarzer & Jerusalem, 1995), (b) *The Inventory of College Challenges for Ethnic Minority Students* (ICCEMS) (Ying, Lee, & Tsai, 2004), and (c) a demographic questionnaire. It was found that (a) Black and White students reported similar levels of self-efficacy, (b) Black students reported lower levels of unclear career direction and social isolation, (c) Black students reported utilizing loans less frequently and the Pell Grant more frequently than White students, and (d) they reported lower rates of employment and less concern about balancing work and school. Implications of these findings and other factors were discussed further.

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## CHAPTER ONE

### Literature Review

#### Introduction

One of the current issues in college education is determining factors that relate to retention of Black college students. According to the National Center for Education Statistics (2012), of all full-time first time students who attended a 4-year college in 2003-2004, only 51% of Blacks obtained a bachelor's degree, compared to 52% of Hispanics, 73% of Caucasians, and 76% of Asians who were enrolled during this same time period. These percentages suggest that there is a discrepancy in the college graduation rates of Blacks and Whites and Asians. The present study will examine factors that predict freshman to sophomore retention in Black and White students at a primarily White institution (PWI).

Different researchers have developed theories related to this discrepancy in college completion, and a number of studies have been conducted to address possible factors that could account for this discrepancy. One theory that has had an impact on the literature on the retention of ethnic minorities is Tinto's Integration Theory (1975, 1987, 1993). According to Tinto, an individual's tendency to persist to graduation relates most importantly to the characteristics of the individual, their interaction in the college, and the factors in the college that are associated with dropout from college. In addition, the most important aspects of persistence come from the family's characteristics and the individual's experiences prior to college. Tinto found that the family's socioeconomic status (SES), the individual's grade performance prior to college, and the level of social

integration and support within the institution all have a significant role in a student's college persistence. For example, students who dropped out felt they had less social integration than those who persisted. Tinto also noted college factors (e.g., resources, facilities, faculty members, campus arrangement, etc.) that have been associated with an individual's college persistence.

In his book *Leaving College*, Tinto (1987) states that departure from a university may also be due to individual isolation, especially from insufficient contact with peers, as well as faculty. These feelings of isolation are felt even in individuals who are not very different from their peers. This lack of social integration may also be linked to the retention of African American students in predominantly White institutions. Tinto also notes that African American students may find persistence in a university challenging due to discrimination and a lack of a supportive community, even in a community with members of the same racial origin. Common racial backgrounds do not necessarily lead to a commonality of interests and viewpoints. Tinto also makes the point that, on very large campuses, minority students have fewer choices in the type of communities they can associate themselves with than do white students, which can lead to feelings of isolation. Along with isolation, Tinto states that "individual departure from a university is due to deficiencies in 'intention, commitment, adjustment, difficulty, congruence, and isolation.'" (Tinto, 1987, p. 37). Research on the following factors thought to be related to student retention will be reviewed: (a) social integration; (b) sense of belonging; (c) self-efficacy; and (d) other factors related to retention.



**Social integration.** Social integration has been widely studied in regards to the retention of minority students. Adams (2005) used the *Black Ideology Scale* to measure the Black consciousness of students attending the University of Louisville in Kentucky. The scale contained six factors, including Black heritage, identity integration, White culture, Black defensiveness, acceptance of White authority, and militancy. Adams found a strong, positive correlation between students' interest in Africa and the number of Pan-African Studies courses they took (e.g., Intro to African American studies, Survey of African Music). Pan-Africanism is the term used to describe the various African movements that take place in order to unify Africans and extinguish the colonialism and white supremacy from Africa (Infoplease, 2013). Pan-African courses focus on the history of Africa in social and political perspectives and consist of observing how Africa's history has affected Africa by observing the effects from colonialism and independence to present day Africa (Indiana University of Pennsylvania, 2012).

Adams (2005) found a strong positive correlation between students' judgments of the importance of academic success and their future within the next five years, using the Black Ideology Scale (BIS). A significant correlation was also found between the importance of academic success and social acceptance, having friends, confidence toward Whites, and competitiveness. African American students who took more Pan-African Studies courses reported enjoying the classes and having had faculty who offered advice about feelings of social unacceptance, having no friends, and academic failure. The implication of these findings is that offering African American studies at PWIs and universities may correlate to an increase the academic success and feelings of social

acceptance in African American students and may consequently increase their rate of retention and persistence.

Jones and Williams (2006) examined how having an African American student center assisted minority students in adjusting to a Pacific Northwest PWI. The African American Student Center, or AASC, was designed to promote interaction between peers and faculty, as well as to provide mentoring services. Six male students were interviewed and asked questions related to their perceptions of the AASC. These students reported that the AASC student counselor was a role model for them and provided advice about how to react toward racist incidents at school. They also stated that the AASC helped them resolve problems they faced (e.g., academic advice, security, freedom to express ideas and concerns, etc.). Based on participants' responses, the authors concluded that the AASC played an important role in the retention of African American students at the PWI. The implication is that having African American mentors and advisors may have a significant impact on the retention of African American students at PWIs and may increase their likelihood of retention from the first to second year of college. However, due to the small sample size of the study, the results may not generalize to all populations of African American students at PWIs.

Tinto (1975) stated that a lack of social integration increases the probability of students leaving college and engaging in other activities (e.g., finding a job). PWIs that promote the social integration of minority students may be able to increase their intentions to persist. Social integration may be promoted in African American students by offering African American courses, utilizing motivational sciences (i.e., studying how

certain students are successful in school settings while others fail to develop the same knowledge to become academically successful) in the classroom (see Pintrich, 2003), and offering African American student centers.

**Sense of belonging.** Additionally, to increase students' intention to persist, one factor that may be beneficial to explore is students' sense of belonging. Students who have a lower sense of belonging tend to have a harder time with persistence. Thus, one way to increase retention may be to increase students' sense of belonging. Hausmann, Schofield, and Woods (2007) examined how African American and White freshmen's sense of belonging to a university related to their intention to persist. In this study, sense of belonging was defined as "the psychological sense that one is a valued member of the college community" (p. 804). Students were asked to complete surveys that included questions related to their sense of belonging, intentions to persist, and institutional commitment at the start of their first semester and at the end of their second semester. Students reported a greater sense of belonging at the beginning of the academic year. This was due to their ratings of peer group interactions, faculty interactions, and support from peers and parents. As the year progressed, students reported a decline in sense of belonging, which was due to lower academic integration and parental support. Academic integration relates to the student's involvement inside and outside of the classroom, including interactions with faculty, staff, and peers (Kraemer, 1997).

Students who reported higher academic integration also reported a greater sense of belonging, whereas students who reported lower academic integration also reported a lesser sense of belonging. Higher parental support was related to a decline in sense of

belonging, which may be due to students' greater connection to their home life instead of college, especially for those students who went away to college. Overall, the authors concluded that White students who reported more peer support had a faster decrease in sense of belonging over time, whereas African American students who had more peer support reported an increase in sense of belonging over time. Although the report for White students is counterintuitive, the decrease in sense of belonging may be due to the negative influence of peers and lower academic integration with faculty and staff. Thus, the trends for African American and White students were found to be reversed.

Hausmann et al. (2007) assessed the benefit of an intervention to improve students' sense of belonging. Three groups were studied: (a) the intervention group; (b) the gift group; and (c) the no gift group. Students in the intervention condition received gifts that displayed the university logo, name, and colors, as well as a message from the university administrators. Students in the gift group received gifts that were not associated with the university and that were administered by their psychology professors. Students in the no gift group did not receive any gifts.

Hausmann et al. (2007) found that students in the intervention group reported a greater sense of belonging than students in either of the other groups, as predicted by the researchers. Students (both African American and White) who received gifts that made them feel valued at their university had a smaller decline in sense of belonging than those in the control groups. The implication is that receiving gifts that emphasize their connection to the university may increase students' sense of belonging.

In another study on sense of belonging, Hutz and Martin (2007) studied differences in the adjustment of ethnocultural majority and minority first year college students by measuring (a) differences in individual variables, (b) ethnocultural fit and identity, and (c) perceptions of barriers and adaptations across cultural groups. The ethnicities represented in this study included (a) African Americans (12.6%), (b) European Americans (56.7%), (c) Hispanic Americans (11%), (d) Native Americans (17.3%), and (e) other ethnocultural minority students (2.4%). The following scales were used to measure differences in student adjustment: (a) *Perceptions of Barriers* (POB; Luzzo & McWhirter, 2001); (b) *Coping with Barriers* (CWB; Luzzo & McWhirter, 2001); (c) *Psychosocial Adaptation for Cultural and Contextual Correspondence* (PACCC-RV-II; Martin & Kulstad-Swartz, 1997); (d) *Multi-group Ethnic Identity Measure* (MEIM; Phinney, 1990, 1992; Roberts et. al., 1999); (e) *Student Adaptation to College Questionnaire* (SACQ; Baker & Siryk, 1989); and (f) a demographic questionnaire. Majority students scored significantly more positively on almost all of the scales and subscales that were administered. Majority students also reported more positive attitudes for the university and higher academic self-confidence. Ethnocultural minority students reported experiencing more barriers, such as discrimination based on gender or race, lack of support, child-care issues, and financial difficulties, than did students in the majority group; however, there were no significant group differences for perceptions of college adjustment, a variable related to a student's intention to persist or leave a university. To alleviate these group differences, the authors recommended providing faculty support to help advocate for and counsel ethnocultural minority

students. Although the results from this study have implications for ethnocultural students' success in college, this study's findings are limited due to its small sample of ethnocultural minority students (i.e., 16 African Americans, 14 Hispanic Americans, 22 Native Americans, and 3 other ethnocultural minority students compared to 72 European Americans) who participated and its grouping of all students into a single ethnocultural minority group, making individual ethnocultural group inferences difficult.

Increasing a student's sense of belonging may increase the probability of college persistence. This can be accomplished by increasing students' academic integration, offering gifts that are related to the university, and eliminating perceived barriers by providing faculty support and advising. Although universities can attempt to change factors related to their institution to promote college persistence in African American students, they should be cognizant of individual characteristics of this population. One individual characteristic that plays an important role in college persistence is student self-efficacy.

**Self-efficacy.** Self-efficacy is often described as an individual's belief in his or her own ability to achieve a goal. Self-efficacy has been shown to be an important factor related to retention. Ramos-Sanchez and Nichols (2007) examined how self-efficacy related to academic performance and college adjustment in first generation students (i.e., students whose parents did not attend college) and traditional college students (i.e., at least one parent holds a college degree) by using the *College Self-Efficacy Instrument* (CSEI; Solberg, O'Brien, Villareal, Kennel, & Davis, 1993) to measure students' self-perceptions of self-efficacy. Questions on this instrument were related to academics

(e.g., coursework), social experiences, and relationships with roommates. Students rated questions on a scale from 1 to 10, where 1 represents extremely low self-efficacy and 10 represents extremely high self-efficacy. The researchers found that a higher initial level of self-efficacy predicted better college adjustment by the end of the school year. This was true regardless of student group. For both groups, self-efficacy did not increase as the year progressed; however, traditional college students reported significantly higher levels of initial self-efficacy than did first generation students. This may be due to differences in parental influences on the importance of college and knowledge about how to adjust to the college setting. The researchers concluded that, in general, the higher rates of initial self-efficacy in traditional college students resulted in better academic success compared to first generation students who had lower initial rates of self-efficacy. Because the sample used in this study had a very low number of African American students ( $n = 3$ ), one should be careful in considering the implications this study has for African American students. However, according to Carroll and Chen (2005), Hispanics and Blacks are more likely to be first generation students, as well as to come from low income families. Overall, students who reported higher initial self-efficacy, especially traditional students, experienced greater academic success than those who reported lower initial self-efficacy.

More recently, a study by Parker (2011) examined whether Black college students at a large public regional PWI reported lower levels of perceived self-efficacy and higher levels of perceived racism, academic demands, and social isolation than White students, factors that may influence the retention of Black students. She hypothesized that (a) Black students would have significantly lower levels of self-efficacy, especially Black

men, (b) Black students would have higher perceived levels of racism and cross-cultural communication difficulty, (c) Black students would have higher perceived academic demands, especially Black men, (d) Black and White students would have similar perceived levels of unclear career direction, and (e) Black students would report having more social isolation than White students. These hypotheses were examined by utilizing information from a demographic questionnaire, the *General Self-Efficacy Scale* (GSE; Schwarzer & Jerusalem, 1995), and the *Inventory of College Challenges for Ethnic Minority Students* (ICCEMS; Ying et al., 2004).

Parker (2011) found that, as predicted, Black ( $M = 1.30$ ) and White ( $M = 1.33$ ) students reported similar levels of perceived career direction, and Black students reported lower levels of perceived self-efficacy than White students although this difference may not have been practically significant because the group means were almost the same (i.e.,  $M = 1.79$  for Black students and  $M = 1.92$  for White students). The remaining hypotheses were not supported; Black ( $M = 0.28$ ) and White ( $M = 0.33$ ) students reported similarly low levels of perceived racism and cross-cultural communication difficulty; Black ( $M = 1.30$ ) and White ( $M = 1.33$ ) students reported similar levels of perceived academic demand, with Black men and women reporting similar levels of perceived academic demand ( $p = .156$ ); and Black ( $M = 1.06$ ) and White ( $M = 1.07$ ) participants reported similar levels of perceived social isolation. The sample was comprised of about 75% White students ( $n = 171$ ; 57 males & 117 females) and about 25% Black students ( $n = 60$ ; 9 males & 51 females). Although this sample is proportional to the population of Black students enrolled at the university, the small number of Black men in the sample



prevented a test for gender differences as a function of ethnicity. For instance, according to the Middle Tennessee State University Factbook (2011), in 2011 there were approximately 26,442 students enrolled at the university; 4089 (16.6%) were African American, and 17,956 (72.8%) were Caucasian.

**Other factors related to retention.** Pfitzner, Brat, and Lang (2011) examined additional factors related to freshman to sophomore year retention in students from 367 colleges and universities in the U.S. The factors of focus included (a) whether the university was public or private, (b) the grades of freshmen at the end of the first year, (c) the number of freshmen living on campus, (d) SAT scores, and (e) tuition costs. Although the study did not specifically look at retention rates based on ethnicity, most factors that were examined could be related to PWIs and predominantly black universities. The researchers found that the average rate of retention at public ( $M = 76.86$ ) and private schools ( $M = 77.86$ ) was very similar (i.e., a 1% difference in favor of private schools). Not surprisingly, schools where students had higher SAT scores and that had higher tuition rates had higher rates of retention. For example, schools that had 100 points higher on the SAT had a predicted increase in retention of 4.24%. This may be due to both the quality of the students and the institutions. Also, schools that had a greater number of freshmen in good standing and freshmen living on campus had higher rates of retention. In addition to these factors, the authors suggested that having highly trained faculty (e.g., more members holding Ph.D. degrees) and strategies in place to improve student performance (e.g., tutors, study centers, quiet dorms) would increase the retention rates. The researchers concluded that recruiting higher quality students (e.g., higher SAT

scores) would lead to higher rates of retention; however, this style of recruitment is not practical for all universities, particularly large regional public universities which tend not to be as selective and have less competitive admission standards. For instance, public universities that increased their admission requirements to recruit higher quality students (i.e., raising minimal SAT scores) could anticipate lower acceptance rates and may experience lower enrollment of minority students. Those universities that can do other things, such as provide living arrangements on campus for freshmen, as well as tutors and study centers, may be better able to utilize strategies to increase the retention of both majority and minority students.

Most recently, Butterfield and Pemberton (2012) surveyed the relation between student demographics, such as gender, ethnicity, marital status, and financial status, and student college retention. A random sampling procedure that utilized the campus directory was used to send surveys to 547 students (some students were no longer enrolled because they had dropped out by the time of study). One hundred and three surveys were returned. The majority of respondents were female Caucasians between 18 and 24 years who reported using multiple sources of financial aid (e.g., loans, grants, scholarships, out of pocket). Most participants were unmarried, had no children, and had at least a part-time job. Most males who reported having children reported being enrolled full-time, and a few reported being enrolled part-time. For females, however, almost half of the respondents who had children reported they were either no longer enrolled (i.e., had already dropped out at the time of the study) or were only enrolled part-time. This gender difference in enrollment may be because female students in the study had more

familial responsibilities and demands (e.g., single mothers) than males in the study. The implication is that female students who have children may have more difficulties with retention than males who have children because of child-care or financial responsibilities.

Butterfield and Pemberton (2012) found that male students completed more semesters than female students, even though females were more likely to have received scholarships. This may be because more females reported having dropped out or being enrolled part-time, resulting in their taking longer to complete the same amount of coursework. Therefore, students who (a) had multiple sources of financial aid, (b) only worked part-time (e.g., work-study job on campus), and (c) were childless reported higher rates of retention, whereas students who (a) had more familial responsibilities, (b) had fewer sources of financial aid, and (c) worked full-time were less likely to persist in school. Although this study focused on differences between male and female students' genders, it did not provide much detail on the interaction of student ethnicity with these factors. For instance, it has been suggested that these factors (i.e., sources of financial aid, employment status/income level, familial responsibilities) play a role in the retention of African American and other minority students, as well. These factors (i.e., financial aid, employment status, familial responsibilities) have been shown to create gaps in graduation rates between African American and Caucasian students. For example, research from *The Journal of Blacks in Higher Education* (2009) shows that two-thirds of African American students who drop out of school do so because of financial reasons (e.g., increase in tuition, fees, textbooks, etc.) or because they have to enter the workforce to support their families. Although Butterfield and Pemberton (2012) sampled primarily

Caucasian students ( $n = 96$ ) rather than minority students ( $n = 7$  minority students, with only 1 African American student), schools that are able to determine how these factors differentially affect African Americans may be better able to develop strategies to increase the retention rate of this population.

### **Rationale for the Present Study**

**Limitations of existing research.** Although the amount of research on the college retention of African Americans is increasing, there is still a need for more research in this area. One of the most common limitations of existing research is the sample size of African American students in the existing studies. For example, Ramos-Sanchez and Nichols (2007), Jones and Williams (2006), and Butterfield and Pemberton (2012) all had under representations of African American students in their studies. In Ramos-Sanchez and Nichols, only 1.6% ( $n = 3$ ) of participants identified themselves as African American, and Jones and Williams only had six participants in their study that included only first-year students. In Butterfield and Pemberton's (2012) study, there was only 1 African American female student and no African American male participants, compared to 96 Caucasian student participants. Many studies also have a difference in gender representation. For instance, in Butterfield and Pemberton, there were 65 female participants (only 1 Black female), and male participants (0 Black males) only made up 36.9% ( $n = 38$ ) of the sample. In Parker (2011), although Black students comprised 25% of participants, only 9 of the 60 who participated were male. Thus, more research is needed to study potential gender differences in males' and females' retention rates as a function of ethnicity.

Another limitation of existing research is that some studies, such as Hutz and Martin (2007), have grouped all ethnocultural minority students together into one group. Additionally, the *other ethnocultural minority* category in this study only comprised 2.4% of the sample. Although the data these researchers collected is valuable, their results may not fully generalize to African American college students. Therefore, there is still a need for more extensive research on factors that are related to the retention of African American students. Future research should address these issues in order to better understand retention challenges in African American students.

**The present study.** The present study, an extension of Parker (2011), examined further factors that may influence the retention rates of Black and White male and female college students who attend Middle Tennessee State University, a large, regional southern PWI. This issue continues to be important because the number of Black students enrolled at MTSU increases every year. For instance, in Fall 2010, there were 4,307 Black students who made up 16.3% of the student body; however, by Fall 2013, there were 4,690 Black students, making up 19.6% of the student body (Middle Tennessee State University, 2013). This number was similar in Fall 2014; Black students comprised 19.7% of the student body (MTSU, 2014). According to data from Forbes (2013), the MTSU 2012 graduation rate for Black students was 43%, compared to 45% for White students. These data suggest that there is little difference in the graduation/retention rates of these two populations at the present university although these two groups comprise markedly different percentages of the student population. White (70.47%) and Black (17.92%) students make up the highest rates of students enrolled by ethnicity, followed

by Hispanic (3.34%) and Asian (2.63%) student populations. According to the MTSU 2014 Fact Book (MTSU, 2014), of the 4012 MTSU 2013-2014 graduates, 16% were Black, and 76% were White.

One possibility is that MTSU may differ from the national norm in terms of ethnocultural student graduation and persistence because it does a better job of catering to the needs of a diverse student body. Parker (2011) also showed that Black and White students at this PWI shared similar experiences with the following factors related to retention: (a) self-efficacy; (b) perceived racism; (c) academic demands; (d) career direction; and (e) social isolation. Perhaps these similarities play a role in the nearly identical graduation rates (expressed as a percentage) of these populations.

What continues to be unknown, however, is whether there are gender differences as a function of ethnicity for some of the other factors known to be related to retention. In Butterfield and Pemberton's (2012) study, gender differences in retention were found for financial status and whether participants were married and/or had children. This is an important issue to examine in relation to retention because MTSU has such a high nontraditional student population and has lower admission requirements than some of the other public schools in the state, translating to lower high school GPAs and ACT scores.

This study is an extension of Parker (2011). In the present study, first-year Black and White male and female college students completed *The General Self-Efficacy Scale* (GSE) (Schwarzer & Jerusalem, 1995), *The Inventory of College Challenges for Ethnic Minority Students* (ICCEMS) (Ying et al., 2004), and a demographic questionnaire in order to assess additional factors related to retention. Efforts were made to recruit a

large enough sample of male participants from both ethnic groups to address differences as a function of both ethnicity and gender. To do this, data was collected for the entire semester, rather than for one month, as occurred for Parker (2011). The information gathered from these scales was used to support or refute the following hypotheses:

**Hypotheses.**

1. Black students will report similar levels of self-efficacy than White students.
2. Black and White students will report similar levels of perceived racism, academic demands, career direction, and social isolation, despite gender.
3. Black and White males will report significantly lower levels of perceived career direction than Black and White females.
4. Black students will report less staff support than White students.
5. Black and White females will have higher high school GPAs than Black and White males.
6. Black students will report higher rates of employment (part-time and full-time) than White students.
7. Female students will report more familial responsibilities (i.e., being married or having children) than male students.
8. Black students will report having fewer financial resources for college and taking out more financial aid than White students.
9. White students will report a greater likelihood of persisting from the freshman year to the sophomore year than Black students.

## CHAPTER TWO

### Method

#### Participants

The participants were 225 Black and White male ( $n = 74$ ) and female ( $n = 151$ ) first-year students ( $M = 19$  years) enrolled in general psychology courses. The final sample of participants included (a) 18 Black males, (b) 46 Black females, (c) 56 White males, and (d) 105 White females. An additional 20 participants (5 males and 15 females) were excluded from the sample because their ethnicity was “Other.” Participants were recruited utilizing the Psychology Department’s Sona System during Spring 2015.

#### Materials

**Demographic questionnaire.** The demographic questionnaire consists of 19 questions about students’ ethnicity, gender, and classification (e.g., freshman, sophomore, etc.). Other questions include whether students (a) are international, (b) are part-time or full-time, (c) are a member of a fraternity/sorority, (d) are a student athlete, (e) are living on-campus or off-campus, (f) are knowledgeable of their parents’ highest level of education attained, (g) have selected a major, (h) are a first generation student, (i) are taking any prescribed courses in Math or Reading, (j) are knowledgeable of their high school GPA, (k) are knowledgeable of their ACT score, (l) are married, (m) have children (n) are knowledgeable of their family’s SES, and (o) are taking or plan to take an African American studies course. Demographic questions were primarily adapted from Parker (2011). A complete list of questions can be found in Appendix A. Demographic information about participants can be found in Tables 1 and 2.



Table 1

*Descriptive Statistics of Demographic Questionnaire*

Groups				
	Black		White	
	Men	Women	Men	Women
International Student	0	0	2	4
First Generation Student	4	14	6	17
Member of Fraternity/Sorority	1	1	8	18
Member of Student Organization	4	18	19	34
Decided on a Major	15	43	50	82
Taking African American Studies	2	19	0	5
Children	0	1	1	2
Married	0	0	5	2
Living on-campus	10	34	17	34
Living off-campus	8	11	39	70

Table 2

*Descriptive Statistics for Parental Education*

Parental Education Completed								
	Black				White			
	Mother		Father		Mother		Father	
	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women
Not High School	1	6	0	5	2	4	4	8
High School	5	13	4	15	20	32	21	32
Some College	1	6	3	6	11	19	16	17
Associate's Degree	2	5	1	3	7	12	1	12
Bachelor's Degree	5	11	7	9	9	28	4	18
Master's Degree	4	3	1	3	5	7	5	6
Doctoral Degree	0	1	2	1	0	0	2	4

**The General Self-Efficacy Scale.** *The General Self-Efficacy Scale* (GSE; Schwarzer & Jerusalem, 1995) measures factors related to students' self-perceptions of how they believe they handle certain situations. The scale consists of 10 items that are rated on a 4-point Likert scale, where 1 = *not at all true* and 4 = *exactly true*. An average score is calculated to determine overall levels of self-efficacy. Lower scores indicate lower levels of self-efficacy, whereas higher scores indicate higher levels of self-efficacy.

**The Inventory of College Challenges for Ethnic Minority Students.** *The Inventory of College Challenges for Ethnic Minority Students* (ICCEMS; Ying et al., 2004) consists of 55 items that assess challenges for ethnic minority students in college. Items on the ICCEMS are worded as "Did this happen to you DURING THIS SEMESTER?" Participants respond either *not at all* (0), *a little* (1), *somewhat* (2), *often* (3), or *all the time* (4).

The following factors are assessed via the ICCEMS (Ying et al., 2004):

(a) perceived racism and cross-cultural communication difficulty (4 items); (b) academic demands (3 items); (c) financial worry (5 items); (d) unclear career direction (4 items); (e) social isolation (4 items); (f) counseling needs (3 items); (g) housing problems (3 items); (h) difficulty with academic expression (2 items); (i) romantic difficulties (3 items); (j) homesickness (3 items); (k) inability to study (3 items); (l) pressure to use substances (2 items); and (m) unfamiliarity with campus (3 items). Three items are independent items.

**Procedure**

The Institutional Review Board (IRB; see Appendix B) granted approval before the online research study was conducted. Participants completed an online survey comprised of the demographic questionnaire, the GSE (Schwarzer & Jerusalem, 1995), and the ICCEMS (Ying et al., 2004). First, participants read the informed consent letter (see Appendix C). Next, the participants completed the entire survey online via the Sona System. The online survey took approximately 20-30 minutes to complete, and participants received one research credit for their participation. Upon completion, participants read a debriefing statement (see Appendix D).

## CHAPTER THREE

### Results

A series of between subjects ANOVAs were completed to assess the nine hypotheses that were made prior to data collection. Hypotheses will be addressed in order.

#### Hypothesis 1

The first hypothesis was that Black and White students would report similar levels of self-efficacy. A one-way ANOVA was utilized to determine if Black and White students reported similar levels of self-efficacy. There was no significant difference in self-efficacy,  $F(1, 221) = .224, p = .637$ . Thus, this hypothesis was supported. Black students ( $M = 31.76, SD = 4.33$ ) reported comparable levels to White students ( $M = 32.04, SD = 3.88$ ).

#### Hypothesis 2

The second hypothesis was that Black and White students would report similar levels of perceived racism, academic demands, career direction, and social isolation, despite gender. A one-way ANOVA for student ethnicity was used to analyze students' scores on the respective subscales of the ICCEMS. There were significant group differences for unclear career direction,  $F(1, 223) = 4.98, p = .027$ , and social isolation,  $F(1, 221) = 3.92, p = .049$ . Black students ( $M = 7.19, SD = 4.47$ ) reported lower levels of unclear career direction than White students ( $M = 8.54, SD = 3.96$ ), meaning Black students were more sure about their career path than White students (i.e., lower scores on this factor are more desirable). Black students ( $M = 3.74, SD = 3.61$ ) also reported lower

levels of social isolation than White students ( $M = 4.81, SD = 3.62$ ). There were no other significant group differences as a function of ethnicity. Thus, this hypothesis was partially supported. Means for group scores on the ICCEMS subscales can be found in Table 3.

### **Hypothesis 3**

The third hypothesis was that Black and White males will report significantly lower levels of perceived career direction than Black and White females. There was not a significant group difference for perceived career direction,  $F(1, 222) = .954, p = .330$ ; Black and White males ( $M = 7.77, SD = 4.17$ ) reported similar levels of career direction to Black and White females ( $M = 8.34, SD = 4.14$ ). Thus, this hypothesis was not supported.

### **Hypothesis 4**

The fourth hypothesis was that Black students would report less staff support than White students. This was analyzed by looking at reported levels for counseling needs, a measure which included the following items: (a) had difficulty getting needed information from your academic advisor; (b) had difficulty finding a counselor for your personal needs (e.g., academic, career, and emotional, etc.); and (c) had difficulty getting the help you needed from a counselor. A one-way ANOVA for ethnicity showed no significant difference in level of staff support reported by Black and White students,  $F(1, 212) = 1.23, p = .269$ , although Black students ( $M = 2.50, SD = 3.18$ ) reported slightly lower levels of staff support compared to White students ( $M = 3.03, SD = 3.14$ ). Thus, this hypothesis also was not supported.

Table 3

*Subscore Means on the ICCEMS by Ethnicity*

	Ethnicity					
	Black			White		
	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Racism & Cross-Cultural Communication Difficulty	64	2.05	2.28	159	1.55	2.40
Counseling Needs	62	2.50	3.18	152	3.03	3.14
Financial Worry	61	5.60	4.42	156	7.67	4.64
Academic Demands	64	4.31	2.76	159	4.82	2.58
Unclear Career Direction	64	7.19	4.47	160	8.54	3.96
Housing Problems	63	3.44	2.62	150	2.52	2.59
Social Isolation	62	3.74	3.61	160	4.81	3.62
Romantic Difficulties	58	3.95	3.17	153	3.16	2.94
Homesickness	63	3.97	2.48	159	3.41	2.78
Difficulty with Academic Expression	64	2.38	2.02	160	2.00	2.05
Unfamiliarity with Campus	64	3.06	2.02	159	3.79	1.95
Inability to Study	64	2.39	2.67	159	3.48	2.86
Pressure to Use Substance	64	0.14	0.43	158	0.30	0.81

### **Hypothesis 5**

It was predicted that Black and White females would have higher high school GPAs than Black and White males. A one-way ANOVA for participants' sex was conducted to analyze reported high school GPAs. There was a significant group difference for sex for high school GPA,  $F(1, 212) = 9.39, p = .002$ ; female students ( $M = 3.53, SD = 0.39$ ) reported having higher high school GPAs than male students ( $M = 3.36, SD = 0.38$ ). Thus, this hypothesis was supported.

### **Hypothesis 6**

It was predicted that Black students would report higher rates of employment (part-time and full-time) than White students. One-way ANOVAs for ethnicity were conducted to analyze rates of employment. Due to the absence of a direct question about employment on the demographic questionnaire, factors related to employment, finances, and work/school balance were analyzed instead. On factors related to work, finances, and time management, there was a significant difference between Black and White students,  $F(1, 218) = 11.09, p = .001$ ; Black students ( $M = 5.10, SD = 3.86$ ) reported lower levels of employment than White students ( $M = 7.09, SD = 4.00$ ). When asked about balancing work and school, there was a significant difference between Black and White students,  $F(1, 219) = 17.65, p < .001$ . Black students reported less concern about this balance ( $M = 1.21, SD = 1.47$ ) than White students ( $M = 2.16, SD = 1.50$ ), perhaps because they also reported working less. These mean scores correspond with responses ranging from *a little* (1) to *somewhat* (2) on the ICCEMS. When asked about financial pressures (e.g., paying for tuition, books, etc.), however, there was not a significant difference,  $F(1, 224) = .489,$



$p = .485$ . Black students reported similar levels ( $M = 1.75, SD = 1.40$ ) as White students ( $M = 1.89, SD = 1.40$ ). Additionally, when asked about likeliness of dropping out due to financial reasons, there was no significant difference,  $F(1, 224) = .779, p = .379$ . Black students ( $M = 2.02, SD = 1.03$ ) reported being no more likely than White students ( $M = 1.89, SD = 0.96$ ) to drop out for financial reasons. These mean scores correspond with responses ranging from *very unlikely* (1) to *unlikely* (2). Therefore, this hypothesis was partially supported.

### **Hypothesis 7**

It was predicted that female students would report having more familial responsibilities (i.e., being married or having children) than male students. One-way ANOVAs were conducted to test this hypothesis. There was not a significant group difference for having children,  $F(1, 190) = .015, p = .902$ ; however, there was a significant difference for marital status,  $F(1, 224) = 4.93, p = .027$ . Female students ( $M = 0.02, SD = 0.15$ ) and male students ( $M = 0.02, SD = 0.13$ ) were identical in their reports of having children; however, female students ( $M = 0.01, SD = 0.12$ ) were less likely to report being married compared to males students ( $M = 0.07, SD = 0.25$ ). It should be noted, however, that the vast majority of participants did not have children and were not married, as evidenced by the numbers in Table 1. Thus, this hypothesis was not supported.

### **Hypothesis 8**

For the eighth hypothesis, it was predicted that Black students would report having fewer financial resources for college and taking out more financial aid than White

students. A series of one-way ANOVAs was conducted to analyze the use of scholarships, grants, and loans. For scholarships, there was no significant effect of ethnicity,  $F(1, 219) = .643, p = .424$ . Black students ( $M = 0.81, SD = 0.39$ ) reported similar levels of utilizing scholarships as White students ( $M = 0.76, SD = 0.43$ ). For grants, there was not a significant effect for ethnicity,  $F(1, 219) = .245, p = .621$ ; Black students ( $M = 0.45, SD = 0.50$ ) also reported similar levels of utilizing grants as White students ( $M = 0.42, SD = 0.50$ ). The grant category included items such as the HOPE scholarship, which is an academic scholarship, and the DREAM scholarship, which is a need-based scholarship for first generation college students. For loans, however, there was a significant effect for ethnicity,  $F(1, 219) = .246, p = .019$ . Contrary to what was expected, Black students ( $M = 0.39, SD = 0.49$ ) reported lower levels of utilizing loans than White students ( $M = 0.56, SD = 0.50$ ). For the Pell Grant, however, Black students ( $M = 0.75, SD = 0.43$ ) reported higher use of the Pell Grant than White students ( $M = 0.42, SD = 0.50$ ),  $F(1, 213) = 20.58, p < .001$ .

### **Hypothesis 9**

The ninth hypothesis predicted that White students would report a greater likelihood of persisting from the freshman year to the sophomore year than Black students. A one-way ANOVA for ethnicity was conducted to analyze reported likelihood of persistence. There was not a significant group difference for ethnicity for persisting from freshman year to sophomore year,  $F(1, 218) = .059, p = .808$ . White students ( $M = 4.39, SD = 1.18$ ) and Black students ( $M = 4.35, SD = 0.85$ ) reported comparable

levels of expected persistence to the sophomore year. Thus, this hypothesis was not supported.

### **Additional Data**

Additional analyses were conducted on some of the additional data that was collected to determine if there are other factors influencing retention for Black and White students. These factors included (a) high school GPA, (b) ACT scores, (c) worrying about paying for college, and (d) likeliness of graduating. There was not a significant difference for ethnicity for high school GPA,  $F(1, 212) = 3.40, p = .067$ . However, there was a significant difference for ACT scores,  $F(1, 191) = 45.21, p < .001$ . For high school GPA, Black students ( $M = 3.40, SD = 0.37$ ) reported lower averages than White students ( $M = 3.51, SD = 0.40$ ). For ACT scores, Black students ( $M = 19.92, SD = 2.63$ ) reported lower scores than White students ( $M = 23.27, SD = 3.43$ ). There were no significant differences for (a) worrying about paying for college,  $F(1, 191) = 2.40, p = .123$ , or (b) likeliness of graduating,  $F(1, 191) = 1.79, p = .182$ . For worrying about paying for college, Black students ( $M = 2.28, SD = 0.63$ ) reported slightly higher levels than White students ( $M = 2.13, SD = 0.76$ ). For likeliness of graduating, Black students ( $M = 4.35, SD = 0.83$ ) reported slightly higher levels than White students ( $M = 4.08, SD = 1.23$ ).

## CHAPTER FOUR

### Discussion

#### Summary of Findings

The purpose of the present study was to determine whether Black and White students from a southern PWI showed significant differences in factors related to retention (e.g., self-efficacy, racism and cross-cultural communication difficulty, academic demands, career direction, social isolation). The results of this research can be used to help address the differences in Black and White students' degree attainment. Previous research has examined these factors in relation to minority students and White students, but not specifically Black students, and in particular Black males.

It was predicted that (a) Black and White students would report similar levels of unclear career direction and social isolation, (b) Black students would report less staff support than White students, (c) Black students would report higher rates of employment than White students, (d) female students would report more familial responsibilities (i.e., being married) than male students, and (e) Black students would report having fewer financial resources for college and taking out more financial aid than White students. The following results were found and not supported by hypotheses: (a) Black and White students reported a significant difference for unclear career direction and social isolation; (b) Black and White students reported similar levels of staff support; (c) Black students reported lower rates of employment than White students; (d) male students reported a higher frequency of being married than female students; (e) Black and White students

reported similar levels of utilizing scholarships and grants; and (f) Black students reported lower levels of utilizing loans than White students.

According to the results of this study, the following hypotheses were supported: (a) Black and White students reported similar levels of self-efficacy; (b) Black and White students reported similar levels of perceived racism and academic demands; (c) female students reported higher high school GPAs than male students; and (d) Black students reported utilizing the Pell Grant more than white students but reported having loans at lower rates.

The following factors were found to be significantly different between Black and White students, and often in a nonintuitive way: (a) unclear career direction and social isolation; (b) high school GPA (by sex); (c) rates of employment; (d) marital status (by sex); (e) utilization of loans; (f) utilization of the Pell Grant; and (g) worrying about balancing work and school. The predictions made by the researcher were somewhat influenced by the results from Parker's (2011) previous research at the same university. The results, however, differed from Parker's findings. For unclear career direction and social isolation, for example, it was predicted that Black and White students would report similar levels of unclear career direction and social isolation. In the present study, Black students reported lower levels of unclear career direction and social isolation. It is possible that more Black students took University 1010, a course designed to help undeclared college students explore career options and become more involved with the university. The higher level of perceived unclear career direction for White students may be due to these students in the sample needing more time to explore career options before

committing to any individual career choice. It may also be due to feeling pressure from parents or other family members to make a career choice. Additionally, Black students reported lower levels of perceived social isolation. This may be due to the diversity of the PWI. For example, MTSU's Intercultural and Diversity Affairs (IDA) office hosts events (e.g., cultural meals, conversation partners meal, culture fests) to unify students of different cultures and ethnicities to ensure that students have the best college experience.

On factors related to work, finances, and time management, Black students reported lower rates of employment and less concern about balancing work and school. These students may be financially secure for the semester and are focusing on their academics rather than splitting their time between work and school. It should also be noted that there was not a direct question asking students if they worked part-time or full-time in the demographic questionnaire. Therefore, this information should be interpreted with caution.

For marital status, it was predicted that female students would be more likely to report being married than male students. The results from the present study, however, showed that male students reported being married more often than female students. This was a nonintuitive finding, especially due to the lower sample of males ( $n = 74$ ) in the study. This finding is surprising also due to the young age of participants ( $M = 19$  years). Although males were more likely to report being married than females, the vast majority of participants reported not being married. The mean scores for this factor for males ( $M = 0.07$ ) and females ( $M = 0.01$ ) suggests that although there may have been a significant

difference between the sexes, the rates of freshmen students being married were very low.

Another factor that had a significant group difference was financial resources. Black students reported using loans less frequently than White students. The majority of Black students reported using scholarships and the Pell Grant more than any other type of financial aid, whereas White students reported using scholarships and loans more frequently. The higher usage of the Pell Grant by Black students may be due to Black students meeting the qualifications more often than White students. Pell Grants are generally needs-based and provided to students from low-income families. Also, the amount from the grant depends on (a) the student's expected family contribution, (b) the cost of attendance, (c) the student's enrollment status (i.e., part-time or full-time), and (d) whether the student attends for a full academic year. The difference between Black and White students' financial resources may be due to the eligibility requirements for the scholarship, loan, etc. For example, the DREAM scholarship is designed to support first generation students on a needs basis. Other factors may be involved in financial aid resources, such as parents' income, state/non-state residency status, etc.

Although Black and White students reported similar levels of perceived racism, both ethnicities reported higher levels compared to previous research by Parker (2011). In Parker's study, Black ( $M = 0.28$ ) and White ( $M = 0.33$ ) students reported much lower levels of perceived racism four years ago than Black ( $M = 2.05$ ) and White ( $M = 1.55$ ) students did in the present study; Although Black students in the present study reported higher levels of perceived racism than White students, the difference was not significant.

The increase in perceived racism overall may reflect a heightened awareness and sensitivity to discrimination around the nation, particularly to events occurring Spring 2015, rather than to actual changes at the campus level. This may be due to heightened awareness of racial discrimination that has been brought to attention via media. For example, recently in Oklahoma, a fraternity was shut down due to a racist chant being recorded via smartphone. This type of action along with a heightened awareness of racial discrimination may increase the likelihood that Black and White students report higher levels of perceived racism.

The heightened awareness and perception of racism is not necessarily specific to one ethnicity, as the results of this study suggest. For example in Nashville, TN, groups of people of all ethnicities marched in downtown Nashville during Spring 2015. The protest blocked off I-24 and streets downtown while people unified to talk about the discrimination in Ferguson, MO (i.e., the death of Michael Brown). Although this protest was peaceful (police officers even helped by offering hot chocolate, coffee, and water), the riots that took place in Ferguson, where the incident happened, were not. Other nonviolent protests took place on the MTSU campus as well at this time.

Similar to Parker (2011), Black and White students showed comparable levels on other factors related to retention (i.e., perceived racism and cross-cultural communication difficulty, self-efficacy, academic demands). This may be due to the southern PWI (MTSU) meeting the needs of Black students as the population of students grow. The staff/faculty at MTSU may provide adequate support regarding academic demands and self-efficacy. Previous research has found differences between Black and White students



on these factors. For example, Hutz and Martin (2007) found that ethnocultural minorities experienced more barriers (e.g., discrimination based on gender or race, lack of support, child-care issues, and financial difficulties) than majority students. The differences in these findings may be due to the support provided by staff. Although some of the universities were also PWIs, other schools may not provide enough support to ethnocultural minorities, leading to a decrease in sense of belonging, a factor related to retention. As noted earlier, the graduation rates for Black and White students at MTSU are comparable. Although there is a smaller population of Black students at MTSU, the graduation rates are similar (43% for Black students and 45% for White students) (Forbes, 2013), suggesting that there other factors that play a role in the retention of minorities.

In Parker's (2011) study, it was mentioned that there are factors known as first determinant factors that influence retention of minority students; these are factors students bring with them to college, which can relate to retention based on Tinto's (1975) research. Some of these factors include (a) high school GPA, (b) ACT/SAT scores, (c) academic abilities, and (d) time management skills. Analysis of two of these factors, high school GPA and ACT scores, showed significant differences between Black and White students. Black students reported lower scores for both high school GPA ( $M = 3.40$ ) and ACT ( $M = 19.92$ ) than White students GPA ( $M = 3.51$ ) and ACT ( $M = 23.27$ ). While there was not a significant difference for high school GPA, there was a significant difference for ACT scores. These results suggest that White students in this sample may be prepared to perform better academically and show more college

preparedness than Black students in this sample; preparedness for college level work can play a role in student retention because students who perform poorly in school are less likely to complete a degree. Because students in this study were only in their first year, it may be too soon to know how grades affect financial aid and future retention. On other factors, however, such as (a) worrying about paying for college, (b) reported likeliness of dropping out for financial reasons, (c) reported likeliness of returning for the sophomore year, and (d) reported likeliness of graduating, Black and White students were similar. Therefore, White students at MTSU may be more prepared for college than Black students, but it does not adversely affect their perceptions of persistence in college at this point in time.

### **Limitations**

There were several limitations of the present study that may have affected the results of the research. First, there were only 64 Black students in the study, compared to 161 White students. Also, there were only 18 Black males in the study compared to 46 Black females, 56 White males, and 105 White females. According to the MTSU 2014 Fact Book (2014), the student population at MTSU is comprised of 67% White students and 19.7% Black students; thus this population is representative of the whole population. It should be noted, however, that the present study had more Black participants than previous research studies have had (e.g., Hutz & Martin, 2007; Ramos-Sanchez & Nichols, 2007), including those that have specifically examined retention in Black students (Parker, 2011).

Another limitation of the present study is that data was collected only during the Spring 2015 semester. Although data collection lasted throughout the semester, it would have been beneficial to collect data on first semester students; it is possible that those students who were most at risk for dropping out of school (perhaps because of preparation or social isolation) would have dropped out by the second semester. Also, in order to replicate Parker (2011), it will be important to include students who are in their first semester of college. Therefore, results from this study should be interpreted with caution in relation to first semester freshmen students. Students' perceptions may have changed after the first semester, which may result in different factors predicting retention over time. Additionally, students may have a better idea of what is required of them to be successful, leading to different reports of academic demands and career direction.

### **Future Research**

Future research should use a larger sample of Black participants, especially Black males. Additionally, studies should compare differences between PWIs and HBCUs, in terms of the support provided to minority students. This research has the potential to benefit Black students at PWIs if schools understand the types of supports offered in both type of universities. Future research could also follow students through their freshmen first and second semesters to determine if there are differences in factors related to retention from the beginning to the end of the first year. A longitudinal study could also be beneficial in tracking students' college career from start to end and determining if levels of self-efficacy change throughout a student's college career.

In conclusion, universities should continue to attempt to bridge the gap between White and Black students' degree attainment. The present study adds to the literature on the retention rates of Black students in college; however, it demonstrates the need for more research on the reasons for the gap in degree attainment and how universities can support all minority students. The researcher recommends that universities make efforts to provide supports to all students. This could be done by (a) providing programs that may increase students' self-efficacy about school, (b) providing mentoring/counseling sessions for students who need additional support, including financial advising, in their college career, and (c) ensuring that all students are provided with the tools necessary for academic preparedness and success.

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**APPENDICES**

**APPENDIX A**  
**Demographic Questionnaire**

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**Instructions: Please answer the following information about yourself.**

1. Sex
  - a. Male
  - b. Female
2. Age \_\_\_\_\_ (birthday: month/day/year)
3. Ethnicity
  - a. Black
  - b. White
  - c. Other (please specify \_\_\_\_\_)
4. Are you an international student?
  - a. Yes
  - b. No
5. What is your current classification in college?
  - a. Freshmen (0-30 hrs.)
  - b. Sophomore (31-60 hrs.)
  - c. Junior (61-90 hrs.)
  - d. Senior (> 90 hrs.)
6. What is your current enrollment characterized as?
  - a. Full-time ( $\geq$  12 hours)
  - b. Part-time (< 12 hours)

7. Are you a member of a social fraternity or sorority?
- a. Yes
  - b. No
8. Are you a student-athlete on a team sponsored by your institution's athletics department?
- a. Yes
  - b. No
9. Are you an active member of at least one student organization on campus?
- a. Yes
  - b. No
10. What is your current residency?
- a. I live on campus (e.g., dormitory or other campus housing)
  - b. I live off-campus (e.g., with parents, in an apartment)
11. What is the highest level of education that your parent(s) completed:
- Mother
- a. Did not finish high school
  - b. Graduated from high school
  - c. Attended college but did not complete degree
  - d. Completed an associate's degree (e.g., community college)
  - e. Completed a bachelor's degree
  - f. Completed a master's degree (e.g., M.A., M.S.)
  - g. Completed a doctoral degree

Father

- a. Did not finish high school
- b. Graduated from high school
- c. Attended college but did not complete degree
- d. Completed an associate's degree (e.g., community college)
- e. Completed a bachelor's degree
- f. Completed a master's degree (e.g., M.A., M.S.)
- g. Completed a doctoral degree

12. Have you decided on a major?

- a. Yes
- b. no

If yes, please list your major.

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13. How often do you worry about being successful in your major?

- a. Never
- b. Sometimes
- c. Often

14. Are you the first person in your immediate family (mother, father, siblings) to attend college?

- a. Yes
- b. No

15. Are you (or have you) taken any prescribed courses in Math or Reading?

- a. Yes
- b. No

16. Have you taken (or do you plan to take) an African American studies course while at MTSU?

- a. Yes                      b. No

17. What was your high school G.P.A. at graduation?

\_\_\_\_\_

18. What was your highest score on the ACT?

\_\_\_\_\_

19. Are you currently married?

- a. Yes                      b. No

20. Do you have children?

- a. Yes                      b. No

If so, list their age(s) here. \_\_\_\_\_

21. Did you qualify for or do you have a Pell Grant?

- a. Yes                      b. No

22. Which type of financial aid do you have? (mark all that apply)

- a. Scholarships (e.g., HOPE, Dream, Other)
- b. Grants
- c. Loans
- d. None

23. How often do you worry about paying for college?

- a. Never
- b. Sometimes

c. Often

24. How likely are you to drop out for financial reasons?

a. Very unlikely

b. Unlikely

c. Neither unlikely or likely

d. Likely

e. Very Likely

25. How likely are you to return to MTSU next year for your sophomore year?

a. Very unlikely

b. Unlikely

c. Neither unlikely or likely

d. Likely

e. Very Likely

26. How likely are you to graduate from MTSU?

a. Very unlikely

b. Unlikely

c. Neither unlikely or likely

d. Likely

e. Very Likely



**APPENDIX B****IRB Approval Letter**

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4/18/2014

Investigator(s): Jarren Brock, Dr. Michelle Boyer-Pennington  
Department: Psychology  
Investigator(s) Email Address: jbb4c@mtmail.mtsu.edu, Michelle.Boyer-Pennington@mtsu.edu

Protocol Title: Gender Differences in Black and White Students' Adjustment to College at a Predominantly White University

Protocol Number: #14-341

Dear Investigator(s),

Your study has been designated to be exempt. The exemption is pursuant to 45 CFR 46.101(b)(2) Educational Tests, Surveys, Interviews, or Observations.

We will contact you annually on the status of your project. If it is completed, we will close it out of our system. You do not need to complete a progress report and you will not need to complete a final report. It is important to note that your study is approved for the life of the project and does not have an expiration date.

The following changes must be reported to the Office of Compliance before they are initiated:

- Adding new subject population
- Adding a new investigator
- Adding new procedures (e.g., new survey; new questions to your survey)
- A change in funding source
- Any change that makes the study no longer eligible for exemption.

The following changes do not need to be reported to the Office of Compliance:

- Editorial or administrative revisions to the consent or other study documents
- Increasing or decreasing the number of subjects from your proposed population

If you encounter any serious unanticipated problems to participants, or if you have any questions as you conduct your research, please do not hesitate to contact us.

Sincerely,

Kellie Hilker, Compliance Officer  
Office of Compliance  
615-494-8918

## APPENDIX C

### Informed Consent Letter

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This study consists of an online survey, which you may now participate in. You will receive one research credit immediately upon completion of the survey. The survey consists of a number of multiple-choice or forced choice questions, and may be divided into a number of sections. You must complete all sections in one sitting, as you are not allowed to resume at another time from where you left off. While you are participating, your responses will be stored in a temporary holding area as you move through the sections, but they will not be permanently saved until you complete all sections, and you are given a chance to review your responses.

The following information is provided to inform you about the research project and your participation in it. Please read this form carefully and feel free to ask any questions you may have about this study and the information given below. You will be given an opportunity to ask questions, and your questions will be answered. Also, you will be given a copy of this consent form.

Your participation in this research study is voluntary. You are also free to withdraw from this study at any time. In the event new information becomes available that may affect the risks or benefits associated with this research study or your willingness to participate in it, you will be notified so that you can make an informed decision, whether or not to continue your participation in this study.

For additional information about giving consent or your rights as a participant in this study, please feel free to contact the MTSU Office of Compliance at (615) 494-8918.

1. Purpose of the study:

You are being asked to participate in a research study to aid in the improvement of services provided by universities to first year freshmen.

2. Description of procedures to be followed and approximate duration of the study:

This survey consists of 26 questions about yourself (e.g., age and gender) and 62 statements about your experiences in college. This survey will allow you to explore your feelings and experiences with being a first-year college student at MTSU. This survey should take you about 20-30 minutes to complete. You will complete this survey online on the Sona System.

3. Expected costs: none

4. Description of the discomforts, inconveniences, and/or risks that can be reasonably expected as a result of participation in this study:

No risks are anticipated. If you feel uncomfortable answering any of the questions, you may skip those questions or stop participating at any point.

5. Unforeseeable risks:

No risks are unanticipated, but some students may feel uncomfortable answering some of the questions.

6. Anticipated benefits from this study:

- a) The potential benefits to science and humankind that may result from this study are to make college a better experience for all students.
- b) The potential benefits to you from this study are helping researchers find better ways for universities to serve students.

7. Alternative treatments available: Participation in this study is voluntary. Participants may choose not to participate in research or to stop participating in this study.

8. Compensation for participation:  
Participants will receive 1 research credit for their participation.

9. Circumstances under which the Principal Investigator may withdraw you from study participation:  
If you feel uncomfortable at any time, you may withdraw from this study by not answering the remaining questions and skipping to the end to receive credit.

10. What happens if you choose to withdraw from study participation:  
All participants will receive 1 research credit even if they withdraw from the study. However, students who choose to withdraw from the study and want to receive credit can skip to the end of the online survey to receive credit. Alternatively, students may log off of the Sona System to terminate their session (without receiving credit).

11. Contact Information.  
If you have any questions or concerns about this research study, please feel free to contact Jarren Brock at [vgwolfio@yahoo.com](mailto:vgwolfio@yahoo.com) or my Faculty Advisor, Dr. Michelle Boyer-Pennington, at [Michelle.Boyer-Pennington@mtsu.edu](mailto:Michelle.Boyer-Pennington@mtsu.edu).

12. Confidentiality.

All efforts, within reason, will be made to keep the personal information in your research record private but total privacy cannot be promised. Your information may be shared with MTSU or the government, such as the Middle Tennessee State University Institutional Review Board, Federal Government Office for Human Research Protections if you or someone else is in danger or if we are required to do so by law.

13. STATEMENT BY PERSON AGREEING TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS STUDY

I have read this informed consent document and understand my rights as a research participant. Further, I understand that information I provide is only intended for research purposes and is not intended to establish a patient/psychologist relationship between me and the researchers/university or to be used for diagnostic purposes. Should I become distressed at any time while participating in this study and feel that I need psychiatric/medical or other emotional assistance, I will contact one of the counseling services on campus. By proceeding to the first page of the survey, I hereby give my informed and voluntary consent to participate in this research.

**APPENDIX D****Debriefing Letter**

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If you have any questions or concerns about this research study, please feel free to contact Jarren Brock at [vgwolfio@yahoo.com](mailto:vgwolfio@yahoo.com) or my Faculty Advisor, Dr. Michelle Boyer-Pennington, at [Michelle.Boyer-Pennington@mtsu.edu](mailto:Michelle.Boyer-Pennington@mtsu.edu).