CARIBBEAN INTERNATIONAL UNDERGRADUATES’ “RESISTING, REFRAMING AND REAFFIRMING” OF THEIR ETHNIC IDENTITY AT A FOUR YEAR INSTITUTION

By

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To my family—my lifeline
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The last four years of my life have been a learning experience on multiple levels, characterized by emotional, mental and physical ebbs and flows. It has been such a culminating process that it makes the writing of these acknowledgements almost surreal. While I recognize that this PhD process has been an extremely personal process, it would have been insurmountable without the constant support of individuals, many of whom it is impossible to mention by name given the limitations of this document. With this in mind, I will use this medium to attempt to capture in words my gratitude for those who have stood by me, held my hand, supported me and carried me when I was too weak to carry myself or too stubborn to ask for help. I can only hope these words can adequately express how truly blessed I feel to have such positive spirits in my life.

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgments .................................................................................................................. 4

List of Tables .......................................................................................................................... 11

List of Figures .......................................................................................................................... 12

List of Terms ........................................................................................................................... 13

Abstract .................................................................................................................................... 15

Chapter 1: Introduction ........................................................................................................... 17
  Contextualizing Caribbean Student Identity in U.S. Higher Education ................... 23
  Purpose of the Study & Research Questions ................................................................. 25
  Significance of the Study ..................................................................................................... 26

Chapter 2: Review of Literature ............................................................................................. 32
  International Education in the U.S. Higher Educational System .............................. 33
  Representations of International Student Issues ............................................................ 38
  Navigating College Student Identity Development ....................................................... 43
    Aspects of College Student Identity ............................................................................. 48
    College students’ gender identity ............................................................................... 48
    College students’ sexual identity ................................................................................ 50
  Racial Identity vs. Ethnic Identity ................................................................................. 52
  Ethnic Identity Aspects ................................................................................................. 57
  Caribbean student ethnic identity issues ...................................................................... 62
  Performativity and Identity .............................................................................................. 64
  Chapter Summary .............................................................................................................. 68

Chapter 3: Methodology ........................................................................................................ 70
  Epistemological and Theoretical Approaches ............................................................... 71
  Critical Race Theory as Theoretical Perspective ......................................................... 74
  The Data Collection Process ........................................................................................... 75
    Access and Rapport ....................................................................................................... 75
    Sampling Strategy ......................................................................................................... 79
  Data Collection Procedures ............................................................................................. 80
    Interviews ...................................................................................................................... 80
    Photo voice .................................................................................................................... 85
    Reflective journaling ..................................................................................................... 87
  Data Analysis .................................................................................................................... 91
Methodological Rigor of the Study .................................................................97
Limitations of the Study ..................................................................................100
Subjectivity Statement ....................................................................................101

4 FINDINGS ...........................................................................................................105

Overview of the Theory ....................................................................................105
Homogenous Institutional Aspects ..................................................................109
  Institutional programmatic efforts .................................................................109
  Pedagogical elements .....................................................................................119
  Documentation requirements .........................................................................125
  Campus demographics ...................................................................................128
Contextualizing the C.I.S. Ethnic Identity Responses within the Three “Reactions”...132
  Resisting .........................................................................................................133
  Reframing .......................................................................................................153
  Reaffirming .....................................................................................................172
Interpretation of Theory ....................................................................................183
Chapter Summary ............................................................................................189

5 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS ................................................................191

Summary of Findings .......................................................................................192
Discussion regarding Homogenous and Over-generalized institutional Discourse ....194
Discussion Regarding the Identification of C.I.S. with Their Native Backgrounds ......198
Discussion Regarding the Identification of C.I.S. with the U.S. Culture .................205
Implications for Practice ..................................................................................209
Implications for Theory ...................................................................................213
Implications for Research ...............................................................................218
Conclusions .....................................................................................................222

APPENDIX

A IRB DOCUMENTATION .................................................................................225
B CONSENT FORMS .......................................................................................228
  Informed Consent Form (Group 1) ...............................................................228
  Informed Consent Form (Group 2) ...............................................................230
C INTERVIEW PROTOCOL- FIRST ROUND INTERVIEW .........................232
D PHOTO VOICE PROTOCOL .................................................................233
E REFLECTIVE JOURNALING PROTOCOL .............................................234
F FOLLOW UP INTERVIEW PROTOCOL ......................................................235
LIST OF REFERENCES .....................................................................................236
## LIST OF TABLES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table</th>
<th>page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3-1</td>
<td>Data Collection Schedule</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
# LIST OF FIGURES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Figure</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3-1</td>
<td>Campus population</td>
<td>88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3-2</td>
<td>Love of football</td>
<td>88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3-3</td>
<td>Caribbean peers</td>
<td>89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3-4</td>
<td>Flowchart of hybrid data analysis procedures</td>
<td>97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4-1</td>
<td>Theoretical model: Caribbean international students’ three “REactions” to their ethnic identity</td>
<td>107</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4-2</td>
<td>Theoretical model: aspects through which Caribbean international students’ negotiate ethnic identity</td>
<td>108</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4-3</td>
<td>Adopting sports</td>
<td>110</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4-4</td>
<td>Sports as a barrier</td>
<td>114</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4-5</td>
<td>Department space</td>
<td>117</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4-6</td>
<td>Flag in class</td>
<td>119</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4-7</td>
<td>Extracurricular groups</td>
<td>138</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4-8</td>
<td>Technology</td>
<td>139</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4-9</td>
<td>Plaza of the Americas</td>
<td>154</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4-10</td>
<td>Food court</td>
<td>155</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4-11</td>
<td>Caribbean flags</td>
<td>156</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4-12</td>
<td>Banana trees</td>
<td>158</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4-13</td>
<td>Weather on campus</td>
<td>161</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4-14</td>
<td>National club</td>
<td>169</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4-15</td>
<td>U.W.C. group</td>
<td>172</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4-16</td>
<td>Benefit posters</td>
<td>174</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
LIST OF TERMS

The following terms are key terms in the study and therefore require special consideration to ensure that they are understood in the context of these definitions:

Upperclassman  Refers to a student in the junior or senior class of a college or university.

Transnational student  A term used synonymously with ‘international student’ in this study.

International Student  Students holding a J1 or F1 status visa who are permanent residents outside the host country, in this instance, the United States of America and who are seeking a degree from a national college or university.

Caribbean Student  Students with either an F1 or J1 visa status who are permanent residents of a country in the Caribbean region as defined in this study.

Latin America  Areas of America whose official language are Spanish and Portuguese, derived from Latin: includes South & Central America, Mexico and some islands of the Caribbean.

The Caribbean  The region stretching from the tip of Florida to the coast of South America in the body of water called the Caribbean Sea. It includes the northernmost islands, the Greater Antilles (Cuba, Hispaniola-Dominican Republic and Haiti, Jamaica, and Puerto Rico), the smaller more eastern islands in the Lesser Antilles (St. Kitts, Nevis, Antigua, Guadeloupe, Dominica, Martinique, St. Lucia, Barbados, St. Vincent, Grenada and Trinidad and Tobago) (Waters, 1999).

Nation-state  A country that is a polity, that is independent and sovereign with its own government, enacts its own laws and controls the territory within its borders (Gutek, 2006).

International Education  Education that examines, 1) informal, nonformal, and formal educational relationships among people of various nation-states, 2) issues in education that are global and transcend national boundaries and 3) emergent trends that are creating greater interdependency and interrelationships among people as members of a global society (Gutek, 2006, p.40).

Cross border education  One component of the internationalization of post-secondary education that refers to situations in which the teacher, student, program, institution/provider or course material cross national jurisdictional borders (OECD, 2004, p.19).
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Internationalization</th>
<th>Policies and practices of academic systems, institutions and individuals to cope with the global academic environment (Altbach &amp; Knight, 2007).</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Culture</td>
<td>The production and exchange of meaning between the members of a social group, community or nation, such as factors that characterize their way of life and shared values (Hall, 1997).</td>
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<td>Ethnicity</td>
<td>A set of ideas concerning a group’s real or imagined cultural links with an ancestral past and insights into the nature and origins of their modern beliefs, behaviors and accomplishments (Baronov &amp; Yelvington, 2009).</td>
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<td>Ethnic identification</td>
<td>Cultural and historical traditions such as language and religion based on ethnic background that suggest the sharing of some set of common characteristics that set them apart from the broader society (Baronov &amp; Yelvington, 2009).</td>
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<td>Identity Development</td>
<td>The process involving an individual’s conception of self, inclusive of, a selection of their physical, psychological, emotional and social attributes (Waters, 1999).</td>
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<tr>
<td>Race</td>
<td>A social construct in which a group is defined on the basis of physical criteria such as skin color and facial features (Tatum, 1997).</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
The purpose of this study was to examine the ethnic identity experiences of Caribbean international students in the context of the over-generalized and homogenous aspects of their institutional discourse on international students. It also sought to consider their identification with their native backgrounds and the United States in view of their new environment. Through a methodological design grounded in constructionism and subjectivism, six Caribbean international students participated in three rounds of data collection including two rounds of interviews and photo voice and reflective journaling. Data was analyzed using a hybrid of both Charmaz’s (2009) and Clarke’s (2005) grounded theory methods with a resulting theory illustrating the complexity inherent to these students’ negotiation of their ethnic identity. Additionally, the study was framed in Judith Butler’s (1990) theoretical work on performativity and identity to examine aspects of intersectionality, identity, subjectivity and agency in relation to participants’ negotiation of their ethnic identity in the context of institutional discourse on international students.

Based on the analysis I propose a multilayered theory exhibiting the fluidity and complexity of the Caribbean international students’ ethnic identity experience. Three significant dimensions emerge from participants’ experiences located at the core of their ethnic identity: 1)
Resisting, 2) Reaffirming, and 3) Reframing. These three dimensions are reactions to the institutional context. More specifically, four elements of the institutional context emerged: programmatic efforts, pedagogical elements, campus demographics, and immigration requirements. In addition, for each of the three reacting dimensions at the core, there are three different salient aspects of their ethnic identity negotiation: 1) For the resisting dimension students employ selective assimilation, adjustments to language and accent, and separation of identities. 2) For the reaffirming dimension students navigate commitment to home, academic identity, and feelings of empowerment. And finally, 3) for reframing attachment to the Caribbean, personal development, and peer relations matter. The emerging theory reveals that participants constantly make shifts in their navigation of their identity in their new academic and cultural setting, and that institutional stakeholders must pay closer attention to the over-generalized and homogenous institutional discourse on international students to maximize internationalization missions on learning, discovering and engagement.
CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

The U.S. higher educational system is globally recognized as a pioneering force in international education given its participation in cross border education and the annual sojourn of thousands of foreign students to the U.S. for educational pursuits. Recent census data suggest that individuals from over 230 countries annually study at institutions of higher education in the US. Students from Latin America and the Caribbean are grouped together as a region in the census and comprise 11.4% of all international students in the United States (Chow & Bhandari, 2010). Though there was a 4.6% positive change in enrollment in the 2008-09 academic year from the Caribbean region specifically, the latest enrollment figures show a 1.6% decline for the 2009-10 academic year. Similarly, enrollment figures from the region have fallen substantially from previous years. Though the 2009-10 figures represent only a 1.6% decrease, the decline is significant given the already small enrollment numbers of students that study in the US from the Caribbean. More specifically, international students from the Caribbean comprised only 1.9% (13,112) of the total international students enrolled during the 2009-10 academic year. The challenge to understand this decline in enrollment, or any issues directly associated with these students is compounded by the dearth of experiential information on Caribbean students, as they are almost invisible in higher education literature and larger empirical research databases.

The percentage of Caribbean students at U.S. universities may seem marginal in comparison to other international student populations, and even more so the native student population. However, they do contribute significantly to the diversity on these campuses in their perspectives as citizens of developing countries living in a major developed country. Additionally, despite their small size, the Caribbean is a well-recognized region globally, given their rich cultural background. The need to understand their experiences as international students
should be commensurate with students from any other region of the world (Browne-Huntt, 2008; Lauture, 2007). As Sovic (2007) contends, existing literature consistently represents international students as a homogenous unit with little differentiation based on aspects such as gender, race/ethnicity or sexual identities. There have been negligible attempts to differentiate their identity development experiences during their transitional process into a new cultural environment (Torres, Jones & Renn, 2009). This is problematic given that Caribbean students come from fundamentally different backgrounds that distinguish their transitional experiences to the U.S. educational system and socio-cultural environment on multiple levels. Caribbean students have consistently sought postsecondary educational opportunities on U.S. campuses and this transitional period in their lives should be considered in view of their native social realities. This is particularly salient given international students’ transitional challenges navigating cultures foreign to their native backgrounds. Similarly this is crucial in the context of students’ ongoing cognitive, social and psychological development during their college years (Bektas, 2008; Browne-Huntt, 2008; Dao, Lee & Chang, 2007; Kingston & Forland, 2008; Wadsworth, Hecht & Jung, 2008). Therefore, in view of the dismal representation of Caribbean students in research literature and the nonexistent portrayal of their transitional experiences as international students navigating a new cultural environment, this study seeks to highlight the cultural and ethnic identification experiences of Caribbean international students during their studies in the United States. The specific dimensions of these ethnic identity experiences to be addressed in the study are further explored in subsequent articulations of the purpose of the study and associated research questions.

It is crucial for this study to further contextualize the notion of “internationalization” and “international education” in order to appreciate the contribution of Caribbean students to the
internationalization process. International education has progressively been viewed as a pivotal component of a university’s mission. Researchers trace interest in internationalization to the middle ages. It was characterized by pilgrimages sought by university stakeholders, both students and professors who would sojourn from distant lands to other universities to gain learning, friends and leisure (De Wit, 2002). There is a debate related to focus on how one distinguishes ‘internationalization’ and ‘international university’. Internationalization has been described by the International Association of Universities (2005) as the broad concept involving international cooperation and the changes taking place within a given institution through policy and specific initiatives. Knight (2004) elucidates various aspects of internationalization as inclusive of: 1) academic mobility for students and teachers, 2) international linkages, partnerships and projects, 3) new international academic programs and research initiatives, 4) innovative delivery of educational programs in foreign locations through franchises and branch campuses, 5) the inclusion of an intercultural and globally-inclusive curriculum and teaching and learning processes, and 6) trade in higher education or international development projects. Fundamentally, internationalization incorporates policy-level planning that facilitates the previously mentioned components. On the other hand, international education may be viewed as the concrete realization of internationalization in the actual programs and practices that facilitate internationalized learning, inclusive of curriculum education abroad, international research and scholarship, and the engagement and involvement of international students and scholars on U.S. campuses (NASULGC, 2004).

For the purposes of this study, the focus was on international education as it refers to transnational sojourns to countries other than one’s home country. It encompassed a focus on a single component of international education in the influence of this transitional stage on the
ethnic identity experiences of international students from the Caribbean region as a consequence of their sojourn to the U.S. cultural environment.

Historically, there have been political, social and economic connections between the United States and the Caribbean region (Baptiste, 1988a, b; Braveboy-Wagner, 2009). As Braveboy-Wagner (2009) suggests, the level of interaction between these two regions has been high given instances of political interventions, installations of military bases, tourism, migration of people, and international commerce. This interaction has been sustained due to the geographic proximity between the smaller Caribbean states and the United States. As such, Caribbean nationals have always maintained a strong sense of awareness of this relationship and the associated influences on their daily existence. This has resulted in significant percentages of Caribbean nationals migrating to the United States in successive years, often determined by existing policies on immigration which are described as ranging from severe restrictions to free movement (Keely & Elwell, 1981).

Traditionally, emigration patterns and policy changes have directly affected the sojourn of international students to study opportunities in the United States. As Chin and Bhandari (2006) articulate, the flow of international students from various places of origin will fluctuate due to a variety of economic, political and academic factors in their home country and the U.S. This is most recently visible in the decrease in international enrollment after the events of September 11th, 2001, and the subsequent immigration policies contributing to tightened visa application review processes. There was also a popular perception overseas that there were negative attitudes in the U.S. towards international students (Open Doors, 2005). The tenuous nature of immigration policies and its effect on the international education experience are all concerns familiar to international students from the Caribbean. This is especially pertinent to them as
citizens of developing countries, which are most sensitive to policies instituted by developed nations such as the United States.

The 2009-10 publication of the Institute of International Education’s Open Door International Student Census reports a 3% incremental increase in international student enrollment from the previous academic year. This figure represents an all-time high in international student numbers in the U.S. The 2010 census report showed that there was a total international student enrollment of 690,923 during the 2009-10 academic year, which accounts for 3.6% of the total (18,264,000) U.S. higher education enrollment. International undergraduate students comprise 1.7% (274,431) of that population. Within the international student population studying in the U.S., undergraduates account for 39.7% (274,431) of the 690,923 international enrollees for 2009-10 (Chow & Bhandari, 2010). Such findings from the 2009-10 census suggest that studies in the U.S. continue to be an attractive option for undergraduates from foreign countries, inclusive of Caribbean nations, and therefore deserve attention as far as their undergraduate life experiences. This becomes even more pressing, as undergraduate students from the Caribbean accounted for 62.8% (8,238) of the total enrollees from the Caribbean in the 2009-10 year. Therefore the undergraduate population from the Caribbean accounts for the most representative group from their region in U.S. higher education institutions. Though a focus on the experiences of both international undergraduate and graduate students is important and necessary, these recent statistics underscore the importance of focusing on the experiences of international undergraduate students from the Caribbean exclusively.

Though their numbers on campuses may seem minimal relative to the aggregate higher education population, the contributions of international students to the U.S. higher education environment far surpass their seemingly slight numbers as representative in the census data
(Bevis, 2002; Harrison, 2002; Slaughter & Rhoades, 2004). Additionally, these students often become engrossed in a complex racial and ethnic dialogue within U.S. institutions wherein they are often thrust into homogenous categorizations as both Black and international students statistically. They also find themselves navigating distinctions between their Afro Caribbean experiences and those of other Black ethnicities such as African Americans, first and second generation Caribbean immigrants or African students within their new social environment. Therefore, the institutional tendency to homogenize them as either international or Black students in both documentation and programmatic aspects overlooks important distinctions and leads to misconceptions about their experiences. It is therefore critical to chronicle the diverse experiences of these international students during their sojourn in U.S. universities so as to offer a comprehensive appreciation of the realities of international education.

Additionally, issues pertinent to international students from the Caribbean are essentially invisible in academic literature. This is problematic as higher education stakeholders will be challenged to understand the issues and concerns unique to these students (Browne-Huntt, 2008; Edwards-Josephs, 2008; Lacina, 2002; Lauture, 2007; Szelényi & Chang, 2002). Without an appreciation for the challenges among Caribbean students who enter US universities, administrators and faculty are less likely to meet their academic and social needs. Furthermore, students are less likely to have quality educational and social experiences that contribute to their academic and personal development (Anderson, Carmichael, Harper, Huang, 2009; Atkinson, Morten & Sue, 1997; Browne-Huntt, 2008; Lauture, 2007).

Finally, from a student development perspective, Caribbean students have been largely unrepresented in the literature. Higher education practice has increasingly recognized the importance of theories on college student development. However, these theories and any
associated research have focused solely on U.S. students. Any mention of Caribbean students in the literature has centered on the immigrant population. International students have different experiences and these theories do not adequately take their differences into consideration. It is therefore important to capture them in the student development literature guiding research and practice.

**Contextualizing Caribbean Student Identity in U.S. Higher Education**

The Institute of International Education, the national resource for the international student census, classifies Caribbean students under the larger grouping of Latin America and the Caribbean. This is a classification that is common within research literature discussing Caribbean student issues. However, the complexity inherent to the geographic, historical and cultural realities of the region suggests that careful attention must be given to the categorization of the Caribbean region. Boswell (2003) demarcates the Caribbean into five sub-regions including 1) the Greater Antilles, 2) the Lesser Antilles, 3) The Bahamas & Turks and Caicos, 4) Cayman Islands, and 5) the Netherland Antilles. The area acquired its name based on the proximity of the islands and their surrounding coasts to the Caribbean Sea.

The primary distinctions attributed to these islands surround their size, cultural background, demographics, geography and historical associations. Some identified commonalities include legacies of colonialism, slavery and domination of island economies at some point in the nation state’s existence (Waters, 1999). This has led to what is termed varying degrees of issues such as underdevelopment, out-migration and political instability (Randall, 2009). From a historical perspective, a pan-Caribbean identity has not largely been accepted, and the interactions amongst sub regions such as the Anglo-Caribbean, Hispanic Caribbean, Dutch Caribbean and French Caribbean is often defined by colonial heritage (Hillman & D’Agostino, 1992). However, strong commonalities exist in elements such as food, dance, music, linguistic
and religious backgrounds and diverse multiracial groupings. The current regional interactions are characterized by a growing appreciation of mutual economic and political interests that transcend linguistic and cultural barriers (Braveboy-Wagner, 2009). These historical and cultural aspects that characterize the Caribbean experience have resulted in a unique and complex assemblage of identities. Waters (1999) considers this complexity in the distinctions he makes amongst the terms identity, ethnicity, and race. The distinctions he makes amongst these key terms are formative to the development of this paper. He defines identity as the conception of select physical, psychological, emotional or social attributes of an individual. Ethnicity is defined as the cultural attributes inherent to a group, such as language, behavior and ancestral origin, and racial is often considered a social construct as defined by one’s physical attributes. This discussion becomes very complex however, as racial and ethnic identities are not considered “zero-sum entities.” Higher education literature in particular, has largely used the terms interchangeably. However, this tendency becomes misleading in describing Caribbean students who are from rich multiracial societies and may identify more based on their ethnic background than fixed racial categories. For some Caribbean nationals, the idea of race and ethnicity not being “zero-sum entities” means that an individual will have the ability to assume different identities or move between identities based on situational factors. For instance, a Caribbean student studying in the U.S. may move between identifying himself or herself as a “Caribbean national” to “West Indian.” They may also assume nationality associations such as “Jamaican” or “Afro-Caribbean” in relation to their racial and ethnic identity. This may depend on situational factors, for instance, in socializations amongst other Caribbean nationals. In these interactions, the individual may choose to distinguish himself or herself based on nationality as ‘Jamaican’ or ‘Trinidadian’ to specify their ethnic identity. However, in socializing with a larger group of
foreigners, the same individual may simply identify himself or herself as a member of the larger Caribbean region. Such situations are particularly pertinent in college environments where Caribbean students may be lumped in with other Black ethnicities that have fewer ethnic connections to the Caribbean. Though the international student population from the Caribbean may be relatively small, first-generation students of Caribbean descent often outnumber their international counterparts. Additionally, the Caribbean population both on and off-campus may also act as a larger source of connection to their backgrounds. This may complicate the manner in which these international students navigate their ethnic identity in terms of their sense of kinship with these groups as connections with their ethnic background. With this in mind, the navigation of such complexities becomes very salient in discussing these students from the Caribbean region given their distinct cultural background and their conception of their ethnic identity associations.

This idea of dueling identities is determined both by their positioning in the larger U.S. social structure and their socialization with different social groups. It closely parallels Judith Butler’s (1990) ‘performativity’ concept to be further explored in latter portions of this paper. Butler’s concept of performativity has identity as a central tenet in its reference to the conscious and unconscious thoughts or ways that an individual understands herself in relation to the world. It also considers the effect of discourse on the establishment of an assumed ‘identity’ and the idea that identities are contextual and may change depending on situational factors (Lester, 2008). This becomes a prominent supposition in the experience of Caribbean international students as far as issues of ethnic identity in their new cultural environment.

**Purpose of the Study & Research Questions**

The purpose of this study was to probe Caribbean undergraduate students’ ethnic identity as international students at a Research I university in the Southeast region of the United States. It
sought to examine how these students negotiate their identities as foreigners or temporary residents in the United States given existing discourse on international student issues and college student identity experiences. Furthermore, it considered their ethnic identity experience with the recognition that international students are largely addressed as a homogenous group in both the literature and in institutional programming. With this in mind, it sought to explore the existing stereotypes and power relations that characterize such homogenizing discourses. Particular focus was paid to upperclassmen or junior and senior level students as they had at least two years prior experience as students and temporary residents in the United States, and were able to frame their perspectives in view of these experiences. With this in mind, the research questions that guided this study include the following:

How do undergraduate international students from the Caribbean perceive that existing ethnically over generalized and homogeneous institutional discourse at the university level has shaped their negotiation of their ethnic identities? A) How do undergraduate international students from the Caribbean perceive that their experience as international students in the United States has affected their identification with their native cultural backgrounds? B) How do undergraduate international students from the Caribbean perceive that their experience as international students from the Caribbean has influenced their identification with the United States culture?

**Significance of the Study**

The undergraduate population at U.S. colleges and universities receives significant attention in higher education literature. However, literature specific to international undergraduates is meagerly represented and even more so for studies on students from the Caribbean region. Of interest among many researchers is identity development among undergraduates. Identity development is often approached from different perspectives, including
gender, sexuality, race, ethnicity and various psychological aspects (Evans, Forney, Guido, Patton & Renn, 2010). Several ethnic identity development models have been proposed to assess student development within diverse groups (Atkinson et al., 1993; Ibrahim, Ohnishi, & Sandhu, 1997; Phinney, 1990; Torres, 2003). Some researchers may propose that the development of Caribbean students may be considered within existing categories or models. For example Cross’ (1991,2001) model of psychological Nigrescence which is proposed as a model for Black students, but focuses on the African American experience, and different stages attributed to other minority models or Phinney’s (1990) ethnic minority model that seeks to address the ethnic identity concerns of minority adolescents. However, it would be inaccurate to assume that these models allow for a holistic appreciation of the ethnic diversity of this particular group of students. From another context, Brubaker and Cooper (2000) highlight an alternative view of identities as “the evanescent product of multiple and competing discourses…invoked to highlight the unstable, multiple, fluctuating, and fragmented nature of the contemporary self” (p. 8). Therefore, identity may be viewed as something that people and groups can have without being aware of it as something to be discovered (Brubaker & Cooper, 2000). As Margaret Somers (1992) suggests, discussions on identity should consider dimensions such as time, space and relationality and the importance of situating social narratives in historically specific relational settings (Brubank & Cooper, 2000, p.12). Thus there is a fundamental need to recognize that ethnic and racial identities are different in the United States than other parts of the world. Additionally, the experiences of international students from the Caribbean are distinguishable based on such aspects as time, space and rationality.

Given that a significant percentage of the Caribbean region identifies as being of African descent, incorporating Caribbean students within African American models or other generic...
Black racial identity models is foolhardy. The Caribbean’s colonial past and subsequent post-colonial experiences means that their racial and ethnic identity experiences are unique to them. Though some Caribbean islands such as Jamaica gained their independence from colonial territories in the early 1960s and this period was also significant for African Americans as the civil rights period, both populations have significantly different experiences and social advancements since this time. For instance, for decades descendants of Black racial background have assumed the highest leadership positions in the Caribbean society. However, it is only recently that the first African American assumed the highest leadership position in the United States with the election in 2008 of President Barack Obama. Therefore, Caribbean students have been socialized in predominantly Black nations with different social experiences than their African American peers who are more aware of ongoing struggles for racial equality in their society. As a result, these students have significantly different experiences than Black Americans, even though they may share similar racial features and connections. They do not come from backgrounds that define them, as racial ‘minorities’ as they are largely from predominantly Black nations and as such may not associate with the ‘minority’ label or experience. This may essentially distinguish their ethnic experiences from those of other Black students in the U.S. higher education environment who have significantly different backgrounds. For these reasons, it is misleading to consider existing racial or ethnic identity models as representative of the Caribbean international students’ experience. Given that the focus of this paper is ethnic identity, the perspectives of these students from the Caribbean may account for different nuances not encapsulated by existing ethnic identity models.

Concern has also been expressed regarding the tendency to categorize within-group black ethnicities as a homogenous ethnic group, which minimizes the distinctiveness of different
experiences within Black populations (Evans et al., 2010). As a group, the ethnic experiences of Caribbean students should not be discounted; instead, their diversity should be recognized and considered as important in its singularity. Additionally, higher education stakeholders should appreciate that traditional-aged college students are developmentally at a vulnerable stage in terms of acknowledging aspects of their academic, social and psychological development. Thus, they may not be cognizant of issues related to any aspect of identity development, in this case their ethnic identity. These ethnic developmental experiences may be further influenced by existing beliefs, and approaches to categorizing international students, more specifically, Caribbean international students, both at the university level and the larger social environment. The inability to consider the developmental experiences of these students as a unique ethnic group may have several negative repercussions. First, it may negatively affect the engagement level of these students in the higher education environment. If these students feel that their identity and contributions are not considered in the development of programs, curriculum and other activities, they may feel disconnected from their social environment, and display less confidence or willingness to participate in university life. This is highlighted by Wadsworth et al. (2008) in their discussion of the disappointing classroom interactions and acculturation experiences that international students may encounter due to failure at the institutional level to consider ethnic differences.

Existing literature has been more focused on explaining the experience of adjustment and acculturation on homogenous groups of international students than on assessing the associated effects on their identity development. Identity development is often secondary to a more explicit discussion of the student’s academic or social experience. Little attention is given to different aspects of identity such as students’ sexuality, gender, race and ethnicity that may be
significantly affected in the transitional process. It therefore highlights the potential of this study to consider the significance of such differences in maximizing positive academic, social and psychological experiences for these international students in foreign environments.

Also, a major by-product of international education and study abroad is the opportunity to share diverse perspectives and appreciation of different ways of life with domestic students. Similarly, the hope in higher education is that a significant segment of the undergraduate population will choose to pursue graduate studies. Census statistics reveal that the graduate population is significantly lower for Caribbean students with graduate students accounting for 26% (3,307) of the total enrollees from the region (Chow & Bhandari, 2010). One contributing factor may be that unfulfilled experiences at the undergraduate level may dissuade international undergraduate students from exploring graduate study opportunities upon program completion. In the event that campuses do not seek to incorporate these students, they may perceive ‘chilly campus’ climates that fail to embrace their ethnic differences and may choose to discontinue studies in such environments. This may drastically reduce the diversity of the graduate student population. The ripple effect is that the critical inquiry that should occur at this level may suffer from lack of exposure to the diverse perspectives these international students may have contributed.

Finally, higher education faculty, staff and administrators have a responsibility to seek to understand the characteristics that distinguish different student groups in their educational environment. This will allow them to maximize their engagement both academically and socially, while attending to their psychological development during their tenure in the university environment (Anderson et al., 2009; Browne-Huntt, 2008; Kim, 2004; Wadsworth et al., 2008). In turn, it will increase the benefits of the international education experience of both local and
foreign participants in the educational process (NASULGC, 2004; OECD, 2004, U.S. Department of Education, 2004). This study provides these parties with a lens through which to consider the experiences of this unique group. This may ultimately assist in positively impacting interactions with these students at multiple levels.
CHAPTER 2
REVIEW OF LITERATURE

A review of the available research deemed integral to contextualizing the issue at hand includes expansive discussions on the following: First, the chapter begins with an overview of the development of international education in the U.S. with focus on international student issues. This overview allows for an appreciation of the historical connections with international education in a U.S. context and the experiences associated with international students during their sojourn to the United States. It allows for connections in latter portions of the study to potential perspectives shared by the study participants as international students from the Caribbean. Second, the review offers an examination of college student development research with focus on sexuality, gender and ethnicity as aspects of identity development. College student development is a prevailing issue in the higher education literature as it offers an explanation of the developmental issues affiliated with college students, particularly traditional undergraduates as they mature in the college environment. The section on ethnic identity is particularly salient to this study in the glimpse it offers of previous work on college students’ ethnic identity development from different lenses. The final section highlights the study’s theoretical framework, in Judith Butler’s (1990) proposition of the ‘performativity’ concept as it relates to issues of identity. Butler’s (1990) concept of performativity highlights the complexity inherent to locating identities in complicated social environments characterized by multiple discourses and power relations. The core facets of this framework and the affiliated ethnic identity aspects act as the foundation for elements of the research questions and interview protocol. An appreciation of this area of research is critical to the larger issue of ethnic identity in the higher education environment and the ability to comprehensively consider such aspects in relation to international students from the Caribbean.
International Education in the U.S. Higher Educational System

In order to understand the importance of international education in the U.S. higher education environment, it is crucial to present a historical perspective on the significance of this mandate in the context of the U.S. educational arena. Within the landscape of the United States of America there are specific periods that are identified as significant in the country’s contribution to international education. De Wit (2002) identifies five stages as the first being before the twentieth century - a period characterized by U.S. import of European higher education models and the expeditions taken by students to foreign lands to engage in studies at these universities. Second, ‘the first half of the Twentieth Century: Peace and Mutual Understanding’ - this period was characterized by increased interest in academic mobility across nations, primarily within Europe and North America through fellowships and other sponsorships to encourage exchanges that promoted shared understandings. Unfortunately World War I terminated such ventures given the existing political climate. Two Noble peace prizewinners, Nicholas Murray Butler and Elihu Root also founded the U.S.-based Institute of International Education (IIE) during this period. The institute was founded in 1919 by two firm believers that ‘there could be no lasting peace without greater understanding between nations-and that international educational exchange formed the strongest basis for fostering such understanding” (IIE, 2009, “About IIE: A brief history of IIE,” para. 1). The third stage is labeled, ‘after World War II: Foreign Policy and National Security’. This period saw increased cross border exchanges by scholars beyond Europe and the United States and a commitment to increased mutual understanding and peace-keeping as the prerequisite for national security and foreign policy. During this period the Fulbright program was developed to foster such initiatives globally. Fourth, is the stage characterized as ‘the Impetus of the Cold War’ - a period that saw the introduction of controversial legislations such as the National Defense Education Act of 1958,
Title VI of the Higher education Act of 1960 and the International Education Act 1966. The National Defense Education Act 1958 was the United States’ effort to regain international leadership, and counteract the Soviet Union’s launch of Sputnik in 1957. The Title VI Act was the federal government’s effort to internationalize the curriculum and in so doing develop multidisciplinary studies, foreign language centers, and international study programs. Finally, The International Education Act, 1966 was an attempt by the government of that period to stimulate international education, but did not attain its intended level of recognition given national focus on the Vietnam War. The intent of these pieces of legislation was the United States’ federal governments’ intent to assume the title of “leader of the free world” and galvanize international exchange as a source of public diplomacy and security (Goodwin & Nacht, 1991). The final stage is labeled ‘the 1980s Competitiveness & Beyond’ with the most recent developments in international education. This period is influenced by the emphasis on ‘globalization’ and the increased competition from regions such as the European Union in internationalization efforts.

Similarly, legislative efforts such as NAFTA initiatives within North America and the desire for the U.S. to maintain its position as a leader in international education have concretized the commitment to international education initiatives. As a result there are 1) yearly increases in the number of international student enrollees and scholars in U.S. institutions, 2) increasing numbers of U.S. study-abroad students venturing to foreign countries, and 3) undertakings to establish satellite programs of U.S. institutions in overseas countries and research opportunities with foreign affiliates.

Such initiatives will become even more crucial for the United States to sustain their share of the international education market given increased competition evident in global trends in this
regard. Evidence of the increased competition from other regions is more apparent on several levels. Several competing nations in the international student market have launched recruiting campaigns with major budgets, and centralized their efforts through a main website. This includes initiatives such as “Choose France” (France), “Live, Learn, & Grow” (Australia), “Innovative, Individual, Inspirational” (U.K.), and “Land of Ideas” (Germany) (Green & Koch, 2010). These countries have all invested multi-million dollar budgets to support their international education campaigns, developed coordinated national strategies and have expanded scholarship offerings to increase their share for the international student market. On the other hand, while there is increased competition in these traditional markets, other countries such as Canada, New Zealand, Japan, continental Europe, China, Malaysia, Singapore, Taiwan, South Africa and the Middle East have joined the market in greater force. The increased higher education offerings in their locals markets means these countries are competing for their own students to stay in their home countries as opposed to considering alternative offerings. Additionally, they are increasing their presence in the international student market through their recruitment of foreign students. For instance, Malaysia and the Middle East’s Islamic education option are particularly attractive to Islamic students as the anti-Islam attitude increased in Europe and the United States (De Wit, 2010). Another trend in the market is the movement from massive recruitment to selective recruitment of top talents who will be invited to both study and remain in the country for employment purposes. This emphasis on the skilled is seen as a solution to the demand for such talent in shrinking markets such as North American, Europe, Australia and Japan, and growing economies such as China (De Wit, 2010).

The aforementioned trends suggest that the higher education market is changing and competition in the international education arena is undergoing a metamorphosis. This is clear
through the introduction of new competitors who are integrating higher education in their
domestic and foreign policy initiatives and the expansion of traditional markets in the
international education market (Douglass & Edelstein, 2010). Therefore, even though the U.S.
remains the top recruiter of international students due in part to the large number of research
universities, there are trends threatening this position. In fact, the U.S. share of the international
student market fell from 25 to 20 percent during the 2000 to 2006 period, while other nations and
countries experienced growth (Douglass & Edelstein, 2010).

Considering such trends, and in view of the historical attachment of the United States to
the international education agenda, there needs to be a strategic effort taken to address the effect
of changing trends in international education if internationalization is to remain a priority in U.S.
higher education. This is uniquely framed by agencies such as the national association of state
universities and land grant universities (NASULGC) as highlighted in their document A Call to
Leadership (2004) which states, ‘If we are to truly be universities and colleges of the world…we
must internationalize our mission, our learning, discovery and engagement’ (p. 42). These three
aspects, learning, discovery and engagement are key elements that other policy reports such as
the Spellings Commission Report, released by the U.S. Department of Education, have also
identified as paramount to the continuous advancement and improvement of the higher education
offering (N.S.S.E., 2007; U.S. Department of Education, 2007). While recognizing these
essential outcomes, it is also imperative to outline the various benefits of international education
and more specifically international student mobility across borders.

Undoubtedly, the presence of international students on U.S. campuses has diversified
college populations, increased an awareness of cultures and issues outside the local context, and
resulted in the sharing of skill sets underutilized within the U.S. college environment, more
specifically in science-oriented fields (Bevis, 2002; Harrison, 2002; Slaughter & Rhoades, 2004). The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (2004) also recognizes that OECD countries sustain internationalization based on academic, cultural, economic, social and political grounds. In addition to previously stated benefits, there is also the potential to stimulate academic programs and research and facilitate economic and political ties between host and home countries. Thereby this results in positive social relations and an appreciation of diverse viewpoints amongst international parties.

From a more individualistic perspective, students often consider additional factors in their choice of the United States as a promising location for their pursuit of postsecondary studies. These reasons often support the aforementioned benefits, but are considered from a more personal standpoint in the development of the individual student. Concerns often held among international students who pursue education outside their home countries include perceived quality of life in the host country and adjustments to foreign cultures, accessibility and range of postsecondary studies, cost of studying overseas, recognition of skills and qualifications upon return to home country and the host country policies on immigration (Centre for Educational Research and Innovation, OECD. 2004). The importance of considerations such as immigration policies and host country’s tolerance for diverse cultures was emphasized in the low international student figures for years following the September 11 events and the federal governments’ establishment of legislation such as the Patriot Act. This act imposed increased restrictions on movement by immigrants and international nationals within the United States, and increased perceptions of an unwelcoming climate for international students. As exemplified in such international education trends, international students have additional concerns outside the opportunities for cultural exchange and academic engagement that may be generated in their
sojourn overseas. Details of expectations and adjustment factors have generally marked the experiences of international students and form the focus of much study on this population (Berry, 2003; Kim, 2004; Wadsworth et al., 2008). Notwithstanding, it cannot be surmised that all international students share identical concerns or experiences during their studies at U.S. universities and colleges. For this reason, this study focuses on undergraduate international students from the Caribbean region as a select group of students who require individualized attention.

**Representations of International Student Issues**

Perhaps one of the most noticeable distinctions in the literature on international students is the representation of study experiences amongst undergraduate and graduate students. Chow and Bhandari (2010) quote Institute of International Education statistics portraying that the international undergraduate student population in 2009/10 outnumbered the international graduate population with differences of 1.4% and 1.5% of total student enrollment at their levels respectively. Perhaps this gives some insight into the imbalance in research initiatives into the international undergraduate experience. Lesser portions of the literature focus on the contribution of undergraduates to the cultural awareness of local traditional students and the adjustment issues of these international students psychologically, socially and academically (Breuning, 2007; Poyrazli & Graham, 2007). Adjustment issues are a significant concern for students, regardless of their phase of study. These levels of adjustment are identifiable at several junctures: academically, personally and psychologically. From the academic perspective, issues related to pre-sojourn preparations and expectations (Constantine, Anderson, Berkel, Caldwell & Utsey, 2005; Cubillo, Sanchez & Cerviño, 2006; Kingston & Forland, 2008; Lee, 2008; Mupinga & Mupinga, 2005) and issues of student engagement upon actual contact with the academic environment have been particularly pertinent (Baek & Damarin, 2008; Bruening, 2007; Curry &
Copeman, 2005; Song, 2004; Zhao, Kuh, & Carini, 2005). For instance, Cubillo et al. (2006) assume a marketing perspective in examining the international student’s role as consumer in choosing host countries for further studies. The major considerations identified included image of host country, inclusive of cost of living and social and academic reputation, their evaluation of potential program offerings inclusive of sustainability and reputation of the intended program, institutional image in respect to issues such as quality of professors, prestige and international recognition, and the personal needs of the individual student for improvement and self-development.

Conversely, Lee (2008) asserts that depending on the origin of the international student, they may be dependent on families and friends in the host country to help in the decision-making process, particularly in distant countries such as India and Asia. The author also highlights that eastern students are more likely to rely on institutional rankings from bodies such as the U.S. News and World Report to determine their most viable options for international study. Upon immersion in their new environments, the process of comparing expectations to actual experiences commences and the effect of such encounters may affect levels of engagement and adjustment. The findings on the engagement level of international students suggest there are different dimensions of this experience. In an examination of the engagement and interaction levels between American and International students, Breuning (2007) confirmed that most international students view themselves as cultural ambassadors. These students are more engaged in student organizations and similar activities at the undergraduate than graduate levels, and prefer to take the lead in planning social events themselves through their own organizations. This is supported in certain respects by Zhao (2005) in the comparison of American and International undergraduate student’s engagement at the beginning and end of the educational experience.
Zhao’s (2005) study also suggests that while international students may be open to social interactions in their freshman year, unfamiliarity with their environments may lead to them being more academically engaged with more faculty/student interactions than their American peers. However, by their senior year they are more adapted to the cultural milieu and are as socially engaged as their American peers. The conclusion of both studies acknowledges the openness of these students to assuming their roles as cultural ambassadors. However, it also recognizes that their engagement in their academic environment is dependent upon a level of comfort in adjusting to the unfamiliar cultural framework and engaging through their own cultural lens.

From a more personal stance, focus has also been placed on the ability of international students to acclimatize socially to their new cultural homes (Breuning, 2007; Forbes-Mewett & Nyland, 2008; Klomegah, 2006; Olivas & Li, 2006; Popadiuk, 2008). The psychological effect of adaptation has been directly linked to the effects of acculturation in much of the literature and the complexity of the issue continues to garner attention (Dao et al., 2007; Stark-Wroblewske, Yanico & Lupe, 2005; Wadsworth et al., 2008; Wei, Heppner, Mallen, Ku, Liao, & Wu, 2007). Undoubtedly, international students undergo high levels of displacement in both their physical relocation to foreign countries and the inherent unfamiliarity at multiple levels. Accompanying the normal transitional aspects that most native born students encounter in matriculating to higher educational institutions, international students have to deal with increased levels of homesickness, acculturation, and cultural peculiarities. These cultural peculiarities may include local food, unusual weather conditions and social behaviors.

Accompanying these differences may be symptoms of depression and overall estrangement from support systems largely available to local students but not necessarily international students (Bartram; 2009; Day & Hajj, 1986; Hovey, 2000; Poyrazli et al., 2007). Lee and Rice (2007)
highlight an instance of such difficulties in their depiction of one such concern for Eastern students in their assertion that “even before 9/11 women who wore veils or saris had difficulties integrating with campus life and suffered unpleasant experiences” (p. 385). This is a glaring example of the transitional challenges that students of diverse cultures, particularly non-Western cultures may undergo in adapting to the culturally-bound environment of their new homes. However, it is also representative of much of the literature on acculturation focusing on international students from Eastern cultures and the psychological strain of unfamiliar social environments on their academic and social experiences (Bektas, 2009; Miyazaki, Bodenhorn, Zalaquett & Mun Ng, 2008; Nilsson, Butler, Shouse & Joshi, 2008; Stark-Wroblewske et al., 2005; Wei et al., 2007; Wei, Ku, Russell, Malinckrodt & Liao, 2008).

Asian students in particular, are primarily the focus of such studies, possibly because of their populous representation in the U.S. higher education system. Stark-Wroblewski et al. (2005) assess some of these issues from the perspective of Japanese and Chinese female international students. They addressed the issue of Western appearance norms, the effects of acculturation and internalization of these appearance norms and its effect upon these women’s eating pathology. “Internalization of Western appearance norms, particularly the thin ideal, was positively associated with eating pathology…awareness and internalization of Western appearance norms and explained eating disordered attitudes even after controlling for effects of general distress and general acculturation” (Stark- Wroblewski et al., 2005, p.43).

Redfield, Linton and Herskovits’ (1936) offer a rudimentary definition of acculturation as “the phenomena which results when groups of individuals having different cultures come into continuous first-hand contact with subsequent changes in the original cultural patterns of either or both groups” (p.149). This concept of acculturation is a key psychological dimension that not
only affects the experience of the student in their host country, but also is thought to potentially have long-term effects. Wadsworth et al., (2008) further contextualize acculturation from the international student perspective by contending, “while adapting to a new culture, people experience various types of stressors resulting from the personal, demographic, or social makeup of an acculturating individual and a host culture” (p.66). As such, these students may encounter differing levels of dissonance in their adjustment to new living environments and the psychological effects this may have on their self-identity (Chen, 2000; Jung, Hecht & Wadsworth, 2007; Zimmerman, 1995). Wei et al. (2008) address one aspect of this relationship by focusing on the effect of coping strategies and self-esteem as moderators of perceived discrimination and depressive symptoms in Asian international students. They found that perceived discrimination was a unique source of stress for these students outside general stress levels. Additionally their choice of coping strategy combined with low self-esteem may heighten stress levels. Such students, particularly those who utilize high levels of reactive coping strategies and evoke an immediate emotional response to perceived discrimination may have stronger levels of stress. The complexity inherent to this study suggests the multiple factors that may influence the acculturation process and ultimately affect the psychological adjustment of international students to their new environments.

Though many of the available studies focus on the psychological adjustment of Eastern-oriented students, perhaps due to the extreme nature of their acculturation process, it is also critical to consider the mental effects of this process on seemingly more westernized students. The issues may indeed vary for these students, but their contact with a completely new cultural environment is bound to demand adjustments at several levels. Based on available research it is clear that diverse issues have been explored in relation to international students. The deficiencies
in the literature are seemingly in distinguishing issues as specific to diverse ethnic groups and making connections to their identity development.

**Navigating College Student Identity Development**

The identity development of college students is a prominent issue in the landscape of higher education literature. These developmental experiences have been differentiated based on matters such as gender, race and ethnicity and sexual orientation. Much of the theoretical assessment has been done from a psychosocial approach, cognitive-structural or typological approach. A significant portion of the work on college student identity development has been conducted from a psychosocial perspective (Chickering & Reisser, 1969; Cross, 1995; D’Augelli, 1994; Helms, 1990; Jones & McEwen, 2000; Josselson, 1987) in its focus on the personal and interpersonal lives of individuals, the content of the development and “what students will be concerned about” (Knefelkamp et al., 1978, p.x11). Others have assumed a cognitive-structural perspective in their focus on how students will think about psychosocial issues and any shifts in reasoning, with less focus on what they think about (Knefelkamp et al., 1978, p.x11). These include theories like those focusing on moral and faith development (Gilligan, 1982; Kohlberg, 1975). Additionally, social identity theories focus on how individuals construct their various social identities, whether race, ethnicity, gender, or sexual orientation and the intersection of multiple identities (Jones & McEwen, 2003; McEwen, 2003). However, much of these theories have also assumed a cognitive-social perspective in their focus on the way individuals think and their progression through stages of cognitive development and associated self-identification (Abes, Jones & McEwen, 2007; Baxter Magolda, 1992, 1998; Evans, Forney & Guido-DiBrito, 1998; Gilligan, 1986; Perry, 1981).

Identity development has been defined as the process involving an individual’s conception of self, inclusive of, a selection of their physical, psychological, emotional and social attributes
Stephan (1992) contends that “identities are meaning that the self acquires through social interaction and as such are crucial to an understanding of an individual’s sense of himself or herself” (p.51). Numerous theories have been proposed to underscore diverse elements of college student identity development (Cross, 1995; Helms, 1990; Josselson, 1996). Many of these theorists have credited Chickering (1969) with initiating interest in the developmental process of college students. Though his theory was criticized for its exclusion of different groups of students, in later work Chickering and Reisser (1993) considered such weaknesses. The revised theory highlights seven vectors of development, which are essentially pathways or stages in the individual developmental process of the college student. This model is similar to later models in that it considers that these vectors or steps are not mutually exclusive. Instead, these steps can be experienced at different rates, in different patterns, and can be the basis of self-reflection by the developing student.

More recent studies have sought to extend the consideration of student development through the consideration of the student’s developmental meaning making experience in the context of cognitive, intrapersonal and interpersonal dimensions of their social environments (Baxter Magolda, 2009). This concept of meaning making has gained increasing prominence in the college student literature and incorporates an individual achieving a level wherein one a) becomes critically aware of one’s own composition of reality, b) self-consciously participates in an ongoing dialogue towards truth, and c) cultivates a capacity to respond or act in ways that are satisfying and just (Parks, 2000). Diverse dimensions of the students’ experiences have highlighted aspects such as 1) cognitive power, which considers intellectual power, reflective judgment mature decision making and problem solving expertise, 2) interpersonal capacity in the ability to engage in authentic interdependent relationships with diverse others in which self is
not overshadowed by a need for others approval, mutually negotiating needs and genuinely taking others’ perspective into account with being consumed by them, 3) intrapersonal capacity in the ability to choose one’s own values and identity in crafting an internally generated sense of self that regulates interpretation of experience and choices, and 4) self-authorship, in the students’ capacity to internally define a coherent belief system and identity that coordinates mutual relation with others (Baxter Magolda, 2004). Other student development researchers such as Renn (2003, 2004) and Taylor (2008) have used ecology frameworks that focus on the environmental context to assess the connection between the social and personal meaning making aspects of a student’s experience. These studies through their contextualization of the student’s experience in diverse environments such as student and institutional cultures frame the students’ meaning making through environmental interactions. As Brofenbrenner (1979) contends, “the understanding of human development…requires an examination of multi-person systems of interactions not limited to a single setting and must take into account aspects of the environment beyond the immediate situations containing the subject (p.21). He therefore considers the student’s existence within a complex, dynamic, interactive ‘web of environments’ which may or may not contain them. In applying the model to a campus environment, Brofenbrenner (1979, 1993, 2006) accounted for the influence of four major aspects, 1) person- attributes or ‘developmentally instigative characteristics’ of the individual and its influence on their interpersonal interactions, 2) process- the responses or ‘proximal processes’ encompassing interactions within the environment over time, 3) context- the setting in which the work of development occurs, and 4) time- episodes across different time intervals inclusive of the changing socio-cultural influences on development. Developmental ecology theories are gaining popularity in the examination of the experiences and development of college students. It has
been used to examine issues such as college peer cultures (Renn & Arnold, 2003), academic success of ethnic minority, first-generation college students (Dennis, Phinny, & Chuateco, 2005), biracial and multiracial college students (Renn, 2003), Latino fraternity members at a Hispanic-serving university (Guardia & Evans, 2008) and college drinking (Weitzman, Nelson, Lee & Wechsler, 2004). Brofenbrenner’s (1979, 1993, 2006) model is just one theoretical articulation of the identity development experience as it applies to the college student. Different frameworks are constantly being utilized to offer disparate perspectives of the college student identity experience.

In particular, Jones and McEwen (2000) also offer another theoretical delineation on the college student identity development experience. These authors conceptualized an intrapersonal approach to identity through their model of multiple dimensions of identity (MMDI) as representative of the different aspects of identity inherent to college student development. They therefore offer their consideration of dimensions such as race, gender, sexuality, religion, culture and class in relation to a student’s individual attributes, personality and identity. These aspects are considered in the context of the student’s family background, sociocultural conditions, current experiences and career decisions and life planning. Abes et al. (2007) later considered MMDI from a cognitive perspective in their incorporation of the element of meaning making to the model. These authors’ re-conceptualization of a student’s consideration of different dimensions of their identity and their cognitive self-authorship process advances their earlier model (Jones & McEwen, 2000). The progression of scholarship on college student identity development models shows an increasing appreciation for the complexity of the identity development process. Therefore, dimensions of gender, race/ethnicity and sexuality are considered in the context of psychosocial and cognitive experiences at the college level.
One distinct trend in the college student identity literature, particularly the seminal research, is its overwhelming focus on identity as a concrete stage in college student development (Cross, 1995; D’Augelli, 1994; Helms, 1990) as opposed to the perspective on identity as a fluid, contingent and negotiated process (Abes et al., 2007; Jones & McEwen, 2000). On the one hand, categories such as Home/Away, Self/Other and West/Non-west serve to embed the representation of identities as neatly bounded categories with oppositional configurations (Malam, 2003). Conversely, identities have been represented as constantly shifting and changing across space and context with a refusal to stay within such fixed representations. As Del Casino and Hanna (2000) contend, identity categories are attempts to fix subjectivity and are only partial, as they do not capture the complex array of subject positions as one moves through different sites and contexts. Identity is therefore seen as being shaped and reshaped by our interactions and as such has an emergent quality (Hecht, 1993). In viewing international students through the lens of the immigrant experience, Hedge (1998) acknowledges the fluidity of identity as a continuous renegotiation in an attempt to adapt and integrate with the host culture. Abes et al. (2007) also highlight the fluidity of dimensions of identity through their use of a feminist theoretical lens of multiple identities to expand their model of multiple identities. Their consideration of the interaction of context, meaning making and identity perceptions and the intersectionality of identities such as class, race, ethnicity, gender and sexual orientation as contextualized by individual’s experiences further extends the view of identities as fluid and not static facets. The expansion of research literature in this direction moves the dominant view from a conceptualization of college student identity as a fixed and bounded perspective. It therefore offers an alternative conceptualization of identity as fluid and negotiated in the context of different aspects of the student experience.
Aspects of College Student Identity

The literature has examined different aspects of college student identity as crucial to the college experience. Many of these identity aspects are categorized as social identities or ways in which an individual defines himself in terms of categories that individual believes is shared with other people (Deaux, 2001). Outside of the labels or categories assigned to social identities, these identities have implications for those who claim the identities in that they have associated cognitive beliefs, emotional associations and behavioral consequences (Deaux, 2010). Popular elements of social identity include gender (Henry, 2008; Josselson, 1987; Watt, 2006), sexuality (Cass, 1979, 1996; D’Augelli, 1994; Worthington et al., 2002), racial (Cross, 1991, 2001; Ferdman and Gallegos, 2001; Helms, 1993, 1995) and ethnic identity (Phinney, 1990; Torres, 2004). The sections below will further discuss details of these areas of social identity with application to the college student population. The final portion of this section will delve even further into ethnic identity as the focus of this paper.

College students’ gender identity

Issues related to gender and identity development have increasingly received attention as the number of women in higher education has progressively grown. Accompanying this change is the recognition that gender differences also influence the higher education experience of college students. The lack of a defining male identity theory in the literature is perhaps due to the belief that much of the literature has already been developed with the male student in mind. This is attributable to men being the majority population in higher education for so many years. Seminal work such as Josselson’s (1987) research on female identity development provide one perspective on the issues or states that may affect the development of females in a college environment. Through her presentation of four states in the female identity development process, 1) identity diffusion, 2) foreclosure, 3) moratorium, and 4) identity achievement, she presents
some notion of the complexity that may undergird a woman’s navigation of self and identity. However, Josselson’s (1987) work should be viewed in the context that it is not representative of the complexity that may underlie the experiences of women of different races and ethnicities, sexual orientations or generational status.

Other research has sought to highlight similar elements. Henry (2008) and Watt (2006) have each explored different aspects of the black female identity college experience. Henry (2008) examines the experiences of black female millennial students in predominantly female populated campuses and the impact of romantic relationships on their identity. Watt (2006) takes another perspective in a focus on the relationship between racial identity, female identity and self-esteem in African American women attending historically black institutions.

Existing material already presents a formidable composite of the male experience. As David and Laker (2003) articulate, “early research did not study ‘men’. Rather, it studied “students” who were men. There was no gender lens in the research, and thus the resulting theory cannot capture the gendered nature of identity development, for men or for women” (p.1). Later research has since sought to capture diverse aspects of the male experience, often in combination with other factors such as race. For example, Edwards and Jones (2009) grapple with the battle many male students face in “putting my man face on” in regards to social expectations pertaining to their emotions, social behaviors, academic adjustment and professional pursuits.

The research on gender identity becomes even more complex however when other distinguishing aspects such as race or ethnicity and sexual orientation are considered in tandem with gender-specific issues. Distinctions between concepts such as sex as biological and gender as the “culturally shaped expression of sexual differences” (Evans et al., 2010, p. 329), offers yet another level of multiplicity to the gender identity dialogue.
College students’ sexual identity

Sexual identity is yet another component of college student development addressed in the literature. Some researchers are careful to distinguish between sexual orientation or predisposition and sexual identity or recognition and identification with their predisposition, as different concepts that should be carefully distinguished in the literature (Worthington, Savoy, Dillon & Vernaglia, 2002). Evans et al. (2010) contend that most lesbian gay bisexual identity theories can either be viewed as 1) sociological in their emphasis on the impact of community and stigma and development of social roles, or 2) psychological, based on the internal changes such as self-awareness, formation of gay/lesbian/bisexual self images and decisions about identity management of individuals in their identification process. One of the most cited theorists in this regard is Vivien Cass’ (1979, 1996) six stage theory and more recently D’Augelli’s (1994) and McCarn and Fassinger’s (1996) offered different perspectives on the sexual identity experiences of the same group.

Her later revision of the model takes into consideration that the movement through the six stages involves the interaction of individual’s needs, desires and behaviors with sex drive and aspects such as social class, geographical location and race (Cass, 1996). Later work by McCarn and Fassinger (1996) and Fassinger and Miller (1997) considered the identity development of lesbians and gay males respectively in terms of the consideration of cultural and contextual influence such as individual sexual identity and group membership identity. D’Augelli (1994) took another angle by positing a life span model of gay, lesbian and bisexual identity as a social construction influenced by personal actions, subjectivities, interactive intimacies and socio-historical connections.

On an alternate side of the spectrum, heterosexuality is less studied in the literature. Perhaps similar to the seeming absence of males in gender identity work, as the more dominant
group, heterosexual identity has not received as much attention in the research landscape. Worthington et al. (2002) offer a detailed and comprehensive model of issues in heterosexual identity focusing on both individual and social aspects of the identity process. They identify six interactive factors as crucial to heterosexual sexual identity, 1) biology, particularly physical maturation, 2) microsocial context such as values and attitudes of significant others, 3) gender norms and socialization, 4) culture in the context of place and time, 5) religious orientation in terms of core belief systems and the importance of religion in one’s life, and 6) systemic homonegativity, sexual prejudice and privilege through the discrimination and negativity targets at homosexuals and the associated benefits for heterosexuals (Evans et al., 2010).

Other research on the topic has primarily been qualitative in nature and has explored issues such as spirituality and sexual identity for LGBT students (Love, Bock, Jannarone, & Richardson, 2005), leadership roles and involvement as influenced by the LGBT identity on campus (Renn, 2007; Renn & Bilodeau, 2005), gender-specific studies on the male identity and homosexuality (Stevens, 2004) and identity development issues and lesbian students (Abes et al., 2007). The largely qualitative nature of these studies offers a valuable perspective on the different nuances within the sexual identity issues of college students.

Each of the above areas is a major aspect of college student development. However there are also personal, cultural and social factors that will distinguish the experiences of different students. The combination of these factors with aspects such as gender and sexuality should also be considered as a distinguishing feature of students’ experiences. One such aspect is race and ethnicity, which is often considered simultaneously in the literature. This offers a primary rationale for the relevance of this study. The preceding section therefore serves to offer some insight into the complexity of the race/ethnicity aspect of student development matters.
**Racial Identity vs. Ethnic Identity**

Many definitions of racial and ethnic identity have been proposed in academia. Some proponents have preferred to refer to these terms synonymously, while others have recognized the complexity inherent to both concepts and have distinguished between them.

Evans et al. (2010) assert that racial identity theories focus on the role of race and the extent to which it is incorporated into identity or self concept. Racial identity has been defined as a social construction and its use in theory is connected to aspects of group attachment. Therefore Helms (1993, 1995) makes the distinction that racial identity is “a sense of group or collective identity based on one’s perception that he or she shares a common racial heritage with a particular racial group” (p. 3), and the development of racial identity theories are based on “the tradition of treating race as a sociopolitical, and to a lesser extent, cultural construction” (p.181).

Numerous racial identity instruments and models have been proposed in the literature to attempt to measure and highlight characteristics of students from diverse ethnic backgrounds respectively. Within the United States racial context, models exist for the recognized major racial groupings in the U.S. social structure. Helms (1995) through her seminal White identity development model, offers a perspective on the developmental experiences of White students. The model offers a lens through which to view the societal power and privilege inherent to the White experience in the United States. The objective of the model was to create awareness within Whites about their role in maintaining a societal structure that privileges their race and the existing racist social structures, and recognition of the need for its destruction. Other models such as Rowe, Bennet and Atkinson (1994) offer alternate perspectives of the White identity experience through the White racial consciousness model (WRCM), which seeks to offer Whites an appreciation of their attitude towards their own race, and other racial groups in order to better assess such relationships.
Within the U.S. context, other models such as Ferdman and Gallegos’ (2001) model of Latino identity development examine the Latino identity in the context of the U.S. racial system with six identity categories, 1) Latino-integrated, 2) Latino-identified, 3) Subgroup-identified, 4) Latino as other, 5) Undifferentiated/denial, and 6) White-identified. They describe the Latino identity as complex in that “being Latino” incorporates racial, cultural and ethnic distinctions in which race is secondary for this group. Issues of race become prominent in the demarcations of skin color as a form of racial identification and the stratification emerging from these categories. The complexity inherent to lack of finite racial categories is clear in Latinos’ response to different racial categories. In a U.S. context for example, some identify with White racial categories, while others may make joint associations with racial and ethnic components based on factors such as familiar reference groups, educational experiences, physical appearance and peer interactions (Evans et al., 2010). Based on such intricate racial considerations, researchers such as Ferdman and Gallegos (2001) moved away from identifying stages in racial identity development. Instead they focused on different orientations to racial identification in Latinos’ conception of their orientation based on a) one’s lens towards identity, b) how they prefer to identify, c) how Latinos are seen as a group, d) how Whites as a group are seen, and e) how race fits into the equation. As a result of the fluidity of racial orientations, Ferdman and Gallegos (2001) distinguish through their ‘orientations’ that an individual may relate to several categories during their lives and as such their proposed model is neither linear nor cyclical.

Kim (2001) proposed the Asian-American identity development perspective based on research on Japanese American women and it offers an examination of how Asian Americans negotiate their racial identity and resolve racial conflicts in a dominant White society. She therefore offers a model with five “conceptually distinct, sequential, and progressive stages”
In the development of her model, the author presents three assumptions as crucial to Asian Americans identity development. First, Asian American and White racism are not mutually exclusive in that racist external factors influence Asian American development. Second, Asian Americans must acknowledge and consciously seek to deconstruct and challenge negative messages and stereotypes previously unconsciously adopted. Finally, the ability to develop a positive Asian American identity is based on one’s ability to handle identity crises and change former negative experiences into constructive developmentally encouraging ones (Kim, 2001). Based on these three assumptions, Kim (2001) proposes the five aforementioned stages of 1) ethnic awareness, 2) White identification, 3) awakening to social political consciousness, 4) redirection to Asian American consciousness, and 5) incorporation.

In representing the American Indian racial identity work, Evans et al., (2010) discuss issues that contribute to the complexity of this task. They recognize that American Indians represent a “diverse array of peoples, tribes and cultures” (p.266). Additionally, issues related to the role of colonization in group identity through formal and informal methods of ideologies, institutions, policies and economies, subjugation and exploitations of the group (Waziyatawin & Yellow Bird, 2005), and forced hegemonic assimilation (Tierney, 1996) are crucial to understanding the racial identity experience. Horse’s (2001) framework of Indian racial identity is offered as a tool for understanding the American Indian experience. Horse (2001) presents a description of the Native American identity experience in the context of the colonization and subjugation of their land peoples and resources. He frames the identity experience as an understanding of Native American “consciousness” of aspects such as language, genealogical heritage, a worldview that respects native traditions and values, the ability to see oneself as an Indian and status as member of a recognized tribe. However, these issues are those often
associated with ethnic identity as will be discussed in the subsequent section, and offers an example of literature that presents the racial and ethnic experience as synonymous.

Finally, the African American viewpoint is captured through popular models such as Cross’s (1991, 2001) model of psychological ‘nigrescence’ or “process of becoming black”. Cross identifies three core concepts in a) personal identity or traits or characteristics, b) reference group orientation in what they value, their worldview and their political and philosophical lens, and c) race salience or the significance of race in the individual’s approach to life. Cross and Fhagen-Smith’s (2001) later work contextualizes the black identity experience through stages of Marcia’s (1996) identity life span statuses. They distinguish between Black identity changes that occur in adolescence (part three of Cross’ original model) and adulthood (part four of Cross’ original model). It differs the original Cross (1991) model in its assumption that most adolescents have some level of awareness of their Black self as opposed to the original model that presumed they had no awareness of their ‘blackness’. It therefore places these youth at either low or high levels of salience in terms of their awareness of their ‘blackness’ and determines their transition to racial identity patterns in more early adulthood and adult stages of ‘nigrescence’. These theories and other similar work on Black identity are often associated with an all-encompassing Black student experience. However this is misleading as the model specifically addresses the African American experience, and is misleading in its generalization of the Black American experience and the exclusion of the distinctiveness of other Black ethnic groups (Cross, 1991; Cross & Fhagen-Smith, 2001; Jackson, 2001; Sellers, Smith, Shelton, Rowley & Chavous, 1998).

Multiracial theories have also been proposed as an alternative representation of the mixed race experience. Researchers have proposed both rigid and permeable theories for monoracial
groups. However, Renn (2004) contends that existing models, whether rigid or permeable prove problematic for individuals of mixed heritage in the incorporation of elements that suggest individuals will question identity, reject majority culture and immerse themselves in minority culture. This is so as such theories propose that individuals have to reject one aspect of their identity in order to immerse themselves in others. It therefore negates the uniqueness of the mixed race experience that may be defined by situational identity patterns. In order to counteract such ideas, research has represented the multiracial experience as multidimensional (Kich, 1992; Poston, 1990). The situational aspect of multiracial identity development emphasizes the ability of the individual to engage in border crossings depending on social contexts defined by racial categories (Roots, 1996; Wallace, 2001). Daniel (1996) proposes a theory emphasizing the state of “positive marginality” in which an individual sees himself as biracial and understands their biraciality as a privileged position for social interaction. Therefore individuals may experience positive marginality in four different ways: a) integrative identity-simultaneously referencing different racial communities, b) synthesized integrative identity-identifying equally and comfortably in different communities and shuttling between them, c) functional identity-identifies and functions between different communities but feels more acceptance and comfort in one than another, and d) pluralistic identity-blending aspects of different communities but considering themselves part of neither. Alternatively, Renn (2004) presents five patterns of racial identity based on a qualitative study with 56 college students on six campuses in three geographic regions. Based on her findings she presented the five patterns as representative of students’ experiences. First there is monoracial, these are students identifying more with one racial background than another (“I’m Black.” “I’m Asian”). Second, there is multiple monoracial identities, identifying with multiple heritages based on cultural knowledge and attachment to
both (“I’m half White and half Chinese”). Third, there is multiracial identity, claiming mixed race identity (“I’m biracial”, “I’m mixed”). Fourth, extraracial identity, deconstructing race or opting out of identification by U.S. racial categories (“I’m Jamaican”, “I won’t check boxes”). Finally there is situational identity, identifying differently in different contexts (“When I’m with my fraternity, I’m like them-White. When I’m with the Japan Club, I’m Japanese American, and when I’m home, I’m hapa” (pp.67-68). Such offerings offer diverse perspectives of racial identity characterizing college students’ experiences outside monoracial considerations.

Ethnic Identity Aspects

Extant literature has proposed many definitions of ethnic identity. As previously mentioned some proponents have used the terms racial and ethnic identity synonymously. However, others have recognized the complexity inherent to both concepts and have distinguished them. For the most part, there are key concepts that characterize ethnic identity and acknowledge its importance as a core aspect of identity. For instance, Stephan (1992) describes its importance as a “master status, an identity that overrides all others in others’ judgments of the self” (p.51). Furthermore, the academic cross-section acknowledges key aspects denoting ethnic identity. Tajfel (1981) proposes that ethnic identity is a part of an individual’s self-concept that derives from his or her knowledge of membership in a social group (or groups) together with the value and emotional significance attached to that membership. Breton, Isajiw, Kalbach & Reitz (1990) focus on a distinction between two aspects of ethnic identity in their identification of both an external and internal ethnic identity. They refer to the external component of identity as the recognizable social and cultural behaviors such as language, media, traditions, friendship with other ethnic group members and involvement in ethnic group functions and activities. On the other hand, the internal incorporates three aspects, 1) the cognitive, in the individual’s self-image, image of the group and knowledge of the groups morals and values, moral, and affective
dimensions, 2) the moral, characterized by an obligation to the ethnic group and a commitment to its cohesion, and 3) the affective, the individual’s feelings of attachment to the ethnic group and an affinity for the group’s members and its cultural patterns. Other authors such as Phinney (1992) recognize the diversity inherent to ethnic identity, in the incorporation of elements such as language, positive attitudes, cultural traditions and practices, self-identification, social networks, religious affiliations and endogamy. Baronov & Yelvington (2009) propose a more recent definition in an emphasis on cultural and historical traditions such as language and religion based on ethnic background. The progression of these definitions encapsulates some essence of shared aspects connecting group members and provides the context in which ethnic identity is operationalized in this research paper. Specific focus will be given to elements such as group attachments, self-identification, language and accent, attitudes and cultural practices as signifiers of ethnic identity development of international students from the Caribbean.

Generic tools have been considered as representative of minority identity development (Atkinson et al., 1997) and multiethnic identity development measures and models (Cortes, 2000; Kerwin and Ponterotto, 1995; Phinney, 1992, 1993; Wijeyesinghe, 2001). Researchers have sought to apply these models and measures to different underrepresented ethnic groups in the American context in an effort to capture different aspects of identity development (Avery, Tonidandel, Thomas, Johnson & Mack, 2007; Johnson, Robinson, Sharon, Rayle, Arredondo & Tovar-Gamero, 2005; Lee & Yoo, 2004). These generic tools offer some insights in the ability to match ethnic group experiences to an existing structure. On the other hand, it potentially minimizes unique aspects that may distinguish these groups and may be unexplored in these more generic archetypes. Phinney (1991) offered one such model in which she sought to reveal commonalities across different ethnic groups through the development of a generic theoretical
model of ethnic identity. Her later revisions to the model resulted in a three-stage model of ethnic identity formation labeled as 1) Diffusion/Foreclosure-Unexamined ethnic identity, 2) Ethnic identity search/moratorium, and 3) Ethnic identity achievement. Through Phinney’s (1991) three stage model there is a process where the individual moves from unawareness of ethnic identity components, to a sense of recognition of these components based on moments of conflict or other poignant experiences, and finally to a “healthy bicultural identity” (Evans et al., 2010). Once again, throughout Phinney’s (1991) ethnic identity model there is continuous mention of racial issues and its influence on the identity process. There is a sense that achievement of ethnic identity is tied to a simultaneous achievement of racial identity. This emphasizes the tendency in the literature to use the terms synonymously or a direct consequence of each other. Additionally, there are arguments against the utility of generic ethnic identity models as representative of the experiences of specific ethnic groups as unique. In a similar vein, Syed and Azmitia (2008) sought to address this limitation through their incorporation of Phinney’s (1992) multiethnic measure with their use of a narrative approach with their participants. In using both approaches, the authors show that they recognize the limitations of generic multiethnic scales such as Phinney’s. Accordingly, they incorporated the qualitative method to allow for the appreciation of distinguishing features elicited in the narratives of the five ethnic groups represented in their group of 191 study participants.

The ethnic identity aspect of the college student literature has centered on categories specific to United States nationals. Researchers continue to assert the complexity in articulating the ethnic identity experiences of different groups. They have suggested that any attempt to categorize individuals within single generic groupings is contentious and difficult (Evans et al., 2010). These groups largely have immigrant origins and as such there may be representations
from diverse ethnic groups within racial categories. In the Latino category the diverse associations may include groupings such as Chicano, Latino, Hispanic and Mexican American and national origins from geographic regions such as the Caribbean, Latin, Central and South America (Torres, 2004; Torres, Howard-Hamilton & Cooper, 2003). The complexity of the Asian grouping is represented in populations such as Chinese Americans, Japanese Americans, Indian Americans, Taiwanese Americans and Vietnamese Americans. Several scholars have mentioned the difficulty in generalizing based on the ethnic diversity of the group (Huang, 1997; Torres et al., 2003) and difficulty in using linear models to represent their experiences (Yeh & Huang, 1996). The ethnic identity of the Native American experience in the United States is even more complex based on their history as non-immigrant, native settlers of the country. There is even disagreement in whether to refer to the group as Native Americans (Jackson, Smith, & Hill, 2003; Lundberg, 2007) or American Indians (Cajete, 2005) or Indigenous Americans (Mihesuah & Wilson, 2004) based on distinctions such as level of attachment to the United States and other indigenous groups globally. The diversity inherent to the number of tribes represented in these groupings as distinguished by aspects such as customs, language, history, culture and symbols suggests the complexity in including them all in one grouping (Horse, 2001). Finally, the difficulty in representing the African American experience as a group extends to the Black American history of the slave experience and attachment to the African continent. Relocation from Africa and detachment from the ethnic elements such as the customs, language and traditions of African nations, limits African Americans from making connections with the African part of their heritage (Evans et al., 2010). Additionally, the diversity of the Black experience in the United States and the disparateness of worldviews on the attachment to Africa complicate the representation of a collective Black American ethnic group experience.
Another trend in the higher education ethnic identity literature is the consideration of ethnic identity in light of issues of adjustment. Though there are strong arguments concerning the representation of collective ethnic group experiences in the United States, there is a significant body of literature that does so, particularly in addressing adjustment experiences. The tendency is to make reference to generic racial categories in this literature, but discuss elements of ethnic identity. In many instances, this literature surrounds the adjustment of underrepresented populations in the U.S. social context in higher education institutions, more specifically, Latino students (Guardia & Evans, 2008; Rivas-Drake, 2008; Torres & Baxter-Magolda, 2004; Torres & Hernandez, 2007), Native Americans (Cajete, 2005; Jackson et al., 2003; Lundberg, 2007; Mihesuah & Wilson, 2004), African Americans (Cole & Jacob-Arriola, 2007; Day-Vines, Barket & Exum, 1998; Phelps, Taylor & Gerard, 2001; Rodgers & Summers, 2008;) and Asian Americans (Kawaguchi, 2003; Lee, 2005; Rhoades, Lee & Yamada, 2002; Yee & Huang, 1996; Yoo & Lee, 2005). These groups are recognized minority groups in the U.S. social structure and in navigating aspects of ethnic identity in college environments they may draw upon coping strategies to adjust to the personal and academic aspects of their college lives. For some students it means navigating their cognitive, intrapersonal and interpersonal development in environments where they are seen as the ‘other’. The Latino students in Torres and Hernandez’s (2007) study navigated different elements of their development through ethnic group attachments such as family and kinship ties as authority figures, and often-viewed aspects based on a continuum of Latino versus non-Latino or Anglo associations.

Rodgers and Summers (2007) indirectly address ethnic identity in their examination of retention issues of African American students at predominantly White campuses versus historically Black institutions. Their examination of the issue is influenced by the
psychologically bound model on retention as proposed by Bean and Eaton (2000). However, in their examination of the retention issues of this student group on these campuses, they articulate a key point regarding their ethnic identity process. They contend that African American students assume a bicultural attitude at predominantly White institutions so as to successfully maneuver their membership in their predominantly White campus community and simultaneously maintain strong ties to their African American community. This is an illuminating point that may speak volumes for the integration and identity development of underrepresented groups in the higher education system on a much broader scale. The focus on different groups of international students is yet another example of the focus on underrepresented groups’ adjustment as an ethnic identity concern. This has been particularly discernible in literature addressing Asian and Middle Eastern international students’ adjustment issues to new cultural environments based on differences in cultural practices (Dao et al., 2007; Diangelo, 2006; Frey & Roysircar, 2006; Hsieh, 2007).

**Caribbean student ethnic identity issues**

The examination of Caribbean national’s ethnicity issues in the U.S. context has primarily been focused on the immigrant Caribbean population in the United States (Hall & Carter, 2006; McLaughlin, 1981; Rogers, 2006; Tatum, 1997; Waters, 1996). Researchers have studied aspects, which distinguish generations within the immigrant Afro-Caribbean group. For instance, Hall et al. (2006) address differences in first and second-generation descendants’ level of identification with their ethnic groups and their attitudes towards ethnic and racial majority groups. They contend that the children of Afro-Caribbean immigrants have stronger racial identity status than their parents in their associations with majority ethnic groups in the United States. However, they also share similar levels of ethnic identity ties to the Afro-Caribbean ethnicity. The fact that these descendants were born in the U.S., unlike their parents, but have
similar levels of ethnic identity as their Caribbean immigrant parents, may suggest the strong influence of the Afro-Caribbean ethnicity on their upbringing. Given that international students from the Caribbean share similar ethnic backgrounds with first generation immigrants, the ethnic identity development of these Caribbean students is equally pertinent. Additionally, it is critical to consider the associated changes to their ethnic identity in their new home environments. Adding to the complexity of the issue is the fact that Caribbean students are now ethnic minorities on U.S. college campuses, whereas they were in the majority in their homelands (Ho, 1985; Rogers, 2006). Therefore, changes to elements of ethnic identity, such as their self-identification, attitudes towards their ethnic group and sense of belonging may be associated factors affected in their transition from their homelands to the U.S.

Caribbean students as ethnic minorities on U.S. campuses have primarily been addressed in dissertation material. Though none of these studies seem to focus on ethnic identity development of this student group, they do encompass the cultural adjustments made by students of Caribbean background in the U.S. higher education system (Allen, 2001; Browne Huntt, 2008; Campbell; 2002; Carty Roper, 1989; Lauture, 2007; Salmon, 1982).

In her phenomenological research design incorporating the perspectives of ten graduate students from the Caribbean, Brown Huntt (2008) addressed the cultural adjustments necessary for these students. Through her phenomenological design she sought to determine 1) how the cultural milieu of Latin America and the Caribbean defines and influenced their academic and social experience as students at a predominantly White institution in the Midwest, and 2) how these students blended or negotiated their identities to address their academic, personal and social experiences. Among the issues were 1) communication and the effort to have their classmates and new community listen past their accents, 2) their unfamiliarity with the
pedagogical practices in U.S. classrooms, and 3) their ability to maintain positive relationships with faculty and peers. Central to their transitional experience was the ability to maintain strong connections with family and friends in their native homes. Lauture’s (2007) work addresses similar issues through her phenomenological study of ten Haitian undergraduates’ experience at U.S. colleges. She sought to examine these student’s perspectives on their academic experiences transitioning from high school in Haiti to college in the U.S. Her findings suggested that students had to make pedagogical adjustments such as moving from the route-learning or memorization as fundamental to their learning environment in Haiti to the more critical, discussion oriented focus of the U.S. classroom. Additionally, another significant adjustment was the need to make behavioral shifts from beliefs that making eye contact with one’s elders such as faculty, or challenging their viewpoints, was a sign of disrespect. This was an adjustment in that these new behaviors inherent to U.S. pedagogical culture, contradicted their own culturally ascribed practices. The ability to maintain strong connections through Caribbean student associations and other attachments to their home countries was also integral to maintaining ethnic identity for this group of students and was a strong theme in the research (Allen, 2001; Browne Huntt, 2008; Campbell, 2002).

In keeping with aspects of the international students’ adjustment experiences in the United States and the fluidity of their identity experiences, Judith Butler’s (1990) performativity and identity theory seems especially pertinent. This becomes even more applicable in light of these students’ ability to navigate aspects of their identity in the context of their institutional culture and the large societal environment.

**Performativity and Identity**

Judith Butler’s (1990) performativity framework is the conceptual framework grounding the development of this study. Originating in the feminist landscape, this theory has its roots in
gender identity, admittedly not the main focus of this paper; however, it also considers concepts such as intersectionality, identity, subjectivity and agency which are core concepts to the development of this study.

In discussing gender through the performativity lens, Butler suggests that feminine and masculine performances create the ideology of gender and therefore gender emerges as reality to the extent that it is performed. These roles are thus established, recreated and reinforced within the performances and it is through these performances that gender norms are defined and seen as natural. Therefore, she suggests that gender can be seen as the repeated stylization of the body, or a set of repeated acts within a regulatory frame that gives the appearance of a natural sort of being over time. In further clarifying core concepts of performativity, Lester (2008) articulates core tenets of performativity. First, there is ‘identity’, a fluid state that can change at any moment and is created and recreated through discourse. Butler (1990) suggests that our use of language or discourse signifies the ‘identity’. Therefore, to use gender as an example, gender is therefore an act that brings into being what it names, for instance, a “masculine” man, or a “feminine” woman (Butler, 1990, p.24-5). At the same time, gender is ‘performatively’ constituted in the same way that our choice of clothes is curtailed or predetermined by society, context and economies in which we are situated (Salih, 2002). Individuals also have multiple and competing identities that may exist simultaneously and may emerge depending on the situations one encounters.

Second, ‘agency’, another important facet, is represented in the individual’s ability to traverse acknowledged norms and acknowledge agency. Through the ability to ‘overperform’ or resist normative roles, the norm is exposed. The individual’s identity may be determined by the extent to which social norms prescribe to the authenticity of the performances. As Butler (1990) contends, identity is political and it is through construction and deconstruction that agency is
achieved. As Butler (1995) contends, it is ‘the constituted character of the subject that is the very precondition of its agency. For what is it that enables a purposive and significant reconfiguration of cultural and political relations, if not a relation that can be turned against itself, reworked and resisted?’ (p.46). Therefore, revisit the gender example, Butler (1993) refers to the “contentious practice of ‘queerness’” (p.21), and ‘drag’ as a subversive practice which seeks to deconstruct and reconstruct gender roles and acquire agency. This emphasizes the need to consider elements of one’s identity in relation to the larger social context and to actively deconstruct existing norms that may significantly influence the ‘performance’ of one’s identity.

Last, ‘power’ is directly associated with ‘agency’ as specific identities aligns with power and is given more validity and relevance in certain situations. There are often regulatory powers attached to accepted norms and as such some identities are more validated and recognized than others. This may limit the scope of agency attached to more covert identities.

In discussing different aspects of identity, it then becomes necessary to look at the concept of intersectionality or how social and cultural categories intertwine. This paper focuses on ethnic identity, however as previously mentioned, the concepts of race and ethnicity are closely connected in addition to other aspects of identity, such as class and gender. Jones and McEwen (2000) offered one of the first conceptualizations of intersecting identities within the intrapersonal domain with their ‘model of multiple dimensions of identity’. Their initial model incorporates relationships amongst different social identities (e.g. race, gender, social class, and sexual orientation), and considers them in conjunction with their core self or personal identities. Since the development of their initial model, Abes, Jones & McEwen (2007) reconceptualized the ‘multiple dimensions of identity’ to consider college student’s meaning making capacity. This takes into consideration student’s understanding of the relationships amongst their personal
and social identities and how they come to perceive these relationships. Therefore, students who use access more complex meaning making levels show an awareness of the performative nature of their identity and rely less on fixed, externally defined meanings (Abes et. al., 2007). This suggests an appreciation of intersectionality in the relationships between socio-cultural categories and identities and the acknowledgement of diverse and marginalized positions of these transitional categories (Knudsen, 2004). Patricia Collins (1998) acknowledges that a focus on intersectionality is not a question of adding one oppression to the next as distinct social hierarchies, but rather an examination of how gender, race, class and nation mutually construct each other (p.63). She further makes reference to the potential grounding of U.S. national identity in ethnic nationalism of a highly racialized nation-state. In this societal structure the most valuable citizens are Whites, with Native Americans, African Americans, Mexican Americans and Puerto Ricans seen as second-class citizens. Also, people of color from the Caribbean, Asia, Latin America and Africa encounter more difficulty naturalizing as immigrants than those from European nation. This suggests intersectionality on two levels, the co-construction of race and ethnicity and the assignation of power levels to intersected constructs that therein influence lived realities.

Baukje (2006) declares that the ‘blind spot’ in the intersectionality approach is the singular association of ‘belongingness’ to ethnicity, when it may in fact also be connected to combined issues of ethnicity, culture, race, and class. This also suggests the complexity inherent to the identity process so far as navigating amidst multiple aspects represented in the larger social discourse.

The final key concept in the ‘performativity’ theory is the process of repetition. Repetition is seen as integral to the production of subjectivity as it is through this process of repetition that
performativity is constituted in the subject and a space is created to contest the foundations and 
origins of stable identity categories (Jackson, 2004). Through repetition, which never looks the 
same or exhausts its performative possibilities, the identity category is forced to remain open to 
future modifications. As Butler (1995) asserts in reference to gender identity in particular, ‘we do 
not choose our gendered identity; our gender is produced as we repeat ourselves. We do not take 
on roles to act out as in a performance; we become subjects through repetition…gender then 
constitutes the identity it is purported to be…the very ‘expressions’ that are said to be its results’ 
(pg. 25). Interruptions and deconstruction of elements of the existing space are possible through 
questioning existing discourses and the nature and location of power relations. It is therefore 
possible to derive agency from within existing discourses, challenge historicity, and expose the 
falsehood of their origins. Such an emphasis on multiple junctures for intersectionality and 
racially-based social imbalances underlines the centrality of such an approach to the larger issue 
of performativity and identity in the educational arena. It therefore offers a unique lens through 
which to appreciate the identity issues of the underrepresented experiences of international 
students from the Caribbean.

**Chapter Summary**

Available research on the ethnic identity issues and adjustment of Caribbean students 
spanned dated work as far back as 1981 to most recent work in 2008. However there has been no 
study that has explored the ethnic identity experiences of these students. In the above discussion 
on international education and international student issues it becomes clear that regardless of 
their backgrounds there are several critical aspects affecting the students’ experiences in the U.S. 
environment. Though these issues may vary culturally and even individually, the personal, 
academic and psychological implications for these students should not be undermined. Butler’s 
theoretical perspective offers a unique perspective of the underlying issues affecting the identity
process. It considers the complexity inherent to this process based on influences from existing social agencies. This takes the examination of identity from solely descriptive to a more critical analysis of the students’ experiences.

College students, regardless of their age or level of study are bound to experience diverse developmental issues during their educational pursuits. Traditional undergraduate students in particular have been the focus of much identity development research based on their chronological age and their transition from adolescence to adulthood. The fact that this development takes place in the context of the college environment for these students, presents a challenge to the higher education to be cognizant of these issues and meet the needs of this population. For international students, these developmental issues may be even further complicated when one considers the inherent cultural adjustments in their new home environments. It is also critical to consider the issues of these students based on their diverse backgrounds, in this instance ethnicity, to ensure that generic solutions are not viewed as applicable to the entire international student population.

This study therefore seeks to address that substantial gap in the literature in relation to Caribbean undergraduate students and to facilitate discussion on the ethnic identity needs of this growing population in the U.S. higher education system. Essentially, generic models on ethnic identity do not adequately capture the cultural nuances of these groups of students. Additionally, the practice of homogenizing international students as a mass population with little consideration of distinguishing aspects also negates cultural and ethnic nuances. Therefore further studies in this regard will seek to direct academic discussion on the path to appreciating international students with a significantly wider scope.
CHAPTER 3
METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study is to probe Caribbean undergraduate students’ exploration of their ethnic identity at a select four-year university in the Southeast region of the United States and to describe how these students negotiate their identities as foreigners or temporary residents in the United States. In light of this research goal, the following chapter describes the methodology taken in this study. It elucidates the epistemological and theoretical approaches supporting the study. This is central to the development of the study as a representation of the perspectives of the study participants. The data collection method is then highlighted as the tool used to generate the perspectives of individual students, while allowing for their expression of their ethnic identity experiences as international students. An overview of the chosen grounded theory data analysis method is then provided to provide a conceptual representation of the data analysis process. Finally, a researcher subjectivity statement is presented as an additional tool for ‘bracketing’ research positioning as a Caribbean national studying other international students from the region.

Prior to highlighting key methodological issues in the paper, the following research questions are restated so as to contextualize the focus of the study in relation to the theoretical and epistemological frameworks. The first question below addresses their acculturation experience from the perspective of their ethnic background.

How do undergraduate international students from the Caribbean perceive that existing ethnically over-generalized and homogeneous institutional discourse at the university level has shaped their negotiation of their ethnic identities? A) How do undergraduate international students from the Caribbean perceive that their experience as international students in the United States has affected their identification with their native cultural backgrounds? B) How do
undergraduate international students from the Caribbean perceive that their experience as international students from the Caribbean has influenced their identification with the U.S. culture?

**Epistemological and Theoretical Approaches**

Constructionism and elements of subjectivism were the combined epistemological foundations guiding this study, while the interpretive framework of critical inquiry acted as the second level of support to ground the research. These approaches are so-named based on Crotty’s (1998) categorization of these elements of qualitative work. Epistemologically, Hatch (2002) recognizes that it is fundamental to qualitative research to determine what can be known in terms of the relationship between the knower and the known. He asserts that in studies grounded in this approach, knowledge is a human construction and the researcher and the participant co-construct understandings. In discussing constructionism as an epistemological grounding, Crotty (1998) contends that this form of knowledge rejects the objectivist acknowledgement of an objective truth. Instead, it embraces the belief that truth or meaning is created through human engagement with the realities in our world. As such there is no meaning without a mind and meaning is constructed differently by individuals even in relation to the same phenomenon. This is therefore integrally tied to the interpretive constructivist framework bound in this philosophical approach.

The subjectivist epistemology was useful in the interpretation of the critical aspect of this study in its ability to ground the imposition of the object by the subject or participant (Crotty, 1998). Therefore as Crotty (1998) contends, knowledge from such a lens is constructed in the individual mind to the extent that meaning is imported from somewhere else, whether it is our dreams, our collective unconscious, or even belief systems. This means individuals’ understanding of the world is subconsciously or consciously influenced by different aspects of
their surroundings. The subjective experience of the individual is crucial to an understanding of the larger social experience. As Jackson (2004) asserts, this view of subjectivity-in-process, places a subject’s agency within the socio-cultural intersections of categories such as race, class and gender while assuming that the meanings of these categories are local, partial and specific. Therefore constant questioning of social practices allows for acknowledgement of the levels and limits of power relations and discourses, therein forcing us to reevaluate and disrupt ‘taught’ norms.

Additionally, the interactions that occur between the participants and objects or players are also an integral experiential viewpoint on knowledge construction. Therefore, both constructionism and subjectivism as epistemologies were used to offer diverse levels of meaning making for participants.

Hatch (2002) supports values, beliefs, feelings and assumptions at the individual level as crucial to constructivist studies as it acknowledges universal and absolute realities in which the objects of inquiry and individual perspectives are constructions of reality. Thus, viewpoints are constructed through the diverse perspectives of individuals with multiple realities and experiences. The construction of multiple realities is also addressed by Denzin and Lincoln (2005) in their assertion that individual’s constructions may ultimately combine with those of other individuals to form a consensus.

Both the constructionism and subjectivism epistemologies are significant in their attempt to recognize that students as individuals will have different experiences based on different aspects of their ethnic backgrounds such as race, ethnicity, gender and class. It is thereby crucial to appreciate their ethnic identity experiences inclusive of their values, beliefs and feelings. At the same time, one should recognize that in their foreign environment, their interactions with the
larger social discourse are key to their meaning making experience as international students from the Caribbean.

The theoretical framework supporting the identified interpretive epistemologies for this study is the critical inquiry approach. Crotty (2003) describes critical inquiry as research that calls current ideology into question and initiates action in the cause of social justice. Therefore researchers use their work to interrogate commonly held values and assumptions, challenge social structures and engage in social action. Kincheloe and McLaren (1994) support this as a social theory that is centered on issues of power and justice. It highlights the construction of a social system and the interaction of cultural dynamics such as matters of economy, race, class, gender, ideologies, discourses, education, religion, and other social institutions. Power relationships are at the center of critical inquiry, as the researcher’s main focus is to illuminate existing sources of hegemony and injustice. Primarily, it underscores the issue of privilege in relation to matters of race, class, gender and sexuality (Crotty, 2003; Kincheloe & McLaren, 1994).

Kincheloe and McLaren (1994) further articulate that there are certain key assumptions about critical inquiry research, including 1) that all thought is fundamentally mediated by power relations that are historically constituted and social in nature, 2) that certain groups in any society are privileged over others, thereby constituting an oppression that is most forceful when subordinates accept their social status as natural, necessary or inevitable, 3) that oppression has many faces and concern for one at the expense of others can be counterproductive because of the connections between them, and 4) that mainstream research practices are often implicated, even unwillingly, in systems of class, race and gender oppression. Thus critical inquiry in particular is a natural extension of the chosen theoretical framework of the study in Butler’s (1990)
The discussion of power provides a strong theoretical connection to critical race theory (CRT), as it has also been linked to aspects of performativity in its questioning approach to existing societal structures. Tenets of this theory have been identified as, 1) race as endemic to the U.S. society, legally, culturally and psychologically, 2) an interpretation of civil rights law in terms of its limitations in fully addressing racial inequalities, 3) challenges to the dominant legal claims of neutrality, objectivity, color blindness and meritocracy as camouflages for the self-interests of powerful entities in society, and 4) insistence on a contextual examination of the law and the experiential knowledge of people of color in analyzing law and society (Tate, 1997). Solórzano and Yanno (2002) closely parallel Tate’s (1992) tenets by identifying five key themes in CRT as 1) the intercentricity of race and racism with other forms of subordination, 2) the challenge to dominant ideology, 3) the commitment to social justice, 4) the centrality of experiential knowledge, and 4) the transdisciplinary perspective. As Parker and Lynn (2002) contend, educational research has historically ignored marginalized groups by not addressing their concerns. There has been a tendency to use genetic or biological determinist perspectives to explain social educational problems. Additionally race has been de-emphasized by arguing that minority students’ educational experiences are directly related to issues of class and gender.
without giving much credence to race, culture, language and immigrant status. Therefore CRT offers a theoretical and methodological opportunity to acknowledge existing imbalances in educational research. It also accounts for the role of race and racism in forms of subordination based on gender, class, sexual orientation, language and national origin and focuses on layers of subordination based on race, gender, class, immigration status, surname, phenotype, accent and sexuality (Solórzano & Yanno, 2002).

The Data Collection Process

The data collection process in qualitative research has sometimes been compared to a “circle” or series of interrelated activities involving related activities which both include and go beyond collecting data (Creswell, 2008). This circle is thought to include actions such as locating a site or an individual, gaining access and establishing rapport, purposeful sampling, and data collection procedures. In keeping with the concept of a data collection circle, this section follows the facets of this idea in the discussion of the data collection process. The concept of the ‘data collection circle’ was particularly pertinent to this study as the data collection and analysis processes were continuously intertwined. The researcher consistently collected and analyzed data at different stages of the methodological process in keeping with the recurring process inherent to the constructivist grounded theory method highlighted in latter portions of this chapter.

Access and Rapport

The identified participants in this research study are international students from the Caribbean region who are upperclassmen at the undergraduate level at a large public, research-intensive university in the southeastern region of the United States. A total of 20 undergraduate students from the Caribbean region, who meet the criteria of ‘international students’ within the context of this study, are currently enrolled at the identified university. However, only fourteen of these students, ten females and 4 males, are upperclassmen and met the criteria for inclusion
in the study. Based on this representation the students were divided into equal batches for recruitment. Therefore, two groups each comprising five females and two males were initially identified for participation in the two different rounds of data collection. In the first round of data collection, the initial group of five females and two males were approached for participation. This sampling was conducted on a first come, first serve basis until the group approached the desired sample of five females and two males. However, given the unpredictability of the first come, first serve selection process, the initial sample of seven actually included four females and three males. The remaining participants were considered solely for the purposes of theoretical sampling if this was deemed necessary in the latter portions of the study. Theoretical sampling will also be explained in the latter section of this chapter. Overall, during the data collection process, the intention was to build a rapport with the participants, thereby assisting in an in-depth exploration of their experiences. Additionally, the data collection process sought their involvement on multiple levels and rapport was crucial to achieving success in engaging their participation throughout the entire process. In an effort to do this there were consistent attempts to maintain communication through courtesy emails throughout the semester to offer encouragement at different points of the academic semester and to remind them of upcoming points of data collection. Interestingly, participants would also contact the researcher at different points to check on the researcher’s progress and offer encouragement as well. This resulted in the development of a strong rapport throughout the data collection process with a sense of investment on both parts, both researcher and co-researcher. The shared ethnic backgrounds between researcher and co-researcher and a sense of investment in research related to their shared backgrounds. This was felt to contribute to this initial rapport between parties and participants’ strong level of engagement during the research process. Additionally, the multiple
rounds of data collection increased instances of contact and increased feelings of investment in the progress of the study.

Though these students comprise a small percentage of the overall student population, there are different points of access for these students in the school population. First, the Caribbean Student Association, CARIBSA, was approached as a point of contact through communication with executive members and the association’s faculty advisor to determine different means of communicating with members. The researcher attended an association meeting and used the portion of the meeting designated for announcements to inform members of the research study and invite their participation. However, this strategy proved to be an unsuccessful recruitment strategy, as no participants were recruited as a result of this point of contact. Participants later proffered one possible reason for this lack of success in the data collection process as they articulated that there were somewhat strained relationships between the association and international Caribbean students. As such, even though the association is named the Caribbean Student association, my targeted population does not typically attend given that they identify it as a space more welcoming for Caribbean American or first and second generation students born to Caribbean born parents or immigrants to the U.S. Additionally, members were also able to access the IRB approved flyer and informed consent via the association’s Facebook® page which was used as a promotional tool for further perusal at member’s disposal. The use of social network promotion for this population was deemed particularly lucrative as a recruiting tool given their high usage of networks such as Facebook® and the reliance of student groups such as CARIBSA on this network to communicate with members. However, once again, this was not the successful point of contact as first imagined with the CARIBSA population, given reasons previously explained. Facebook® did however prove a meaningful source of communication
with the eventual participants in that it proved a more effective point of contact with the eventual participants than their institutional email accounts. Several of the participants responded more quickly to messages sent via Facebook’s® messaging service than those sent to their institutional email accounts. This supported the wisdom of using Facebook® as a point of access and confirmed that in large part the population of the CARIBSA association did not feel they were representative of the study participation requirements.

Another point of access was different institutional electronic mailing lists, such as the institution’s international student center listserv and the honors student listserv. The weekly emailed announcements from the International center and the Honors program were utilized for this purpose with the assistance of established contacts the researcher has with university administration. The international center listserv proved particularly resourceful as the center was able to send a blind copy of the email to the fourteen students meeting the research criteria on campus. The rationale for this recruitment strategy was that the students would more readily respond to this individualized communication rather than a mass institutional email, and based on participant feedback this proved to be the case. Given the success of the listserv recruitment method, there was no need to persist with initial plans to post flyers at different points on campus for further recruitment. Feedback from participants also confirmed that it was the description of the researcher as a Caribbean national in their initial recruitment emails that encouraged their interest in the research. Additionally, there was an instant rapport based on this shared background in their initial contact with the researcher as an international student from the Caribbean. This seemingly made participants more comfortable in relating their experiences and assisted in building rapport particularly in the initial data collection stages of the research. However, given this shared background and instant rapport, it was very important for the
researcher to acknowledge presuppositions and experiences as a Caribbean international student in order to focus on participants’ experiences.

**Sampling Strategy**

Given the generalizations inherent to the purpose statement and research question, it is necessary to further define the group under investigation. As such, the identified population of Caribbean international students is specific to those currently enrolled at the four-year large public university in the southeastern United States, and within the traditional age group for undergraduate college students. Traditional age group in this context refers to residential students between the ages 18 and 25 who are full time students at the institution (Sorey & Duggan, 2008). This age group is identified as it represents a stage coined as ‘emerging adulthood’ or a developmental stage after adolescence and before full adulthood (Arnett, 2004; Pizzolato, 2005; Pizzolato, Claudhari, Murrell, Podobnik & Schaeffer, 2008).

The identified population as a subgroup was defined as Caribbean traditional aged international students who attend four-year institutions in the United States. Criterion sampling was the primary sampling method. Hatch (2002) proposes that criterion sampling includes individuals who fit particular predetermined criteria. In this respect, students shared their current status as traditional aged undergraduate students currently in their junior and senior years, who sojourned from their homelands in the Caribbean to pursue undergraduate studies in the United States.

Given the scarcity of this sample in the larger student population on campus, if the proposed sample was proving difficult to access through the Caribbean Student Association or the identified email listservs, then snowball sampling was proposed as the secondary sampling strategy utilized to contact respondents who are representative of the desired sample. This was the identified secondary sampling strategy given that these students are in such small numbers on
campus. Also, outside of those who may be members of the Caribbean Association, they are a largely disconnected group and was deemed necessary to, in addition, contact these students by word of mouth if the primary sampling method was inadequate. Therefore, if necessary, participants who had already consented to their participation or other students on campus would have been encouraged to suggest participants to the researcher who meet the criteria for inclusion in the study. However, this proved unnecessary given the initial response from participants to the individualized emails. The turnaround response time from the first seven participants was relatively fast and did not require the use of snowball sampling. Participants were recruited from the institution according to the following criteria: a) each participant self identified as being of Caribbean background or nationality, b) they were enrolled as undergraduate international students, c) they were residential students under the age of 25, and d) they were enrolled full time at the institution. The objective of such sampling procedures was to support the ability of the purposeful sampling approach to facilitate rich contextual perspectives on the identified research question and purpose statement as predicated within the stated epistemological and theoretical foundations of the study.

Data Collection Procedures

Data collection incorporated a multi-level design utilizing three different sources of information.

Interviews

In the first stage, interviews were the primary data collection tool used to capture the perspectives of the research participants. Researchers consider qualitative interviews to be speech events and conversations that allow one to explore the experiences and interpretations of informants (Hatch, 2002; Kale, 1996; Rubin & Rubin, 1995; Seidman, 1998). In his focus on the quality of the interviewing process, Seidman (1998) offers a deeper appreciation of a qualitative
researcher’s perspective on the method in relation to participants. He explains that “Interviewing provides access to the context of people’s behavior and thereby provides a way for researchers to understand the meaning of that behavior…a basic assumption of in-depth interviewing research is that the meaning people make of their experience affects the way they carry out that experience…to put behavior in context and provide access to understanding their action (p.4).

This offers a glimpse through the qualitative interviewer’s lens in the rationale for choosing interviews as the primary data collection tool. The interviewing method has also been characterized as more than a set of skills but an approach to learning, and an opportunity to achieve understanding through encouraging people to describe their worlds in their own words (Rubin & Rubin, 1995). A similar viewpoint was also assumed in the use of the method in this study to chronicle deep, rich appreciation of the key respondents to the process.

Formal, semi-structured interviews were the form utilized in the interview process. As Hatch (2002) recommends, the process assumed its structure in the use of a time limit of approximately 45 minutes to an hour, the tape recorded nature of the session and the fact that the researcher guided the interview process with predetermined open-ended questions. However, the ‘semi’ structured nature arose because the questions were only used as guides in the process and the interviewer followed the leads of the interviewee and probed into emerging areas during the interview. This allowed for an in-depth exploration of the interviewees perspectives and experiences throughout the interview. Bogdan and Biken (1998) also contend that the objective is not to get through all the questions, but instead place emphasis on understanding the participant’s point of view. Similarly, Charmaz (2009) suggests that the concept of ‘intensive interviewing’ is central to the constructivist approach in its ability to elicit each participant’s interpretation of his or her experience. Therefore the interviewer assumed the position of trying
to understand the topic with the interviewee having the relevant experience to shed light on the topic (p. 25).

Kvale’s (1996) interview method was used as a guideline for the process. This method was particularly well-suited to the constructivist aspect of the study as it pays particular attention to safeguarding participant’s perspectives at every point in the interview process. It does this as the approach involves the following responsibilities on the part of the researcher, a) attention to everyday ‘life world’ of participants, b) efforts to understand the meaning of the themes in dialogue, c) encouragement of descriptions of specific experiences, d) openness to novel and unexpected perspectives, e) acknowledgement of possible ambiguity and contradictions in the dialogue, f) awareness of new insights that may come to interviewer and participant in the interview, and g) knowledge that the interviewer brings varying degrees of sensitivity to different aspects of the participants’ experiences and perspectives (p.30-31). Additionally, Charmaz (2009) contends that the researcher should ensure the following, 1) that participants’ comfort level is given priority over getting juicy details, 2) pay careful attention to suitable times to probe, 3) try to understand the experience from the participant’s view and validate its significance to this person, and 4) slant ending questions toward positive responses to close the interview on a positive level.

These nuances were considered in the development of the research instrument and the facilitation of the interview process. Interview questions were developed with strong support from previous research on ethnic identity development, its relationship to potentially fluid identity experiences and possible effects of power issues such as stereotyping (Diangelo, 2006; Hsieh, 2006; Phinney, 1990; Torres et al., 2009; Wadsworth et al., 2008). The protocol also reflected issues underscored in Butler’s (1990) performativity framework as consistent with
aspects of the research questions. Therefore constructs such as self-identification, agency, repetition of identities, and intersectionality were explored in light of participant’s ethnic identity (Appendix C).

The construct of self-identification explored aspects of ethnic identity such as language and accent. Accent has been characterized as an important factor related to language as an ethnic identifier. Therefore, the effect of participants’ accent and their ethnic identity development were highlighted in the interview questions. Existing discourse on international students’ identity issues report changes in individual’s attitudes towards their ethnic group; therefore this construct was also further explored (Berry, 2003; Berry, Trimble & Olmedo, 1986; Stark-Wroblewski & Yanico, 2005). Attachment to cultural traditions and practices and involvement in ethnic-based social networks are also identified in the literature as crucial aspects. As such the involvement level of the participants in programs and networks, which are associated with their ethnic groups, was central to the development of interview questions. All the identified constructs were directly related to how ethnic identity was operationalized in this research paper. As such, interview questions sought to attain participant’s views, feelings and attitudes related to all the above-mentioned constructs.

In accordance with Glesne’s (1999) recommendation, the suitability of the interview protocol was assessed through different methods. In this instance, two different methods of verification were utilized. First, peer reviewers, in this instance at least two fellow graduate students with substantial experience in qualitative research methods reviewed a draft of the interview protocol to assess its effectiveness in terms of grammatical construction, organization, clarity and relevance of questions. In the second phase, the researcher conducted a pilot test of the instrument through meetings with international undergraduate students from the Caribbean.
The intention was to attain their perspectives on issues of clarity, repetition, or missing elements in relation to the questions included on the protocol. The participants involved in this stage of the review process were not the same individuals involved in the formal interview process.

As Hatch (2002) suggests, emphasis was placed on ensuring that questions, 1) were open-ended, allowing participants to share their unique perspectives, 2) used language familiar to informants, 3) were clear enough that informants could understand them, while communicating the expectations of the researcher, 4) were neutral and did not seek to lead the interview in a predetermined direction, 5) respected the informants and presumed that they had valuable knowledge to share, and 6) generated answers relevant to the stated research objectives. With this in mind, the peer review and piloting process were integral in maintaining such criteria and assisted in a rewarding experience for both the interviewer and the interviewee. Accordingly, based on feedback from both parties, the researcher made appropriate revisions to the protocol so as to incorporate their suggestions.

The secondary data collection methods assumed two forms, 1) photo voice, and 2) reflective journaling. The questions driving the photo voice and reflective journaling processes specifically addressed aspects related to the power imbalance issues of critical race theory. Therefore questions centered on the institution’s role in preventing or assisting Caribbean international students to sustain their ethnic identity as students. Additionally, participants’ pictures and reflections also addressed aspects that helped them to represent their ethnic identity or presented a barrier to this representation. Both methods sought to support the interviewing process and allow for active participation by study participants in the data collection process. Therefore, participants participated in interviews and then conducted their photo voice and reflective journaling respectively to complete the first stage of the data collection process. The
subsequent narrative on each of these methods seeks to justify how each method disrupted the power balance of the data collection process. Participants truly became co-researchers by assuming control of data collection. The researcher then assumed a secondary role with these methods, as participants were the creators and disseminators of data that reflected their experiences.

**Photo voice**

Photo voice, also termed auto-driving (Heisley & Levy, 1991), reflexive photography (Douglas, 1998), photo novella (LeClerc, Wells, Craig, Wilson, 2002; Wang & Burris, 1994) and native image-making (Wagner, 1979) was introduced by Wagner (1979) as a process of researching the world of others by asking them to make photographs that depict some aspect of their experiences. Collier (1967), a seminal source on visual ethnography suggests that methods such as photo voice are effective in surveying and mapping material cultures or social interactions. However, in using photos as data collection sources it is integral to remember that the viewing of photographic imagery is a patterned social activity that is molded by social contexts, cultural conventions and group norms (Schwartz, 1989). For this reason, the participants’ role as co-researcher in this second phase of the research process was integral in allowing them the opportunity to direct the data collection process. This strategy of participants assuming the role as data collector was significant. It enabled them to identify and represent their own experiences and allowed them to act as recorders and potential mediums of change through the generation of critical dialogue and knowledge of the issue under examination. Paulo Freire (1970) in his influential critical commentary on education, articulates that problem-solving education starts with issues central to people’s lives that enable them to find common themes through dialogue. He explained that the visual images were one such way to encourage critical thought and to begin to discuss the everyday social and political forces influencing their lives. A
similar idea was explored through the use of photo voice with these co-researchers, as it sought to generate thoughts regarding their ethnic identity in the context of the larger social experience as international students in the United States. Participants were either loaned a digital camera or used their personal digital cameras or phones to capture their photographic images. The researcher also provided them with instructions to guide them in capturing images that reflect their experiences. These instructions directed them to use their cameras to take pictures of campus life, such as objects, spaces and people that are most representative of the questions in their photo voice protocol (Appendix D). They were given instructions to take pictures that are representative of their possible changes in their identity as international students from the Caribbean on a U.S. campus, as guided by these questions (Appendix D). Additionally, they were told to take as many pictures as they desired in response to each question but that they had to choose one image that best represented each question. At the end of the process they either uploaded their four most representative pictures to their Google Picasa page or emailed them to the researcher. Below are samples of the photo voice submissions made by participants. Additional samples of participant’s submissions will also be incorporated in the subsequent chapter providing a detailed portrayal of their perspectives (Figure 3-1, Figure 3-2, Figure 3-3).

It was crucial to offer the participants alternatives, given that some were more familiar with programs such as Google Picasa and found it easy to utilize, while others preferred to simply email their pictures. Given the high level of interaction as co-researchers and the prolonged data collection period, flexibility was crucial to keep their interest and minimize attrition during the data collection process. Unfortunately, this second phase of data collection saw the loss of one participant from the study, who failed to complete the photo voice portion despite repeated offers of assistance and guidance during the process. Based on communications
with the participant who was a part-time professional photographer, it seemed she was dissatisfied with the quality of her art and did not feel comfortable submitting work she considered unsatisfactory. Despite reassurance to the contrary, the photo voice process seemed to prove too frustrating and she withdrew from participating in this or latter rounds of data collection.

In general, the photo voice portion of the data collection stage allowed for a penetrating lens into the participants’ experiences based on the ability of photographic images to act as ‘intimate dimensions of the social’ (Harper, 2002). The photographs also offered reflections of the participant’s point of view, biases and knowledge (Becker, 1974) of the issue under examination. The level of independence given to participants as co-researchers in this stage of the process allowed for a shift in the power dynamic of the research process in their active involvement in the collection process. This portion of the data collection was perhaps the most reflective of the data collection power structures. This became most evident as the researcher was forced to reframe positioning and sense of control in the process and give over all power to the participant. Therefore, the participant truly became co-researchers in the process in their level of control. Clark-Ibanez (2004) supports this involvement by describing the subjective images collected by participants as a method key to disrupting the power dynamics involved with regular interviews. In so doing, the objective is to foster a sense of participant trust and empowerment in their role as co-researchers with self-determination regarding the subjects of their photographs. This is magnified by the researcher’s confidence in their knowledge and ability to capture and prioritize their issues (Castleden, Garvin & First Nation, 2008).

Reflective journaling

After capturing their photographic representations, the six remaining participants in the first round of data collection were asked to either upload their pictures to a password protected
Google Picasa webpage or email them to the researcher. This phase of the photo voice process incorporated a reflective journaling component, and so participants were asked to provide a reflective narrative of their interpretation of each captured image as representative of their experiences. Below are sample reflections based on the photo voice excerpts provided in the previous section.

Figure 3-1. Campus population (reprinted by permission from Ned, 2011)

Ned: This picture symbolizes for me the whole campus population ... you have a few that you could maybe be African American or from the Caribbean but the essence ... the huge population I don’t think ... pays that much attention to us ... we as Caribbean students we pay attention among us, but I don’t think ... the majority of the students pay that much attention to us, so basically what I wanted to capture was the fact that if you’re from the Caribbean probably you would be the only one in your class.

Figure 3-2. Love of football (reprinted by permission from Susan, 2011)
Susan: American’s know what they like…they’ve been raised not to settle and make demands for what they want, and this applies to everything…American’s love football and they don’t want to hear about anything else-soccer? Hell no…it’s hard to get people to understand where I come from when they’re not willing to let go a little of where they came from.

Figure 3-3. Caribbean peers (reprinted by permission from Shawn, 2011)

Shawn: Having people that understand my way of thinking, living and eating made it easier to be comfortable in the U.S…part of the whole experience of coming to college in the U.S. is to learn about the American culture, so it would not be beneficial to only be around Caribbean people…but it is nice to have people that have been at U.F. longer than me to guide me little bit.

They were also given the option to meet with the researcher and reflect orally on the guided questions and the photo voice process. It was important to give the participants the flexibility to respond with either written or oral reflections on their photographs. Some participants preferred to write their reflections, while others preferred to sit and talk to me about them based on the guided questions provided to them. Given the limitations of their time and their academic settings, it was wiser to allow for this level of flexibility so as to adjust to their preferred forms of communication and keep them engaged in the data collection process. This component encouraged the co-researchers to articulate their thoughts and feelings regarding their photographs as portrayals of their realities and the research questions that guided their photo generation process. For each picture that they uploaded, participants were asked to use the four questions reflected in Appendix E to guide them in reflecting on their uploaded pictures. For
each photo, participants reflected on issues such as 1) their motivation for taking the picture, 2) how the picture represented their college experience, and 3) what they found difficult to capture in their photography. Additionally, the participants were also encouraged to articulate any divergent issues that they deemed significant to their reflections of data collection process, as this was seen as important in fostering new insights to the process (Schwartz, 1994; Pink, 2001). The incorporation of the reflexive journaling component offered a platform for deeper creativity, critical thinking, analysis and innovative discovery for co-researchers in the photo voice experience (Jasper, 2005). It also provided a glimpse of the knowledge and insight gained through co-researcher’s reflections on their identity experiences. This assisted both the researcher and the participant in making more profound connections and insights on the issue under examination. This also facilitated the transformative nature of the photo voice and reflective journaling experience as an empowering educational experience (Friere, 1970; Glaze, 2001; Jasper, 2004).

The final stage of the data collection process took place after the participants uploaded their photos and reflective journaling text. A second round of interviews was conducted with the primary participants. This provided some member checking in determining their perspective of their photo voice and interviewing experiences as representative of their identity negotiation experiences as international students from the Caribbean.

Based on the results of the theoretical sampling and member checking portion of the data collection process, it was decided that there was no need to gather any additional data through the remaining seven students of the campus population. This final round of interviews with the primary participants allowed the research to explore any existing gaps after the first two rounds
of data collection and analysis of the primary participants’ data. The table below offers a visual representation of the data collection schedule:

Table 3-1. Data collection schedule

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time Frame</th>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>Source of Data Collection</th>
<th>Purpose</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Summer 2010- (Fall 2011- September)</td>
<td>Seven primary participants (5 females, 2 males)</td>
<td>1st Round of interviews</td>
<td>Began the discussion of their identity experiences as international students at a U.S. institution</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fall 2011 (October-December)</td>
<td>Same group of participants</td>
<td>Photo Voice and Reflective Journaling</td>
<td>Students had the opportunity to direct data collection through the chronicling of photos and narrative reflections on their experiences.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spring 2011 (January-February)</td>
<td>Same group of participants</td>
<td>2nd Round of interviews</td>
<td>Used to complete the data collection cycle and discuss initial data analysis findings with participants to authenticate as representative of their experiences.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Data Analysis

Hatch (2002) describes data analysis as a systematic search for meaning so that what is learned can be communicated to others. It also involves organizing and interrogating data to allow for patterns, themes, relationships, explanations, interpretations, critiques and theories to emerge in the process. The data analysis process that guided the ‘search for meaning’ in this study was the grounded theory method.
Since its inception in the work of two sociologists, Glaser and Strauss in the 1960s, grounded theory has evolved in diverse forms, from the systematic procedures espoused by Strauss and Corbin (1998), to the emerging design of Glaser (1992) the constructivist approach of Charmaz (2000, 2009), and the situational analysis approach of Clarke (2005).

For the purposes of this study, a modified and consolidated method including Charmaz’s (2009) constructivist grounded theory approach and Clarke’s (2005) situational approach formed the basis of subsequent data analysis procedures. These analytical methods were incorporated at different stages of analysis to maximize the utility of each method based on the overall design and goals of the research study.

As a renowned proponent of the grounded theory approach, Charmaz (2009) highlights the constructivist grounded theory approach as one that focuses on the phenomenon of study and sees both data and analysis as created from shared experiences and relationships with participants and other sources (p. 130). Therefore the focus is placed on both how and why participants construct meaning and actions in specific circumstances. In terms of the development of a theory, the method assists in simultaneously theorizing researchers’ interpretive work and acknowledging the development of a theory as an interpretation (Bryant, 2000, Charmaz, 2000, 2002).

Given the objectives of this study, the paper explores different nuances of Charmaz’s (2009) grounded theory design as it was deemed particularly well suited to the identified constructivist methodological lens. This is confirmed through her assertion that grounded theory offers a platform to learn about the worlds we study and serves as a method for developing theories to understand them. Therefore, data and theories are not discovered but are constructed based on our prior and current involvement and our interactions with people, perspectives and
research practices. Integral to this notion of constructed realities is the belief that the theoretical underpinnings simply offer one depiction of the world under examination and not an exact representation (Charmaz, 2009; Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Schwandt, 1994).

Coding is the crucial link in moving from the data collection process to data analysis. Charmaz (2009) maintains that coding is the pivotal connection between collecting data and the development of an emergent theory to explain the data as it allows you to define what is happening in the data and try to explore different meanings. Accordingly, three phases of coding were explored in this research study. The first stage was ‘initial coding’ which involved naming each word, line or segment of the data. This meant sticking as closely to the data as possible and trying to ascertain actions in each segment of the data, rather than applying categories in this phase. These codes were provisional, comparative and grounded in the data with a focus on reflecting action in simple and precise codes. Thereafter, the second phase entailed developing focused and selective coding through the identification of the most significant and frequent codes generated in the initial phase. These codes were more conceptual, directed and selective than those generated in the first round and allowed for sorting, synthesizing and organizing large amounts of data into more manageable groupings. Finally, theoretical coding was conducted in an effort to identify relationships between focused codes. Glaser (1978) in his seminal explorations of this level of coding suggests that it helps to “weave the fractured story back together” (p. 72). This allows for a focus on relationships such as contexts, causes, contingencies, consequences, categories, covariances and conditions (p.74) and allows for the development of a coherent story.

Clarke’s situational mapping method was utilized to specifically address relationships dynamics such as power as represented in the data. Clarke (2005) identifies three types of
situational maps and all three of these styles were infused in the research design. All three identified methods were integrated in this research design and included 1) situational maps as strategies for articulating the elements in the situation and examining relations among them, 2) social worlds/arenas maps as cartographies of collective commitments, relations and sites of action, and 3) positional maps as simplification strategies for plotting positions articulated and not articulated in discourses.

At the situational mapping stage the focus was on descriptively laying out the most important human and nonhuman elements in the situation under examination as expansively as possible. In doing so the focus was on who and what was involved in the situation, who or what mattered in the situation, and the elements that made a difference in the situation (Clarke, 2005, pg. 87). The mapping component of the analysis focused specifically on data from the reflective journaling generated from the participants’ photo voice experience. Mapping began from the most abstract and disorganized jottings of these elements to a very organized and structured mapping with associated connections between elements. Positional maps as the final product of the situational mapping were used to generate discussion during the final interview phase. Though these maps may seem overly static, they offered fluidity in the continuous negotiations, repositioning and reorganization of related elements on the map.

Memo writing is another crucial aspect of the constructivist grounded theory approach and also offers strong support to the development of Clarke’s situational map in its acknowledgement of researcher reflexivity to the process. Knapp (1995) supports this in viewing sources of data such as journals and memos as integral to the analysis. Charmaz (2009) believes that memo writing is a pivotal intermediate step between data collection and the construction of draft versions of the paper. Clarke (2005) suggests that memoing after each mapping session will help
in detecting insights, any related shifts of emphasis or direction and offer details of further directions for theoretical sampling. Memoing is therefore useful in capturing thoughts, researcher comparisons and connections, crystallizing questions and elucidating pathways for the researcher to pursue. It offers a formal and standardized option for chronicling the reflexivity of the researcher and conceptualization of researcher experiences in the data collection and analysis process. For the purposes of this study, both early memos and advanced memos (Charmaz, 2009) were used in different respects. First, it was used to record researcher observations of the data collection process. Second, it chronicled the development of the data analysis in respect to development of codes and categories pertaining to the topic and as a context in which to bracket research subjectivity during the data collection process. In both respects, memos include details on challenges and learning opportunities encountered in the methodological process.

The memo writing process is directly linked to theoretical sampling in data analysis. Whereas memo writing assisted in identifying incomplete categories and analytical gaps, theoretical sampling helped to highlight data to fill these gaps and assist in saturation of categories (Charmaz, 2009). This type of sampling demands the ability to access participants after initial interviews to further probe areas of interest in key categories and illuminates issues related to these categories. These issues included properties of categories, hunches about categories, distinguishing between categories and clarifying relationships between categories. Theoretical sampling was only used for these purposes and varied from ‘saturation’ in the data analysis process. ‘Saturation’ was considered only when data analysis offered no new theoretical insights or new properties for theoretical categories (Charmaz, 2009; Glazer, 2001).

The second phase of the situational design involved the social world and positional mapping formats. Social world mapping is closely related to Strauss’ (1978) ‘universe of
discourse’ and integrates aspects of power relationships. It highlights the influence of power relationships on the way people organize themselves in respect to the categories others may try to establish for them, and their self-placement in the larger structural situations based on existing discourses. This aspect of mapping considers discourses and power relationships that are also central components of Butler’s (1990) performativity framework and the critical lens undergirding this study. At this stage the focus was on participants’ experiences in their larger social environment and the existing patterns, sub-worlds or groupings that characterized participant experiences. Finally, positional maps evolved based on the previously constructed situational and social worlds maps and expressed positions reflected or missing from the research discourse. The representations on this map were generated during the memoing stage in the details noted on social world groupings and relationships. Clarke (2005) articulates that the focus of position maps is the issues, positions on issues and absences on positions in the larger discourse. Therefore the map sought to highlight positions on the identified discourse on participants’ experiences with identity in their role as international students.

In keeping with the constructivist approach suggested by Kathy Charmaz (2000, 2009), data collection and analysis focused on the values, beliefs, feelings, and assumptions of the participants. Clarke’s (2005) modification offered an illustrative component to the analysis phase incorporating consideration of existing power dynamics and associations that may influence the values and feelings of participants in the larger discourse. Through the use of maps the researcher was able to visually represent these power dynamics during the data analysis phase so as to represent the existing associations in the institutional experience of the participants and make important connections within their social worlds. Additionally, this also helped participants to have a visual representation during the final interview process, and was helpful in generating
discussions on any associations they felt were important to the discourse. The figure below (Figure 3-4) seeks to provide a graphical representation of the data analysis procedure employed in the study. The ensuing narrative seeks to explore such issues in a more explanatory and discursive manner while probing the assumptions and meanings of the research participants.

Figure 3-4. Flowchart of hybrid data analysis procedures

**Methodological Rigor of the Study**

There are contradictory perspectives on the application of validity and reliability issues in qualitative research, particularly in regards to comparisons with the terminology and concepts in
more positivist research (Ely, Anzul, Friedman, Garner & Steinmetz, 1991; Lecompte & Goetz, 1982). Lincoln and Guba’s (1985) proposition of alternative terms for these issues regarding the ‘trustworthiness’ of the research process, namely credibility, transferability, dependability and conformability, have been widely accepted in the qualitative research arena and were addressed through different procedures in the research process.

Internal validity is often addressed through safeguards such as member checking and peer reviews. In this study, ‘credibility’ and ‘conformability’ or the accuracy of interpretations based on available data will be addressed in different ways. Member checks were conducted by sending participants initial analysis of their interviews in an effort to ascertain their perspectives on the representative nature of the data. This verification process was helpful in determining their impressions of the analysis as true representations of their experiences as expressed in their interviews.

Additionally, a peer review process was engaged as a fellow graduate student, who has completed data analysis coursework requirements and also participated in research utilizing grounded theory reviewed the raw data to assess the feasibility of the findings based on available data. The researcher utilized memoing as a supportive tool to chronicle reflections on the data collection and analysis process. Glaser (1978) refers to theoretical memos as “the theorizing write up of ideas about codes and their relationships as they strike the analyst while coding” (p.83). This concept grounded the reflexivity process in regards to data analysis. Lincoln and Guba (2000) refer to it as “researcher’s position” or “reflexivity” and this was a critical layer in assessing the relationship between the researcher and different aspects of the research process, from choice of research site and participants, to existing ideological assumptions, and theoretical orientations of the study. In a similar vein, Charmaz (2009) describes ‘reflexivity’ as the
researcher’s scrutiny of his or her research experience, decisions and interpretations in such a way as to allow for assessment of its influence on interests, positions, and assumptions in the inquiry process. Accordingly, constant reflection in this regard was employed as a fundamental component of this study in all aspects of the methodological design, from the identified theoretical framework to data analysis method.

Merriam (2002) suggests that reliability refers to the extent to which research findings can be replicated given that human behavior is not static and experiences will change depending on the individual. Therefore the idea is not to attain identical results if a qualitative study is replicated, but that the results are consistent with collected data. Lincoln and Guba (1985) refer to this as “dependability” or “consistency” in that given the collected data, the results are both consistent and dependable. Research recognizes that efforts to triangulate the process are critical, through techniques that evaluate whether or not the research findings represent a ‘credible’ conceptual interpretation of the data drawn from participants’ original data (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p.296). Therefore, peer examination, reflexivity and the use of three distinct data collection methods were crucial components of the study in facilitating credibility. For the purposes of this study, an audit trail was also maintained by the researcher through detailed explanations of the data collection and analysis process inclusive of any problems, issues and ideas emerging from the process. In so doing is the intention was to increase ‘conformability’ or how well the inquiry’s findings were supported by data collection and ‘dependability’ in the integration of the data collection, analysis and theory generation processes explored in the study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Patton, 1990).

These two researchers also discuss “generalizability” in reference to external validity as it is termed in more positivist research. Whereas the statistical generalization from a random
sample to a population is critical in quantitative research; this is less important in qualitative research. Instead, focus was placed on the application of the study findings to other contexts and an in-depth analysis of the specific context as opposed to a more general ‘truth’ about a large population. With this in mind, “generalizability” in this study was considered in terms of how readers may ultimately view the findings of the study as representative of their experiences or context. Therefore, the strategy for achieving this involved the use of rich, thick descriptions throughout the narrative to facilitate an in-depth and transparent perspective of the application or ‘transferability’ of the research situation to other contexts.

**Limitations of the Study**

This study focused on the experiences of students at one institution, thus the findings may not be transferrable to all such students within four-year institutions nationwide. The findings are however a representative snapshot of the aspects inherent to this group of students at the time during which this study was conducted.

From an institutional perspective, while the university under examination is comparable to other public flagship universities in the United States based on mission, student population and facilities, there are issues relative to this institution based on its geographical location and institutional culture that should not be considered endemic to all large public universities.

The Caribbean region is a conglomeration of islands with rich individual histories, traits, norms and practices beyond those similarities that unify them as a group. As such, the students themselves assumed such characteristic differences in tandem with their own individual differences. It is therefore intended that this study be framed with those differences held under consideration.

Finally, my subjectivity as a Caribbean international student may be viewed as a limitation to my involvement in the study. However, this is intentionally avoided as a noted limitation in
this study. Recognizing my positionality in this respect, I recognized and bracketed any existing suppositions on the research topic in an effort to focus on a representative examination of the participant’s experiences. Therefore, memo writing in the data analysis process was the method used to chronicle my acknowledgement of my positionality in the larger context of the research.

**Subjectivity Statement**

“There is no way to escape the social world in order to study it; nor fortunately is that necessary” (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1998, p.15). Researcher subjectivity is considered an important element of the qualitative research process in the acceptance that the knower and known are inseparable entities and as such researchers are intrinsically connected to the world they study. Therefore it is crucial that the researcher has the ability to monitor his or her influence on the research site, bracket biases, and consider their ideological beliefs and emotional responses in order to allow for a deep understanding of the human experience and the possibility of connections between the researcher and participant (Goodall, 2000; Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Many researchers choose areas of study that are closely connected in some way with their personal experiences or interactions and I am no different in this regard. As an international student from the Caribbean studying in the U.S., I entered my program knowing that I wanted to take the things I would learn on my academic sojourn and use it to highlight important issues in higher education from a Caribbean context. My initial thoughts were focused on international faculty issues, perhaps due to my professional background as a faculty member in the Caribbean prior to studies in the United States. However, soon after beginning my studies, my research interests soon evolved to focus on international students, perhaps because of a lack of contact with international faculty or engagement as faculty in the U.S. context and my increased interactions as a student with other international students.
The majority of the issues I have explored thus far in research have emerged from my own experiences as an international student navigating higher education in the United States. Additionally, I have sought to highlight the experiences of Caribbean students in the U.S. as they are essentially invisible in the academic research. In essence, I saw no reflection of my own experiences and challenges as an international student or those of my colleagues in the literature, but was forced to make connections with the generic information on international students. I also believed that there are nuances and challenges inherent to Caribbean students that could not be captured by the literature that focused on a homogenous Black experience, the immigrant community or the diverse international student population in the United States.

Considering that my first entry into the U.S. higher education system was as a graduate student, I also have an interest in chronicling different aspect of the graduate student perspective of international students from the Caribbean. However, realistically, I also recognize that the majority of students from the Caribbean studying in the U.S. are at the undergraduate level. To enhance the potential for my research to be helpful to a wider cross section of students, educators and other educational stakeholders, the study was focused on the undergraduate level experience. Additionally, I have found that graduate students are much more disconnected on university campuses. Access to undergraduate students was therefore thought to be more practical in this regard. Also, not having had the undergraduate experience in the U.S., I was curious to see how it paralleled the graduate student experience for students of similar background as myself in the U.S. context. From the very beginning of the data collection process and the intense interest of the participants in the research study, characterized by their speedy responses and engagement in the process, it underscored the importance of the research. As a researcher this underscored my initial suspicion that this population was largely disconnected and ignored at the institutional
level and had several concerns that needed to be addressed. This was quickly validated by participants, most of whom in their first interviews articulated how pleasantly surprised they were that someone was seeking to study their experiences on campus. At several points during the research process they noted how important they felt the research was for other undergraduates from the Caribbean. As a researcher, this fueled my desire to adequately representatively capture their experiences for the higher education community. Being a graduate student and significantly older than many of the participants, I felt almost like an older sister to many of them and given that there was a sense of kinship based on our shared backgrounds and aspects of the institutional experiences, I had to consciously recognize my subjectivity at several points in the research. It was interesting however, to see how my maturity as a graduate student with years of life experience beyond theirs made my experience of some institutional experiences significantly different.

In terms of my epistemological viewpoint, I have always been someone who acted as a listening ear for my friends, family and students in my ability to allow them to talk through their experiences and consider different viewpoints. Also, my academic foray into qualitative research and the discussions on ‘truth’ and perceptions of reality felt like a natural and exciting avenue through which to pursue my research interests. Therefore I immediately recognized that my seemingly natural disposition towards qualitative research could be a dynamic way through which to explore the different aspects of my research interest and my development as an academic researcher. Thus far, I have also been consistently expanding my qualitative research experience by fulfilling coursework for a minor in qualitative methodology and consistently undertaking qualitative research projects utilizing diverse forms of data collection and analysis methods, particularly those utilized in this study. The results of such projects have been used for
both professional conference presentations and publication submissions and have strengthened my level of confidence in the field, although I will always consider myself a learner and recognize that there is still a great deal to be explored in qualitative research methodology. My experiences during this research process significantly underscored my passion for qualitative research and how each research experience can serve as crucial learning experiences for future projects. Important lessons were learned in the loss of one of my participants and the unpredictability of the data collection process. These lessons included a sense of how attached a qualitative researcher can become to participants and how difficult it is to let go of both the participant and their rich data if they choose not to participate in the entire research process. The shifting power structure of the photo voice data collection process was also a key lesson for one who likes to be in control, as I was forced to hand over complete control to the participants. Therefore, though the first round of data collections went relatively fast, the slower pace of the photo voice process which was completely outside researcher control was a lesson in patience and the importance of participants as co-researchers in the process.

All things considered I recognize that it was important for me to recognize existing biases and belief systems in the development of this research paper based on professional and past experiences. However, I also contend that these aspects allowed me to appreciate unique nuances in the experiences of the Caribbean student population under examination. At the forefront of this exercise it was my intention to articulate these issues as explicitly and detailed as possible to allow for a rich narrative of the stated research objective and therefore I tried to capture such throughout the process through researcher memos.
CHAPTER 4
FINDINGS

The research questions for this study sought to examine how existing ethnically over-
generalized and homogenous institutional discourses have shaped the ethnic identity experiences
of Caribbean undergraduate international students. It also sought to ascertain how their
international educational experiences have affected their identification with their native cultural
backgrounds and the U.S. culture. Findings from this study therefore reflect these experiences as
these students negotiate the above-mentioned contexts. The resulting theory offers insight into
their negotiation or performance of their ethnic identity. It also delineates aspects of their
academic setting that they characterize as homogenous or ethnically over-generalized, and the
mechanisms they employ as they negotiate their ethnic identity.

Overview of the Theory

Through a hybrid of Charmaz’s (2009) constructivist and Clarke’s (2005) situational
mapping approaches to grounded theory, there are three significant dimensions emerging from
participants’ experiences located at the core of their ethnic identity: 1) Resisting, 2) Reaffirming,
and 3) Reframing. These three dimensions are reactions to the homogenous institutional context.
More specifically, four elements of the institutional context emerged in the study as relevant for
students’ identity: programmatic efforts, pedagogical elements, campus demographics, and
documentation requirements. From these four, programmatic efforts and pedagogical elements
exerted the stronger pressure on participants’ identity (Figure 4-1). In addition, for each of the
three reacting dimensions at the core, there are three different salient aspects of their ethnic
identity negotiation as follows: 1) For the dimension “resisting”, students employ selective
assimilation, adjustments to language and accent, and separation of identities. 2) For the
dimension “reaffirming” students navigate commitment to home, academic identity, and feelings
of empowerment. And finally, for “reframing”, attachment to the Caribbean, personal development, and peer relations matter (Figure 4-2). Participants’ expressions of their experiences reveal that they constantly make shifts in their navigation of their identity in their new academic and cultural setting. Therefore, the associated elements of each dimension are not necessarily independent of each other but often interact and influence their experiences across dimensions. For instance, their selective assimilation in the academic settings has changed their perspective on their individual academic development and their connection to their native backgrounds. However, in turn this is not a unidirectional relationship as the aforementioned latter dimensions may also play a part in the selective assimilation experiences. It is crucial to consider the mechanisms in the context of their associated “REaction” as it gives an appreciation of the different strategies participants’ employ in relation to their ethnic identity. This chapter describes in detail the interplay of the various elements and dimensions of the theory that emerged in this study.

The depiction of the theory related to the negotiation of the ethnic identity of Caribbean International Students (C.I.S) as represented in (Figure 4-1) gives a comprehensive representation of the diverse aspects of this population’s experience. Through the figure, the researcher attempts to offer a delineation of the C.I.S experience through the graphical representation of the associated processes and relationships. These relationships should be viewed as the researcher’s interpretation of the participants’ reflections and as such, the findings are co-constructions of their experiences. The outer circle of the theory illustrates the influences of theoretical frameworks at two levels in elements of critical race theory (Tate, 1993) and Butler’s (1990) performativity theory. In participants’ navigation of their ethnic identity, there
are components of both theories that emerge through participants’ reactions to their ethnic identity.

![Diagram](image.png)

**Figure 4-1. Theoretical model: Caribbean international students’ three “REactions” to their ethnic identity**

Additionally, the second circle, portrays the four aspects participants describe as homogenous and over-generalized aspects of their institutional experiences: 1) institutional programmatic efforts, 2) pedagogical elements, 3) documentation requirements, and 4) campus demographics. The first two, institutional programmatic efforts and pedagogical elements, have stronger influence than the latter, documentation requirements and campus demographics. The institutional programmatic efforts include student associations and institutional programs for international students. Pedagogical elements include issues related to course content, teaching approach and classroom interactions with students and professors. Documentation requirements
include federal visa regulations and restrictions on international student employment, and campus demographics refer to the representation of domestic and international diversity on campus. All four of these elements have different levels of influence on the ethnic identity experiences of C.I.S. The innermost circle shows the three distinct branches or REactions emanating from their ethnic identity negotiations in which they reaffirm, resist and reframe different aspects of the ethnic identity.

Figure 4-2 below represents a detailed illustration of the elements of each Reaction to participants’ ethnic identity experience.

Figure 4-2. Theoretical model: aspects through which Caribbean international students’ negotiate ethnic identity

All three REactions involve different branches of the experience and in some ways interact with each other on different levels. The resisting dimension includes components such as a) selective assimilation, b) adjustments to language and accent, and c) separation of identities. Therefore,
participants talk about their embodiment of resistance through resisting all three of these actions. The second derivative is the reaffirming aspect and it involves the acknowledgement of their a) commitment to home, b) feelings of empowerment, and c) academic commitment through their reaffirmation of their ethnic identity. The final derivative is the reframing aspect which speaks to their reexamination of their a) attachment to the Caribbean, b) personal development, and c) peer relations. Through their experiences on campus, these students gained new insights into these three aspects and the associated influence on their ethnic identity. All three of the Big REactions, resisting, reaffirming and reframing, have directly affected their negotiation of their ethnic identity and speak to the malleability of different aspects of their identity in the context of their new environments.

In conclusion, the previous section offered a general overview of the emerging theory, and the following roadmap will offer a guide as to the arrangement of the subsequent sections of this chapter. First, there will be a discussion of the ‘Homogenous Institutional Aspects’ as outlined in the theory (Figure 4-1). Second, there will be a discussion of the three aspects emerging from each ‘REaction’ to participants’ negotiation of their ethnic identity (Figure 4-2). Third, there will be an interpretation of the theory based on connections to theories mentioned in earlier sections of the study. Finally, the researcher will end with a summative overview of the chapter.

**Homogenous Institutional Aspects**

**Institutional programmatic efforts**

This was a major issue for participants and spoke to their feelings of underrepresentation on the larger university campus. Participants were well aware of how small the Caribbean international population is on campus, both in the context of the larger student body and within the international student population as well. Due to the lack of program tailored to this small population, students’ feelings of disorientation were particularly strong in their initial two years.
As Susan articulated, “I think I would’ve had such a better freshman year if I’d felt helped… instead of just thrown to the wild with the wolves”. She further insisted that little efforts such as “even explaining what football is or how big of an importance it is to the community, you know, you want to feel a part of, as internationals, as much as you want to stand out, you want to be included”. It was their ability to understand the passion for specific sports such as American football in the institutional and wider culture and make comparisons with the level of passion for similar cultural activities in the Caribbean that helped them to connect with the broader institutional context (Figure 4-3).

Figure 4-3. Adopting sports (reprinted by permission from Susan, 2011)

Susan: I’ve always been interested in sports, … once I’m around something I’m gonna try to learn about it… it has helped; the thing is … learning about it and accepting that part of the American culture … has helped in terms of friends… I feel like if I came to this school and just fought against football, I would’ve never fit in at all, … it has helped in making me feel a little better, more comfortable up here and feeling a little more accepted by the group.

On the other hand, their perspectives on the existing institutional programs for their specific ethnic groups were often framed in view of their statistical reality as a minority student population. Students were quick to recognize their almost minimal representation, particularly at the undergraduate level and therefore had no expectations of multiple programs specifically geared towards their population. As Rebecca explicitly articulated “it’s their system and I’m
coming into it, so I don’t think that I deserve the sort of individualized attention, especially at such a small minority”. However, with this in mind, there was still an expectation that the institution would be more helpful in assisting in making connections amongst international Caribbean students, which suggests an institutional deficiency in assisting these students. These networks could be useful in helping students adapt to their new cultural environment. Rebecca explains her confusion about the lack of institutional assistance in making connections, “I thought that would have been one of the purposes of the international center, to sort of be like, oh, well here are some other students, from the same area, same background … just to have that information available for us.” Instead students were left to depend on random opportunities or encounters. “I never knew that there were other … international Jamaican students … I remember searching… asking around …I just didn’t know that they existed …I found one other student by accident in Publix, I heard her accent … stopped her and asked her” (Rebecca). In assisting such connections it was felt that the institution would not necessarily need to create programs specifically for this small Caribbean student population, but should facilitate interactions that may never otherwise occur in the larger institutional population. In the absence of such efforts there were feelings of isolation and desolation on the university campus. These feelings were particularly strong in their freshman and sophomore level years and compounded by their unfamiliarity with the U.S. higher education system and the larger social environment. Susan gives a graphic explanation of her feelings in this regard, “58,000 students, lost in the crowd and international at that, oh God no, I’m in a deep hole below anybody here.” The insurmountable task of making such connections would often result in uncharacteristic behavior when these opportunities occurred.

Susan: It’s always refreshing to hear any kind of accent in a party… it amazes me… I will be in a party, with a room full of people… and my head goes round ‘is
somebody like a Caribbean here?’… I get like a crazy person… ‘cause I’m like, wait who’s from the Caribbean?’… it’s like a little bit of home.

Such disconnectedness contributed to participants’ impressions of an overrepresentation of students from other populations, particularly their Asian and Indian international peers. Their feelings of underrepresentation were equally reinforced by the number of programs that were directed towards accommodating the needs of groups such as Asian and Indian international students. As Ned explains, “since the biggest population of international students are mostly Indian and Chinese so the small cohorts…tends to be underrepresented…like the islands.”

Similarly, Joe explains:

Joe: Asian students in fact are the majority and you can feel the difference … I remember last semester they had like a whole month celebrating the Asian culture… but they do not actually have that for Caribbean students…, at times it’s kind of hard to, to express yourself, to be vocal on campus, because like, you’re just part of the minority.

Participants internalize their underrepresented numbers on the college campus to the extent that it affects their level of involvement. This underrepresentation is felt on two levels, both within the larger school population, and also the international student population. Therefore, unlike Caribbean students, other international students may recognize their smaller representation on the larger institutional level but have broader opportunities to identify aspects of themselves in the international student body. Examples of the imbalance are represented in institutional programmatic events such as cultural celebrations and institutional emails. In particular, as native English speakers, institutional emails fostering social interactions to help international students adjust as second language English speakers contributed to participants’ feelings of underrepresentation in the international student community. There were very few programs or events specifically for international students that participants viewed as inclusive of their needs and interests.
Susan: Even things like festivals… I know that carnival is not a religious festival … but it’s our culture and for me it’s like a religious experience … just understanding … when I come and I talk to you about this … could you maybe let me go? (laughs), or let me take the exam a little earlier or something?… if they know that you’re Muslim or your Hindu and you have your festivals coming up they do give consideration for that…I think if you’re Catholic or Christian it’s a totally different story, because I remember Easter … I had class, and I’m like I don’t know what I’m supposed to do! Like ash Wednesday I had class, you know

Participants were very pragmatic about the statistical representation of the international students on campus and how this in turn drove institutional programs. However, this also contributed to their interpretations of the institutional view of the political position of the Caribbean as a third world region. It was therefore felt this presumed institutional value system drove the efforts for greater recruitment efforts from developing regions such as India and Asia as opposed to the Caribbean. As such, these communities were viewed as more obvious and lucrative competitors on the global scale as compared to the nations of the Caribbean. This underscores Butler’s (1990) concept of power as reflected in institutional programmatic priorities focused on some international student populations over others. Therefore participants expressed that their peers from India and Asia are viewed as the normative group within the international student population and their needs drive institutional programs. This reinforces the third world status of the Caribbean for these students. It gives a different appreciation of the Caribbean’s positioning in the global context as compared to more developed economies such as China and other Asian countries:

Rebecca: I guess that’s where you see that we’re not valued as much, because I’m almost a hundred percent sure that they do recruiting in Asia, they have to, there are too many students here for them not to (laughs), especially in departments like engineering and physics and in those groundbreaking research places, so I guess that’s where you can start to see where we are undervalued, and then I don’t know if that’s a fault of us, or if that’s a fault of them, and it may just be circumstantial, because there’s so few of us we can’t make that impact, or because you know there’s groundbreaking research being
done in Asia and we can’t afford to do that at home, so I’m not sure who is to blame for that but I definitely see that.

The homogeneity of institutional programming was also apparent outside the international student population, when viewed in the context of the larger institutional experience. Therefore, students did recognize that they were attending an American institution and so expected exposure to different aspects of the American culture, but felt that greater accommodation could be made for extracurricular programs featuring diverse cultural groups. As Rebecca explains, “The events they have, it’s not tailored specifically to different culture groups, it’s more just like, international students, come join this, or international students come do that.”

Instead they saw homogeneity on two levels, either the overrepresentation of specific international groups, or the fixation on American cultural experiences. Undeniably, participants appreciated the opportunity to immerse themselves in the U.S. cultural environment and learn through a different cultural lens. However, the ethnocentric focus of their institutional experience diminished the ‘cultural exchange’ component of their international education experience. Instead, the exchange seemed one-sided with their role being largely consumers of aspects of their new cultural setting, with little opportunity for mutually beneficial exchanges with host students. Joe gave one perspective on this adjustment through his photo voice and reflection (Figure 4-4)

Figure 4-4. Sports as a barrier (reprinted by permission from Joe, 2011)
Joe: Here, everybody loves football…it’s the main sport, and sometimes if you’re new to this place you feel left out because your main sport and you can’t even watch it on T.V…sometimes you feel there is a barrier…there is no way I’m going to be happy as a soccer fan here.

The one-sided nature of the exchange and openness for such opportunities leads to the belief that there was intolerance for non-American views. As Susan contends, “we are in the U.S., but we have a lot of international students here, they talk about wanting to make it diverse but it’s just more like … American way of thinking… American way of bringing things out… American flag…American way.”

Though some may argue that allowances are made for a Caribbean student association on campus that should seek to address these needs, students felt this was another symbol of institutional homogeneity. Thus, they felt largely disconnected from this organization given that the membership almost exclusively represented Caribbean-American students of immigrant descent, who embrace distinctly different experiences than those of their Caribbean international peers.

Ned: They [Caribbean-American students] are involved with the Haitian American organization… since you see them all the time you assume that they are from Haiti, and then you speak the Haitian language with them and they’re like ‘what?’ (laughs), they don’t understand, … since it happens to me continuously I just speak English with everyone, I’m not assuming that because you have the same skin color or … because you’re also involved in the organization that it makes you 100 percent Haitian and that you speak the language.

Therefore, even in the community that should have allowed for some sense of heterogeneity in the programming, they felt a mismatch with their ability to identify authentic representations of their ethnic backgrounds. This issue will also be discussed in later articulations of their ethnic identity experience.

Specific individuals within the international center were identified as helpful and friendly whenever participants did venture there for assistance. However, these visits were often made
only to complete documentation, as most students saw another homogenous aspect in that they identified the center with the larger international Asian and Indian populations. This Asian and Indian identity ascribed to the international center was felt on two levels. First, these were the populations participants saw as more frequent users of the center. As Ned describes, “Every time you go in… the biggest population of international students are mostly Indian and Chinese so the small cohorts, like people from the other countries tends to be underrepresented.” Second, they felt the majority of electronic communications were more geared towards the needs of these groups than their own. Susan characterizes this by saying that “International here is Asian or Indian… if you’re from another country they don’t really look at that.” Therefore, she feels that in terms of institutional communications, “all the things that the international office sends are like, learn to speak English, and this church or whatever, international stuff like that or dating in the U.S., or things that don’t really pertain to us per say.”

Such limitations led to minimal levels of attachment to the ‘international student community’. Participants underscored this through their identification of minimal Caribbean student representation or sense of belonging to any existing community. As Ned describes it, “when I first came… I felt like, oh, no one really knows me… I feel invisible… like this is the big core up here, this is the big circle that has everyone in it, and I’m down here.” If participants did feel a part of this community, their minority status was underscored by their meager numbers and disconnect from the issues of the majority international student groups as dictated by the institutional programs. There were strong feelings of detachment from any sense of community. This was particularly strong in their initial two years upon realizing the level of disconnect from the small Caribbean population on campus. Ned, an engineering major, describes this through photo voice and reflective journaling on his departmental experience (Figure 4-5).
Ned: I took this picture in a way to show that the population of the students of my department… they are mostly Indian or Chinese…American …I kind of felt like I’m by myself and I don’t have any other students like I can click with… that represents like a barrier for me.

Similarly, Susan describes a level of disconnectedness from the international population and from any sense of community: “I do feel like a minority in the international student community, like I don’t associate myself with being a part of that I guess, like if there is a community, I’m definitely not a part of it.”

The inability to make connections was felt more by students who weren’t members of smaller institutional student communities. On the contrary, student members of smaller groups such as the United World College (U.W.C.) divisions felt more fortunate based on their exposure to such programmatic initiatives. Once again, Butler’s (1990) interpretation of power is represented in the institution’s focus on the experience of international students in groups such as the U.W.C. over those of their peers who do not belong to such groups. This is so as the mandate of such groups specifically seeks to create a community of international student representatives on the campus:

Olivia: If I wasn’t with U.W.C, I wouldn’t be, I don’t think I would’ve lasted here for more than a week… we had a separate orientation, … we had small groups of twenty U.W.C.s … it’s not as if you were in a big group and the majority was
from the U.S. so it’s hard to connect... all of us were international students and ... were at [the institution] for the first time so it was easier for us to connect.

Additionally, they felt fortunate in the availability of academic advisors to help them in navigating aspects of their new academic environment, such as course programs. As Olivia pointed out, “they actually talk to us, like this might be good for you, this might be good for you … depending on what you have taken in the international bachelor, so they really help to push our way through”. The level of importance these students attach to such institutional initiatives as a crucial component largely unavailable to their non-UWC affiliated international student peers emphasized the differences in the experiences amongst international students. The availability of initiatives such as those accessible to the U.W.C. community helped to minimize feelings of homogeneity because students identified this program as interested in the well-being of all international groups regardless of originating country. Therefore, this represented one opportunity students saw as useful in targeting the needs of all international students.

However, while there was general acknowledgement that groups like the U.W.C. sought to facilitate this, there was a feeling of underutilization of international educational opportunities. Rebecca: They bring us here so that we can expose their students to our cultural backgrounds… it sounds all great … but nothing is actually done … to facilitate the interactions with international students, and U.S. students… and that’s a shame, because that’s something that I think should be taken advantage of, I mean that’s the point of us here.

This seeming lack of appreciation for the international educational opportunities was seen as a significant weakness in the increasingly globalized environment. Rebecca further describes this weakness by asserting that “we’re living in a world now that’s all about globalization, and it’s all about cultural exchange and understanding … I don’t think that’s something taken advantage of by the administration, by faculty, by students… we tend to stay in our groups.”
Pedagogical elements

Different aspects of the pedagogical experience were labeled as homogenous through participants’ inability to make connections with their ethnic backgrounds in these domains. One such domain was the overall course content they were exposed to during the majority of their undergraduate program. The inability to make even minimal cultural connections in their classes was a source of frustration for some participants, while others accepted it as an expected norm. The responses to this environment differed as some chose to accept it as an unchanging reality and others sought to intentionally inject their perspectives in class discussions. From a curriculum perspective, participants viewed the lack of international reflections as a limiting characteristic. They were seldom able to make direct connections to their experiences in the Caribbean within their course content. “The curriculum that we study it’s very U.S.-based, you know, we don’t tend to go outside of that” (Rebecca). Rebecca lamented the situation in her photo voice and reflection (Figure 4-6).

Figure 4-6. Flag in class (reprinted by permission from Rebecca, 2011)

Rebecca: I chose this picture because most of the classrooms on campus have an American flag … most of the syllabi focus on American history, culture … coming from an international perspective it’s often hard to present that point of view…for me is one of the barriers, trying to figure out how I can add my point of view into a curriculum that’s so heavily based on America.

One aspect closely tied to the course content was issues related to teaching approaches. Professors were seen as the facilitators of homogenous course content. It was felt that these
professors had significant control over the incorporation of global perspectives in their course content and yet avoided such material. Thus their attitudes as exemplified through their openness to students offering diverse perspectives during their classrooms were a crucial indicator of their pedagogy. Susan described her professor in her British Literature class in a positive light because in her view, “he would just love to get my perspective on stuff, because I was actually there.” Certain disciplines were also characterized as more open to diverse perspectives and participants therefore felt encouraged to offer their viewpoints. Students were extremely conscious of the professors who were more open to such perspectives in their classes, and associated this pedagogical approach more readily to classes in the liberal arts and social sciences. Similarly, such undifferentiated teaching approaches were also more obvious in the more junior level classes. Classes during the freshman and sophomore years were described as mostly large lecture hall sessions with minimal engagement between professors and students and little opportunity for discussions as a class. Senior level classes were often on a smaller scale but this did not guarantee the opportunity for shared perspectives, as a student’s personality and willingness to take the initiative in offering viewpoints based on their own experiences was the determining factor. “Sociology and those classes, they would like the other perspective because it’s nice to have a fresh take on things … they like that … I chime in and say, okay well in our country we do this or this is how I see it”(Susan).

In most instances there was also a level of frustration with professors who would not incorporate diverse perspectives in their classrooms, thereby resulting in unrealized expectations of their classroom experiences. For some participants this was representative of an attitude that the U.S. was a world leader and valued their own knowledge over those of outsiders, particularly those from underdeveloped nations.
Olivia: The way they give lectures here...like even the professors ... when they teach they always look at the U.S. as if when they speak of the difference between two countries they always speak of the U.S. as if it’s the best, always the best perspective and how back home they teach us it’s not for Curacao to be always the best, they just teach you there is a lot of good things and bad things and sometimes different countries will be put in different ways, so I think a lot of things are really different.

The level of frustration or acceptance with these homogenous pedagogical patterns varied based on aspects such as the academic major, openness of the professors or facilitators to diverse perspectives and their associated class level. Therefore, students in engineering or science majors had less expectations of a cultural lens being intertwined in their course content and more of a mathematical and traditional approach.

Joe: I do engineering and unlike other majors, like education where you may have to explain certain things about culture and stuff... an engineering student you just do math, physics... people don’t usually care where you’re from and what you do back home... it’s about, let’s get to business and that’s it, so being Caribbean doesn’t necessarily make a difference in the classroom.

However, those in other majors such as business, liberal arts and social sciences were more frustrated with course content that did not assume a greater appreciation for a global perspective. These fields were expected to facilitate such discussions given the nature of associated subject areas and fields. The very interconnectedness of the current global environment was a strong rationale for their advocacy of the representation of diverse perspectives in pedagogical settings.

Susan: Sometimes you know you’d be in a sociology class or a philosophy class or something and it’d be discussion based and you know they are obviously introducing more cultures, ... and you chime in and they might say something strange like, ‘you know these people used to eat their children or whatever’ and then you know I might chime in and be like, ‘well you know that’s understandable, back home ...and I’ve had a number of cases’, ‘Well we’re in America, we don’t do that’, and I’m like ‘Okay, awesome, I’m just trying to share my experiences with you’.

It was even more frustrating to encounter peers who were resistant to outside perspectives and instead displayed a fixation on U.S. content. Peers’ ethnocentric attitudes underscored the
preference for homogenous pedagogical settings and invalidated the potential of the international education experience for cultural exchange. There was a general acceptance that they were studying in an American institution and therefore expected that the course content would undoubtedly be addressed through an American lens. Additionally, participants also recognized that the homogeneity of class content was felt even more in junior level classes that were mostly focused on non-specialized, introductory courses. As Ned explains, “When I’m in a class…I don’t know anyone, that’s when you kind of feel invisible, like you’re in a classroom with two hundred or three hundred students so everybody just come in, sit down, take their notes and goes home.” Similarly, as portrayed in Ned’s articulation participants recognized that all students regardless of background may have similar feelings given the size of the institution and the nature of junior level undergraduate classes. However it was intensified for international students who were already in the minority. Therefore, their ability to transcend these barriers was dictated by their own initiative in communicating with their classmates, as peer engagement was not facilitated in the context of the class session.

Classroom interactions were also characterized as homogenous in the unwillingness of peers to tolerate perspectives that did not have an American focus. Rebecca describes her reaction to ignorant comments from her classmates such as “oh, what do you know about that? You’re from Jamaica”’ by rationalizing in her reaction to such comments, “sometimes is offensive, but you know I just remind myself that you know they just don’t know.” Therefore, this attitude contributed to consistently Americanized discussions and Caribbean students feeling disconnected from class content and the shared perspectives of their classmates. Class interactions were often demarcated by peer interactions in which classmates were unfamiliar
with the Caribbean or any issues related to a more global perspective and did not seem open to pushing themselves outside their comfort zones.

Susan: Most of the time the actual kids in the classroom would not be interested, tuned out or just totally disagree with anything I say, you know I’m like the only place that does X, Y, and Z. Yeah, but this is America, we don’t care, we’re the powerhouse or whatever, and, you know I’m like, okay, no need to be ignorant.

As such, Caribbean students did not feel encouraged to share their lived experiences. Therefore, only the more assertive students made an effort to push past the ethnocentric attitudes of their classmates and make connections based on their own experiences during class discussions.

Participants such as Susan openly shared that it was her personality that drove her level of participation and distinguished her in class, “I think because of my accent, they actually do remember, and I do speak up a lot, I think it’s my personality.” However, there were others that viewed the ethnocentric classroom space as a limitation on their participation.

![Empty classroom](image)

**Figure 4-6. Empty classroom**

Olivia: I basically wanted to capture how in class you feel intimidated and it’s really hard to capture intimidation, so I actually captured a classroom, because I think the classroom I think is the place where I as a Caribbean and international student feels more intimidated … because it’s really hard because of the barrier of the language and accents.

Students like Olivia attribute such classroom environments to feelings of intimidation. She explains that it is “the place where I as a Caribbean and international student feels more intimidated in the classroom… it’s really hard because of the barrier of the language and accents,
so this is where I find myself being intimidated.” She also expressed this below through her photo voice and reflection (Figure 4-6).

Participants also encountered unfamiliar elements as characterized by more macro level representations of pedagogical approaches in the larger undergraduate educational system. This included their general inexperience with consistent use of multiple-choice testing as an evaluative measure in their classes. They articulated that this was a major adjustment from the Caribbean educational system that was grounded in essay writing and analytical writing and less on memorization of course content. There was therefore an adjustment period for learning how to excel in multiple-choice testing as international undergraduates. For Rebecca, her first semester was her “worst academic semester”, based on the need to transition from essay writing and analysis to multiple choice testing. She expressed the frustration she felt making this adjustment “the way that we’re tested, multiple choice, it took me forever to get the hang of it…. I’m so used to writing essays and being analytical with my work, as opposed to memorization and you know seeing which answer it best fits” (Rebecca). For her, it was a need to “adjust to the way we’re being taught, adjust to the way we’re being tested.” This adjustment and aforementioned homogenous aspects of these students pedagogical environment led to a belief that the institutional commitment to internationalization was not being actualized. As Olivia acknowledged, “I know we are in the United States, but we have a lot of international students here, they talk about wanting to make it diverse but it’s just more like the American way.”

These perspectives suggest a need to show greater incorporation of heterogeneous perspectives and viewpoints in the classroom environment, so as to maximize the experiences of all participants. The inability to show a sense of value for heterogeneity in the pedagogical environment is a significant indicator to participants of the larger institutional commitment. In
their view, their primary reason for being in the United States is the educational component, and the lack of diversity in this respect speaks volumes about the value the institution places on this experience.

**Documentation requirements**

Another homogenous institutional aspect was the documentation requirements for international students. Participants in many instances recognized that these conditions were federally mandated and as such there were institutional limitations on differentiating strategies. However, generally, issues of international student visas and the documentation processes made Caribbean students feel a sense of anonymity, as if they were simply a ‘number’ in the federal and institutional database. They felt that these federal categorizations depersonalized their presence in the institution and are mainly viewed as tracking mechanisms. As Rebecca explains, “I start to realize my standing… when it comes to… applying for jobs or visas… it’s a little frustrating, not a little, it’s a lot frustrating, especially… in terms of documentation… proving who you are and we’re your from.”

There was also a grudging acceptance that all documentation processes were frustrating and more difficult for international students than their native counterparts. Thus, the documentation process was homogenous in its systematic tracking of all international students and the homogeneity of the process was seen as a ‘necessary evil’ in conducting any institutional paperwork. Ned makes the distinction that “any process that you have to do… will be a little bit longer… than probably if you’re just a resident.” Therefore he continues that as “an international student…you just know that everything is just a little bit more difficult.” There is a sense of acceptance that this is the nature of the process for all international students. Therefore, the homogeneity and predictability of the documentation processes are unavoidable and should be simply accepted as part of the international student experience. The international center was
labeled as the space for dealing with such documentation-related issues, and some students reflected that they only venture to these offices when they were dealing with such issues and needed assistance in facilitating the federal requirements. “The international center is the last resource that I take advantage of, I just go there for my I-20” (Rebecca). Shawn paralleled this view in his explanation of the primary utilization of the international center, “as international students… we’ll have the same problems… getting your I-20, or just making sure you’re on track because you have to take twelve credits.”

In the same vein, International student status was seen as a handicap in accessing valuable work experience based on the federal restrictions. This was described on two levels. First, all international students, regardless of their difference in backgrounds and levels of experience were limited in the number of on-campus job opportunities. Participants expressed the need to compete with native students for the limited posts that were available to them. The scales are therefore seen as imbalanced in this respect. This tendency to hire American students supports participants’ feelings that the institution saw all international students as a homogenous employment source characterized as being more challenging hires. This even extends to the availability of internships or work study experiences associated with certain academic disciplines. Though these opportunities are viewed as beneficial to the learning process, the documentation issues did not facilitate international students attaining such experiences. Therefore Ned explains that American students “have work study and it makes it easy for them.” However, international students like himself can only do OPS and “OPS is you against the world… they barely hire… like a year, I’ve been looking for a job… it is very tough.” Thus they felt it was advisable that international students recognize that this issue was common to all international students regardless of country of origin or level of work experience:
Ned: We only can do OPS… sometimes you spend years applying, I don’t know if it has to do with the economy, or if it has to do with luck… they don’t explicitly say… ‘you won’t get jobs’… but it’s just way more difficult … if you had … residency… then you would have more options… the more option you have, the better it is…the only options that you have, everyone wants them so it makes it even, way more difficult.

Even in instances where they are required to do volunteer hours for their academic majors, this often becomes a very frustrating experience based on the complications attached to processing paperwork for international students. Thus, many potential employers are often disenchanted by the process and prefer to hire native students that require less processing time and effort. Susan shares her frustration with the complicated nature of the documentation processes by explaining that “Internships …a lot of the volunteer things were … swiped out for me… because I’m international… I don’t have a social security number, they can’t do a background check … it’s just so much red tape to do stuff.”

To further complicate these documentation issues, the employment climate became even more troubling during the recent institutional budget cuts. Students articulated that departments or units within the institution were less open to hiring international students given that these funds had to come from departmental funds. Conversely, Rebecca asserts that native students could be funded from state monies. “When I came here it was fine, but then with the budget cuts, they were not willing to hire internationals… I can kind of understand it, because … it comes out of their personal budget, as opposed to American students who are paid by the government… but it is very frustrating.” Therefore she asserts that it is frustrating as far as job opportunities are concerned, because “a lot of them are closed off to American citizens, American residents.”

This frustration also extended to their participation in on-campus job fairs, often seen as a hallmark of senior level students. Job fairs are seen as preparation for entry to the job market and give seniors the opportunities to present themselves to recruiters in their field. Once again,
participants felt that because of the generic view surrounding documentation for international students, potential employers were either hesitant or openly unwilling to consider international students and how they may individually serve their professional needs. Therefore, situations in which Caribbean international students have had to seek internship opportunities or participated in job fairs have been particularly frustrating and stressful. Prior to doing this they had to prepare themselves for continuous rejection from potential employers. For Ned, an engineering student this is particularly pertinent in the context of the institution’s facilitation of an on-campus job fair. The institution accommodates private companies on-campus in order to provide a venue for recruiting opportunities for senior level students. However, for international students like Ned, these job fairs assume very different connotations than it does for native students. It is seen as a homogenizing environment for international students based on their interactions with job fair recruiters.

Ned: That’s extremely hard, it is soooo hard, …the most difficult thing… when I go to the fair they kind of like have this label saying like, no international students…it’s like, we don’t sponsor F1 visa, as if they tell you, if you’re F1, don’t even bother take the line, so sometimes you can do the job…but just because of this…you just pass.

It was therefore felt that regardless of past work experience and ability to contribute professionally, their international status was seen as a handicap based on the documentation issues. These issues were viewed as generic to all international students.

**Campus demographics**

As students at a predominantly White institution (P.W.I.), students were well aware that they were recognized as a minority on dual levels. First, they were presumed to be African Americans and assigned to a racial minority group based on their physical features and as students of African descent in a majority White country and educational institution. Second, as Caribbean international students, they were a smaller grouping within the international student
population, and as such naturally were a minority within this community. From their perspective then, they did not see their backgrounds represented in the demographic landscape of the institution. Instead, they felt that all students of African descent were first assumed to be African American until they spoke and their accents distinguished them. Shawn explains that this is only natural in the context of the institution’s population and the underrepresented Caribbean student population. “Usually when I speak they notice I’m from the Caribbean but a lot of people just think that I’m an African American, so it doesn’t come to them that I’m an international student.” The Caribbean student underrepresentation is compared once again to the contrasting experience for Asian and Indian students. The opposite is true for this population, as the first assumption is that they are international students based on their dominance in the international student population. Shawn explains that these students are immediately assumed to be international students.

Shawn: The Indians, you recognize them immediately, Chinese, sorry the Asians you recognize them, a lot of people look at me and probably think I’m an African American… I can’t really blame them … the odds are much bigger that he is an African American other than an international student.

In an effort to distinguish their ethnic identity, when they did identify themselves as being from the Caribbean, they were often designated as being from ‘the islands’. This generic phrase used to describe anyone from the Caribbean was frustrating given that it over generalized the Caribbean experience. As Ned describes it, reference is often made to the Caribbean “like the Caribbean is a country, it’s like, you’re just from the Caribbean, they don’t show that this is Haiti…this is Dominica…they group us all together.” There is no effort to differentiate islands as part of the larger conglomeration of islands. Furthermore, this tendency to categorize extended to the larger institutional context. Participants recognized that institutionally there was a tendency to categorize Caribbean students within a grouping that includes Latin and South America.
However, they felt that the commonalities across Caribbean islands did not extend enough to Latin and South America to warrant such a grouping. Therefore, even though they could recognize that they could identify more commonalities with Latin and South America than other regions it was not enough to warrant such a generic grouping. “I see Latin people different from the Caribbean… maybe our culture is kind of related, but we do not… see each other like as a group, as one unit” (Joe). These students do not identify with Latin or South America, and see these generalized tendencies as another homogenizing institutional attitude.

Participants expressed that the small representation of Caribbean undergraduate students on the campus was also seen as a surprising statistic given the proximity of the region to the United States. As Susan pointed out, “I think they need to make more leeway for Caribbean people especially since we’re right there, and, if they targeted us more, then they would have more people coming from the Caribbean.” There was a sense that there was an institutional disregard for recruiting Caribbean international students to strengthen institutional diversity. This therefore led to them feeling that there was an underlying intent to maintain the homogenous campus culture that did not reflect more of their population’s experiences. It also reinforced beliefs that the Caribbean was less valued than other regions as a source of human capital. In other words, students from more developed nations were valued as more advantageous to the U.S. higher education experience.

Rebecca: I don’t see anything changing until that sort of like cultural mindset changes… who are these especially Caribbean people… we have nothing really to offer to them… that they would want to take advantage of, as opposed to … the Asian students … there’s reason for them to want to make those connections… I mean it’s sad, but it’s kind of just the reality.

It is for these reasons and the demographics of the larger campus community itself that participants felt that the title ‘international student’ was automatically associated with Asian and Indian students. As previously explained, this was attributed to the percentage this population
holds within the international community. Thus the miniscule numbers of Caribbean students underscored a lack of institutional investment in recruiting Caribbean students. Susan describes her first realization of the paltry Caribbean representation as a shocking one.

Susan: I remember, my mom came with me to set up the first time and we went to the international office … my mom was like, ‘so how many Trini people came up this semester?’ (laughs)…You know my mom expected to hear like ‘yeah, fifty something’, no, it was like TWO.

However, the percentage of these international students in academic majors also dictated stereotypical expectations of the fields of study for international students. For Ned, an engineering major, this was particularly pertinent, “if I don’t tell someone I’m international, some would probably never guess that…in my department, most of the graduate students are from India, you kind of feel like they’re being labeled, these are international students.” This expectation presented another issue for Susan as a business major, as her academic department was not prepared to facilitate the necessary paperwork for an international undergraduate’s internship experience.

Susan: I think they actually did tell me I was one of two Caribbean students that were doing business … I actually had to go fight and talk to the dean [of the business school]…when they wouldn’t do an internship… they hadn’t ever had to deal with the problem of signing off on internship papers for international students.

This aspect of overgeneralization highlighted the stereotypical association of international students with certain academic majors and how this affected the documentation process for students in these majors. However, it also influenced the student’s response to such overgeneralization, which will be covered in the latter portion of this chapter.

Finally, there are also stereotypical expectations concerning the academic performance of these students as a prerequisite for their presence at the institution. As Ned explains, “most of them have two perceptions of international students, either they are from a rich family or they are
extremely smart.” This is another instance in which over-generalized discourse drives institutional perceptions of Caribbean students. This was only one aspect of the overgeneralization of international students, but it did add a level of pressure to participants’ academic experience in terms of their expected academic performance. “It gets frustrating … the only way for you to … impress these people is to be like really, really smart or have very, very good grades… I wouldn’t say it’s a problem … it’s kind of serves as motivation …to perform well” (Joe). Latter portions of the paper address these students’ response to similar embodiments of the over-generalized institutional discourse in this regard. It should be noted that the subsequent discussions of aspects of students’ negotiations of their ethnic identity in the context of the three REactions will make reference to issues previously highlighted in discussions of the homogenous aspects of the institution. At first reading, the discussions of some of these aspects may seem reminiscent of issues discussed in the Reaction section; however this is a direct consequence of their relationship to the associated Reaction. Nonetheless, in the larger perspective of the theory, it offers a more detailed articulation of these students’ experiences in the context of each element.

**Contextualizing the C.I.S. Ethnic Identity Responses within the Three “Reactions”**

In view of the commonalities across Caribbean international student’s ethnic background and elements of their identity, there were specific responses to the previously explained homogenous and over-generalized institutional discourses they encountered. These responses are categorized as the three “REactions” for the purposes of the theory, 1) Resisting, 2) Reframing, and 3) Reaffirming. Within each REaction there are specific actions or mechanisms outlining participant’s experiences in relation to their ethnic identity (Figure 4-2). These REactions personify the action-oriented nature of students’ ethnic identity experience in different aspects. It represents aspects of Butler’s (1990) performativity theory in the fluidity of students’ identity
experience, and the performative nature in the actions they assume to navigate their ethnic identity in their institutional context. There is no specific order or linearity to students’ experience of the three REactions. Contextual factors such as academic major, level of social involvement and country of origin may alter the level of response in different categories, or the movement within and across responses for different students.

**Resisting**

The ‘resisting’ component speaks to ways in which participants expressed that they resisted homogenous and over-generalized aspects of the institutional discourse. More specifically, these are ways that these students fought against these aspects and the potential effects on their identification with their ethnic background. These responses were viewed as crucial to their ability to function effectively in their academic environments. In essence, this REaction epitomized the action-oriented nature of participants’ navigation of their ethnic identity. Through the resisting component, students’ actively employed strategies to function in their homogenous institutional environment. In so doing, they adopt different levels of agency in their use of these strategies as a route through which to maximize their international education experience. The first component discussed of the resisting reaction was participants’ selective assimilation in their new environment.

**Selective assimilation.** Selective Assimilation was conducted on several different levels. It refers to participants’ ability to make shifts in terms of the dominance or subordination of different aspects of their ethnic background. Students therefore developed strategies for being intentional in their modifications of aspects of their ethnic identity. For instance, they recognized that aspects of their ethnic identity were stronger in their home environments than in the United States. This was largely based on the need to soften such aspects in order to fit in within the U.S. society.
Olivia: To get adapted to the country, to integrate, to make friends ... understand them... be able to communicate with them if you don’t change yourself... and try to be their way you’re not gonna be able to communicate with them... be able to understand their culture... be able to integrate to the way they think ... there’s no way you’re gonna survive here without having to shift.

These intentional ‘shifts’ to assimilate are represented in different ways through adoption of behaviors seen as more suitable to their new environments. Sometimes these shifts may be seemingly simple adjustments to behavior in the U.S., but may take on greater significance in the Caribbean. As Shawn expresses, “You can go to the same restaurant here in the States and back home and people dress up much nicer at home because...not eating at home is usually done on special occasions so...you dress up more on special occasions.”

One such form of selective assimilation that will also be discussed through another lens in later sections of this paper is the modifications to language and accent. Language and accent are crucial signifiers of ethnic background, and participants expressed that this was a symbolic and necessary tool for their assimilation purposes. It was symbolic in that it proved they were making adjustments to integrate and communicate with their peers, and it was necessary in that their peers could not seem to understand them without such adjustments. As Ned points out “you have to think a little bit to say, how do I pronounce this so they don’t ask me, could you please repeat?...I would say the accent is a barrier sometimes, that I have to jump over, but I don’t let it stop me from performing or saying something important.” Therefore, there is a definite softening of accent in an effort to assimilate to the social environment, particularly with American peers. There is a clear attempt to resist long-term modifications to their language and accent by intentional changes based on their audience. As Rebecca explains, “I have to soften it because I want to be understood... it’s soft enough that it can be understood and it’s hard enough that people understand it’s an accent... there’s some sort of compromise that has taken place.” For
Caribbean students who speak English as a second-language the consequences of these adjustments may present itself through loss of fluency in their native tongue.

Olivia: You will speak mostly English here and you have to change your accent to be … understood so … when you speak your own language you will see that you are losing words … words that normally will come to you easily … you have to fight twice as hard, you have to be able to change your accent to sound like them.

Such language and accent modifications are seen as necessary for purposes of assimilation in order for students to effectively function in their environments. Therefore participants consciously make these adjustments to maximize communication with different audiences.

Other adjustments involve a shift in participants’ perception of their national identity in the context of their new environments. Participants expressed a changed appreciation for the importance of racial categories and grouping in the U.S. society. Coming from largely multiracial or predominantly Black countries, many times it was an adjustment for them to label themselves by racial groups instead of nationality. As Rebecca explained, “I consider myself Jamaican, more than I do Black, White, Indian … but up here, you’re forced to think like that, … whether it’s a piece of paper and they ask what you are … you’re forced to think of yourself racially, so that was, that was really strange.” Because of such categorizations, many times their peers would assume they fell into categories they did not identify with racially. It was difficult for their peers who couldn’t understand that they identified more closely with their national identity than a fixed racial category.

Susan: Trinidad just has too much culture, Indian, Chinese, African, and they can’t comprehend, like when people ask me what my race is they’re just confused, they’re like, how did that work, like, they don’t get how multicultural it is … my friends are always very confused, what do Trinidadian people look like and I’m like, we don’t have a look, it’s a culture, it’s a way of life, you know, and that is what you know get, they don’t get it.
Aside from the adjustment to racial categorizations it was also difficult for them to embrace the categorization of minority, as they saw this as another level of stereotyping within the U.S. social structure. Their appreciation of the stereotypical perceptions attached to different racial groups reflects the intercentricity of race and racism in the U.S. society, and how this may be linked to subordination at different levels socially. As nationals of the Caribbean, the minority status is an unfamiliar typology, particularly as it pertains to race. As Olivia explains, such categorizations are abnormal in her experience. “It’s just a stereotype of minorities that we don’t have at home, back home I would never think … my friend is actually like Asian Curacao, … African Curacao, we don’t have that…they are just considered Curacaolian.” Whereas the ‘minority status’ based on racial categories is one adjustment, the stereotypes associated with such groupings is another. Therefore, participants gained an awareness of these as part of their socialization in their new environments. Participants express that stereotypes associated with minority groups are typical, and based on their small numbers Caribbean students become a minority group themselves, “Black Americans… Black Caribbeans … Latin Americans … they classify people … for us that come from outside in, you’re definitely a small minority, so you definitely feel isolated, you feel like a minority” (Olivia). She further described this as a foreign conceptualization, as the minority status was not the norm in the Caribbean context.

Even though racial categorizations into minority groupings is unfamiliar in the Caribbean, and one remnant of Caribbean islands’ postcolonial experience is social class differentiations based on skin-color. Persons of lighter skin tone are associated with White colonial masters and are traditionally associated with higher social class standings. On the other hand, those with obvious features of Black descent such as skin-tone are affiliated with the working class. However increased multiracial relationships have resulted in complex multiracial Caribbean
societies characterized by varying skin tones in the social structure. Rebecca explains the complex intersection of race and class in her experiences at home as a lighter-skinned Jamaican.

Rebecca: Back home I’m white and whenever we did a lot of family vacations anywhere we went as black, so I’ve always had that confusion … at home you’re white, you’re rich, up here, you’re, and so I’ve kind of just realized, in order to deal with it and to be secure enough in what I am I almost eliminate it from the way that I think and I consider myself Jamaican, more than I do black white Indian … but up here, you’re forced to think like that… whether it’s a piece of paper … you’re forced to think of yourself racially, so that was, that was really strange… introducing myself to Black American culture I didn’t fit, introducing myself to White American culture I didn’t fit, so, introducing myself to Hispanic American culture I didn’t fit, so it’s realizing I don’t fit in those boxes, it’s more, I can take something from each of them, I can identify with something from each of them, but I don’t fit.

Though participants’ were familiar with race issues in the intersection of race and class in their societies, ethnic identity was the overarching identifier and they paid less attention to the race and class classifications. However, based on their experiences in the U.S., participants were more aware of the racial categorizations and stereotypes associated with a minority status in the United States. There was however, a strong resistance to such categories, with the only concession being their stronger identification with their national backgrounds. As Rebecca emphasized, “I consider myself Jamaican, more … it’s realizing I don’t fit in those boxes, … I can take something from each of them, I can identify with something from each of them, but I don’t fit.”

The idea of feeling like misfits within categories extended to their interactions with different groups on campus. For many students they expected to feel stronger connections with the Black American community in the United States, given that they themselves originated from predominantly Black societies. However, this was not realized upon actual interactions within the African American community for different reasons. Susan explained that she “went to B.S.U. (Black Students Union) and I’m like okay, I don’t feel Black enough.” In fact, there was a
feeling of being an “outcast” from many group-oriented interactions on campus, as she reflected in her photo voice and reflective journaling (Figure 4-7).

Figure 4-7 Extracurricular groups (reprinted by permission from Susan, 2011)

Susan: I never found that like, in my mind,…there would have been somewhere on campus, you know like how the fraternities hang out on the set, or Turlington, if there was a place that Caribbean would hang out that would be my place, but I didn’t have something like that so I was like, what do I do?.... I was like, well let me use the fraternity and sorority angle because that is extremely segregated, ridiculously so.

For this reason, many participants resisted group interactions and instead chose to make individual connections with their African American peers. “I have a lot of Black American friends, but it’s more one on one interactions, as opposed to like group interactions, so I don’t get involved, in the group culture, I more just have those individual relationships” (Rebecca). Shawn gave another reason for this differentiated level of interaction in the ascribed minority status and the difficulty relating to this experience.

Shawn: I don’t like to associate with too many African Americans, like if you’re my friend like I’m down with it, I’m perfectly fine with it, but as soon as you have these Black clubs and communities, I try not to associate myself with that simply because … a lot of them they are the minority so they have to prove something and I don’t like that.

These attitudes related to interactions with the Black American community were surprising for many participants who had anticipated closer bonds with that community. However in their interactions they recognized they could not relate to the experiences of the minority group and
their struggle to assert themselves in their own social strata. For these reasons they resisted full assimilation to these groups and instead chose to interact on an individual level with group members.

Participants’ conformity to aspects of the pedagogy in their undergraduate classes as different from their Caribbean backgrounds was another area of selective assimilation. Therefore, as previously mentioned the homogenous pedagogical approaches of their classrooms dictated they assimilate in order to function. One such adjustment referred to the testing or evaluative measures in their classrooms. As Rebecca explains, it was an adjustment as “the way we’re being tested especially, it’s really an art, it’s a skill … back home it’s all about essay writing…analyzing … your point of view, up here … it’s just, do you know the material.”

Another way participants expressed they were impelled to assimilate even partially was in areas such as their eating habits, pop culture consumption, and recognition of national holidays. As Shawn clarifies, “I’ve changed a little … I love the music… I can’t really keep up with the music that comes from home… I try to stick as close to … Caribbean food… but …it’s been obvious; I’ve gone to more McDonalds.” For others, like Joe, it was an increasing connection to technological gadgets as he expressed in his photo voice and reflective journaling (Figure 4.8).

Figure 4-8. Technology (reprinted by permission from Joe, 2011)
Joe: For somebody in America, these things are commodities…they don’t think of how these may make your college experience difficult…I really need them, but sometimes you know back home you weren’t exposed to these, you tend to be addicted to these technological things…if you are not careful you lose everything and forget the purpose of being here…school.

Consequently, their assimilation is based on necessity, and involves a level of moderation. As Joe describes in his growing attachment to technology, “we need computers … but we … need to be careful … not using it to prevent you from studying…use your cell phone … gotta talk to family back home… but don’t be so addicted that you can’t go to class.” There was a sense that it would be unrealistic to avoid these aspects of the American lifestyle. However, there was a level of insistence that core values are maintained even in the midst of their adoption of more American habits. “Everyone has his or her own values, and these values, they are unique, when you try to lose that, society loses something too, like there are things that define you as a person” (Joe). There is therefore a conscious monitoring of the level of adoption of different societal aspects. Ned uses the description of his eating habits as an example, “I don’t adopt the American eating habits, I like to sometimes go and get McDonalds, but that’s when I’m in an emergency …some of them I adopt.” However he was quick to clarify that in terms of his core values “I keep things for myself.” At the core, there is a resistance to the loss of values connected with their ethnic background, “it’s important … to adapt where you’re from but not to forget your roots though… so in order to be happy you have to adapt some parts” (Shawn). Thus, there was a sense that one should recognize that some adaptation was necessary to function in their new environments. However, there was a very strategic and intentional approach to balance their adoption of aspects of the U.S. environment and their native backgrounds. Participants felt a clear need to determine the expectations in each environment and adjust their actions or thinking based on the situation:
Shawn: When I first came to the states… everything was so new … I would be like, well in the Caribbean it was like this… now I try to not to think about it, I think about them as two separate places… I’m here now so I have to live by their rules… just be in the mindset that … I’m in the U.S. but … when I’m at home, I switch, I’m at home.

Participants therefore recognize the need for a conscious adjustment in order to function in the U.S. as different from their native ethnic contexts. Rebecca confirms that this involves, “Separating yourself from everything that’s familiar and coming into this new place … the changes are adaptation more than anything else … and trying to realize I have choice, …I’m here for the next four years, how can I make this work best.” Consequently, there is a temporal nature to the adjustments participants make in their new cultural environments. These changes are contextualized as necessary to effectively ‘fit in’ within their social and academic contexts. At the same time, there is also a conscious effort to sustain core aspects of their ethnic identity in the midst of these changes.

**Adjustments to Language and Accent.** The importance of language as a core aspect of ethnic identity was underscored through participants’ perceptions of the adjustments they had to make in this regard. “Language is one of the most important things of the culture” (Olivia). The following section outlines the tactics they felt necessary to enact within the homogeneous institutional culture. Language and accent was another temporal aspect defining participants’ resistance in their navigation of their ethnic identity. They openly recognized that it would be counterproductive for them to completely resist any modifications to their language and accent in their new environment. Therefore, they adapted to their environment only as much as absolutely necessary, but resisted complete adoption that would lead to loss of their valued accents and languages. As such, they resisted the homogeneity dictated in different institutional contexts through different levels of modifications to their language and accent in their new environment.
Consequently, language and accent was the one aspect of ethnic identity that demanded change in order to effectively function in the U.S. social environment. Some participants were second language English speakers, given that they were from former Dutch or French colonies. However, even those participants from former English colonies have distinctive accents and Creole languages that are native to their originating countries. Therefore, all participants had connections with this aspect of the ‘resistance’ component of their study experience. There was a constant need to ‘soften’ their accents in order to minimize miscommunication with their peers, particularly in classroom settings. “If I’m in the classroom and it’s a discussion and I’m making a point I know I have to soften it because I want to be understood…I think it’s come to a place where it’s soft enough that it can be understood” (Rebecca). Softening of the accent is undoubtedly a conscious process for participants in their interactions with Americans. “I have to speak the way they speak ... it’s not my way, I would never say it that way, but I would have to do it in class to be able to be understood and connect a lot more” (Olivia). Their experiences dictate that it is often difficult for Americans to listen past an accent in order to fully understand the communicated messages. However the softening of their accent is not limited to interactions with peers, but also U.S. born professors as well. It was thought that this was particularly crucial in dealings with professors who may not have much experience interacting with international students. Ned describes the conscious actions he takes in navigating such interactions. “sometimes when I go to their office hours, if they’re kind of new or they’re from some part of the United States that doesn’t have that much immigrants … you have to think …how do I pronounce this so they don’t ask me, ‘could you please repeat?’” (Ned)

One participant referred to this dilemma as assuming “Americaneez” in their conversation patterns, particularly in class settings that dictate a switching of identities. In one interview
directly after a class session, Susan explained “Like coming from that class, I still had ‘Americaneez’ or whatever still going on in my head, and if my mom were to call now she’d be like, why are you talking like that? (laughs)” Even outside the class contexts there are specific language identities that they associated with communications with Americans in other social settings. Olivia explained that she would have to “use a lot of ‘like’, a lot of ‘cute’, a lot of words, like the sayings they say here.” Rebecca is very contextual in her explanation “I don’t use colloquial terms up here anymore, because they’re not understood, I mean I use some and my friends have now caught on to the meaning of them.” This contextual aspect of the experience with language and accent is also highlighted in their interactions with specific groups and the communication patterns they view as central to ensuring less frustrating discussions.

Susan: I’ve had to compartmentalize some of that and adjust and switch, so if I’m in, I had to go to a sorority house once…to support my friend, and (snaps finger), valley girl came out, ‘you know, like, like oh my God yes, it’s amazing’, you know like the American valley girl, cause I tried to be Trini … they looked so confused, even though it wasn’t strong Trini, so I just switched to American, you know it’s so funny, I don’t think I’d be able to survive in the U.S. if I couldn’t do that …I think if you are not able to do that you’ll go crazy cause nobody will know what the hell you’re talking about (laughs)… I didn’t know how to speak American, but you know you pick up from your friends …and you realize…. you can get ahead if you know these things, I guess it depends on the situation.

The contextual nature of the adjustment to language and accent extend to interactions with others outside the American context to their international student peers, inclusive of Caribbean internationals and other foreign nationals and family and friends at home in the Caribbean. The shared consensus is that in the U.S. context, it is their fellow international compatriots that are one source of help in sustaining their language and accents. In general, international students were characterized as ‘having a better ear for accents’. As Ned explains, “when I’m speaking with someone from the Caribbean they are used to speaking with people who have accents, or their ears are different, they’re not gonna tell you, would you please repeat all the time.”
Additionally, persons with foreign status or who have spent significant time relating to internationals are generally seen as more tolerant of the language and accent concerns of international students. Therefore, participants’ discussions with international peers are perceived as more comfortable interactions. As Olivia describes, she is more comfortable because “When I talk to… my international friends or Caribbean friends, I can be myself, I can speak with my stronger accent …I don’t have to change it at all.”

Rather than totally relinquishing their native language or accent, participants maximize opportunities to socialize with family and friends as a purposeful strategy to maintain their connection to their language and accent. This is how participants resist the environment in this regard. The loss of fluency in their native tongue or loss of accent is seen as a lost connection to home and an associated loss in culture. As Olivia explains, “that’s making me kind of feel that I’m losing my culture…because not being able to speak with my people the way I want to…I will feel kind of disconnected with home.” For participants, their language or accent was the foremost distinguisher for them as an aspect of their ethnic identity. It was what they used to distinguish each other in their new environments in which they are largely disconnected from persons from the Caribbean. It is therefore refreshing for them to have chance encounters with persons with Caribbean accents who they identify in their surroundings. The infrequency of these encounters made them memorable ones in their day to day lives.

Susan: It’s always refreshing to hear any kind of accent … it amazes me, I didn’t even know that I could pick it up that easily and I will be in … a room full of people and I could hear some word, or something … and my head goes round and I’m like, is somebody from the Caribbean here?

For second language English speakers there was a degree of fear regarding potential for loss of fluency in their native tongue. There were comparative levels of fear in native English speakers who spoke versions of Creole or Patois and saw this as a crucial indicator of their ethnic
identity. For Olivia, who is from a Curacao, a former Dutch colony and speaks five languages she expressed that “You will speak mostly English here and you have to change your accent to be able to be understood…you will see that you are losing words and that you are like, words that normally will come to you easily.” Similarly, for Susan who is from Trinidad a former British colony there are equal levels of fear concerning loss of her Creole tongue.

Susan: They say Trinis speak in hills and valleys, you know like the sing song, I cannot lose that, that’s just me, but, to be Trini, you have to use the language, like all the colloquial words like ‘lyme’…I’ve had to compartmentalize some of that and adjust and switch.

In the same vein, there has to be a similar level of adjustment when she visits home to avoid mocking reactions from peers and family back home. Therefore if she uses terms associated with the U.S., or they detect softening of the accent “they look at you like fresh water ackee or whatever, like, yeah, she’s wasted… sounding very White according to them, it’s just, it’s hard to just switch on and off sometimes.” (Susan)

This level of consciousness of the modification of their language and accent was not instinctive, rather, it required an initial adjustment period in being able to identify when their accent softened, as different from the norm. The first two years were identified as critical in their ability to build up this ‘resistance’ and a level of consciousness regarding when and how to adjust their accents or language skills to accommodate their new environments, and the readjustments needed to interact in their home environments. “Now that I have had two years here…I realize you don’t have to let that stop you, it will be harder for you…you have to be able to change your accent to sound like them” (Olivia). Though all participants identified the importance of time in making this adjustment, Susan related a specific example of the linguistic changes required of her in a social setting.

Susan: I was fighting it for two years, and then I just kind of gave up… I have to pronounce things differently… how I speak now is not how I speak at home…
I’m switching this up, this is slight accent, but Americans can understand it. When I go to a restaurant I can’t say water, I have to say, can I get a ‘wada’, they always say, what are you saying? If I ask for beer I have to … pronounce my R’s more… language is the main thing that is always a problem.

Her explanation exemplifies the frustration in the initial period of resistance to the modifications. It also suggests that the adjustment takes time and is a constant process of negotiation. Therefore there is an adjustment period for participants to learn to compartmentalize different contexts for modifications and types of modifications necessary. This introduces the ‘performativity’ inherent to the adjustments participants’ employ in order to function in different environments. It also emphasizes that individuals can project different aspects of their identity depending on their situation. Even though there may be multiple and competing dimensions of these students’ identity in their new cultural context, they are able to make adjustments to their language and accent so the most suitable facet emerges as necessary. Similarly, there was a constant desire to have a check and balance for unintended and possibly permanent changes in accent. The connections to home are foremost in helping students recognize changes in their language skills and accent. Participants were dependent on feedback from family and friends about such modifications. Rebecca describes the importance of the family and friend network back home as crucial, “Initially … I wouldn’t even notice… when I stopped speaking in my Jamaican accent, I would be calling home … speaking to my parents, or … my friends and … they would have to point out ‘whoa, this new accent is coming in’.” For this reason, family and friends help them to maintain these skills as a means of maintaining their connection to their ethnic identity. “My mom only speaks Dutch to me just for me to remember it, but I’ve definitely lost fluency” (Shawn). Interestingly, there is also recognition that when opportunities present themselves to use their native language there is a tendency to “over-use” it as a means of diminishing feelings of loss.
Susan: If I talk to my Trini friend right now, slang, colloquialism, everything is gonna come out in full Trini way …if my mom were to call now she’d be like, why are you talking like that? (laughs), you know, and then I would automatically be like over-Trini, I’d be like, what you talking bout? Get overly Trini.

This emphatic use of the language or accent to counteract any ‘softening’ tendencies is a proactive move towards sustaining this aspect of their ethnic identity. There is a sense of constancy to this struggle in that they consistently have to consciously make these adjustments depending on their social groups in the U.S. Additionally, they are forced to consciously adjust whenever they visit their native homelands, and readjust upon reentrance to the U.S. after periods such as vacations spent at home. “I speak with a lot more colloquial terms, I use a lot more patois when I’m at home than I am up here around my friends” (Rebecca). Ned, who is a native French speaker also explains his experience readjusting at home as one that demands an adjustment period. Therefore, even though he is a native Creole and French speaker, his language skills demand some adjustments on visits home. “I don’t talk that much with people who speak French… don’t use it anymore … if I have to speak it … I would still speak it at a decent level, but it would take me … a little longer to adjust” (Ned). This readjustment also happens in the reverse in that contact with home ‘thickens’ accents for these students. As such this leads to a continuation of the cycle of adjustment and readjustment. The cycle never essentially gets easier, but it simply requires an intentional recognition of the change in environment and the selective use of their accent depending on the context. Shawn explains his interactions with Caribbean peers by saying, “When I’m around more Caribbean people, I do get a thicker accent, but I think it’s just because you’re in a different environment, you adapt to your environment.” Conversely, Susan shows the adjustment in speaking to non-Caribbean peers as crucial to her ability to communicate with them.

Susan: When I came home from Christmas… I could not stop speaking Trini … I started talking to my friends like, ‘ey, what’s the scene horse? You know how
long I aint seen you?’ And they were like ‘what just came out of your mouth?’ (laughs), and I’m like, ‘oh hey, yeah, hi, how are you?’ (laughs… you get back into the things [the U.S. environment], and you’re like, okay, what is the appropriate English word for Bacchanal, or what is the appropriate English word for macca, okay, macosious, means you’re nosy, you know so you brain doesn’t work as fast.

Essentially these students are extremely vigilant in their stance on maintenance of their language and accent, despite the social pressures that may lead to gradual disappearance of their skills. The ability to soften their accents facilitates feelings of belonging and a connection with their American peers. “If I speak, I sound different and there’s a block, because it’s like, oh, you are not one of us, and then you will feel like you don’t belong… so that’s something, I feel like I’m very invisible on campus” (Olivia). There is also a feeling of survival attached to their ability to make the ‘switch’ and assume softened versions of their accents to communicate in their new environments. However, it is even more important to resist the full time effects of these adjustments and seek the assistance of family and friends from the Caribbean whether they are with them here as international students themselves or back home in the Caribbean. Ned reinforced this in his assertion that “It makes you 100 percent Haitian… that you speak the language.” Therefore their ability to ‘resist’ the homogeneity of their new environments through temporary adjustments is necessary to the maintenance of language and accent as a core aspect of their ethnic identity.

Separation of Identities. This component of resisting is integral to the maintenance of ethnic identity. It is one that is in some sense pervasive throughout different aspects of the ethnic identity experience represented in this theory. Essentially, it speaks to the ability of the participants to contextualize their experiences on several levels. Participants’ identification of the multiple identities they assume as international students emphasizes the complexity of this aspect. Despite the existence of their multiple and competing identities, students are cognizant of
different identity aspects and are able to separate them as they deem it necessary. Through these situationally-grounded identities, they indicate their resistance to confining themselves to the over-generalized experiences of international students. This underscores the fluidity of participants’ ethnic identity experience and their ability to acknowledge agency in their separation of facets of their ethnic identity.

Participants referred to the ‘separation’ of their ethnic identity as highly contextual. Thus, the identity they assume in their social interactions is very different from their identity in their classroom settings. “When I come here I separate the two…I’m most Trinidadian in social settings, here, I kind of leave the Trinidadian identity at the door when I go to school” (Susan). The degree to which this separation occurs depends on the openness of their professors and peers to undiminished representations of their individual ethnic experiences in their interactions with them. Therefore, the professors in fields such as social sciences and liberal arts are more welcoming of such individuality and diversity, than those in the hard sciences. Rebecca who is pursuing a psychology major and dance minor finds her professors open to her contributions, “I’ve never had a problem with that… I always found that teachers appreciate that I have that other perspective, you know, that third world perspective.” On the other hand, Marc, an engineering major suggests that “you just do math, physics and stuff like that… people don’t usually care where you’re from and what you do back home, because it’s about, let’s get to business and that’s it.” These two students have very different experiences in their ability to make ethnically-grounded connections in their classrooms.

Generally, as mentioned above, students felt that their classroom content was largely U.S.-based. Even Rebecca who admitted that she had instances to interject perspectives from the Caribbean in some classes, expressed a level of frustration, “I don’t think that they take into
consideration international students … the curriculum … it’s very U.S.-based… we don’t tend to go outside of that… simple things like language in writing,…how we spell things, versus how they spell things.” Additionally, this frustration is compounded by the need to soften their accents and ‘hide’ their identity. “You have to … hide your identity… to try and sound like them and try to sound like another person is not being yourself, it’s putting on an act” (Olivia). While students tended to concede that this was the norm in their undergraduate classes, their frustration often heightened to the extent that it presented itself in unique ways.

Susan: I’m doing a writing class … this is the first time where I’m actually like ready to cuss [curse] out the professor cause I’m telling her, well okay, this is how I’ve been bred by the British school system … it’s how we’re bred to do things and format and spell, and although they give me leeway for spelling and I could change it, I just do it on purpose just because I can, (laughs), like I refuse to spell color ‘O-R’ like I could if I wanted to, but I lie and say, just to fight it down, just to have something that I could do to them to piss them off.

Resistance through ‘separation of their identities’ is also represented in participants’ consciousness of three different embodiments of their ethnic identity. While participants’ acknowledge three distinct embodiments of their ethnic identity, it also speaks to another level of intersectionality of their ethnic identity. This representation of intersectionality is unique in that it speaks to how aspects of identity intersect, and yet students have to intentionally separate these aspects of ethnic identity in their new environments. These intersecting and separated facets are evident on three distinct levels, 1) international student identity, 2) Caribbean identity, and 3) national identity. From the larger institutional perspective, many felt that only the international and Caribbean identity were given a level of recognition. Shawn, a student athlete offers one perspective of this dynamic in how he operates within these two realities.

Shawn: For our swim team, … the majority of the international people they are Caribbean people, so for once we are the majority…, so, they identify us, well that’s in our swimming world, but then in the whole university athletic association, I see myself as an international student when we do paperwork and everything, and everything when there are meetings, it’s all international
students together… we’re so small within the athletic department as international students so it’s hard to separate us all… definitely in the swimming world… we are seen as Caribbean.

The separation of participants’ identities also has some connection with the degree of recognition different groups had with their ethnic background. This is especially evident in social interactions with other international students or individuals with previous knowledge of the Caribbean. In their interactions with either of these groups they were able to focus specifically on their national identity. As Olivia explains, “I will definitely introduce myself as being from Curacao because they will be like, ‘oh you’re from the Caribbean, but the Caribbean is big so they will definitely distinguish that I’m from Curacao.” However, in her interactions with those outside these two groups she acknowledges her identity differently, “when I’m in a class of a lot of Americans, I definitely have to classify myself as Caribbean because then I will be better understood.” Thus, in the larger institutional context, general unfamiliarity with individual islands and cursory knowledge of the Caribbean as a region encourages greater levels of regional identity. This is compounded for some participants more than others. Therefore, participants from islands with larger immigrant populations, such as Haiti and Jamaica, are more recognizable than those from smaller islands with fewer immigrant populations in the United States. This leads to participants being immediately associated with the more popular nations once they identify themselves as being from the Caribbean. “Everybody is Jamaican in my opinion in this school, everybody who’s Caribbean is from Jamaica and says mon [sic] to everybody else… I wanted to make a t-shirt, I’m not Jamaican, I’m from the Caribbean, but I’m not Jamaican” (Susan). However, given the small representation of Caribbean students as a minority in the international student community, this presented another perspective on the separation of identities. Students saw themselves as minorities in both the international student community and the larger institutional population. Additionally, their inability to make
connections with others who shared their national identities increased their connection to other Caribbean students. As such, they expressed a significant increase in their level of regional identity, given their inability to make connections on a national level.

Susan: I haven’t been able to represent national identity at all in terms of U.F., but Caribbean identity, they do get I’m Caribbean… I can just represent me and Trinidad, and my natural identity but, that’s where the problem is, like, I can’t, I don’t have a platform to do it, and when I try it’s mainly with friends, … in classes, or with the administration… I guess the chances of you seeing a Trini again, you’re probably like, whatever I’m not gonna see one of these again for a while, so, don’t really need to learn about them and the culture.

Given the general unfamiliarity with Caribbean islands, participants therefore contextualize their identity on a regional basis as opposed to identification with their individual islands. “It makes me realize that we’re a very small country … when they ask me where I’m from, I say, specifically, from an island in the Caribbean called Curacao, so they kind of have an idea” (Shawn). This increased association with the Caribbean as a region, has resulted in increased levels of regional pride. “I’m from the Caribbean I’m like, okay, you’re my people, you know, now it’s like a Caribbean mentality for me, it used to be Trinidadian mentality and now it’s like a Caribbean mentality” (Susan). Interestingly, even this substantial change in a shared Caribbean identity, does not diminish their attachment to their individual islands and their sense of national identity. “My everything is for Jamaica… that’s where I was born and raised …, but I share that solidarity with the Caribbean community, so on the forefront of my mind I am Jamaican, secondary, I am from the Caribbean.” (Rebecca)

In sum, undeniably, there is a level of complexity inherent to participants’ view of their identity in different contexts. Their resistance to the view of international students as a single homogenous group is illustrated through their distinct representations of their ethnic identity as separate identities.
Reframing

In reframing their ethnic identity, participants articulate ways in which they reexamine their ethnic identity in the context of their experiences. Their academic and social experiences in the United States influenced the ‘reframing’ of their ethnic identity. This reframing results in the reevaluation of their, 1) attachment to the Caribbean, 2) personal development, and 3) peer relations.

Attachment to the Caribbean. One consequence of the international education experience for participants was the new perspective it offered on their attachment to the Caribbean. Sense of belonging and the illustration of attachment to one’s ethnic background is a core tenet of ethnic identity. Participants expressed that they gained a new appreciation of this based on their experiences.

There was a sense of a deeper appreciation for their ethnic background and the cultural nuances unique to the Caribbean. Therefore, many discovered that they realized that previously they’d taken their attachment to things such as food and cultural activities for granted and sought to gain access to these in some form while in the United States. The easiest connection to maintain was through food, and many sought to do this through preparation of their own meals or accessing food similar to home in local restaurants. “I have to …find my Caribbean food, so that makes me more connected to my home, my people” (Olivia). For others it meant accessing specific restaurants, “I always eat at Reggae Shack …and I love the curry… that I feel is Trini, but I guess Caribbean too, … makes me feel like home, it tastes almost … like home… I get that to… recharge and stuff.” (Susan)

A core value that they ascribed to the Caribbean was the ‘sense of community’, as Rebecca explained, “I appreciate … the community living… a sense of support and having people around you, and you don’t, you don’t have that here.” Many of them identified differences in the
individualistic culture of the United States as something they had to adapt to. Prior to arriving in the United States, they had taken the sense of community inherent to their ethnic background for granted. “Here that’s something that I’ve had to adjust to, here, you’re by yourself, you just try to make your way by yourself, whereas in the Caribbean you grew up knowing that you’re in a community” (Ned). Through her photo voice and reflection, Rebecca sought to portray a space on campus that gave her this feeling of community (Figure 4-9).

Figure 4-9. Plaza of the Americas (reprinted by permission from Rebecca, 2011)

Rebecca: I took the plaza of the Americas …it usually tends to be very diverse groups… on campus it’s that one place where you feel the community on campus…you constantly feel a presence of people and cultures colliding … I felt that was really representative of Jamaica, and Jamaican lifestyle, the community lifestyle and also the diversity.

The recognition of their level of attachment to different aspects of their ethnic background developed through their personal identification of the absence of these things in their new environments. They were able to make direct comparisons and recognize that things considered the norm back home were not necessarily so in the U.S. In doing so they recognized their attachment to these norms. This was also exemplified through attachment to things like food, that were even slight versions of things from home, even if they recognized that it was not an exact replication. In his explanation of his photo of individuals at a Latin food chain in the school’s food court Shawn verified this attachment (Figure 4-10).
Shawn: We have a lot of Latin cultural influences… the type of food they serve there, it’s not even close to what they serve at home… it’s going in the direction of what the food is back home … a lot of times when I want good food I find either a Latin or places like Reggae Shack.

Correspondingly, participants’ renewed sense of appreciation for their ethnic backgrounds simultaneously strengthened their commitment to maintaining this connection through diverse interactions. These connections were founded in relationships both in the United States and in their Caribbean nations. This in itself portrays the importance they placed on consistently seeking out such interactions and sustaining their attachment to home. On one level participants sought interactions with other Caribbean students on campus who could relate to their ethnic associations. However, it was also in any encounters with other students from the Caribbean that they recognized commonalities across the islands. This was helpful in creating bonds with the students and the reinforcement of a Caribbean identity. As previously mentioned the sparse numbers of Caribbean international students meant that there was a movement towards more of a regional identity grounded in a deeper appreciation of regional bonds as exemplified in Ned’s reflections below (Figure 4-11). Contact with persons from the same nation was very infrequent and so sporadic that participants embraced connections with any Caribbean students they
encountered as ‘compatriots’. This facilitated an increased appreciation of a regional identity and an attachment to the larger Caribbean region more so than individual islands.

Olivia: Somehow we have similar sometimes words we say, even though it’s another language we will still understand… I feel more connected…to the Caribbean and not just Curacao, I feel a lot more connected to the other Caribbean islands now … with the culture, because we found similarities to bond us more.

Figure 4-11. Caribbean flags (reprinted by permission from Ned, 2011)

Ned: It makes me aware of the different islands … whereas before I never paid attention to these countries… I never even knew their flags, so now I’m a part… I can compare my culture with their culture … it amazes me, even though we don’t have the same language and it changes from place to place, but there are basic things that are the same.

Their connections to family and friends in the Caribbean were also fundamental in the maintenance of their sense of attachment to the Caribbean. Upon realizing the level of disconnect from things associated with their ethnic background, the family structure and their peers became significant reminders of aspects of their ethnic background. Thus they took intentional steps to maintain such connections to them because they considered it invaluable.

Rebecca: They keep me up to date with things that are going on at home constantly and because of the relationships I have with them, I keep in contact with the Jamaican culture, so I read the newspaper… I make sure to know the new songs that are coming out … whichever events are happening … I know these things even though I’m not there… because I know that’s things that they’re still participating in… I can still have that connection with them.
Conversely, it’s this new level of appreciation and attachment to aspects of their ethnic identity that created a sense of disconnect with peers from the Caribbean immigrant populations on campus, particularly in the context of the Caribbean student association. Many participants avoided group interactions with these students as they viewed their representation of aspects of the Caribbean background as diluted.

Rebecca: It’s things that they’ve heard about but things that they’ve never experienced so, … they latch onto whatever they can, … it’s Caribbean culture because that where they’re parents are from … it’s all word of mouth, … it’s all from their parent’s experiences or that, subset of Jamaican culture that’s formed within a Fort Lauderdale, that’s what they know, so to them it feels genuine but as a real Jamaican who knows the culture, it’s funny.

There was a sense of ‘authenticity’ and ‘inauthenticity’ associated with levels of connection to the original cultural background. This reexamination of being inauthentic influenced their level of attachment to the Caribbean and reinforced their negative feelings for loss of this connection. As such, they clung to their identified ‘core’ values as intrinsic to their ethnic identity and placed less significance on those temporary adjustments for survival purposes in their new environments. “I do a pretty good job of being stuck to my identity. I try…to keep what belongs to me and get rid of some things that are just for social stuff” (Joe). There was a level of fear attached to their inability to maintain their core values and the connection to home. This becomes even more tragic if they attach no level of connection to aspects of the Caribbean in the U.S. and have strong feelings of disconnect in their new environment. “Losing my culture… I will feel disconnected with home and not connected here because I would never be connected here, so it’s like being in the middle with no, kind of no identity” (Olivia). Participants are well aware of the superior resources and opportunities available in the United States but these resources are also considered in terms of the potential it would offer in the Caribbean. Therefore, there is a desire for similar resources to be available in the Caribbean for the benefit of their peers and
consequently the development of the region. “This experience would have been great… if my country had a university like …with like all the resources … I think it has to do with culture, it’s amazing you always stick to your culture.” (Ned)

At the heart of the issue of student’s ethnic identity experience is the realization that in order to feel ‘whole’ and ‘authentic’ they have to maintain strong connections with the Caribbean on some level (Figure 4-12). While they are in the United States this is facilitated by seeking these connections wherever possible, but the inability to do so leads to feelings of imbalance. This need for a sense of balance through a sustained connection to home is seen as crucial in their ability to function away from their familiar home environment.

Figure 4-12. Banana trees (reprinted by permission from Rebecca, 2011)

Rebecca: I have a banana tree in my back yard … I know that sounds very cliché but I do, and so whenever, actually a lot of nature reminds me of home and so when I saw the banana tree I was like, oh my gosh, my house… green banana.

Susan’s quote puts into perspective how strongly participants felt about maintaining their connection to home.

Susan: I didn’t go home last year, ahm, for an entire year, and that’s the longest I’ve been away from home, and that messed with my mind so badly…I can’t ever do that again, I need to go home at least once a year …because we are pretending, … you’re just not being who you really are, as a person, I mean, the full you.
It was only through the distance from home during studies that they recognized how important different aspects of their ethnic background were to them. In so doing it helped them to reassert their connection to these ethnically-grounded elements.

**Personal development.** Given their status as senior level students with at least two years experience at the institution, participants expressed that there was a considerable change in their mindset since freshman year. These students conveyed that based on their international education experience there had been a significant change in their perception of their personal development. They identified several ways in which they have reevaluated their ethnic identity based on their personal development.

Based on their time at the institution, their exposure to different cultures and different viewpoints, participants expressed that they gained the opportunity to broaden their viewpoints. Their experiences allowed for deeper comparisons with home and more critical thinking which allowed them to develop perspectives of their own.

Rebecca: That strength of who I am … deeper understanding of who I am as a Jamaican, as a woman, as an individual … the reason that it is as strong as it is now and that I can be as confident as I am now in all those different roles is because I had the opportunity to come here, because I had the opportunity to step outside … have that compare and contrast and to be able to meet all these people who have completely different views from me and question my views, question how much I actually do identify with them, relate to them and … start to tweak and … and truly understand for myself personally.

Consequently, there was a deeper sense of self as separate from their typical interaction with family and friends at home as a result of experiences in their new environment. Their exposure to a new cultural environment, and diverse perspectives allowed them to broaden their perspectives on the Caribbean. These experiences allowed for a deeper sense of personal responsibility and independent thought based on their ability to consider their cultural experiences with more distance.
Ned: Being here gives me a different view of my culture… we had this talk about voodoo… back home … you just grow up that voodoo is bad…it’s evil… rather than just shutting all the misconceptions that I had before, it just opened me to hear what he was saying, it kind of just gave me like a different appreciation of my culture.

In addition to the growth in their own perspectives there was also a deeper appreciation of international perspectives on the Caribbean region and individual islands. There is also a greater appreciation for the differences in culture and how conceptualizations of cultural aspects differ from their own. For these students this has led to a better understanding of cultural nuances, both in terms of the differences and commonalities amongst Caribbean nations. As Shawn explains, a sense of kinship develops amongst Caribbean international students and he doesn’t “see them as friends, they seem like brothers.” This bond becomes so strong, that they “ take care of each other, we could not see each other for a year, not speak to each other, …but when we come together it’s like we saw each other yesterday” (Shawn). For Caribbean international students, as a marginally represented group on campus, such connections strengthened the regional sense of kinship. “I didn’t really know much about the rest of the Caribbean or cared as much… now it’s like a Caribbean mentality for me, it used to be Trinidadian mentality and now it’s like a Caribbean mentality.” (Susan)

In addition to changed perspectives on the Caribbean, the international education experience has also fostered changed perceptions of the United States. Their time in the United States has significantly increased their understanding of the U.S. culture, and given them more of an ‘inside’ perspective as a temporary resident. Rebecca explained that previously she felt like the U.S. had “little or no culture”, but given an opportunity to travel around the United States, she now recognizes that “it does have a culture, it’s just extremely different from our culture.” This suggests that cultural comparisons are constantly being made between their native environments and the United States. These cultural considerations even extend to contemplations
of their institutional culture. Within the institutional culture itself, Susan explains that “I’m more understanding… even the Black Greeks…you have to learn the history …the networking, in terms of business particularly, that networking link …that’s golden, but that is something to pride and hold on to, I get it now.” At the same time, they are in a constant period of reflection and comparative analysis and for many participants this has translated to a deeper appreciation of their rich cultural backgrounds. As Olivia explains, constant comparisons are a natural part of the experience, “I appreciate things from home so much more things that I never thought I would …family is the most important… I make comparison about everything … I think a lot of things are really different and make you compare every day.” Shawn provided a very stark description of the growth he has made based on comparisons he makes between the U.S. and the Caribbean as a sign of his changed perspectives (Figure 4-13).

Figure 4-13 Weather on campus (reprinted by permission from Shawn, 2011)

Shawn: When I first came to the States …I thought it was very odd, I’d never seen trees without leaves and such cold and people dressed up in so many layers … I’m still not comfortable with it … every day I wish that the summer could come sooner … I prefer color, a lot of color …the island where I’m from …it’s a whole lot of color…it represents my college experience in that I think part of the college experience is that you live and you learn, and so you have to adapt to your places because not everywhere you go it will be the same.
This new appreciation for cultural aspects of both environments leads to a reexamination of the different ways in which they need to adapt to function in the U.S. while they are here, and the demands for readjustment upon reentry to the Caribbean.

Rebecca:  It’s a little scary to me sometimes… as much as I try to stay connected to the culture back home… because I know that’s where I want to ultimately be, but sometimes when I go home and I’m faced with the day to day reality… I second guess whether I can actually do that, because of the things that I’ve been exposed to and I’ve become used to living in a first world country.

There is a sense that the distance has created a dual reality that will require readjustments in future. With this new appreciation of a different environment, there is a better understanding of existing social issues and their effect on their society’s development. Thus, even in the midst of their academic pursuits, they often reflect on the possibility of applying their studies in a Caribbean context. Another common consideration was the potential for their countries if similar educational resources were available. In their contemplations there was the acknowledgement of infrastructural weaknesses in the Caribbean and changes in mindsets that would need to be addressed to maximize such resources for the improvement of their nations.

Ned:  Here it’s true we have better resources, we have expensive labs… even if you transpose these things… you would still need people with an education, like a higher level of education, which is something that we kind of lack back home… if my country has like only two universities… the size of any public university…, it’s like when you plant a seed to give you mango, when you plant it, you plant it, no impact, but five or ten years later when you look at all those mangoes… you probably would not get any results whatsoever in the first ten years, but 100 years, then you would feel oh, it’s a different place, the people think differently, the people behave differently.

Even with the recognition of the significant differences in their two social environments, there is affirmation of their connection to their ethnic backgrounds. They still feel a commitment to using their experience for the improvement of their societies in the long run. This is another aspect that displays the agency participants’ assume in their navigation of their ethnic identity.

Thus, these students are able to maximize the positives of their international education
experience and seek to apply their learning to edifying their native societies. These feelings of empowerment are tied to their personal strength. “It just makes me grow and feel more confident you know, because I have this mentality that if I can make it here I can make it everywhere else” (Ned). This becomes even more transformational, when they explain that this personal strength is confirmed in their acknowledged new levels of independence. “I realize I can fight for what I want…it makes me happy when I make a small step for international students by myself.” (Susan)

Similarly, in terms of their personal development, there were several things that surfaced in terms of their reexamination of personal changes as created by their new environment. They acknowledge that they are able to adapt to their environments and operate accordingly by considering both environments as completely different and making different adjustments. This underscores the fluidity of their ethnic identity negotiation in their ability to compartmentalize their actions based on the identified context. “I kind of just switch into gears, it just happens … I kind of just accept the realities for what they are … so I kind of accept this as my American reality, and that as my Jamaican reality” (Rebecca). They have a renewed sense of ownership and drive to assist in the development of their home countries. “Sometimes when you’re in the third world …you’re expecting … these big countries to… save you… it’s gotta be you, if there is something to do, you have to do it, no one’s gonna do it” (Joe). Additionally, their ability to recognize the benefits and limitations of different environments enables them to perceive how these lenses have helped in positively influencing their personal development. Students like Susan recognize that their current environment had direct effects on aspects of their personal development.

Susan: I wonder how it would’ve been to go to a school … somewhere they had more real Caribbean people on a whole… how would I be different, you know,
would I have grown as much as I did, I feel like my being detached from home and being detached from that element, I was able to grow more.

All things considered, in the midst of their personal evolutions, these participants were consciously processing diverse aspects of their new environments and scrutinizing their personal development in the context of their ethnic identity. Aspects of their ethnic identity and the associated adjustments to such are at the core of their impressions of themselves and their environments in their senior years as a developmental process.

Peer relations. Peer interactions form a significant part of participants’ experiences. These interactions provided them with an avenue through which to reevaluate aspects of their ethnic identity. Additionally, these interactions occurred in different subsets and allowed for various levels of examination.

In their general classroom environment, they are obvious minorities first as international students in undergraduate classes, and also as a minority group within the international student population. This feeling of being a minority is underscored by their peers’ unfamiliarity with their ethnic background. “It makes me realize that we’re a very small country … but one thing though it makes me appreciate the people that actually know” (Shawn). Based on the ethnocentric focus of class discussions and their peers’ attitude during these discussions, participants did not feel there was much opportunity to change this mindset in the classroom. They felt it was a wasted effort to share perspectives based on their peers’ lack of interest. As Susan shared, “Sometimes you know you’d be in a sociology class… I’ve had a number of cases… most of the time the actual kids in the classroom would not be interested, tuned out or just totally disagree with anything I say.” Instead, these students felt that the one area they could best represent their ethnic background was through above average performance academically.
This aspect will be explained in further detail later in the paper as an example of one way that participants were able to reaffirm their ethnic identity.

Based on their inability to introduce their experiences in their classrooms, participants utilized interactions in social settings as their opportunity to speak to those interested about aspects of their ethnic background. “I’m proud to be Jamaican so that’s something that always comes up… every single person I meet some sort of conversation about Jamaica or Jamaican culture always comes up… I try to expose people to that” (Rebecca). Their ability to represent their background is often seen as a responsibility, particularly in their ability to debunk stereotypes. These students’ commitment to sharing about their countries at opportune moments shows their commitment to challenging misleading and stereotypical perceptions on the Caribbean. This aligns with the critical race theories focus on challenging the dominant ideology (Tate, 1992). As Shawn explained, “Every time I get the opportunity to speak about my country or represent my country it’s an honor.” Given the limited and ethnocentric views of their peers, they are often apprised of many of the stereotypical views of the Caribbean. As Olivia shared, some of her peers’ stereotypical beliefs include things such as “they all came from Africa so they’re all like dark skinned… they all dance reggae all the time.” She also pointed out that “there’s something that connects us with weed, I don’t know why and I feel completely disconnected.” Based on their encounters with such stereotypical views, participants therefore saw themselves as the most important mechanisms through which to disparage these generalizations. They sought to portray through their own actions contradictions to such claims, and in so doing give realistic affirmations of their actual values and norms.

Interactions with two different peer groups in particular evoked surprising revelations for participants. This included their interactions with African Americans and ‘Caribbean-American’
students of different generational descent. The one peer group they expected to form an easy connection with in the U.S. given their background in predominantly Black societies was African American students. “I thought the African Americans would be the most accepting and they’ve turned out to be the least” (Susan). In many instances physical similarities between these two groups led to assumptions they were African American, however, their accents soon disavowed these initial notions. “I used to be approached by African Americans and then once you talk, they’re like oh, so you’re not from the U.S…. and then they’ll put up a barrier, once you talk, they start putting the barrier and the distance” (Olivia). Further interactions with their African American peers indicated that there were fundamental differences that contributed to these feelings. However, these realizations were not automatic upon introduction to the U.S. social structure. For many it involved interactions with the Black Student Association and informal interactions and observations of their African American peers on campus. Susan explains the movement towards greater understanding of the disconnect, “The Caribbean and the American history is totally different and… coming fresh from the Caribbean, I didn’t understand … all the different groups customs and stuff…I get it now, I get it.”

The general consensus was that this disconnect was grounded in the differences in the historical experiences of both groups and their difficulties in relating to each other. On one hand, the Caribbean is a predominantly Black region that has gained independence from colonizers and established their own societies, with their own governments and social structures. On the other hand, African Americans have had a relatively recent struggle to establish themselves in a predominantly White society and are still seeking to assume a level of empowerment and acknowledgement in a society in which other groups have privilege. Therefore, even though both groups may have shared similar racial backgrounds, the history of their ethnic backgrounds
contributed to their inability to understand each other. As a result, participants’ struggle to understand the realities for some of their African American peers was contextualized through a process of comparative analysis of their own societies and the African American experience in the United States. Therefore the ethnic differences are closely tied to the historical differences in social groups of similar racial characteristics.

Rebecca: They just seem to have such a complex… I don’t know what it is, I guess especially us as Caribbean people we are so empowered… I don’t know if it’s because we had the fight and we won… because we have our independence, our own culture, they don’t, you know, they still live in this world where you know it’s a big deal that Obama is president, so, I guess they’ve never had that sense of pride like we have, and so there is just so much insecurity and baggage and … there’s a complex that comes with that and for me it comes across almost as aggressive.

Thus, the intersectionality of different racial and ethnic experiences was an obstacle in the relations between these two groups. Even though many of them eventually gained a deeper understanding of the racial and ethnic complexity of the U.S. society, there was still an acknowledged disconnect between the African American and Caribbean populations. This is personified in their acknowledgement that they still feel disconnected from the African American community. Two primary reasons contribute to this disconnect, 1) their difficulty relating to the ‘minority’ experience of the group, and 2) finding African Americans in a collective setting as intimidating. The determined solution seems to be an avoidance of group interactions with the African American community such as involvement with different Black student associations. Instead they prefer to pursue friendships on an individual basis. Shawn explains his aversion to group interactions as based on the fact that he thinks there is a mentality that “they’re the minority and they’re less and they have to prove themselves.” Based on this rationale there is a preference for one on one interaction as opposed to group interactions. “I have a lot of Black American friends, but it’s more one on one interactions, as opposed to like group interactions, so
I don’t get involved, in the group culture, I more just have those individual relationships.”

(Rebecca)

Likewise, the second group on campus that participants felt a level of disconnect was the Caribbean-American population of American students from different levels of Caribbean descent. Participants reexamined their concept of what it meant to be truly Caribbean or ‘authentic’ Caribbean representatives based on their interactions with this group within the school population. This issue was compounded by the fact that the non-international Caribbean students comprised the majority of the Caribbean population on campus. Therefore, for many in the larger school population their associations with the Caribbean were more grounded in their interactions with these ‘Caribbean American’ students. Participants expressed frustration based on the fact that these students represented themselves as being Caribbean and yet for many of them they had not actually had any contact with the Caribbean region or ventured within any of the islands. Instead, their interactions were limited to the perspectives of their family members who may have emigrated from the Caribbean and may not have been back to the region since that time.

Rebecca: It drives me crazy… I went up to a table that JAMSA… I went to just look at the calendar of events they were having and the girl was talking to me in her thick American accent… she’s telling me how they’re gonna have a dance class and I should come… so it’s things that they’ve heard about but things that they’ve never experienced… it’s all word of mouth.

Similarly, Joe articulates that the conversations he will have with a Haitian differs from that with a Haitian-American based on a level of cultural disconnect. “For somebody who is Haitian American … you would not think that way, because they probably doesn’t listen to what’s going on in Haiti, so you have different conversations, you talk about American stuff.”

For this reason, greater connections were found with the Caribbean nationals within clubs such as “Club Creole” who could connect to their interactions, and not with those members who were
born or raised in the United States and did not share ‘authentic’ experiences (Figure 4-14). Based on similar reasoning participants did not see these students as ‘authentic’ representatives of the ethnic background. This was the primary reasons they chose not to be members of the Caribbean students association on campus.

Figure 4-14. National club (reprinted by permission from Ned, 2011)

Ned: I can talk topics with them that maybe wouldn’t make sense to somebody who wasn’t raised in Haiti, like, we feel more bonded, we talk about like blackout… someone who’s been raised in the U.S. wouldn’t understand, but for us, for us, it’s something, that helps us feel connected, and memories and things that we used to do, and that’s what I wanted to represent in that picture.

Even if initially they showed some interest in the association upon enrolling at the institution, many of them expressed that the association was predominantly if not solely based on Caribbean-American membership and that their activities and interests were not aligned with their own as persons directly from the Caribbean. This was the same for national associations such as the Jamaican American Student Association and Club Creole, the Haitian student population, the sole national associations of Caribbean background on campus.

Another element of expressed disconnect with the Caribbean-American group is characterized through use of language. For some participants, particularly second language English speakers, these initial interactions with American-born peers of Caribbean descent were
misleading until they attempted to speak their native language with these students. As Ned explains “you see them all the time you assume that they are from Haiti, and then you speak the Haitian language with them and they’re like what? (laughs)” Therefore, his choice is to always speak English even if students represent themselves as Haitian, and he never assumes that “because you’re also involved in the organization that it makes you 100 percent Haitian and that you speak the language.” For those participants from the English-speaking Caribbean islands, the language or accent barrier was also a tool of authenticity. They paid particular attention to American-accented ‘Patois/Creole’ or a lack of dexterity in using such as signs of authenticity.

For Susan, this was characterized as a pretense that was unnecessary to show a connection to the Caribbean.

Susan: That’s why I don’t go to CARIBSA anymore… they’ll come to the CARIBSA meeting and be like, ‘bwoy, wha gwaan?’ and … as soon as you go outside [they switch to] ‘yow man, what we doin man?’…, nobody expects you to be full on Jamaican if you’re not born there, at least I don’t, being a Caribbean person…, and I feel like they just take it to another level and because they over represent I get annoyed, I have Caribbean friends who do get annoyed, …[for some of them in terms of dress]… green gold and black decked out or like red, white and black … full outfit and hair or whatever and they’ve never stepped foot in Trinidad or Jamaica.

Even more frustrating in these conversations is the feeling that some Caribbean American students see themselves as having the best of both worlds being American citizens, and assume a level of superiority to the international students based on their citizenship. This does not go over well with Caribbean international students who are extremely proud of their ethnic heritage and the strides made in their islands. Olivia explains that, “They call themselves… Caribbean American, but still they don’t feel they have anything to do… with the Caribbean… they feel a sense of superiority because they are from the U.S. and they are not … from the Caribbean.” She feels it’s almost like they are proclaiming through their attitude, “we’re in the U.S., we came to
the land of opportunity…we are Caribbean American”, and therefore better because they are no longer in the Caribbean.

Such disconnect between these two groups means that these students as predominantly Black students from the Caribbean feel the strongest connection to their fellow international students from the Caribbean. “I surround myself with a lot of international students… those are who my close friends are, or if not I have a lot of like born in the island and then moved here” (Rebecca). However, based on the size of the student population, the marginal representation of these students on campus and unlikely opportunities to make contact with these connections are unpredictable and limited. Therefore, they grasp at any opportunity to connect with fellow Caribbean international students. They use their accents or language as a distinguisher for identifying these students. Therefore the accent forms a bond and is often the means through which they initiate conversations with each other.

Olivia: You feel connected with some Caribbean students …we have similar sometimes words we say even though it’s another language … also the accent you will spot it, and you will be like oh, you are from the Caribbean and even though they are from different islands …they will be more open to knowing about you because they are also in the same situation, you will feel more connected to them.

It is through these infrequent but valuable interactions that these students take an opportunity to learn about each other’s culture and gain an appreciation of their regional connections. It also contributes to their identification of a stronger regional identity within themselves since their time in the United States.

Shawn: When I talk to a Caribbean person, I say I’m from Curacao… but when I talk to a person that’s not from the Caribbean, I, I feel like I have more pride for the Caribbean… you hardly see Caribbean people walk into the same room and don’t say hi to each other… that it’s just part of the culture you know.

However, it is based on these feelings and the sporadic encounters between fellow Caribbean international students that they acknowledge a strong kinship with international students of any
background. “When I talk to my family for example or my friends here in the U.S. itself, my international friends or Caribbean friends, I can be myself … I don’t have to change “(Olivia). Through such interactions with other international students they recognize the similarities in some experiences and form a bond through their attempts to adjust to a new cultural situation as represented in the picture below displaying a group of U.W.C. students (Figure 4-15).

![U.W.C. group](#)

**Figure 4-15.** U.W.C. group (reprinted by permission from Olivia, 2011)

Olivia: It is an international group, people know you are from the Caribbean and they want to know about your culture…. I feel close to home when I am in this group… you can be yourself and express your cultures, your way of thinking, dances, music of your country without being judged or looked down on.

Thus, as important as peer interactions are to the participants, they are undoubtedly complex and multilayered. They offer them an opportunity to reexamine their ethnic identity from different lenses given the acknowledged differences or similarities between themselves and their peers.

**Reaffirming**

The three aspects represented in this portion of the theory refer to different ways that participants verified their connection to their ethnic identity. Through their a) commitment to home, b) academic identity, and c) feelings of empowerment, participants reinforced their ethnicity and their different levels of attachment.
**Commitment to Home.** As international students, participants acknowledged that their international education thus far has provided them with opportunities beyond those they would have had in the Caribbean. Despite their distance from their countries and the disconnected nature of the Caribbean population on campus, these students communicated a strong sense of commitment to the Caribbean.

Based on their status as Caribbean international students, participants recognized they were in the minority in the international student population. Given that few students from the region have the chance to gain the perspectives provided by such international exposure, students placed strong value in giving back to the Caribbean. “I have a strong sense that I have to give back to the Caribbean… it’s simply because … I feel like… we’re so small and we are still trying” (Shawn). For many of them, they acknowledged that their primary commitment was giving back nationally, and then by extension the Caribbean region.

Rebecca: When I think about the impact I want to have, I want to have an impact in Jamaica, it would be lovely to be able to extend that to the wider Caribbean but my focus, my love, my everything is for Jamaica, because that’s where I was born and raised and everything, but I share that solidarity with the Caribbean.

This commitment to give back exemplified the levels of agency participants recognize as a result of their international education experience, and they exemplified this in different ways. For some students they joined the causes of student organizations committed to making contributions in the Caribbean. This was especially pertinent for Haitian students given the recent natural disaster and the institutional efforts to show solidarity (Figure 4-16).

Joe: Reminders of your country on campus help you sustain your identity…Haiti recently has been in the news, and to see people in your school, in your college, take initiatives about your country…concerts, activities, helps you keep your identity…as a Haitian in college, people are expecting you to come up with solutions and the fact that I was involved in that initiative…I felt like this was representing my college experience.
Even in their role as undergraduates with a clear focus on their academics, they still consider it important to think about how they can give back to their countries and show that they still recognize a connection to home. Ned showed a similar commitment in his explanation below.

Ned: In the short term thinking, the minimum that I can do like to help Haiti, is to support organizations that are actually going to Haiti… I myself cannot go, but I can support them, I know you know, encourage them and help them raise money to go.

Others showed their potential for strategic thinking and saw it as their responsibility to utilize all the resources at their disposal and make important connections that could assist them in making important contributions at home in the long run. Even in the midst of their academic pursuits, there were signs that current resources were being considered in view of future plans upon returning home. Rebecca confirmed this commitment through her insight that, “Internships…professors…as someone from a third world country…these are international contacts…international opportunities…that will be able to help me career wise…and I can bring that to Jamaica and form those connections.” At the same time, there was enough humility and maturity in their thinking that they did not see themselves as heroic figures in their efforts to give back to the Caribbean, but simply wanted to make an effort to make a contribution. “It’s always
important to give back to the Caribbean...so many people back home didn’t have the same options…but I don’t see myself as a hero to go back and save things.” (Joe)

At the same time, oftentimes, thoughts of family and friends back home were at the forefront of their minds in many ways. Participants all expressed strong family and community ties as a core value across Caribbean nations. The strength of this value was underscored through its influence on their level of commitment to home. As Joe expressed, “The thing about Caribbean students, is that the family is … the bond is really, really strong… you have to make sure you can give back, because you know, it’s part of the tradition.” The ability to maintain a strong connection with family reinforced this commitment. There was a shared sense that the larger community back home had great expectations for these students upon their return.

Shawn: I felt like going in the engineering department… will help me prove that I worked hard while I was here… when I go back and for example go look for a job, it shows that I’ve lived in a different culture and I’ve took a challenging major so that my work ethics are good so that it will help… hopefully I can take advantage of that fact when I go back to my country.

For these students there was a sense that their community and families were constant concerns and served as motivating forces in several regards towards the achievement of their goals.

Aside from their commitment to the expectations of different members of their community, there was a sense that larger societal issues also influenced their level of commitment. For some participants such as Rebecca, decisions such as their choice in major were tied to an identification of a particular need in their countries. In her case, she chose to study psychology because “my best friend/cousin … held up in front of her gate at gunpoint and seeing the effects that had on her.” As a result of that incident, she explains “I’ve always said I want to work with children who’ve been maltreated or who have undergone some sort of trauma, and so, that’s directly tied to back home.” Others were in a process of contemplation of how to apply their learning to identified areas of need for the advancement of their communities.
Susan: I’m doing marketing … the stupid little ads in Trinidad look terrible, now they actually have some substantial marketing companies but they’re foreign owned, so if I can come home and do that, and work in that field, and maybe develop something in the Caribbean and make us a leader… I always had the intention of going home and applying what I learned there, you know, stealing from America to benefit my home country (laughs)

One such concern, specifically related to international education was the practice of ‘brain drain’ or the choice by some international students from the Caribbean to assume employment and residency in places such as the United States and not reinvest in their originating countries. As Shawn explains, in these situations “not everybody comes back, so you lose people.” Therefore, it’s as if they are “using your natural resources to improve your surrounding in the U.S., not at home, on the other hand … you could’ve used your research… to help your own country” (Shawn). This was a primary concern for participants who acknowledged that their long term plan was always to give back to their communities, even if they sought to gain experience through international work experience in the short term. For some students they rationalized that the United States was already rich in resources and therefore there was a sense that as citizens of small developing nations they should use their skills to benefit their communities.

Joe: You feel like this country (The United States) does not need me, I gotta go back or I think if I have the same opportunities, the same package this American guy has and you go back with it, I’m gonna do way more exceptional things, …that’s why we always feel the need to have that pride and go back home.

Ultimately, through their contemplations, participants reinforce that issues at several levels reaffirm their commitment to the Caribbean. They consider their family and loved ones as central to this commitment, but equally important are the developmental needs of their countries. Thus, their ethnic identity is at the core of their academic decisions, career aspirations and overall quality of life and this was seen as an acknowledgement of their commitment to home.
Feelings of empowerment. In the face of over-generalized aspects of the institution and their academic and social experiences in their new environments, participants were still able to find empowerment. There were specific experiences that allowed them to traverse acknowledged norms, undertake agency and assert feelings of empowerment related to their ethnic identity. From an institutional perspective, participants were overwhelmingly appreciative of the resources at their disposal, both for academic pursuits and extracurricular involvement. They saw their particular institution as a top provider in the United States in terms of the varied resources at their disposal.

Olivia: The possibilities there are here especially in academics … we have facilities for everything, … we have for example libraries at school, the school itself has all the sports and everything at school itself … that is definitely encouragement to perform better because the school has more resources.

There was also a sense of empowerment in the local community of their institution given the positive attitude of the larger community to students from the institution. As Joe explains, “even when you meet people around town and you tell them you go to [the institution] you will see the facial expression is amazing and that’s something you get to be proud of.” As a Caribbean international student, this increased their level of attachment to the institution, and pride as a Caribbean student enrolled at a respected institution. They also all recognized that this was an educational advantage for them as international students in the United States that surpassed the possibilities if they were still in the Caribbean.

Rebecca: I definitely recognize U.S. as better in terms of resources and opportunities … I don’t look at it as being something it has, that makes it better than the Caribbean, it’s just to understand that it’s more circumstantial, and so that’s why I said it may take me a while before I get to go back home, but I want to be able to take advantage of that.

For this reason, they felt more fortunate than their peers in the Caribbean who did not have similar options at their disposal, even if they had the capability to maximize them. It was not that
they felt themselves smarter than their peers studying in the Caribbean, they simply viewed it as a blessing and dictated a serious commitment to their academics. Therefore as senior level students they were considering fellowships, internships, research opportunities or graduate school opportunities that would allow them to maximize their impending achievement as graduates of the institution.

From a global perspective, participants see their acquisition of an undergraduate degree in the U.S. as a source of empowerment.

Ned: I think anyone as long as they have the U.S. degree … they will always feel like this, wow, like okay, being accepted everywhere… having like a U.S. degree kind of like makes you feel apart … since I have a U.S. degree, in this major I should be a leader…I should be good at it, so I can influence other people who have the same major that is outside of the country… I mean people come from everywhere to come here just because they have a high value… I’m like, oh, I’m going to graduate, I’m going to get a degree from … I can go anywhere.

There is a sense that the U.S. higher education is one of the most reputable and recognized internationally, and therefore ultimately a degree from a U.S. university will provide them with greater opportunities than their counterparts. However, they view their international education experience as empowerment within certain boundaries, and do not have a sense of unrealistic opportunities upon graduation. As such, participants tend to have a realistic sense of their options upon completion and a rationale for their future goals. Similarly, Joe offers the assurance that “I do have grand plans” but in the same vein he rationalizes this by stating “I will do what I can do…I was lucky…but I don’t, like many students here they just think that hey, I’m the thing…I don’t like the way they express that.”

In most instances, they are very aware that they are one of few students from their home countries who have pursued higher education in the United States, and see this as a distinguishing characteristic that may help in determining their future goals.
Shawn: It’s not the norm for me to come and study in the States, it’s the norm to go to the Netherlands… I’ve gotten an opportunity… I believe because our communities are so small it’s important for you to, you have a bigger influence on your culture… try and come back and help your country in the best way possible.

Once again, as mentioned in their ‘commitment to home’ there is a strong sense of a shared value system and feelings of empowerment in their ability to give back to their community. For these students there is a sense of empowerment in the potential to make a valuable contribution to their society based on their international education experiences. They see themselves as more “useful…going back to the community and looking for a job” (Ned). This is underscored by their appreciation of the opportunity to gain such an experience based on the relatively few representatives who make this stride. There is an acknowledged sense that they are empowered by the many opportunities open to them as Caribbean international students and they feel obligated to make the best of their situations.

Joe: Right now for me, like the sky is the limit, like in Haiti, there wasn’t so many opportunities and you are limited by what you see, by what’s around you, but being in this community, like being here just gives you that brighter… like that greater dream, you want to do way more.

In sum, based on the relatively sparse representation of students of their ethnic backgrounds studying here in the United States, and the value of the international education experience in their home countries, these students assume a level of empowerment from their study experience. Their experiences in the United States underscore their relative seclusion in their institution, and confirm feelings of being fortunate to have the international education opportunity. These students have internalized this situation and used it as motivation to fulfill their educational and career aspirations, which have a strong connection to advancing their home environments. Thus, they are empowered on different fronts. Foremost, they are empowered being one of few Caribbean international students and the sense of responsibility to represent for
their backgrounds. Additionally, there is a sense of empowerment through the opportunities their education will provide for them and the opportunity to make contributions in the Caribbean.

**Academic commitment.** As international students, participants recognize that their main reason for being in the United States is to gain their undergraduate degrees within a finite period of time as dictated by their student visas. Therefore, their education is a priority for them and a constant source of reflection. However, in admitting that this was a concern for them, participants also expressed that their level of commitment to their academics was a primary way in which they asserted the values of their ethnic background.

As previously discussed, through their commitment to home, these students feel a sense of responsibility to give back to their home environment through their academic performance. Therefore, in many instances their academic goals are driven in some part by their ability to assist in some way at home upon completion. This is tied to their acknowledgment that it is outside the norm for most of the Caribbean student population to study in the United States, and therefore there is a greater sense of responsibility to do well academically.

Shawn: I think for me it’s taking pride in your academics… I’ve gotten an opportunity … because our communities are so small it’s important for you to, you have a bigger influence… if you compare a Caribbean person to a person who lives in Florida and goes to your school, like it’s so much cheaper for them… you have to take pride in whatever you do here in your academics.

It is therefore further encouragement for them and they acknowledge the superior resources at their institution as further support for their academic pursuits. As Olivia asserts, “school provides a lot of opportunities here… that is definitely an encouragement to perform better because the school has more resources.” This supports their commitment to doing well academically as it serves as a reminder that students in their home environments do not have similar opportunities and therefore they have a responsibility to recognize this and succeed. The small representation of Caribbean students also means that they see themselves as representatives of the Caribbean
region. However, in a predominantly White institution they also see themselves as representative of the Black community and this underscores their commitment to represent through their attitudes and behavior in their classroom environments.

Joe: If you’re in class and you’re the only black student with Caribbean background, you always have that impression that you’re representing not only the Black community but also your island … so you always feel like you have to represent your identity.

They also situate themselves as representatives of a relatively small international undergraduate population in an environment that is dominated by their U.S. peers. Therefore, there is a sense to represent through their academic performance as international students, particularly in groups that have predominantly U.S. members as they may be the sole international student. Ned explains his feelings as an international student in a predominantly non-International working group.

Ned: If I’m in a group of students … and I’m the only one … I know in the back of their minds, they will have expectations … it’s not subconscious anymore, like I’m conscious of it, I have this assignment, I’m the only Caribbean student… I have to be on top of that.

Finally, there is the motivation to represent not just for the international students but also as a Caribbean international student in particular. Given that there are often distinguishable by aspects such as their accents and cultural experiences, they also feel a sense of commitment to prove that despite their differences, they are able to match or exceed the academic performance of their peers. As Olivia explains, “academics puts us at the same level … though I’m not similar to you, still I’m able to perform better than you or even at the same level.” Also, given the ability of their peers to do well academically, they feel this requires a commitment to above average academic performance. “You have to do your best if you want to stand out… these students… Americans are doing a very good job themselves, so if you want to compete you have to do your best.” (Joe)
Outside of their personal commitments to doing well academically as Caribbean students, they also recognize that there are other sources of motivation encouraging their attitudes. For many of them, their parents place high regard on higher education and have high expectations about their performance and therefore this drives them to pursue their goals. This is compounded in situations where they are first-generation students and feel a level of obligation to set an example. Additionally, their communities at home are largely aware of their international education pursuits and in an effort to meet these expectations they are committed to achieving their initial goals.

Olivia: Back home you have to be able to come with your diploma and be able to perform well because people expect that from you, people expect that when you come to the U.S. you will perform great, you represent the country so when you go back home people expect you to know a lot... people expect you to perform at the level above average, so definitely if I go home without a diploma, I will be like a failure.

From an institutional perspective, their complicated experiences trying to access internships and work experience through career fairs adds another level of academic pressure to distinguish themselves enough academically to garner attention and gain such opportunities. Joe explains the additional pressure he experiences at these fairs, “to impress these people it to be like really smart or have very good grades, and ... it’s kind of serves as motivation for international students to perform well.” For other participants, they acknowledge the need to do well and avoid these pressures until they feel they are well prepared for future employer expectations. Susan explains she didn’t bother to make the effort to go to the career fair, “it makes no sense ... till I can actually go to apply for OPT... I feel like I have to be above everybody else ... I have that disadvantage that... you have to do all this extra stuff if you hire me.”
In summarizing these themes, it is clear that there were several levels of pressures placed on these students to perform above average. In most instances they saw these pressures as motivating forces and opportunities to represent themselves as Caribbean international students. It was important for them to situate themselves as Caribbean international students who were doing well academically and were committed to this goal.

**Interpretation of Theory**

This section offers a general interpretation of the theory with connections to the literature where possible. Earlier sections of this chapter explained in detail, the framework of the theory (Figure 4-1 and Figure 4-2) and the connections drawn between the different theoretical elements. The scarcity of literature on the Caribbean student population limits direct connections to this population, and dictates application in other areas. Therefore this section seeks to make connections to the theoretical framework (Butler, 1990), and the larger academic literature.

The interpretation of the ethnic identity experiences of Caribbean international students within institutions with homogenous and over-generalized institutional discourses highlights the fluidity of their ethnic identity experience. There are both indications of elements of ‘negotiation’ and ‘performativity’ represented at different points in these students experiences. Through the ‘resisting’ component of the theory, these students also show that they are assuming agency in their navigation of the effect of aspects of institutional discourse on their ethnic identity experiences. Participants through their actions choose to assume this agency in their choice to ‘selectively’ assimilate as opposed to completely adapting to their environment or refusing to adjust in any way (Berry, 2005; Ward, 2008). The selective assimilation of these participants most closely resembles Berry’s (2005) ‘assimilation’ component of his acculturation framework in which immigrant groups participate in their new cultures but do not maintain the culture of their new environments. Therefore, their contact with a new cultural setting brings
accommodations in terms of learning a language, adoption of food preferences, forms of dress and social interactions of the host population (Berry, 2005). The extent to which these participants choose to adopt these aspects in this case places them in the assimilation component. The fluidity inherent to these participants’ selective adoption of aspects of their new environment aligns with Butler’s (1990) idea that reality emerges to the extent that it is performed. Therefore, these participants soften their accent or separate aspects of their identity in an effort to conform to their academic environments and function effectively. For instance, they associate their softened accents with their interactions with individuals who they perceive as resistant. However, in their interactions with those such as other international students or family and friends back home, they undergo renegotiation and assume their authentic accents. This underscores Abes, Jones and McEwen’s (2007) focus on contextual influences such as peers, family, norms, stereotypes and sociopolitical conditions on the meaning making ability and multiple dimensions of student identity. Similarly, it reinforces the fluidity of their ethnic identity in their ability to constantly renegotiate aspects of their identity and reassert them as they see fit in different contexts.

The reframing component highlights their ability to renegotiate their ethnic identity and readjust their conceptions of their attachment to the Caribbean, personal development and peer relations given the reality of their new environments. Scholars have identified the attachment component as a key component of ethnic identity (Phinney, 1992; Tajfel, 1981). In this situation, participants negotiate aspects of their identity such as a) social and cultural behaviors such as language, media, traditions and friendship with other ethnic group members, b) involvement in ethnic group functions and activities, c) self image and image of the group and knowledge of their morals and values, d) obligation to the ethnic group and a commitment to its cohesion, and
e) the individual’s feelings of attachment to the ethnic group and an affinity for the group’s members and its cultural patterns (Baronov & Yelvington, 2009; Breton et al., 1990; Phinney, 1992). Similarly, in their position as international students, participants contemplate the above-mentioned aspects in their new social context and this leads to reconsideration of their personal development and peer relations. These reflections within the over-generalized discourse of their environment help them to consider shifts in elements of their ethnic identity in the larger social context. In so doing they rework and revisit the significance of their own development and diverse peer relations in the context of political and cultural relations (Butler, 1990). This aligns closely to the idea of development of self-authorship, or the ability to construct an internal identity separate from external influence and engage in relationships without losing their identity (Baxter Magolda, 1999). It also suggests that these students are at an advanced level of cognitive complexity as they are able to develop their ethnic identity with less reliance on stereotypes, authorities and external approval as a determining force (Torres & Baxter Magolda, 2004). For these participants, this is characterized in their ability to recognize the homogeneity and existing stereotypes within their environment as well as aspects of development in their ethnic identity. As another example, participants display their advanced cognitive development and personal awareness in their choice of academic majors based on personal motivations to meet a demand in their home countries or love of a particular field. Therefore, they are operating at a level beyond the need to see their experiences reflected in their majors or responding to parental pressure for choice of major or even social advancement (Azmitia, Syed & Radmacher, 2008; Hurtado & Gurin, 2004). Even though their academic performance is in part tied to a level of attachment to their ethnic background, they are intentional in their resistance to stereotypes and the influence of authority figures in this choice.
The consideration of the cultural and political aspects of their new social terrain gives participants an idea of which elements are validated or reinforced, and which is neglected in the institutional discourse. This suggests which aspects of their ethnic identity are seen as the ‘norm’ and therefore have more ‘power’ or ‘agency’ as opposed to more covert aspects of their identity. Therefore, participants felt that in their academic settings, in many ways their identity as international students was reinforced or validated by institutional attempts to recruit them and develop institutional programs such as the United World College that facilitates a sense of community for some within this population. However, they felt many of their distinguishing characteristics based on their individual ethnic experiences were invalidated due to the homogeneity of these same settings.

In terms of aspects such as intersectionality (Butler, 1990), for these students, one cannot ignore the influence of race and ethnicity as distinguishable forces in their interactions. Aspects such as gender, social class and sexual orientation were not dominant in their expressions of their ethnic identity experiences. However, there were instances where race and ethnicity intersected as considerations in their social environment, for instance in their peer relations. This is most clearly illustrated in Caribbean international students’ peer relations on different levels. Given that these students are from multiracially rich nations, many of which are predominantly Black, their physical features often denote stereotypical associations with the Black race. As such, in the highly racially-conscious environment of the United States, they are often assumed to be African Americans. However, ethnically these students have significantly different experiences from African Americans and other Black ethnic groups. Participants were thereby opposed to these overgeneralizations of the Black ethnic groups and themselves suggested that there was a level of disconnect with African Americans. This challenges the dominant ideology on racial identity
models and belies the reasoning of much of the models proposed for Black students in the literary base which infer that the African American racial and ethnic associations may encapsulate the experiences of other students of Black descent regardless of diverse ethnic associations (Cross & Fhagen-Smith, 2001; Jackson, 2001; Sellers et al., 1998).

From another perspective, the historic experiences of the predominantly Black Caribbean region in their post-colonial experience after gaining independence, means that Caribbean students embody divergent levels of power with their racial and ethnic identity from nations where they are in the majority in this regard. Therefore, their entry to the social structure of the United States where the Black race is seen as an underprivileged minority, coupled with the assumption that they often personify Black features leads to automatic labeling as members of the ‘minority’. This presents another misalignment of participants with the ‘acknowledged norms’ or ‘normative roles’ associated with the Black race in the United States. Based on their ethnically different experiences and their inability to identify with the racial struggles of the African American, particularly in their initial entry to the United States, there is a level of disconnect with the ‘normative role’ assigned to minority status. Thus, students in this study ‘resist’ these normative roles stereotypically associated with their racial features. Instead, they seek to highlight their ethnicity through their academic performance, emphasizing their ethnic identity in their peer relations in social settings in particular, and the empowerment they embody as international students from the Caribbean.

Similarly, there are also levels of disconnect from the students of Caribbean descent in the student population who were born in the United States to Caribbean-born parents. This is particularly frustrating for these students given that these multi-generational students of Caribbean descent significantly surpass Caribbean international students in their proportion of
the institutional population and representation in the Caribbean student association. Therefore, the general school population automatically associates aspects of the Caribbean ethnic experience with these students. However as explained in previous sections of this chapter, participants articulate that these students have significantly different connections with the Caribbean ethnic background as their interactions have largely been indirect. As such, even though they may share similar racial features with these students, their ethnic experiences are significantly different being that they were born and raised in the Caribbean and are consistently and directly influenced by ‘authentic’ ethnic aspects of the region.

Likewise, the reaffirming components of the theory most closely depict the tenets of ‘power’ and ‘agency’ in Butler’s (1990) theory. The aspects of commitment to home, feelings of empowerment and academic commitment could often be seen as consequences of the resisting and reframing experiences. More specifically, the ‘performative’ aspects of these Caribbean international students’ ethnic identity experience and their ability to assume multiple and competing identities in their social environments, drives the reaffirming notions of the proposed theory (Abes et al., 2007). For instance, it is in their ability to regenerate and reframe their attachment to the Caribbean and a new appreciation of their personal development that they reassert their commitment to home. Participants express increased pride in their backgrounds and an equally strong sense of responsibility to assist in the development of the Caribbean and their communities. They therefore associate a level of ‘agency’ in their international education and seize it as an opportunity to empower themselves as Caribbean nationals. Even though there is an over-generalized norm associated with international students, these students recognize these norms and seek to ‘resist’ them. They do so through their navigation of the resisting components of the proposed theory. Through their ‘performative’ behavior, they take an intentional approach
in their identification of these homogenous institutional aspects, and through the strategies mentioned in earlier sections of this chapter, they only assume these norms to the extent that it allows them to function. Otherwise, there is a refusal to allow the homogeneity of their environment to negate crucial aspects of their identity and lead to any levels of detachment. This is supported by their identification of their increased attachment to their ethnic background, even in the midst of an environment that is not representative of their experience, and assumes homogenizing characteristics.

**Chapter Summary**

The findings of this study were developed through the use of two forms of grounded theory, Charmaz’s (2009) constructivist grounded theory and Clarke’s (2005) situational mapping grounded theory approach. All three stages of data collection resulted in the analysis of the data by both methods. The elements represented in the final theory represent both perspectives. The homogenous and over-generalized aspects of the theory most closely evolve from the situational, social world and positioning mapping approach (Clarke, 2005). However, further identification of elements of these four aspects, 1) institutional programmatic efforts, 2) pedagogical elements, 3) documentation requirements, and 4) campus demographics was further clarified through the relationships evolving from Charmaz’s (2009) constructivist approach.

Conversely, the aspects relating to the resisting, reframing and reaffirming components evolved from Charmaz’s constructive approach through initial, focused and selective and theoretical data analysis. Additionally, in an effort to specify elements of the nine theoretical components of participants’ ethnic identity, Clarke’s (2005) mapping approach was used to refine these categories.

Inherent to the constructivist approach, the perspectives outlined in this chapter evolve from the researcher’s interpretations of the data, and it’s evolution to the proposed theory.
generated through using the identified approaches. As described, the proposed theory therefore represents the international education environment of Caribbean international students and their associated ethnic identity experiences. The three components of resisting, reframing and reaffirming specifically relate to the different ways these students negotiate their ethnic identity in this environment. It also exemplifies aspects of their ‘performativity’ in their fluid negotiation of their ethnic identity as international students. The following chapter will outline conclusions based on these findings, implications for practice and theory and recommendations for future research.
CHAPTER 5
DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

International education has gained increasing prominence as an objective for higher education institutions and larger educational platforms on a global scale. The United States has traditionally been a global leader in their participation in the international student market, as an attractive and competitive option for international students seeking educational opportunities in U.S. colleges and universities (Chow & Bhandari, 2010; Douglass & Edelstein, 2010). Despite the long tradition of international education in the United States, there have been very few studies that have sought to distinguish the experiences of diverse international student groups. Consequently, the discourse on international students has assumed an over-generalized and homogenous tone, often suggesting that there is little to distinguish different groups (Sovic, 2007). Caribbean international students are one such segment of the international student market encapsulated within this larger higher education discourse.

From a research perspective, very little focus has been paid to this particular ethnic group, and has mostly been in the form of dissertations on the pedagogical experiences of this population (Allen, 2001; Browne Huntt, 2008; Campbell; 2002; Carty Roper, 1989; Lauture, 2007; Salmon, 1982). Recently there has been some mention of these students in the larger college student development literature, but it has been limited to a few paragraphs contextualizing them in relation to the Caribbean immigrant population in the United States (Evans et al., 2010). More generally, the college student development literature has itself over-generalized the Black experience in existing race and ethnicity identity models (Cross & Fhagen-Smith, 2001; Jackson, 2001; Sellers et al., 1998). Though these models are labeled as Black identity models, they represent the African American experience specifically and do not take into consideration the diversity inherent to college students of Black descent. As a predominantly
Black region, the Caribbean is one such group that is often over-generalized in this literature. However, findings of this study suggest that the ethnic identity experience of Caribbean international students is a unique one that is not adequately represented by existing Black ethnic identity models. More specifically, it suggests that Caribbean international students’ ethnic identity experiences are significantly influenced by homogenous institutional discourse on international students.

This dissertation seeks to extend the literature on international students, particularly undergraduates, by extending the literature on this diverse population. Furthermore, deeper emphasis is placed on the ethnic identity experiences of this subset of the undergraduate population’s development as a function of their over-generalized university environment. This chapter includes a review of the purpose of the study and follows with a discussion of the findings as they relate to the three part research questions. It also provides a discussion of implications of the study in three aspects, 1) Implications for research, 2) Implications for practice and 3) Implications for theory. Finally, the chapter provides a discussion of the limitations of the study.

**Summary of Findings**

The purpose of this study was to examine the ethnic identity experiences of Caribbean international students in the context of the over-generalized and homogenous aspects of their institutional discourse on international students. It also sought to consider their identification with their native backgrounds and the United States in view of their new environment. In order to gain an extensive appreciation of their experiences, six Caribbean international students participated in three rounds of data collection including two rounds of interviews and photo voice and reflective journaling. The data was analyzed using a hybrid of both Charmaz’s (2009) and Clarke’s (2005) grounded theory methods. Based on the analysis the researcher proposes a
multilayered theory exhibiting the fluidity and complexity of the Caribbean international students’ ethnic identity experience. The theory suggests that the population identifies four homogenous aspects of the institutional discourse, and that C.I.S. have three REactions taken as they negotiate their ethnic identity. These three REactions include a) Resisting, b) Reaffirming, and c) Reframing and each of these include three specific elements. Participants made conscious decisions to resist the effects of the homogenous aspects of their institution on their identity through specific strategies. These strategies include instances of selective assimilation, adjustments to their language and accent and separation of their identities as ways to negotiate their ethnic identity in their new environment. The reframing aspect of their ethnic identity experience is a direct result of their navigation of their environment. Based on their experiences, participants go through a process of reframing their attachment to the Caribbean, their personal development based on their international education experience and the dynamics of their peer relations as Caribbean international students. The final REaction, refers to navigating their ethnic identity in their environment and includes three different aspects: an acknowledgement of how the over-generalized institutional discourse has resulted in clarification of their commitment to home, feelings of empowerment, and academic commitment as Caribbean international students.

As represented in this theory, the participants, as Caribbean international students, undergo a dynamic and complex process as they negotiate their ethnic identity in their new environment. The conditions these students describe as homogenous and over-generalized are a function of how they navigate their ethnic identity. These students are very intentional in the mechanisms they utilize to sustain their ethnic identity. Nonetheless, these students’ experiences also suggest the fluidity of the ethnic identity experience and its ability to manifest different facets depending on different contexts.
Discussion regarding Homogenous and Over-generalized institutional Discourse

International students have assumed a consistent level of participation in the U.S. higher education over the past sixty years. So much so, that the U.S. higher education market, despite ebbs and flows in international student numbers, has been the leader in the market share of the international student population (Chow & Bhandari, 2010; Green & Koch, 2010). From a higher education perspective, the interest in system-wide internationalization and international student recruitment has grown significantly (De Wit, 2010; Dodge, 2009; Knight, 2007). However, the wider discourse on international students and the international education experience has not assumed much diversity over the years. There has always been an accepted discourse on the potential for international education to broaden aspects of discovery, learning and engagement. Therefore, the expansion of international student enrollment has been motivated by crucial objectives including, a) the provision of opportunities for cultural exchange, b) the sharing of diverse perspectives and critical thinking, and c) increased opportunities to diversify the higher education population (Knight, 2004; NASULGC, 2004). At the institutional level, such arguments have supported efforts to maintain representative numbers of international students on campus. Given the aforementioned objectives, one would expect that institutional strategies be enforced to facilitate such intentions in classroom interactions, institutional programs and policies and the wider campus demographics. Nonetheless, existing literature does not illustrate diverse pathways taken at the institutional level to maximize the potential for such targets. Instead, these are almost assumed goals of the international education experience, without necessarily having conversations on the diverse methods taken towards the achievement of such goals. Combined with these assumed objectives is a homogenous and over-generalized perspective on the international student experience. Therefore, for the most part, the experiences of diverse groups of international students have not been assessed as representative of individual
groups. Instead, international students have been characterized as one general segment of the institutional student population with similar associated concerns (Anderson, 2005; Galloway & Jenkins, 2005; Mupinga & Mupinga, 2005). This is particularly ironic in a U.S. social structure, which is careful to make distinctions on experiences based on racial classifications. Yet for international students, they are largely grouped in the generic ‘foreign student’ classification, with little effort taken to further distinguish their experiences.

Based on findings of this study, international students do recognize their shared experiences as international students adjusting to new environments. However, they also recognize that the institutional tendency to over-generalize in this respect diminishes the importance of the diverse backgrounds that are supposedly driving international education initiatives. As findings suggest, enough attention is not being paid to the diversification in pedagogical environments, at least as perceived by the students in this study. Therefore, instances for the incorporation of diverse perspectives and cultural exchange are not likely to be facilitated at the classroom level through curriculum amendments and classroom interactions. This means that the critical inquiry that is deemed a natural progression of international education is not being facilitated at the classroom level, at least in the context in which the participants of this study navigate. Instead, there are different levels of fixation on U.S.-centered discourse, depending on academic major or class level. This translates to minimal opportunities for the nature of dialogue that higher education stakeholders profess to be a natural consequence of international education and the presence of impressive international student numbers on U.S. campuses.

At the programmatic level, though institutions distinguish themselves as internationalized in some respects, based solely on their share of the international student market, in the view of
these study participants, this internationalization does not permeate engagement efforts in institutional programs. Instead, existing programs largely target the general international student population, or seek to address the needs of the Asian student population. These over-generalized institutional programmatic efforts generate feelings of disconnect for Caribbean international students, who do not feel their needs are considered in program development. As the findings suggest, it is this lack of awareness of their experiences that leads to the assumption that these students are actively involved in institutional groups such as the Caribbean Student Association. Institutionally, if there was an appreciation of the issues inherent to this student population, then institutional stakeholders would realize that the Caribbean international student population sees a strong disconnect from Caribbean-American students or students of immigrant Caribbean descent. Instead, there is yet another overgeneralization of their experiences as shared with this group. Additionally, the fact that these Caribbean-American students are in significantly larger numbers on campus, means that Caribbean international students feel their presence is negated even more in preference for their Americanized peers. Therefore, they are dismissed on two levels due to overrepresentation of more recognized student groups in institutional programs. In the international student population, it is the Asian and Indian student population, and in the Caribbean student population, it is the Caribbean-American population.

This overrepresentation of the Caribbean American population as the majority also leads to a misconception of the nature of the Caribbean student presence in campus demographics. Participants described this as an aspect of over-generalized institutional discourse in that a lack of appreciation of the difference between their ethnic experiences as international students and that of the Caribbean-American population, leads to a misinterpretation of their disconnect within the institution. Therefore, even though institutional stakeholders outside their community
may assume that they are on campus in significant numbers, Caribbean international students have a different lens and are extremely aware of their paucity in numbers, particularly at the undergraduate level. They are therefore unable to make connections with other international students directly from the Caribbean. This therefore limits their ability to come together and make attempts to have their presence felt more as an international student group on campus. Consequently, they are left to grasp these opportunities through chance encounters with other Caribbean international students who they are only able to identify if they have an opportunity to hear them speak and therein recognize their accents. Thus, from a programmatic aspect, these students are disengaged unless they are part of smaller groups on campus that intentionally facilitate such interactions within their mission, as with the United World Scholars program. However, since members of these groups are in the minority, it means that the ability to maximize cultural exchanges at a significant level as a group is undermined for Caribbean international students. Here again, another presumption of the international education experience is not being achieved based on over-generalized aspects of the institutional discourse on international students.

Perhaps the most obvious representation of the over-generalized and homogenous approach to international students is the documentation process inherent to the experience of an international student. It is through the level of standardization in documentation issues, such as visa regulation compliance and restrictions on employment that Caribbean international students feel most indistinguishable from the rest of the international student population. In fact, this is one issue that they see as homogenous to all international students, and the institutional processes in this regard support their feelings. For instance, their visa status determines the approach employers assume in facilitating their employment needs in seeing them as problematic
hires that require more effort to accommodate documentation needs. As Caribbean international students, they are often driven to rely on their academic performance as international students to distinguish themselves and overcome the homogeneity of the documentation process.

In sum, there are identified homogenous and over-generalized aspects of the institutional discourse in relation to international students. These aspects contradict the intended vision for internationalization at the institutional level (Altabach & Knight, 2007; NASULGC, 2004; Stromquist, 2007). From the perspective of Caribbean international students in particular, these homogenous aspects encourage their negotiation of their specific ethnic experiences. This has driven them to clearly distinguish the few instances where they have had an opportunity to do so in their time as international students. The scarcity of such opportunities for learning and engagement that has allowed them to represent themselves as diverse members of the international student population underscores the homogeneity of their international education experience.

Discussion Regarding the Identification of C.I.S. with Their Native Backgrounds

The literature on international students recognizes that one of the foremost challenges for international students is the transitional experience from their own cultural backgrounds to foreign environments (Dao et al., 2007; Galloway & Jenkins, 2005; Lee & Rice, 2007). For the most part, the literature has assumed generic discussions of these adjustments for international students, and in some instances their transitional experiences have been compared to those of immigrant populations in the United States (Berry, 1997; Hazen & Alberts, 2006; Ortiz, 1986). The few studies that have focused on specific ethnic groups have focused on students from different Asian backgrounds (Dao et al., 2007; Diangelo, 2006; Frey & Roysircar, 2006; Hsieh, 2007). To have a largely Asian focus presents a very one-sided appreciation of the ethnic identity negotiations and level of requisite adjustments for international students. The differences may be
even more unrepresentative given that Asian students are operating from an Eastern lens culturally. Therefore, their ethnic identity experiences may be even more distant from the U.S. than more westernized backgrounds. In terms of ethnicity, aspects of identity have focused on elements such as social and cultural behaviors including language, attitudes and cultural practices, involvement in ethnic group functions and activities, image of the group and knowledge of the groups morals and values, self-identification and feelings of attachment to the ethnic group and an affinity for the group’s members and its cultural patterns (Baronov & Yelvington, 2009; Breton, et al., 1990; Phinney, 1992).

Extant literature has focused on ethnic identity from two major positions in the research, a) international students, and b) college student development. As previously mentioned there have been definite trends in its discussion in the international student context. The adjustment component has assumed discussions of concepts such as acculturation, assimilation and similar ideas on changes to the degree of attachment to the native ethnic identity. Researchers such as Berry (1986; 1997) have addressed the associated changes in cultural attitudes, values and behaviors that result from contact between two distinct cultures and the encounters between dominant and non-dominant groups or individuals in pluralistic societies. In the context of higher education, the university campus may be viewed as a pluralistic environment with dominant and non-dominant groups.

In the same vein, participants viewed themselves as non-dominant in the university context on two levels: 1) as a minority in the larger student population, and 2) as a minority in the international student population. This means that Caribbean international students may contextualize their level of adjustments to being the non-dominant in two different contexts for these two populations. For these participants their need to make adjustments as a non-dominant
segment of the school population is exemplified in one respect in their selective assimilation in their class contexts as a measure of softening their identity enough to function in their classrooms. On the other hand, even though they are in the minority within the international student populations, there is still a level of kinship based on their experience as non-dominants. The literature also addresses changes in levels of attachment to ethnic backgrounds in terms of ethnic components such as eating habits, language patterns, contact with persons from home and the host culture, and cultural consumption patterns (Berry, 2003; Marin, Sabogal, Marin, Otero-Sabogal, & Perez-Stable, 1987; Zimmerman, 1995). As Sussman (2002) posits, issues such as heritage and cultural identity are often not salient while someone resides in his/her home country, but may become more salient in a foreign cultural environment. It is therefore compelling to consider such changes or developments for international students in their interactions within their host culture environment. This is particularly salient for the participants of this study; and that is, recognized increased levels of appreciation for values and other aspects of their ethnic background in their time in the U.S. Though they made adjustments to their language and accent to facilitate better communication as necessary, the need to do this increased their level of attachment to their native language or accent, even to the point of overcompensating in encounters with other Caribbean nationals by emphasizing accent and other Caribbean traditions.

International students in this context are sojourners who assume identities similar to immigrants in new cultural environments. Alternately, their experience as members of an underrepresented group in their institutional discourse drives them to acknowledge greater levels of connection to the Caribbean. So much so that even though they recognize that their national identity is stronger when they are at home in the context of their U.S. environment, they assume
a stronger regional or Caribbean identity when they are in the United States. Therefore, unless they are conversing with other international students, participants express that they identify themselves as being from the Caribbean and not individual islands based on the level of ignorance about specific islands. Additionally, their interactions with students from other islands of the Caribbean gives them a better understanding of their commonalities and their ability to acknowledge a deeper sense of a Caribbean identity.

Another key area of the international student literature is a focus on group interactions. As another component of ethnic identity, the adjustments in their new environments and how this manifests in their interpersonal interactions is crucial (Furnham & Bochner, 1986; Kashima & Loh, 2006). Furnham and Bochner (1986) propose three existing networks for international students, the monocultural network, bicultural network and multicultural network. The monocultural network is comprised of close friendships with other co-nationals and serves as the international students’ primary network. The bicultural network is a secondary network that includes locals such as academics, students and advisors and the multicultural network involves international students from other countries. The authors suggest that each network serves a different purpose. Considering the different levels of interactions Furnham and Bochner (1986) propose and later articulations of ecological interactions (Brofenbrenner, 1979, 1993, 2006) articulating similar ideas, this presents an idea of multiple dimensions in which students navigate their different aspects of their ethnic identity. In this case, participants distinguished between their interactions with these groups as very different in their ability to navigate aspects of their ethnic backgrounds. In this context, their monocultural interactions involved the closest connections as they were able to make a deep cultural connection with other students from the Caribbean or their own islands. The multicultural network was next in line in terms of their
ability to empathize with other international students who they saw as more open to the diversity they represented in the international student community. Therefore, there were more opportunities to represent their ethnic background through the multicultural network. Conversely, for the most part the bi-cultural network had the weakest effect, particularly in the pedagogical context. Participants did not feel that they were largely able to represent aspects of their ethnic identity in their interactions with locals such as academics, students and advisors. Instead, these interactions were defined by more ‘Americanized’ behaviors and interests. Therefore all three networks represented different levels of connection with their ethnic background.

The college student development component of the literature offers a different perspective on the ethnic identity argument. U.S. researchers have proffered the majority of the college student development work, and as such it is contextualized within the U.S. higher education system, and based on the U.S. students’ experience (Lundberg, 2007; Phinney, 1990; Renn, 2004; Rhoads et al., 2002; Torres, 1999, 2003). College student development work has focused on the college experiences of traditional-aged students as they process different aspects of their identity during their college years. The idea is that traditional-aged students are at a point in their lives where they are establishing their individual identities away from their families and familiar communities, and are developing different aspects of their identity in the college environment. The nature of the college environment in the exposure to diverse personalities and situations may lead to acknowledgement of previously unrecognized aspects of identity. As Renn (2004) describes it, the college campus is a unique developmental environment in that it fosters a setting for psychological, physical, personal and interpersonal development. In the case of ethnic identity, the majority of the research has assumed a linear and step-wise process that typically
begins with unrealized levels of ethnic identity. As previously mentioned, the majority of the literature has largely addressed the interests of identified racial groupings through racial identity models developed in a U.S. context. Therefore, models addressing the experiences of Latino Americans (Ferdman & Gallegos, 2001; Guardia & Evans, 2008; Rivas-Drake, 2008; Torres & Baxter-Magolda, 2004; Torres & Hernandez, 2007), Native Americans (Cajete, 2005; Horse, 2001; Jackson et al., 2003; Lundberg, 2007; Mihesuah & Wilson, 2004), African Americans (Cross, 1991, 2001; Phelps et al., 2001; Rodgers & Summers, 2008; Cole & Jacob-Arriola, 2007) and Asian Americans (Kawaguchi, 2003; Lee, 2005; Rhoades et al., 2002; Yee & Huang, 1996; Yoo & Lee, 2005) have been addressed. Research has acknowledged that the work on ethnic identity becomes more challenging given the diverse backgrounds of the U.S. population (Evans et al., 2010). Therefore, there has been more research on groups such as Latino and Asian Americans and less on African and Native American groups based on issues related to immigration, phenotype and within-group differences (Evans et al., 2010). However, generic ethnic identity models and measures have still been proposed (Phinney, 1990), and the work on African Americans or Blacks has focused on a U.S. experience and used the terms race and ethnicity interchangeably (Phelps et al., 2001; Phelps, Tranakos-Howe, Dagley & Lyn, 2001). Consequently, Caribbean students’ experiences as a within-Black ethnic group have largely been invisible.

Though there has been some recognition of the Caribbean-American or students’ of Caribbean descent experience in the literature (Hall & Carter, 2006; McLaughlin, 1981; Rogers, 2006; Tatum, 1997; Waters, 1996), these experiences are significantly different from those of international Caribbean students. Participants’ navigation of these differences as expressed through the peer relations component of the C.I.S. theory clearly underscores this distinction.
Therefore, generic models such as Phinney’s (1990) that prescribe developmental steps such as a 1) unexamined ethnic identity, 2) ethnic identity search, and 3) ethnic identity achievement and other research that specifically address the ethnic identity experiences of different U.S.-based ethnic groups, do not present authentic representations of the Caribbean international students’ ethnic identity experience in a U.S. context. In particular, based on findings from this study, participants clearly express an increased appreciation of elements such as their a) attachment to the Caribbean, b) commitment to home, c) feelings of empowerment, d) separation of identities and e) selective assimilation. These four theoretical aspects in particular highlight a key aspect of ethnic identity in terms of students’ attachment or connection with their native backgrounds. The over-generalized and homogenous nature of their institutional experience and the under-representation of the Caribbean international student population provide a unique environment for these students to navigate their ethnic identity. It is their experiences in this environment, including their resisting actions to the homogenous aspect and their interactions with peers, faculty and community that help them to acknowledge increased levels of attachment to the Caribbean. In so doing, aspects of the reaffirming component, such as their commitment to home and feelings of empowerment become stronger. These students’ assertion of their acknowledgement of their sense of responsibility to improve the conditions of their homelands whether in the short or long run and to give back to their communities based on their international education experience reinforces their level of identification with their native backgrounds. The intentional strategies these students use to maintain their connection to their ethnic background, such as their adjustments to their language and accent in selective environments and their separation of their identities depending on context, display an unwillingness to abandon elements they consider as the core of their ethnicity. Therefore, they
compartmentalize aspects of their international education experience, make adjustments only as much as is necessary to function effectively in areas they consider important, such as their academic setting. Otherwise, they maximize connections with peers within the institution and family and friends back home to reassert aspects of their identity that they may suppress in less welcoming contexts.

**Discussion Regarding the Identification of C.I.S. with the U.S. Culture**

International students are often compared to immigrants in that they assume residential status in a foreign country. The only difference is that for many of them their period of residency is limited to the duration of their international education experience. Therefore, there has been literature that has drawn comparisons between their experiences and immigrant populations (Berry, 1997, 2001; Hazen & Alberts, 2006). Such parallels have mostly been made in the acculturation literature in assessing the adjustments international students make in transitioning to their new cultural environments. A key expectation of the international education experience is cultural exchange between international students and citizens of the host nation. However, this does not often translate as a two-way process for many who come in contact with these students.

A few studies have recognized this one-sided focus in the literature in this respect and have sought to address the effects on the host culture (Navas et al., 2005). Undoubtedly, international students have to adjust to their new cultural environments in an effort to effectively navigate the socio-cultural expectations of that society. In so doing, some literature has sought to determine how permanent this process is for international students as far as its effect on their identification with their native backgrounds versus their new host culture (Dao et al., 2007; Koyama, 2005; Stark- Wroblewski et al., 2005). Participants in this study did acknowledge that there were ways they identified with their host society, however it did not outweigh their identification with their
native backgrounds. There is a clear sense of a continued attachment to values and other ethnic connections with the Caribbean.

As a developed first world nation, the United States holds much appeal for international students in its ability, in many instances, to offer them opportunities beyond their home countries. This becomes particularly relevant for students from less developed regions such as the Caribbean. The ‘brain drain’ phenomenon is a significant concern in the international education discourse and participants in this study also recognized the effect of this phenomenon on their home territory. Aside from the opportunities associated with the United States, the period of absence from their ethnic backgrounds and their increased attachment to aspects of the U.S. culture is another reason some international students take advantage of opportunities to remain in the United States after their studies. Participants in this study did recognize that this was a primary concern for them upon beginning studies in the United States. However, for the most part this level of identification was a function of their need to adjust to their new environment while retaining strong attachment to their home country and desire to return upon graduation.

For the Caribbean international students in this study, their levels of identification with the U.S. culture operated on two distinct levels. First, there were the adjustments they made in their behaviors to effectively navigate their new cultural environment. Second, were the different ways they acknowledged a new sense of understanding or appreciation for different aspects of the U.S. culture. As expressed in the previous chapter, participants identified a sense of homogeneity to their environment. In one sense, this homogeneity referred to the predominant U.S. focus of their academic environment, to the exclusion of a willingness to accommodate foreign cultural influences. Therefore, participants’ adoption of a more ‘Americanized’ tone to
their accents was one way they had to assume a more U.S. cultural identity to effectively function in their new environment. Additionally, given their inability to access cultural aspects of their native backgrounds such as food and music they found themselves assuming the consumption patterns and preferences of their American peers. For some participants, this meant that in addition to eating more American foods, for instance fast foods, they were increasingly ‘eating out’, an infrequent practice in the Caribbean often restricted to special occasions, and found that frequently their social interactions occurred over food with their peers at popular eating establishments. Additionally, in an effort to make connections with their peers they recognized that their consumption of U.S. pop culture increased significantly during their period of residence. One aspect that students’ acknowledged they have grown significantly attached to is the availability of resources in the United States versus the Caribbean. Therefore, the availability of resources such as technology and facilities at their university and the availability of convenient 24 hour online services had become an expected part of their social existence. These were resources they recognized were not largely available in the Caribbean and as such there would need to be a period of readjustment to this reality upon their return.

Another perspective on participants’ identification with the U.S. culture is their new appreciation for aspects of the culture. For instance, their interactions with peers revealed within-race differences for other Black ethnic groups. Based on their Caribbean backgrounds, the predominantly Black racial composition of the Caribbean population and the historical experiences of slavery, colonialism and independence, Caribbean nationals have different racial experiences than U.S. Blacks. Participants’ recognized that their time in the U.S. was defined by a movement from lack of understanding of the U.S. Black experience and a greater appreciation of this ethnic groups’ struggles based on socialization experiences. Even though they
acknowledged a better understanding of the African American experience, participants still expressed levels of frustration making connections with members of this ethnic group, particularly outside one-on-one interactions. Therefore, they deliberately pursue relationships with African Americans on solely an individual basis as this is seen as more a comfortable space to navigate their differences than on a larger group basis. Participants also developed a deeper understanding of the social structure of immigrant Caribbean population. Through their interactions with American peers of Caribbean descent within the institution, they developed an awareness of the differences between their ethnic group and the ethnic attachment of those of that group. Based on these interactions, participants shared that their Caribbean American peers had diminished understanding of the Caribbean ethnic background. This was primarily because many of them had never visited or lived in the Caribbean themselves and received their second-hand interpretations of the Caribbean from any relatives who had emigrated from the region. For this reason, they did not have a sense of kinship with these students based on their difference in their levels of ethnic attachment to the Caribbean. Essentially, Caribbean international students’ interactions with members of two U.S. ethnic groups allowed for a deeper understanding of the racial and ethnic distinctions between themselves and these groups. Admittedly there was a connection with them on a racial level. However, their ethnic experiences served as the source of detachment and differentiation with these groups.

In sum, based on participants’ articulation of acknowledged levels of connection to the U.S. culture, it is clear that their interpretations of these connections are contingent on their levels of attachment to the Caribbean. Thus, there were ways they perceived a stronger connection to the U.S., but they mainly did this through comparisons with their awareness of aspects of their ethnic identity.
Implications for Practice

As evidenced in Caribbean international students’ articulation of their experiences, these students have strong perceptions of how their educational experience influences their navigation of their ethnic identity. The elements of the proposed theory suggest areas that demand attention from practitioners.

First, participants’ description of aspects such as the pedagogical environment, programmatic efforts, campus demographics and documentation requirements suggest areas for attention. The homogeneity of the classroom environment in the U.S.-centered curriculum was one such area. At the administrative level, there needs to be a wide-scale appreciation for the incorporation of global perspectives at the pedagogical level. This means that if learning, engagement and discovery are truly valued as aspects of the international education experience, it is crucial that this is considered in the development and execution of curricula. At the faculty level, this translates to ‘buy-in’ at both the development and execution levels. Given that students are most cognizant of their classroom experiences as representative of the institutional commitment to international education, there have to be significant steps to ensure that this is reflected in their classroom interactions. Thus, faculty has a key role to play in ensuring that this is reflected in pedagogical aspects such as coursework, class discussions and general classroom climate. This process begins with transmitting relevant classroom policies to their students during their initial meetings with them concerning acceptable communication practices and pedagogical values integral to their learning. It also means building an appreciation for the incorporation of a globally connected and respectful class environment in the classroom dynamic and consistently monitoring students’ maintenance of policies that support this pedagogical value. Administrators also have an important role to play in this respect. They will need to communicate their commitment to international education through the institutional culture,
policies and practice. In doing so, institutional members at all levels will develop an awareness of its value and the expectation that this is reflected in all organizational efforts.

Areas such as the homogeneity of campus demographics and programmatic efforts will need to be addressed through different initiatives at the administrative level. It would be unrealistic to expect that there will be equitable representation of all international student groups on college campuses. However, the significantly low representation of Caribbean international students on such a populous campus, and the issues of the study’s participants as a consequence of this underrepresentation suggest that the underrepresentation of this population needs to be addressed. In view of the proximity of the United States to the Caribbean, the political and social relationships between the Caribbean exemplified in existing trade agreements and significant immigrant population, there needs to be attention paid to this issue. Based on participants’ perspectives many students in the Caribbean do not consider international education opportunities in the United States to be a viable option based on misconceptions of the inaccessibility of educational options in the United States and unavailability of informational sources on feasible options. If the institution is truly committed to accessing international students from diverse backgrounds, then they should see such an environment as a potentially lucrative recruiting ground. Therefore, the institution should explore increased participation in college fairs in the Caribbean at the national and regional levels to access international students and share information on their educational options outside their national environment. In doing so, the administration would need to address the possibility of increasing funding arrangements such as academic merit-based scholarships to attract high performing students to the institution. Such initiatives will serve to improve the engagement level of the institution’s undergraduates as they will interact with diverse and academically proficient group of peers.
At another level, those participants who were members of the United World College (U.W.C.) Scholars community clearly deemed it an advantage in their engagement level. Such a community was helpful in its facilitation of orientation, counseling and programmatic services that considered the diverse backgrounds of international students. Similar efforts should be taken to address the identified homogenous and over-generalized aspects explored in early sections of the study. If the institution truly values core principles of international education, then this should be transmitted as early as students’ initial entry to the institution. This may be realized as simply as having a student or faculty representative from the Caribbean available at initial undergraduate and international student orientations to act as a point of contact to any available network for these students on campus. Given that the international undergraduate population is so small, the international center could also explore how receptive existing Caribbean international students are to a Big Brother/Sister program that attempts to pair incoming students with more senior level representatives from the Caribbean as a valuable point of peer advisement and orientation to their new environment. Additionally, the institution may need to place a greater level of emphasis on informing students about available resources for academic advising prior to their enrollment or expanding such services if they are inadequate to minimize stressful aspects of the orientation process.

Another programmatic effort may be explored in utilizing programs such as the international student coffee hour currently hosted by the international center as an opportunity for different international student populations to utilize such hours to present aspects of their culture to attendees. This would serve as a visible effort on the institution’s part towards incorporating an opportunity for cultural exchange through specific institutional programs. Through the use of the international center listserv as the point of communication about such
efforts, it would ensure that the opportunity is transmitted to the larger international student population and even the wider student body. If cultural exchange and engagement is truly a priority of the international education experience then the institution needs to explore similar programmatic initiatives as a representation of this value.

The homogenous nature of documentation procedures are the more challenging ones to target as far as the somewhat limited institutional control in this respect. Participants’ acknowledgement that the homogenizing nature of documentation issues is an accepted part of the international student experience speaks to the wide-scale nature of this issue. Students accept a level of anonymity in this respect as far as federal level tracking mechanisms and regulatory restrictions. However, institutionally specific initiatives may be employed to minimize the effect of such procedures. This means ensuring that the documentation challenges of international students are considered in determining expectations for internships and work study experiences. This will once again require a commitment from administration to communicate these realities to academic offices and any participants in college fairs, and adequately sensitize them so they will in turn consider such limitations in their dealings with these students.

The following bullet points will seek to briefly list potential initiatives for the consideration of administrators and other stakeholders college-wide:

- institutional upper level administrators including the college president, vice presidents and provosts should frequently seek to mention the institution’s commitment to internationalization in official speeches and meetings with requisite updates on ongoing initiatives.

- curriculum committees should establish mandates that emphasize the incorporation of a global lens and perspectives in all academic curricula

- colleges and academic departments should facilitate workshops to train and sensitize professors in ways to incorporate more global perspectives in their individual curricula and methods for encouraging cultural sensitivity and tolerance in their classrooms.
administration and associated recruiting offices should seek to have greater participation in college fairs throughout the Caribbean as a mean to recruit a larger international student Caribbean presence on campus.

orientations for incoming international students should encourage the presence of Caribbean faculty and staff who may volunteer as resources to incoming students as advisors and mentors, particularly in their first year.

international office should establish a Big Brother/Sister program with current international students from the Caribbean who may be interested in acting as mentors for their incoming peers and promote this resource at the new student orientation and through emails to this incoming population.

international center should consider utilizing the current international coffee hour as a medium through which to facilitate a period in which to highlight different cultural backgrounds and cultural exchange with persons from these regions.

colleges and academic departments should facilitate training of their staff and administrative personnel in the paperwork and documentation needs of their international student population.

All things considered, students are most aware of the practical aspects of the institution as visible signs of those aspects to which administration assigns value. It is at this level that they are most involved through different levels of participation in the practice of the educational experience. Consequently, institutional stakeholders need to recognize this and make special efforts to ensure that Caribbean international students are as engaged in their educational experience as any other international or native student members of the institution. There has to be a level of equity incorporated in the learning discovery and engagement of all students as crucial stakeholders in the educational process.

**Implications for Theory**

Theories have been utilized and mentioned at different levels in the development of this study. Butler’s (1990) performativity theory has framed the study at the macro-level, however at a less overarching level, studies by Abe et al., (2007) and Brofenbrenner (1979, 1993, 2006) have also been mentioned in their relevance to different aspects of the college student identity.
experience. The emergent theory from this study adds additional dimensions to aspects of these theories.

The emergent theory on Caribbean International students’ negotiation of their ethnic identity suggests an action-oriented component of identity experience. Participants utilize very specific measures as they actively take steps to negotiate their ethnic identity in their new surroundings. The REactions of resisting, reaffirming and reframing are not latent responses by participants. Instead, they are major tactics connected to specific mechanisms through which these students process various aspects of their ethnic identity. This result supports Butler’s (1990) theory in relation to the level of agency employed by individuals in navigating their identity. Similarly she contends that identity is political and it is through construction and deconstruction that agency is achieved (Butler, 1990).

Participants did identify homogenous and over-generalized norms of their institutional environment, which is the space in which they construct and deconstruct their ethnic identity. In so doing, they achieved a level of agency, through their REactions as a consequence of their negotiation of their identity. As suggested in their REactions, participants are very cognizant of their environment. This even extends to instances where their measures need to be more covert, such as in their selective assimilation, in which they still take advantage of opportunities to ‘overperform’ or resist normative roles and in so doing expose the norm (Butler, 1990). Through their actions, participants also acknowledge that there is a level of awareness of the performative nature of their identity, particularly as they constantly make shifts in their ethnic identity depending on their social environment. These performative and shifting behaviors change, depending on instances such as academic versus social settings in the United States, and interactions in the United States versus in the Caribbean. This aligns closely with Abes et al.
(2007) in their assertion that individuals show an awareness of the performative nature of their identity and rely less on fixed, externally defined meanings in accessing more complex meaning making levels.

The meaning making aspects of participants’ experiences are particularly visible in the reframing aspect of the theory in which they articulate altered or new perceptions they acknowledged as a result of their ethnic identity negotiation. These were reframed perceptions specifically related to their a) attachment to the Caribbean, b) peer relations, and c) personal development. In articulating their insights, participants acknowledged that they did recognize deeper levels of personal understanding and ownership of how these three aspects changed as a result of their ethnic identity experience as international students in the United States. It therefore suggests that in the midst of very complex identity development experiences, and the different dimensions that students access in the process, they are constantly integrating different mechanisms and making meaning as a function of their development.

Intersectionality or the combination of social and cultural categories such as race, gender, ethnicity, social class, and sexual orientation are significant considerations in both Butler (1990) and Abes et al. (2007) theories. This suggests a connection between both theories as far as the acknowledgement of students’ ability to negotiate different dimensions of identity and how these identities may interact in the process. It moves away from the rigidity or linearity of theories that consider aspects of identity in isolation, without making concessions for the interaction of different aspects. This was particularly pertinent for these study participants in their exploration of racial and ethnic dimensions in different situations. First, this was a consideration in terms of their stronger associations with their ethnic background as is the norm in the Caribbean and their adjustment to the racial categories that often define social stratification in the United States.
Secondly, their interactions with African American peers gave them a new appreciation for how the interaction of race and ethnicity distinguishes one’s experience in one social environment versus another. Even though they shared similar racial descent with their African American peers, the historical and social differences of their ethnic background led to relational difficulties between the groups. Additionally, in the interactions between Caribbean international students and students of Caribbean descent at the institution there were also relational differences in terms of different levels of connection to the ethnic background as dictated by immigration patterns. This adds another dimension to the intersectionality or multiple dimensions of identity argument, as it gives equal importance to generational and immigrant status as a context of ethnicity and an aspect of identity. Though identity aspects such as gender, socioeconomic status and sexual orientation did not emerge as salient considerations in participants’ exploration of their ethnic identity, their importance should not be negated as potentially influential components.

The discussion of interactions and different environmental considerations generates strong connections to Brofenbrenner’s (1979, 1993, 2006) ecological theoretical framework as far as his consideration of person, process, context and time as four significant aspects of the ‘web of environment’. Findings of the study suggest that characteristics of the individual significantly influence their interactions in different contexts. In this instance, students articulated that the homogenous and over-generalized aspects of their institutional context were particularly influential in terms of their interactions or processes. The significance of these process interactions, in terms of its influence on their ethnic identity, demanded specific mechanisms for them to function in different contexts. For example, students felt they had to make adjustments to their accent and language in their interactions with Americans beyond those with their fellow Caribbean nationals or international peers based on communication difficulties. The time
component of Brofenbrenner’s (1979, 1993, 2006) theory was also significant for these participants as they acknowledged that their ability to effectively navigate their environment as Caribbean international students required an adjustment period. In particular, the first two years were important in developing an awareness of necessary skills and mechanisms due to their interactions over this time. Given that all participants were either juniors or senior level students, they were able to reflect on shifts in their awareness and how this changed over time. For instance, it took time for them to realize how important it was to separate their identities as a resisting dimension, in order to maintain aspects of their ethnic identity in their new environment. This meant that their projection of different aspects of their ethnic identity changed depending on context and interactions.

Collectively, the fluidity inherent to participants’ exploration of their ethnic identity as Caribbean international students has strong connections to all three of the previously mentioned theories. This adds to the argument that identity development is a fluid, contingent and negotiated process that is constantly shifting and transforming based on context and space. As exemplified in the experiences of study participants theoretical considerations such as intersectionality, agency and performativity (Butler, 1990), the interplay of multiple dimensions of identity (Abes et al., 2007), and context, process, people, and time (Brofenbrenner, 1979, 1993, 2006) highlight the fluidity and situational component of identities. This becomes especially pertinent in the consideration of the ethnic identity of students moving outside their familiar environments to completely new settings. It offers a unique appreciation of how the negotiation of aspects of their ethnic identity is in keeping with the abovementioned theoretical facets. For these students in particular their constant shifts in terms of their REactions,
particularl

ey in the resisting component and the achievement of the reaffirming and reframing emphasizes the fluid and situational nature of their experiences.

**Implications for Research**

This research study offered a different lens in the research landscape on three levels. First, it centered on the experiences of an understudied population in Caribbean international undergraduates. Second, it specifically offered an in-depth focus on their ethnic identity experiences as a consequence of their institutional setting. Finally, it offers an emergent theory as one conceptualization of these students’ experiences. As previously mentioned, the Caribbean student population in general, is minimally represented in the literature, even less so as far as Caribbean international college students are concerned. Therefore, this study offers the research landscape a perspective on this understudied group, particularly in the context of their ethnic identities as Caribbean international students.

Additionally, in the context of their international status, it also provides insight into the larger discourse on international students as far as the discussion on the homogeneity and over-generalization that often characterizes the approach to these students. Through these students’ articulation of these homogenizing institutional aspects, it offers a lens for institutions to consider the role they take in contributing to this discourse in their dealings with international students. It also emphasizes the importance of considering the issues that distinguish different groups of international students and the importance of not simply viewing them as a homogenous group. Moreover, as institutions increasingly articulate their commitment to international education and internationalizing their campuses, it heightens the awareness of areas for attention from one student group’s perspective.

However, this research also has potential in the larger international college student discourse, as it will offer educational stakeholders at multiple levels the chance to consider
potential consequences of the international education experience. This can be assessed in terms of the pedagogical, administrative considerations and how this affects the mission of international education as defined by different stakeholders. Stakeholders in the Caribbean in particular may utilize this research to sensitize students who may be seeking educational opportunities overseas, particularly in the United States so they are better prepared to navigate their initial years in a new environment. However, in the research landscape, it is important to consider that the experiences of Caribbean international students may be different depending on factors such as geographical location and institutional size. These students are in a large public university in a small city with few obvious connections to the Caribbean in the larger social framework, therefore research conducted in smaller institution or one that is located in a geographical region which has dominant Caribbean community may have significantly different experiences.

Existing literature has in many instances referred to race and ethnicity synonymously with little differentiation of the two terms or how they may influence each other (Cross, 1991, 2001; Phinney, 1991). In particular, the college student identity literature has been characterized by this trend. Evans et al. (2010) recognize this limitation in the literature, specifically as it related to differentiating ethnic group experiences and not simply discussing aspects of ethnic identity in the context of identified racial categories. This research therefore offers a perspective on the ethnic identity experiences of Caribbean international students with specific focus on core aspects of ethnic identity. Therefore, although racial aspects are discussed as far as their intersectionality (Butler, 1990) with students’ navigation of their ethnic identity, the terms are not used interchangeably. In so doing, it gives insight into how the intersectionality of race and ethnicity may differ across student groups and backgrounds, particularly in terms of these
students’ interactions with their peers. Another key area of intersectionality that may prove interesting is to look at the interplay with factors such as gender, sexuality and class in the assessment of the ethnic experiences of these students.

In considering existing literature on various aspects of college student identity development, another trend is that it largely focuses on the experiences of students native to the United States and their development in the context of realities of their own social environment. This study offers a new perspective in its focus on ethnic identity for an international student group and their transitional experiences in a new social environment. Thus, it allows for a level of cognizance for the fluidity and contingent nature of ethnic identity in the context of the changing social environments of the study participants. In so doing it continues the academic dispute in regards to research that seeks to address identity categories as fixed and identity development as a concrete and linear process. Similarly, in expanding the college student literature in this regard, the emergent theory provides one conceptualization of these students’ ethnic identity experience as a result of the grounded theory data analysis method (Charmaz, 2009; Clarke, 2005). However, it is entirely feasible that the utilization of different qualitative data analysis methods may offer unique nuances to the research landscape.

Further studies could seek to venture into several directions to further explore the ethnic identity experiences of Caribbean international students. First, the miniscule size of the Caribbean population on the chosen campus did not allow for a single-island focus, for instance, a focus on solely Trinidadian students as a representative of the Caribbean. However, it would be interesting to conduct such investigations and then do a meta-analysis across groups to gain an even more in-depth appreciation of students’ ethnic identity experience as Caribbean nationals. The level of agreement of participants in this study who were representative of a cross-section of
islands offers a beginning point from which to appreciate issues generic to Caribbean international students. This could be used to develop even more condensed and refined data collection tools in exploring these issues with representatives of individual islands. Additionally, such expansive qualitative research work on the Caribbean international population could be useful in developing larger quantitative measures for use by researchers who are interested in generalizing to larger populations. Based on the paucity of research on this population, quantitative pursuits would not be advisable without first understanding key aspects related to this student population as it would only offer superficial perspectives, with little appreciation of the nuances that distinguish these students.

Finally, as previously mentioned, this study is limited to the experiences of a group of undergraduate students in a large public university in a specific geographical region and there is no intention to generalize outside this context. However it would be interesting to explore similar research in diverse institutional contexts in the same geographical region in order to compare and contrast study findings. In the same vein, it would also be beneficial to do similar studies in other geographical locations across the United States for similar reasons. With similar reasoning in mind, it would benefit universities to also have an appreciation of these issues in relation to their graduate student population. Though graduate students are considered to be at much different developmental levels in their life stage, an examination of their ethnic identity experiences would offer a unique perspective and expand the discourse on identity development as a continuous, fluid and transformational process. Ultimately, it would perhaps offer educational stakeholders an appreciation of diverse approaches taken to international education and the experiences of international students on a national scale. Due to the essential invisibility of this population in the academic research landscape, there is definitely the need for further empirical research with the
abovementioned objectives. There is a serious gap in the literature as far as international students are concerned and even more so for diverse student groups within this population. It is therefore imperative that these studies are investigated in view of their potential to offer critical insights to the larger higher education academic discourse.

Conclusions

There is little doubt that the modern day social environment is increasingly globalized with a greater need for an appreciation of diverse perspectives and backgrounds. The higher education environment is only one such embodiment of the growing internationalized context for modern day interactions. With this in mind, it is understandable that international education initiatives will continue to gain prominence in institutions across the world. It is therefore imperative that there is a deeper appreciation for the experiences and roles of different stakeholders in the educational process. These stakeholders extend from the international students themselves, to their peers of diverse backgrounds, faculty, administrators, staff, policymakers and the wider community.

Previous studies on college students’ ethnic identity have largely focused on the experiences of American students in the context of their U.S. educational institutions and the wider U.S. social environment. However, as higher education progressively moves towards internationalizing their campuses, it is imperative that the academic literature reflects more diverse backgrounds and experiences. This will be crucial to maximize the engagement level of these students, and realize larger internationalization missions of engagement learning and discovery for all participants in the international education experience. Additionally, as the field of higher education administration continues to grow, and prepare practitioners and researchers, it is crucial that their research literature reflects the diversity that is representative of actual college campuses. This will in turn lead to the development of pedagogical strategies and
institutional policies that consider students of heterogeneous backgrounds. This development of a theoretical representation of Caribbean international students’ negotiation of their ethnic identity in this study is one example of the direction such academic discourse needs to take in actualizing such results.

This study has significant implications for practice, research and theory in its examination of this understudied undergraduate population. The consistent examination of diverse issues of different college student groups will give a greater appreciation of the heterogeneity of college campuses, and the need to consider this in practice, research and theory. The issues emerging in this study underscore how important it is to consider the pedagogical environment as one aspect that students see as a direct representation of their educational experience. It is therefore important to consider the different interactions that take place in these settings and create environments that will maximize the experiences of all participants. Findings also suggest that there needs to be greater administrative attention to creating institutional programs and policies that seek to address the feelings of belonging and acceptance of students of diverse backgrounds. Regardless of their country of origin, students need to feel that their perspectives and concerns receive equal value and consideration in the larger institutional discourse.

In sum, the findings of this study contribute to the empirical research on the United States higher education system as the most dominant force in the international education market. Given that the U.S. comprises the majority share of the international student market it is important that stakeholders garner an understanding of their clientele if they want to continue to safeguard their competitive position in the global higher education market. This becomes particularly salient as their traditional competitors seek to expand their international education offerings and widen their share of the market, and new competitors continue to emerge in increasingly large numbers.
If these students feel more welcome and acknowledged in competitors’ higher education system, then the U.S. will continue to experience a decline in their market and this will in turn affect their ability to foster a diverse and engaged institutional dialogue. Based on the proximity of the Caribbean to the United States, the U.S. higher education market offers an advantage in this respect. However, the ability of the United States to continue to encourage prospective students to overlook more geographically remote international education opportunities and instead consider U.S. universities and colleges is dependent on their ability to sustain social and learning environments that will maximize students’ expectations for their undergraduate education experience.
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**Source of Funding** *(A copy of the grant proposal must be submitted with this protocol if funding is involved):*

**Scientific Purpose of the Study:** The goal of this project is to explore the ethnic identity experiences of international undergraduate students from the Caribbean as students at the university of Florida.

**Describe the Research Methodology in Non-Technical Language:** *(Explain what will be done with or to the research participant):* This study will be facilitated by two rounds of data collection. In the first round, personal interviews will be conducted with seven students on their ethnic identity. The interviews will last approximately one hour in duration. In the second round these seven students will be asked to take photographs in their surrounding environment, based on guided questions in the attached protocol related to the purpose of the research. They will also be asked to write reflective summaries based on questions in an attached reflective journaling protocol. The photographs and summaries will be uploaded to a password protected Google picasa page that only allows access at the discretion of each individual user. Each participant will need to send the researcher a link in order to allow access to his or her Google picasa content. These photographs and summaries will be used as the basis for a second round of interviews with these same participants lasting approximately 45 minutes to an hour. The interview protocols will include questions related to their personal
experiences as students on the campus and their perspectives on their ethnic identity
experiences as international students at U.F. A second round of interviews may be conducted
with seven additional students on an as needed basis. These interviews will also last from 45
minutes to an hour. These interviews will begin with a generic questions related to student
identity and will evolve depending on the issues introduced by the participants. Students will
be recruited via flyers posted on locations on campus, students’ listservs, announcements at the
Caribbean student association and posting on the organization’s Facebook® page. All
interviews will be audio taped and all digital files will be stored in the PI’s secure drive. The
interviews will be transcribed for analysis by the investigator using qualitative methodologies
of open and axial coding. The content of the Google Picasa page is password protected by each
participant and only shared at his or her discretion. Results will be written in a dissertation
research format and will later be used for research article publications and for purposes of
conference participation and publications.

Describe Potential Benefits and Anticipated Risks: (If risk of physical, psychological or
economic harm may be involved, describe the steps taken to protect participant.) It is
perceived that there is no more than minimal risk to participants.
The results of the project will provide insight to university officials regarding the experiences
of this subset of students as international students at the university. This is important,
particularly as universities increasingly espouse a dedication to diversity and promoting
interactions between diverse groups of students as a means of developing global and
multicultural competence. These findings may be later used to gain a more in-depth
understanding of the international student experience based on student’s perspectives and as
such offer considerations for future attention by the higher education community.

Describe How Participant(s) Will Be Recruited, the Number and AGE of the
Participants, and Proposed Compensation: Participants will be recruited via flyers
distributed and posted at different points on campus. Additionally, the PI will attend meetings
of the Caribbean student association and with permission make an announcement at an
appropriate time inviting participation in the study. The Facebook® page of the organization
will also be used as an outlet to recruit participants. Finally, with permission, the listserv of the
international center and other student listservs will be accessed as points of recruitment for
these students. One criterion for participation will be that participants be at least 18 years of
age. Additionally, participants will be informed about the nature of the study and their rights
according to the attached script. If they agree to participate, a mutually beneficial time will be
arranged to conduct the interview. Participants will be offered $20 gift cards from local
establishments such as Publix, The Reggae Shack, Wal-Mart, Papa John’s and Chili’s after
each stage of the data collection, as an incentive and token of appreciation for their willingness
to participate in the study.

**Describe the Informed Consent Process. Include a Copy of the Informed Consent Document:** A consent form will be given to participants prior to beginning the interview, in order to determine whether they are willingly agree to participate in the research process.

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<th>Principal Investigator(s) Signature:</th>
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APPENDIX B
CONSENT FORMS

Informed Consent Form (Group 1)

Please read this consent document carefully before you decide to participate in this study.

Study Title:

Purpose of the research study: The goal of this project is to explore the ethnic identity experiences of international undergraduate students from the Caribbean as students at the University of Florida.

What you will be asked to do in the study: Allow a graduate student to complete a personal interview with you, lasting approximately 45 minutes to an hour. One interview will be conducted in the first phase. You may be asked to take photographs in the second phase of the study based on provided questions. The researcher may contact you for a second follow-up interview of approximately 45 minutes to an hour at your convenience at a later date. The student interviewer will ask general questions about your experiences as an international student from the Caribbean at the university.

Risks and Benefits: We do not perceive that there will be more than minimal risk associated with your participation in this study or anticipate that you will benefit directly from your participation in this study. Your participation will give a graduate student valuable research experience, however, and for that reason we appreciate your voluntary participation.

Compensation: A $20 gift card from a local restaurant of your choice will be provided for your participation at different stages of the process, and there are no penalties for nonparticipation.
Confidentiality: Your identity will be kept confidential to the extent provided by law. Your interview may be taped and later transcribed by the graduate student completing the interview.

Your name will not appear on the transcript, nor will the names of your institution or colleagues. When the study is completed and the data have been analyzed, the list of participants and all interview data will be destroyed. The final results may be presented in a written study for dissertation purposes and for presentation at professional conferences and/or submission to educational journals for possible publication.

Voluntary participation: Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. There is no penalty for not participating or for refusing to answer any particular question or questions.

Right to withdraw from the study: You have the right to withdraw from the study at any time without consequence.

Whom to contact if you have questions about the study:

*****, Educational Administration and Policy, Norman Hall, P.O. Box 117049

*****, Educational Administration and Policy, P.O. Box 117049, Gainesville, FL, 32611-7049,

Whom to contact about your rights as a research participant in the study: UFIRB Office, Box 112250, University of Florida, Gainesville, FL 32611-2250; ph. 392-0433.

Agreement:

I have read the procedure described above. I voluntarily agree to participate in the procedure and I have received a copy of this description for my information.

Study Participant: __________________________ Date: _________________
Interviewer: _____________________________ Date: ___________________

Informed Consent Form (Group 2)

Please read this consent document carefully before you decide to participate in this study.

Study Title:

Purpose of the research study: The goal of this project is to explore the ethnic identity experiences of international undergraduate students from the Caribbean as students at the University of Florida.

What you will be asked to do in the study: Allow a graduate student to complete one personal interview with you, lasting approximately 45 minutes to an hour. The student interviewer will ask general questions about your experiences as an international student from the Caribbean at the university.

Risks and Benefits: We do not perceive that there will be more than minimal risk associated with your participation in this study or anticipate that you will benefit directly from your participation in this study. Your participation will give a graduate student valuable research experience, however, and for that reason we appreciate your voluntary participation.

Compensation: A $20 gift card from a local restaurant of your choice will be provided for your participation in the interview and there are no penalties for nonparticipation.

Confidentiality: Your identity will be kept confidential to the extent provided by law. Your interview may be taped and later transcribed by the graduate student completing the interview.
Your name will not appear on the transcript, nor will the names of your institution or colleagues. When the study is completed and the data have been analyzed, the list of participants and all interview data will be destroyed. The final results may be presented in a written study for dissertation purposes and for presentation at professional conferences and/or submission to educational journals for possible publication.

Voluntary participation: Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. There is no penalty for not participating or for refusing to answer any particular question or questions.

Right to withdraw from the study: You have the right to withdraw from the study at any time without consequence.

Whom to contact if you have questions about the study:
***, Educational Administration and Policy, Norman Hall, P.O. Box 117049
P.O. Box 117049, Gainesville, FL, 32611-7049,

Whom to contact about your rights as a research participant in the study: UFIRB Office, Box 112250, University of Florida, Gainesville, FL 32611-2250; ph. 392-0433.

Agreement:

I have read the procedure described above. I voluntarily agree to participate in the procedure and I have received a copy of this description for my information.

Study Participant: ___________________________ Date: _________________

Interviewer: ________________________________ Date: _________________
APPENDIX C
INTERVIEW PROTOCOL - FIRST ROUND INTERVIEW

1) Could you give me some background information on yourself i.e. age, current student status, major, nationality, how long you’ve been in the U.S.?

2) In what ways do you think you represent/exemplify your Caribbean background while here in the U.S.?

3) Describe any way you think that the institution has made you feel they generalize you because of your status as an international student.

4) Describe any way you think the institution sees or treats international students as a homogenous group.

5) Tell me about a time you thought the label of international student negatively affected you.

6) Tell me about a time you thought your identity as a Caribbean national was ignored at the institutional level.

7) Describe any way you think your identity as a Caribbean national is embraced or supported at the Institutional level.

8) Explain any changes you have observed in how you identify as Caribbean national (language, clothing, eating habits, pop culture consumption) as a __________ since being in the U.S.

9) Describe any changes you’ve observed in how you identify with the U.S. given your time in the U.S.

10) What would you identify as any existing reasons for these changes?

11) How would you describe any changes in the level of belonging/pride you attach to yourself as a __________ while in the U.S?

12) If so, what would you say has contributed to these changes in your sense of belonging?

13) Tell me something about how recognized or empowered you may feel as a student from __________ living here in the U.S.

14) Tell me about how you feel generally as a student from __________ living here in the U.S

15) Is there anything else you would like to add related to the issue?
APPENDIX D
PHOTO VOICE PROTOCOL

Please use your camera to take photographs of image such as those of objects, spaces or people that you think are most representative of your perception of changes in, or influences on your identity as guided by the questions below. After taking the image, please choose one photograph that is most representative of each picture and upload it to your password protected Google Picasa page. Therefore at the end of the process you should have uploaded four pictures in total. Also, please write a paragraph reflecting on your choice of the subject of your photograph and your thoughts and feelings on the portrayed image based on the questions uploaded to the webpage.

1) What do you view on campus as a representation of your Caribbean background?

2) What do you view on campus/in class as a barrier to your ability to represent your background? Or What gets in the way of your ability to represent your Caribbean background?

3) What assists you in representing or sustaining your ________ identity here in the U.S.?

4) What impedes/prevents you from sustaining your __________ identity here in the U.S.?
APPENDIX E
REFLECTIVE JOURNALING PROTOCOL

These questions will be used to guide the reflective journaling of each participant in relation their discussion of each images as representative of their experience. The questions will be uploaded to the webpage so that participants can refer to them as they write their reflective summaries.

1) Why did you choose to take this picture?
2) How does it represent your college experience?
3) What would you have liked to have captured but had difficulty doing so through photography?
4) Do you think these images really represent your experience?
5) How did your way of thinking about your identity as an international student from the Caribbean change as a result of taking and looking at these pictures?
APPENDIX F
FOLLOW UP INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

This interview will begin with an initial general question below and subsequent questions will follow up from issues expressed by each individual participant during the interview.

1) Describe for me how you negotiate your ethnic identity as an international student from the Caribbean.
LIST OF REFERENCES


237


Goodall, H. L. (2000). *Writing the new ethnography*. Lanham, MD: AltaMira.


BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Zaria Tashika Malcolm was born in Kingston, Jamaica to Garnet Malcolm and Catherine Malcolm. The first of three children, Zaria started prep school at age two and progressively worked her way through the k-12 level culminating in her high school diploma from the Immaculate Conception High School. Her k-12 experience was different in that she experienced both the private and public school elementary school setting and therefore was able to appreciate the learning environment of students from different socio-economic backgrounds. Though her high school years took her to one of the most prestigious high schools in the island, she always felt that her early years gave her a realistic and well-rounded appreciation of the Jamaican educational system.

After completing sixth form at Immaculate Conception high school, Zaria was admitted to the premier higher education institution in the Caribbean, the University of the West Indies, Mona, and enrolled in the Hotel Management major, which saw her spending a year at the Kingston, Jamaica campus and two years in Nassau Bahamas for more specialized training. Upon completion of her undergraduate studies in 1998 with a bachelor honors degree in her field, she spent approximately one year working in different areas of the Hospitality and Tourism industry before gaining employment as a junior lecturer in the Tourism, Hospitality and Entertainment Department of the Excelsior Community College in Kingston, Jamaica. Zaria spent the next eight years working in the community college system and during that time held positions such as senior lecturer and acting head of department, culminating in her most recent position as Assistant Head of Department. She credits her time at Excelsior with allowing her to develop her passion for understanding the educational needs of underrepresented and lower-socio-economic populations given the diverse student population at the institution. During her time at Excelsior Zaria also attended the University of the West Indies, Mona as a part-time
student and in 2002, gained a Ma. Degree in communication studies with distinction honors. Additionally, after gaining her master level degree, combined with many years of service as an educator, Zaria realized that she had an undying love for her role as an educator and higher education system and from 2003-2005 pursued a postgraduate degree in Education and Training from the Heart Trust N.T.A. in Kingston, Jamaica.

In 2007, Zaria was granted a Fulbright scholarship to pursue Ph.D. studies in the United States and took study leave from her position at Excelsior Community College to explore her Ph.D. study opportunity. She accepted an admission offer from the University of Florida for enrollment in 2007, an offer she had deferred the previous year due to financial difficulties. Upon enrollment the Department of Educational Administration and Policy at the University of Florida also granted her an Alumni Fellowship which significantly eased her financial burden even further and allowed her to gain invaluable experience in another of her passions, educational research, with duties as a research assistant. During her four years at the University of Florida, Zaria worked closely with her academic advisor, Dr. Pilar Mendoza as her research assistant for four years, honing her research and teaching skills in roles as both a research and teaching assistant. Through her own initiative, she also explored research opportunities with other faculty and staff in the College of Education, namely Dr. Mirka Koro-Ljungberg, Dr. Diane Archer-Banks, and Dr. Ruth Lowery and was able to publish and present in many venues with all named members of staff.

In her four year tenure as a Ph.D. student at the University of Florida, Zaria has been awarded a number of awards and acknowledgements at the institution. Within her first year, she was awarded the student of the month departmental award and went on to earn the Walter L. Smith academic scholarship in Spring 2009, and the outstanding international student award.
from the College of Education in Fall, 2010. She has also made service commitment through positions as reviewer for the American Educational Research Association and article reviewer and manuscript editor in the Florida Journal of Educational Administration & Policy at the University of Florida. Additionally, she served on several College of Education planning committees and panels on issues related to international education.