

Experiencing Difference, Seeking Community: Racial, Panethnic, and National Identities Among Female Caribbean-Born U.S. College Students

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ABSTRACT

Multiple, intersecting sites of social identification provide communities in which Caribbean-born women in U.S. colleges may claim membership, while simultaneously indicating social markers of difference. Data from focus groups conducted at two NYC colleges show how social sites of race, nationality, and panethnicity shape identity and exclusion for these participants and how this identification impacts their psychological well-being and the pursuit of their goals. The findings illustrate the complexity of cross-cultural adjustment within social contexts and emphasize the effects of intersecting social identities on personal and interpersonal experiences. The evidence of exclusion underscores the challenges to full citizenship for Caribbean immigrant women in U.S. colleges. However, the sites of belonging identified in this data have relevance for enhancing Caribbean immigrant women's cross-cultural adjustment, their experience of community, and ultimately, their full participation in the political economy of their sending countries and that of the United States. These findings indicate the importance of extending U.S. higher education's response to foreign-born female students. This paper invites the reader to consider the impact of exclusion and belonging on Caribbean immigrant women's higher education experience and hence, their potential for involvement in the transnational production, exchange and distribution of wealth.

JEL Codes: Z13

Key Words: exclusion, community, cross-cultural adjustment, U.S. colleges, Caribbean immigrant women, pan-ethnicity, ethnicity, race, nationality, identity, social identities.

INTRODUCTION

Imagine the following scenario: a Black woman gets off the subway train that she takes every day from Rosedale, Queens – a neighborhood heavily populated with Caribbean immigrants – to Manhattan's Upper East Side, where she attends a public university. Contemplating the day ahead as she walks, she snaps back into the present as she notices a White woman walking briskly toward her. She assesses the situation, quickly stepping off the sidewalk and into the street to avoid the certain collision. Not fast enough; an entitled elbow smacks her upper arm. She turns to glare at the offender,

who doesn't meet her gaze but casts an annoyed glance at her own elbow without breaking her stride. This is not fiction. Episodes such as this occur routinely outside the relative ethnic homogeneity of New York immigrant neighborhoods.

The recounting of this typical incident brings into focus the importance of including psychological analysis in conversations of political economy. People constitute the systems whereby goods and services are produced, distributed and consumed throughout the world. It is essential to examine their personal and group experiences, to better understand how variations in their social and cultural environments may enhance or constrain their psychological well-being and, consequently, their full participation as productive citizens.

The aim of this study is to examine the experiences of Caribbean-born women in U.S. colleges. This paper presents data analyzed for the specific purposes, as follows:

1. To assess the degree to which women who migrate from the Caribbean to the United States encounter *exclusion* within social structures such as educational institutions.
2. To identify the social dimensions wherein Caribbean-born female college students experience *belonging* as they pursue their academic goals.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Opportunities for education are of undeniable value for enabling women to transcend narrowly defined gender and traditional roles (Crespo, 1994; Das Gupta, 1997; hooks, 2000). For example, Das Gupta (1997) makes clear how young women's resistance of cultural expectations was evident in their attempts to gain control over their education, their career plans, and marriage. In her research, women's narratives often named college as the place where they achieved a consciousness that allowed them to reconcile the realities of their own lives with what their parents wanted for them. Despite having to navigate a structurally different U.S. education system that is poorly prepared to meet the needs of an increasingly diverse student population, immigrant women regard educational contexts as being important sites of possibility.

Seller and Weis (1997) point out that understanding the privilege and marginalization students experience requires going beyond the Black-White dichotomy to fully take into account the “complexity of the current American landscape” (p. ix). Schools represent a microcosm of American society and are important places in which to observe the effects of diversity and exposure to cultures other than one’s own (Olsen, 1997). As Olsen observed in her study of an ethnically diverse high school in California, the presence of programs and spaces developed to support a multicultural does not preclude separation, conformity and exclusion. Accordingly, Tatum argues the importance of cultural space: “Having a place to be rejuvenated and to feel anchored in one’s cultural community increases the possibility that one will have the energy to achieve academically as well as participate in the cross-group dialogue and interaction many colleges want to encourage” (1997, p. 80).

The research question that has most often been explored in relation to immigrant youth – what factors promote positive academic orientation, underachievement, or failure among immigrant children or adolescents? – may be expanded in the context of higher education. These researchers have focused on assessing the significance of assimilation on immigrant youths’ attitudes toward education and success (see Ogbu, 1987, 1991; Suarez-Orozco, 1991 for examples of this work). However, in the context of higher education, the binary conceptualization of either assimilating to or resisting the orientation of native-born ethnic minorities becomes an inadequate theoretical model – particularly in urban centers where institutions are largely attended by diverse groups of foreign- and American-born ethnic minority students. Hence, there is a need to better delineate the psychological responses to being a cultural minority in a high-stake social context such as a tertiary institution.

The problem of “new student populations” is actually an old one in the history of American education (Grubb,1995). According to Grubb (1995), educational responses to poor, immigrant, linguistically different and racial minority students typically have been to either ensure access by inclusion – making resources available for new students, or differentiation – efforts to tailor the content and purpose of instruction to different students’ needs. The appropriate role of educational institutions in accommodating the interests of a growing immigrant student population has been

examined by researchers who are also interested in illustrating the psychological dimensions of this experience (e.g., Grey, 1990; Kiang, 1996). This work on structural and interpersonal marginalization demonstrates the difficulties that remain when institutions either separate foreign-born students into programs that address their language needs but little else, or attempt to integrate their cultural and academic interests but without efforts to socially integrate students. In both cases, the students experience alienation and difference.

Research has established a link between immigrants' and ethnic minority groups' psychological well-being and their ability to negotiate dual contexts – that of the dominant culture and their own ethnic minority group culture (Padilla, 1994; Jones, 1988; Triandis, 1981). According to LaFromboise, Coleman and Gerton (1993), members of minority ethnic groups who achieve bicultural competence (ability to move back and forth between cultures) are more likely to maintain psychological well-being. While the ability to move between ethnic minority group culture and the dominant culture is undoubtedly important, we need more information on particular ethnic subgroups, and how variations within these subgroups relate to education experiences. McAfee's (1997) study of Native American college students found successful students retained a strong grounding in their cultural traditions, had family role models, and motivations that were tied to their family's needs. However, students who were torn between the dominant culture and their ethnic background were less likely to complete their education. Further, Ethier and Deaux's (1990) study of Hispanic first year students at Ivy League universities found gender differences in the importance of Hispanic identity (it was more important to women) and in the extent to which cultural background was related to collective self-esteem (for men but not for women). It is important to determine the extent to which there are ethnic and gender variations in the importance of continuity between home/community environments and the culture of the classroom.

While there is a large body of work on gender and education, not many researchers focus on issues specific to *immigrant women of color*, who in the context of U.S. higher education, fall into the category of "non-traditional students". However, a small body of work (e.g., Crespo, 1994; Davidson, 1997; Hurtado, 1999; Pessar, 1999) has detailed

challenges to academic persistence that have been linked to traditional gender roles for foreign-born immigrant women (e.g., limited access to money, restricted cultural expectations, family responsibilities, pregnancy, and childcare). In addition, this body of work highlights ways in which immigrant women have persisted, despite the inadequacy of institutional support. The findings of these studies underscore the enormous odds women overcome to return to college to complete their degrees, and the resilience involved in their successful completion of a degree. This information is important for addressing and improving the retention rates of non-traditional undergraduates: As Martín-Baró (1994) charged, helping people to gain control over their own existence requires recognizing and using their own attributes.

A concern that exceeds keeping immigrant women of color in college, however, includes an evaluation of how these women may be affected by their experience of an unsupportive institutional environment, as part of their experience of the larger U.S. cultural context. It is, therefore, worth exploring answers to the following question: In what ways do Caribbean-born women's perceptions of exclusion and belonging interact with broader social attitudes and structural forces within U.S. higher education? This research question is nested within an overarching interest in determining how the social categories of gender, class, race and nationality operate in Caribbean immigrant women's experience of being college students. Answers to this question provide opportunity to better understand the extent to which this group may be marginalized and the implications of this marginality for their psychological well-being and success.

METHOD

Participants

Twenty-seven English-speaking Caribbean-born female college students participated in focus groups conducted at two undergraduate colleges of the City University of New York (CUNY): 16 attended Medgar Evers College in Brooklyn and 11 attended Hunter College in Manhattan. Participants' mean age was 28 years old; about 80% of the group immigrated between the ages of 18-33 years old. The national composition of the

participants is representative of the overall Caribbean student population at the two colleges: Most (70%) were from Trinidad, Jamaica, and Haiti. Other participants were from Dominica, St Vincent, St Kitts, Barbados, Guyana, and Grenada. The average length of time participants had been in the U.S. was 6.2 years, with the longest time since immigration being 17 years and the most recently-arrived participant having been in the U.S. for less than a month. Approximately 66% of the group reported being U.S. residents or U.S. citizens; the other participants held F1 visas (i.e., were international students). At the time the data was collected participants had been attending the institutions for an average of five semesters.

Procedure

Methods of recruitment included posting fliers and handing them out on campus, attending meetings of Caribbean student groups, approaching students on campus to invite participation, and snowballing. When students indicated an interest in participating in the study, they were asked for contact information, and assigned an appointment for a focus group meeting. Focus group participants were paid \$15 each.

The Sites

The City University of New York (CUNY) is the nation's largest urban university and comprises eleven senior colleges, located throughout the five boroughs of the City of New York. Two coeducational CUNY senior colleges, Medgar Evers College (MEC) and Hunter College (HC), were selected as sites for the study because of their contrasting history, size, and location, and for their different merits in serving a diverse urban student population. Together, the varying features of these two colleges provided a broad context against which to assess institutional, social and environmental influences on students' progress toward their degrees and the ways in which women negotiated these intersecting influences.

Questionnaire and Focus Groups

Once they indicated their consent, participants were asked to complete a short questionnaire in which they provided general background information (e.g., educational background, income level, age, marital status). Four focus groups were conducted on each campus, totaling eight focus groups conducted. Each focus group lasted approximately two hours (including 30 minutes for signing the consent form, instructions, and completing the questionnaire) and was tape-recorded. Assorted drinks and snacks were provided. The discussions were open-ended, yet guided to include discussion of the following themes: negative and positive aspects of their educational experiences; access to institutional support; interactions with faculty and peers; attitudes of family, friends and partners toward their studies; juggling multiple roles (e.g., mothering, work, church, community, extended family).

Results

The primary focus of this analysis was to identify when participants in this study experience difference inside and outside of the college environment, and to determine how they seek out or establish sites of community in which to participate. Women in this study found opportunities for affinity in predictable places: on campus, in groups formed based on nationality or region of origin; off campus, in immigrant enclaves or neighborhoods; and in their families. However, these spaces were themselves sometimes fraught with difference, and the extent to which they met participants' need for community was multiply determined. For example, when students spoke of themselves as immigrants living in *America*, race was the strongest force that determined their sense of community or exclusion. Blackness splintered at the *college-community* level, however, where Caribbean pan-ethnicity and nationality outnumbered race as sites around which students most often spoke of community. In contrast, the *family* emerged as a relatively stable nexus of belonging for most students. The incongruity of difference and community across these levels was a major finding, as one might expect relatively stable and distinct indicators of community to emerge in response to experiencing

difference. Major sites of community (race, panethnicity, and nationality) served alternately as lines of demarcation. The following contain a discussion of how this intricate function of exclusion and belongingness cuts through various levels of analysis as women on these two college campuses discuss being Caribbean immigrants to America, members of a college community, family members and individuals.

LIVING IN AMERICA: RACE AND ME

While race and ethnicity were dominant themes in participants' discussion of their experience of difference and community, across the two campuses there was marked variation in "where" the distinctions were located. At Hunter College, being an immigrant woman of African ancestry in a college with a predominantly White student population intensified Caribbean women's experience of their Blackness in ways that were not experienced by those participants attending Medgar Evers College and were hence members of a predominantly Black student population. Hunter College students reported being conscious of their heightened visibility on campus and in the classrooms:

A____: Every time I go at the beginning of the semester I make sure I turn around and count the Black faces I can see.

S____: What's your major?

A____: Psych and economics. And I'll sit there and I'll go, one, two, three. Right now I'm in a class where it's just me and this other Black girl and one guy. He's Chinese. Everybody else is White. I'm thinking, "Hello, we're going to stand out here." When you're in a class like that, that professor will know you. They will know you. I don't like that.

J____: The worst class I had was Chemistry lab. I was the only Black person. I was like, OK. And Lord have mercy, in a class of fifteen, sixteen persons, I was the only Black person, so I stand out by myself. The next thing was, there were Asians and there were Russians that made up the rest of the class. Now they are speaking in their own language, you know, in their little groups and I am there like this, like OK [she mimics looking out of place with arms folded, eyes wide and gazing around]. I think that was my first semester ... I was like, this is not happening, you know, this not happening.

[P 7: HC_2_20_02 - 7:11]

The last speaker in the preceding quote resorted to denial to reduce the discomfort she felt being the only woman in the room who was visibly of African descent. In her first semester, and therefore without a clique of her own, she was further excluded because of her nationality and her language. The larger message from this quote, however, is that these women are seeking community among their peers and, at times, their

preferred community would be those who share their heritage. Because people of African ancestry – both those who are foreign-born and those who are U.S.-born – are in the numerical minority in this institution, students find themselves looking for a buffer from the othering gaze that is sure to be turned on them. No-one wants to be the only one who is different. Later in the discussion, J_____ expanded on what seeing another face like hers in class meant to her:

J_____ : ... regardless of wherever they came from, especially in the sciences, having experienced being in the class as a Black person by yourself, you feel so much more comfortable—it doesn't matter where that person is from—if you see another Black student in that class, you feel better. You understand? And you don't even have to know where he's from, Africa, or wherever, I don't care. If there's another Black person in my class, it's like I feel more at home in that class.

[P 7: HC_2_20_02 - 7:11]

In contrast, participants who attended Medgar Evers College were members of a student population of mostly African American and Caribbean students, and so did not have to contend with being a racial minority on campus. These students spoke of feeling comfortable on campus, of having their Blackness reinforced by the Afrocentric ideology of the college, and of feeling a sense of comfort among their “own people.”

M_____ : Well, actually, going to school at MEC is not really – to me – it's not really different from back home, because a lot of Caribbean people are here from all the different islands. So, I don't really feel a difference, whereas if I go to, probably to Baruch, or one of those colleges where there is more diversity – different people from different, you know, backgrounds, I might feel – but here I feel at home. To me, I feel at home because, most people I talk to are from the islands. We share the same things, the same interests, the same ... we have a similar background. There's no difference, really, whereas if I might go to a bigger college, probably like Baruch, where they have a lot of Whites and a lot of, you know, people from different – Chinese, Asians and those people – there might be a difference but here I feel at home. It's like I'm with my people.

[P 1: MEC_11_09_01 1:1]

Experiencing a college community of similar others did not happen by chance for some students, since they chose to attend this college for reasons that include wanting to be among “their own” and wanting to avoid experiencing discrimination.

L_____ : I went to an orientation at a college in Plattsburg ... and it was me and like, 12 Black people, and the whole community was White people. I couldn't move. (laughs) ... I came back here.

M_____ : Yeah, because you don't really know how to act, whether you have to act the way you want to act or if you have to act a certain type of way around people who you're not really accustomed to.

L_____ : Right, it's easier here

M_____ : It's easier here. It's a Black college.

[P 1: MEC_11_09_01 1:1]

When a student chooses a particular college, not on the basis of its ability to prepare her for the career of her choosing but by whether or not she is likely to experience discrimination, at some point the quality of the education she receives gets called into question. However, as the quote above illustrates, the potential of exclusion is enough to deter some students from choosing colleges that do not offer the assurance that they will not be part of a racial minority. Further, we hear in the discussion the strong awareness that being part of a Black numerical minority means one does not know “how to act.” This is the lowest point of unbelonging: when to be yourself is to be wrong and the script detailing acceptable ways of being is not available to you.

One important finding of the study is that the students at Medgar Evers College spoke of how the college’s ideology provided a boost for their self-esteem and racial identity. This explicit relationship between the institution and students’ personal and group identity is illustrated in the following quote from a discussion among participants at Medgar Evers College:

V____: When I just came, I used to feel like, you know, I don’t belong. Like this is their country but now, I feel that just like anybody else, I have the right [to be here] just like anybody else. We all came here looking for something, so now, I’m more concrete now in how I think.

M____: So many diversities come together. You know, Medgar makes you more conscious of your Blackness, right. Like some of the classes that you go in they talk about miscegenation, which is the mixing of the races ... and some of the classes, the professors, they’re Afrocentric. They dress like that, and they teach you more about your Blackness. You get to love your nose and your lips and your face and your butt and your hips.

I____: Love yourself

M____: – and everything. You know, you get to be a strong, proud Black woman. So that when you’re among these White people and maybe you’re the only raisin among them, and plus you’re educated, you could hang in with their circle and talk. You know, when they “Oh I’ve been to Harvard” and this, that, and the other, you could relate and you could talk with them too and you don’t feel so out of place. So you know, Medgar makes me more conscious as a Black person.

Chorus: Yeah

[P2 MEC 11_14_01 2:6]

WITHIN-RACE: EXPLORING CARIBBEAN PANETHNIC IDENTITY

Looking beyond Black-White distinctions to see where students were able to locate a community of similar others reveals these sites of community differed across campuses.

While those at Hunter College, with majority White students, experienced community as Caribbean nationals or persons of African ancestry (by way of panethnicity or race), participants at Medgar Evers College, with a large population of Caribbean nationals, spoke of finding community with others of their country of origin (i.e., nationality or ethnicity). This was especially true of participants who were from countries with the largest numbers of students on that campus: Jamaica, Haiti, and Trinidad.

At Medgar Evers College, a relatively racially homogenous campus, difference was primarily based on social practices related to being American-born or foreign-born. Generational status (i.e., whether they were first-generation or second-generation immigrants) and the length of time since immigration were sources of demarcation as well. Primarily, the distinctions centered on how things are done at home versus how they are done in the USA. This juxtaposition of norms and values, although not the racially determined differences that shaped community on the predominantly White campus, are equally powerful in their influence on students' well-being and identity. Participants' perception of within-group differences is illustrated in the following quote:

L____: Well it is different. Like kids walking in at any time, they can eat in the class, they sit with their legs over the chair. We can't do that back home. We'd get kicked out of class!

M____: Everybody who grew up here, the way they behave is kinda different from what we're accustomed to. They have different attitudes that we are not really accustomed to, we have certain values that we have and some of them [here] are "anything goes".

[P 1: MEC_11_09_01 1:1]

This discussion is highlighting the way the students see themselves, as immigrants, being different from American-born students. Although they are referring to students who, like them, are of African ancestry, the behaviors they describe violate the norms with which they grew up and hence, their perception of sameness and community is diminished. This disunion is more explicit in the following excerpt:

Tracy: So, I know you have a lot of Caribbean students here at Medgar. Do you have a lot of American-born students?

M____: There are more Caribbean than Americans. There are some people who have Caribbean parents but they were born here but most of them have the American kind of lifestyle—

L____: The behavior

M____: Yeah

Tracy: So, give me some other examples of behaviors that might be different here from what they'd be back home in class.

M____: They're aggressive, they're very aggressive.

L____: Extremely aggressive

M____: Yeah, aggressive. You know, we might be a little more polite, whereas they're like, everything you ask them, might be short-answered. They don't want to have the time to really explain anything, they're really aggressive.

Tracy: And that's the students or the teachers, or both?

L____: No, just the students. I don't really talk to the teachers one-on-one to say that.

M____: And yet, those Caribbean people who're here for probably two, three years, they adopt the same attitudes and lifestyles and forget their own and they adopt what they have seen around the campus. This Amer – this you know, aggressive way.

L____: I was just thinking, that's true! (Laughing) Instead of them coming here and trying to change the people here, they change to the people here.

M____: They want to fit in, they want to, you know, be recognized. They want to be noticed. So, it's like they forget all their values and they just want to be like everyone else, they want to dress a certain way, they want to be wearing [name] brands, their hair –

L____: – their nails

M____: Their nails, even their accent. You know.

L____: That's true.

[P 1: MEC_11_09_01 1:1]

Evidently, there are many ways to distinguish an American-born Black person from a foreign-born Black person. Some of these markers are in appearance, others are in speech and behavior, and others are indicated by a particular mindset. Immigrant students who want to minimize their Caribbean peculiarities take on the characteristics of American-born students. Others, like the students quoted above, are critical of such behavior. This awareness of within-race difference is echoed by a group of students who attend Hunter College which, although predominantly White, has a more ethnically diverse student population than that of Medgar Evers College:

Tracy: Now let me ask you. When you're on campus. So there are these ethnic groups. The Latin or Spanish group, the Asians, and what you call African-Americans. When you say African-Americans, who are you –?

D____: I say African-American as distinct from, say –

P____: Black people?

B____: – Blacks. Like I don't consider myself African-American. I'm Black. As a matter of fact I'm Negro [laughter] but anyway, since I'm in the US, I'm Black. And in a sense the African-Americans, Black Americans have a completely different mindset from say, West Indians. There are West Indians who associate with African Americans and consider themselves African-American, but I mean, it's all about you. There may be people who are West Indian who may have come here, say, from age ten and they've certainly been acculturated to the Black American thing and they consider themselves to be Black Americans. And there are people who came here at age five and to this day they're West Indians. And they've probably gone to the Caribbean like a handful of times but they have a West Indian accent and they consider themselves Trini 'til they die. So it's a whole different thing so I don't really consider myself African American.

M____: Can we explore this some more? I want to hear from you two as to what she just said about identity. She makes the separation, that Blacks are different from African-Americans. Do you see it in the same way?

P____: Yes, I do.

M____: Why is that?

P____: Because the –

Tracy: Well, first, what do you consider yourself? Do you identify as –

P____: Oh, Caribbean.

Tracy: OK, Caribbean or Vincentian?

P____: Caribbean. Because I look at the Caribbean as a whole. My sister came here. She went to high school here and if you listen to me and listen to her, it's different. The way she looks at life, it's so different. She is a frivolous, kinda party – that kind of stuff.

Tracy: Younger or older than you?

P____: Younger. My sister and I who stayed in St Vincent, we're more positive. We look more on a career. They just go through the motions. They just come and go to high school, they go to high school and then into college. They have a paved way. We had to struggle for what we got so it's kind of different. It's totally different.

R____: Like for me I consider myself Caribbean too but I find most of the Americans are so materialistic. They don't really appreciate what they have, like they get financial aid –

P____: Exactly.

R____: –and they're still complaining about a bunch of unnecessary things. They worry about going to the mall and clothes, that's another thing. Like the whole mindset when it comes to how you look. People don't, they're not concerned with going to school and studying and getting good grades. Everything is just so material. Pointless.

P____: But it's easier for them. As you say, they have financial aid and live with their parents but some of us we have to work and pay our way through school so we have a totally different outlook. That is why people from the Caribbean come to America and accomplish so much more than people who've been here. So that is one thing, that's why I look at myself as Caribbean.

[P5: HC_2_13_02 5:11]

These sentiments were repeatedly expressed from group to group across both campuses and reflected the dominant attitude among Caribbean immigrants. Not only were most participants clear about how they were different from African-Americans, they were very clear that they did not want to be considered African-American. Consequently, they made this distinction as they defined their own social identity, and hence, these lines bounded their sense of belongingness and participation; simultaneously, these lines marked who they were not and hence, circumscribed their perceptions of exclusion.

Tracy: Who hangs together on campus? Do the – I mean, do you have friendships around majors or clubs or is it predominant that people hang together by ethnic group or where they come from or what? What are the cliques like?

R____: I did a year at Brooklyn College and I found that everybody was kind of like, separated. If you go in the cafeteria you have – a lot of Jews go to that school. So you have the Jews and you have the Blacks and you have Spanish and then people like me who just sit on their own. It's very, very different. Even in class it's something. Everybody has their friends that they sit with. No one really mixes.

Tracy: Does that apply here also?

[Chorus – yes]

R____: Yeah. Definitely. In classes. Especially in classes.

D____: I think it's especially difficult if you're an older student because I'm an older student. I think younger people are more open to building new friendships ... I'm a big woman and I have friends already. A lot of people, I just don't see myself having anything in common with

- them. I cannot relate to them. ... Oh, the other thing is that I don't think I can be really good friends with people who aren't at least West Indian. So, like my good friends are all West Indians. My friends who I've met here, well, actually, it's just one [laughter], who I would say is a friend, she is St Lucian and so I can't – I don't know, it's me relating to people. As an older student and as a West Indian, I can't...
- R____: Like you go into class and you meet somebody, if you miss a day you can call –
- D____: Right. That is important. But ... it would take me a while to feel out and see who I think is smart and who I think is someone that I can relate to at least just on that level before I do that. I'm just very picky, when it comes to interacting with people.
- R____: I think that they are socialized differently from us. They don't gravitate to people easily in this country, they kind of keep their distance because they are afraid something would happen. In the Caribbean we would make friends. You would come to my home, we would go to yours, you know what I mean? It's just a difference in socialization. They're more protective here.
- Tracy: What do you think, M____?
- M____: It's pretty much as R____ described it. People typically stay in their cliques, whether it's by nationality or race or whatever it is. I have a few friends that I met here but it's always easier to be more comfortable with people who you think have something in common with. Or there's something about them that's familiar in terms of geographic region that they're from somewhere close to you or have some kind of related experience to you or something like that. I did try to have some friends who aren't like from my geographic region, or my color and something like that but I found that didn't really last far beyond school. [Laughter] I don't know if it was on my part because I'm not a phone person that's gonna call you every two days to talk. Maybe it was my fault, so I don't know about that.
- [P 5: HC_2_13_02 5:9]

Adjusting to difference is difficult. During the focus groups, participants discussed a wide range of difficulties they encountered in adapting to life in America and as college students. When I asked them what they thought Caribbean students needed to do to deal with the difficulties they faced, their responses included community as a resource they should rely on and contribute to. Again, sustaining the within-race distinction had a role in this regard.

- L____: We just have to go back to community. It takes a village. Things like that, I think that is absolutely important. And then you take it into all your social settings. It's not a bad thing but I don't have White friends, I don't have Black American friends. All my friends are Caribbean. I have a tight network. And when you stop and think, you need it. If I should lose that I wouldn't be anywhere. I can't tell you how many people I go home and call and say make sure you get home safely. Everybody needs to have that. I'm not saying that it has to be a large community. It just has to be a community that supports one another. And that's what we need to go back to.
- [P8: HC 2_26 and 3_01_02 Part I]

Community membership and participation is, therefore, essential for these students who are away from the country of their birth. For those who self-consciously seek out or strive to retain community, community is often defined as a network of others from a background perceived to be similar to their own. While community may extend beyond

their country of origin, for most, community is bounded by the Caribbean region. The classification, “Caribbean”, works well as a pan-ethnic identity around which to transcend national boundaries and form community based on cultural background and similarity of experiences prior to and since coming to the US.

NATIONAL IDENTIFICATION

National level differences also impact the experiences of Caribbean students attending U.S. colleges. Although these are rarely perceived by outsiders, there are notable differences within the anglophone and francophone Caribbean in language (some may argue “dialect” but this depends on one’s definition of these terms), cultural practices and behavior. According to Phinney (1992), ethnic identity is that aspect of social identity that derives from knowledge of membership in a social group and the value and emotional significance attached to that membership. She argues that the ethnic label one chooses to use is separate from ethnicity, which she defines as objective group membership determined by parents’ heritage. For Caribbean immigrants, their self-identification may reflect the regional label, and at other times, an equally appropriate ethnic identity may be synonymous with their nation of origin. Either of these chosen ethnic labels may or may not be consistent with their ethnicity. The complexity of ethnic identity becomes clear as, in this section, I present what participants see as being different among Caribbean nationals, and why.

As was illustrated in the preceding sections, national selectivity was not an option for students at Hunter College. Since this campus had a mix of students from diverse cultural, racial, and ethnic backgrounds, the numbers of students from individual Caribbean countries were too small to sustain national level groupings. On that campus, students had a vibrant club of Caribbean students and some participants reported relying on their Caribbean identity for community membership and participation. Participants who were members of the Caribbean Students’ Union discussed their shifting ethnic identity as follows:

Tracy: But listen, in the Caribbean, what do we call ourselves? Say for example, how did you think of yourselves in terms of an ethnic identity when you were home? Or racial identity?

A____: Black, I saw myself as Black

J____: Jamaican. When I was home, if you asked me, I'm Jamaican. I came here, "I'm Jamaican." "No, you're Black" It's different – When you're home you're like, you're Jamaican, or you're from Barbados, or whatever. But here, it doesn't matter where you're from, what's your ethnic group. You do not see Afro-Caribbean on any of these applications or African-American or whatever. You see Black, you see Caucasian, you see Asian, you see Spanish, you see all kind of stuff. So that was another thing that I had to get used to because when you're home you're not really exposed to the prejudice, as far as your ethnic group is concerned. You're not –

S____: You don't think about race because everybody is the same. What you have is like, browning [i.e., hierarchical labeling based on skin shade], and stuff like that, but basically you know everybody is Black. So you really don't think of yourself as that. But how you distinguish is where they were born. If you were born in America, you're an American, even if you were raised down there. Up here now, it's more a big deal. Oh, you're White, Oh, you're Black, Oh, you're Chinese or Asian.

[P7: HC 2_20_02]

In contrast, on the Medgar Evers College campus, where the student population consisted of mostly Caribbean immigrants, participants reported that the apparently homogenous student cliques found ways of distinguishing themselves from each other. Not only did the social groups break out by country of origin, but also groups had varying degrees of support for each other and got varying levels of regard from outsiders, depending on their size, relative to the other groups of students. This is illustrated in the following quote:

Tracy: So I have a question here. I'm doing this study here and at Hunter, so different questions get different responses, depending on where I am. Take this one, for example, "Do Caribbean students stick together on campus?" but if you're almost all Caribbean, do you have an answer for that?

M____: Yeah.

L____: Yes.

M____: What happens is that they group together.

Tracy: So how do the groups form?

M____: Like Trinidadians together. For example, among the foreign students, you might see a group of Trinidadians or you might see Trinidadians and Jamaicans. You'll see, not really Caribbeans. But the Haitians, they stick together. They're strong.

Tracy: Really?

L____: They're really strong 'cause there are a lot of them here.

M____: They are strong. Whereas, for example a Trinidadian might – if you tell one Haitian person something [offensive about another Haitian], all the others are gonna come down on you. Whereas you might tell a Trinidadian person something [offensive about another Trinidadian], and they [Trinidadians] would try to pull them [the Trinidadian] down: "Oh what she feel she doing?" and this that and the third. Not those Haitians.

[P 1: MEC_11_09_01 - 1:6]

On that campus, the largest numbers of Caribbean-born students are from Jamaica, followed by Trinidad. The third largest group is the Haitians who, because of their relative numbers, their tendency to protect and defend each other, and their ability to

speak to each other in Creole and not be understood by others, are perceived to be impenetrable. Although students from the other countries form cliques, they also form friendships and relationships that cross country lines; hence, their cohesion is perceived to be less stable. Later in the discussion, participants again referred to the Haitians, attempting to explain why they were perceived to have such strong bonds:

M____: It's a family thing. Because even though, like on Eastern Parkway [at the West Indian American Parade] when they put up the flags, you'll see a Trinidadian and an American, you'll see a Trinidadian and a Dominican, you will see different countries mixing –

L____: the Haitians are over there –

M____: I have never seen a Haitian – I'm being real – I have never seen a Haitian and a Trinidadian, or a Haitian and something else. I haven't seen it.

Tracy: Suppose a Haitian was here, would you say that?

Both: Yeah!

M____: – because I asked. I was talking to one and I said, you people are really close, I said, but how come you all don't mix? He said what do you mean we don't mix? I said, the Haitians stick with Haitians and marry you all own kind. He said, probably his parents, but now, you know, they do their own thing. I said, but I don't see it. So their family is like that and their family will tell them the same thing.

[P 1: MEC_11_09_01 - 1:9]

It was clear from those discussions on the Medgar Evers College that there were distinct national demarcations among the students. Of course, participants from countries with small numbers of students at that college are at the margins of these bonds, as is illustrated by the quote below.

Tracy: OK. Now, when you're at Medgar – you talked before about having a lot of Caribbean people around but are you conscious of yourself being Caribbean when you're here? Or, do you just blend in so much that it doesn't matter? Do you feel – do you think about it?

L____: Well, not really Caribbean but I think about being, like, Dominican because most of the accents here – like the Jamaican accent, I don't really get it all the time. They speak too quickly, and the things they say, I don't really understand so... all right, slow down or translate this to English for me.

Tracy: Do you have a lot of Dominican students or do you feel like everybody else is from somewhere else?

L____: (laughs) Everybody else is from somewhere else! There're like maybe about five of us here –

Tracy: Really, in the whole college?

L____: Five that I know of.

M____: yeah, they're not much. There are mostly Haitians –

L____: Yeah, Haitians, Jamaicans, Trinidadians –

M____: Trinidadians and Jamaicans

L____: So where are you from?

M____: Trinidad

L____: Oh. That's it – Jamaicans, Trinidadians (laughs)

[P1: MEC 11_09_01 1:3]

Here the participant L_____ is pointing out the fact that even as she comments on the relative dominance of students from Jamaica, Trinidad and Haiti, she is sitting in a room with a Jamaican (me) and a Trinidadian (the other participant). This is representative of the ethnic makeup of most of the groups in which she finds herself on campus, since there are not many students there from her country, Dominica. Her experience is different from that of M_____ who is from Trinidad, home to the second largest number of Caribbean-born students on that campus. Students from those Caribbean countries with large numbers of students at that school are more secure: the larger Caribbean student population provides more opportunity to form friendships and other supportive relationships.

POSSIBILITY OF A PAN-AFRICAN IDENTITY?

The preceding sections illustrate the complex nature of race, ethnicity, and nationality as sites of identity. When discussions of these social categories as the basis of identity have been de-politicized, de-contextualized and ahistorical, we achieve a limited understanding of what these categories mean to the targets, and we may not fully grasp when these meanings shift to take on more or less importance, depending on what is at stake in the moment. The fluidity of identities demonstrated here, however, does not mean that the identities are inconsequential. For example, when Caribbean immigrants privilege their regional or national identities over their Black identity, the implications of within-race division are devastating to those concerned with unity among peoples of African ancestry across the globe and an enduring Pan-African identity. It is worth mentioning that there were moments in the focus groups when the dominant discourse of community and exclusion (i.e., immigrants from one's region or nation as community; American-born Blacks as other) was interrupted and challenged:

S_____: I have a problem with that. I don't know if you guys have this problem but I personally, cannot relate very much to those pro-Black African Americans, because I find that they annoy the crap out of me. They're very pro-Black, to the point where it almost sounds racist, OK. And we don't tolerate racism towards us, so why should we tolerate racism toward another race? People are like, "Hey, my brother, hey, my sister." OK, you're not my brother, you didn't come out of my mother's womb. Don't call me your sister, right. Or, some African-Americans, they say, "Oh, my African sister," I say, "Excuse me, but I'm not African –

J____: But let me ask you a question. Do you find it offensive for them to refer to you as an African sister?

S____: No. As an African-American, yes. I'm not African-American.

J____: No, if I come to you and you don't know me and I say, "Hi, my African sister," would you be offended?

S____: I wouldn't really be offended but –

A____: She said if they call her African-American

S____: – you know, I don't like people calling me sister. I don't call my male, Black friends brother.

Tracy: So how do you feel about it, J____?

J____: Because I know the struggle that we've been through. There're so many people that went through so much for us to be able to even sit here. You are going for your Ph.D. All this stuff that happened. I don't have a problem with you identifying with me based on our race or ethnic background. I don't have a problem with that ... to me, that's the first step to saying, you know what? Let's talk. Let me be your friend, something like that. If, for some reason we talk and we really can't get along then that would be the end of it but I'm not going to be offended if you refer to me as a Black sister. I'm not going to be offended by that because you can't be closed minded because someone says those things. That's just how I feel about it.

[P7: HC_2_20_02 7:11]

Interruptions such as these provide pockets of evidence of a critical consciousness around race and indicate the possibility of a broader definition of community for Caribbean immigrants. The coalition of persons of African ancestry across geographical boundaries suggested by the last speaker is consistent with, and indicates an essential component of, positive marginality: the recognition that one is part of a larger community of resistant others (Unger, 1998, 2000; McFarlane and Ouellette, 2010 submitted for publication). This positioning recognizes that one does not always experience exclusion because of individual characteristics, but also as a member of a group of similar, stigmatized others. In this vein, similarity might then be reframed to embrace all persons of African ancestry as members of a diasporic community that is marginalized in America. This is the view put forth by another participant who, in another focus group, interrupted the discourse that fixed the limits of community by excluding African-Americans:

L____: That is the difference that I find with Black Americans and Caribbean Americans. We come here and we don't know how to identify with them.

Tracy: OK.

M____: But the thing is the majority of people in there [referring to Daughters of Africa, a student club] are of Caribbean decent. It's just that they probably have a different way of looking at things. I have a way of looking at things that is probably compatible with them to a certain extent too. And that doesn't mean that because they're African-American and we're from the Caribbean that we're going to have all these – we are going to have issues that are, you know seemingly conflicting on the surface, but we have to understand that those are

purely circumstantial. If I grew up here, I would not have those differences, we are the same people. That's the way I feel, it's just certain variations in the situations that made us who we are. West Indians are not innately more hard working or more educated or speak better; it's just because of our socialization. So when we come here and, you know, we have these people telling us, that we're different, that we somehow work harder than African Americans, and we buy into that shit – we're the same people ... the only difference with African-Americans is that they've been here longer. If I come here and I settle here and I have children here, better believe my concerns will be practically the same thing.

L____: But they may have had different experiences

M____: That's true, I agree with that, I agree the experience is different, but I still think – it's like OK. It's like taking a piece of cloth and cutting different shapes out of it, does that make it different? [L____: No, no] No, it doesn't, it makes it the same cloth in different shapes, you understand? So you see the difference?

L____: Yes, but to mold –

M____: No, molding is a lot but the substance is also very important.

T____: But we're not –

M____: I see that, I see the differences, I know the differences, but I think those things can be over ridden ... we should not fall into this trap of defining ourselves as different people from African-Americans. I understand that we need to do that to a certain extent because as I said the experiences have been different. However, Caribbean is not a race unto itself. Don't tell me, "I'm not Black, I'm Caribbean." "I'm not African." "I'm not Afro this, I'm Caribbean." Because this little island has a very shallow history. Believe it or not, you are only Jamaicans for a couple hundred years ... before that we were something.

[P8: HC 2_26 and 3_01_02 Part I 8:7; 8:13]

The view of a pan-African community that was put forth by J____ and M____ in the preceding two quotes was not the majority viewpoint among participants in this study. Note that they each included qualifiers like, "that's the way I feel about it," which suggests they knew they were not representing an accepted position. Overall, participants were more likely to defend a Caribbean or national identity and rarely understood or felt the need to identify with all persons of African ancestry. When these interruptions occurred, other participants would counter with references to aspects of their experiences as Caribbean persons to explain why it did not make sense for them to embrace an exclusively African (or Black) identity. For example, several participants made reference to having Chinese, East Indian or European relatives; others rejected a "pro-Black" stance as extremist and bordering on hate-mongering and at the very least, reverse racism, as is illustrated in the following quote:

A____: I don't like that pro-Black thing period, and I have my reasons for it. For one, if I do that it's like I basically disown a part of me. Yes, I am Black but I still have family that is White and I still have family that is mixed. And I have Indian, Black, you know, and I cannot see myself discriminating because if I do that, I'm discriminating against my own family. And in my eyes, it's not right. All men are equal. So when you hear they have protests, like when they had the Million-Man March. I'm like, OK, yeah, we are in the struggle, yeah we got to

stand up and protest stuff but sometimes in that itself, can't that also bring out prejudice within us, and racism? Even though you can't see it, it can cause that to be developed within somebody. Because no-one knows every man's mind.

[HC: 2_20_02]

FAMILY AND PERSONAL IDENTIFICATION

Themes of home and family in the discussions provided evidence of a core esteem that enabled some participants to reconcile their experiences of exclusion with the knowledge that they belonged. As participants talked through their identity construction in the context of their relocation, the basis for their belongingness came out in very distinct references to the physical space, here and at home:

J____: I miss the community, man. When you go home and you can go outside and you can open your door and leave your door open all night. I miss having a community where you're so comfortable. I had friends in school and when you go home, it's like you have such a big family. You know, I'm talking about when I go home, and I go over to my neighbor's house and I eat dinner. And then you drop asleep over there and they put the sheet over you and your parents know you're there and it's not a problem, you know? When I came here, and of course you're in a box. I have no backyard, I don't see grass – well I have a little grass in but – you come here and you're in a box and your social life is basically school, or if you have friends at work, and home. Otherwise, you hardly know your neighbors, you hardly have a feel of your community when you come here. And it's so, so, so much different from when you're home. So different.

[P7: HC 2_20_02 7:12]

Other participants emphasized that community was also socially different back home. The following quote further illustrates the cross-cultural distinction and its effect on how participants defined themselves and their aspirations:

Tracy: Has the way you identify yourself changed since you moved from Trinidad? When you were in Trinidad, what did you think of yourself as and is that any different now that you live in New York?

D____: Yeah. I guess so. In Trinidad, we were considered the one percent. When you are a graduate from the University of the West Indies, you are the one percent. And people look up to you. If you carry your books to school, people on the street think "Oh, she is a lawyer. She is a professional lady. See how she dresses. I am sure she is a graduate from UWI." People can distinguish that you are different from them because it is a small community. In America, the neighbor doesn't care if you are a Ph.D. student or if you are applying for a fellowship. You're invisible here. But in a small community, people know you. ... And it is felt, the difference itself. You blend in until you're nothing, you're invisible, except to your professors who know you're outstanding, and they will maybe put up your name for something. It pays to know your Chair and know your Dean. And have them know you by name. It pays. I tell people don't be shy. Go ask questions. Go talk to them in their room. Know where they sit, know their phone numbers. It helps. It helps a lot.

Tracy: Do you think our experience in the Caribbean prepares us for doing such things?

D____: No. Not all. It doesn't. I think you have to have your own personal motivation to get somewhere. Nobody is going to lift you up and say D____, you know, we're having a meeting for people who are interested in doing the Ph.D. Nobody is going to take your hand and show you the way. You have to have interest. You have to take an initiative and you have to be motivated. You have to know this is where your goal is and this is where you want to end up. Nobody is going to take you.

[P 6: HC 2_19_02 6:8]

In the U.S. setting that is so different from where immigrants call home, sometimes it comes down to individual characteristics – initiative and motivation – to overcome the challenges these differences present. This personal source of strength is also evident in the following excerpt:

Tracy: I know that here you have a lot of women, and a lot of people from the Caribbean, right? How do you see yourself on campus, in the wider society, and has there been any change in how you view yourself now, as opposed to when you lived back home?

I____: Well, the similarities-- like I said before, we're all out for one thing. To come here, graduate, get our diploma, make the best of our classes, and you know, move on to bigger and better things in our lives ... because that is what all of us came here to do, regardless of where we're from, you know. In terms of difference, I could say, motivation because, there are a lot of people who won't do a lot and will get away with certain things.

...

Tracy: So where does your motivation come from?

I____: Like I said, it all starts within yourself, really. And plus, the amount of guidance you get within your house, for you to do certain things within yourself, and know that in some degrees you are different from other people in terms of how far you're willing to go to get what you want. But at the same time we're all the same, in terms of achieving certain goals, bettering ourselves and knowing that everyday is like a learning process. We all learn something new. That's why I can't tolerate people thinking they're better than anybody else because they have certain things, you know, when we all out for one thing, which is making money, getting the education, and having a family.

[P2 MEC 11_14_01 2:6]

This perspective of individual determination and persistence based on family values was evident across the two campuses. It was interesting that for these immigrant students, “home experiences” as the basis for the drive and confidence that fueled their pursuits sometimes extended across the seas to the family and homes in their counties of origin. For example, one participant told of how a trip back home one holiday reminded her of where she was from; going home allowed her to view her background with new appreciation. The knowledge that at home she had a car to drive, parents who approved of her and supported her, friends who were from a similar background and who knew her – all of this offset the alienation she experienced in the US and reinforced her worth. For these participants, the knowledge of *who* they were *before* they were

immigrant women of color in college helped them to transcend the negative effects of their transition.

DISCUSSION

Findings presented in this paper demonstrate that Caribbean-born female college students in New York City experienced *exclusion* on the basis of their race, ethnicity, nationality and individual characteristics. However, these same social markers formed the basis for their experience of *belonging* – and to varying degrees, represented the goals for which they strove in their efforts to create and maintain their sense of self. For this group of women, as is the case with other groups, identity is constructed and re-constructed, sometimes in ways that appeared spontaneous but was actually deeply rooted in who they were, are and hope to become. However, for these female immigrant college students, their perceptions of difference and community were infused simultaneously with the various social messages they received from their home countries and the U.S. society.

Although statuses of race, ethnicity, nationality and panethnicity may be separated for variable specificity and thematic analysis, these statuses are not separate. Indeed, they are intertwined with each other and with other complicated identities these women hold with them in all aspects of their daily life and hence, share in influencing their experiences. Master statuses shift, depending on contexts, but multiple statuses and identities are with us all the time. Similarly, community membership is nuanced and multiply defined. As the data demonstrates, it is challenging to tease apart the relationship between these multiple categories of inclusion and exclusion and to determine their separate influences on women's experiences as immigrant students.

One area in which the perception of difference was prominent in this study was in the way participants distinguished themselves from persons of African ancestry who were born in the US. This within-race marking (American-born Blacks perceived as being different from Caribbean-born Blacks) has been noted by other researchers (e.g., Kasintz, 1992; Foner, 2001). In fact, this finding is so persistent that one must consider, what utility, if any, does this sustained distinction fulfill? Brewer (1999) argues that the

self evolves in response to the requirements of the social environment. While the well-being of humans is dependent on their in-group membership and participation, individuals rely on being able to distinguish themselves from each other in ways that are important to them. So the more we are similar, the more we strive to be different. Perhaps Caribbean immigrants, away from those who are most like them, focus on ways they perceive themselves to be different from African-Americans in an effort to hold on to (or reach back towards) what they left behind.

Jordan (1998) wrote an essay that illustrates how the dynamic natures of multiple identities results in unpredictable points of disconnect and connection. Jordan describes the divide she felt between herself, a Black woman on vacation from her job as a college professor and Olive, the maid who cleaned Jordan's hotel room in The Bahamas. Race and their gender could not connect these two women across the divide of their class. Back at work on campus, Jordan observed a connection between an Irish-American woman and a South African immigrant woman as one helped the other escape the ravages of living with an alcoholic man. This was an experience Jordan had not had, therefore she was unable to share in the bond that transcended race to join these two women like sisters. Distinguishing between a common imposed identity and the individual identity that will be chosen if a choice is possible, Jordan notes that race, class, and gender are not automatic elements of connection and argues that, quite often, connection lies in what we can do for each other.

Using Jordan's premise to consider the case of relations between Caribbean-born and American-born women of African ancestry in the U.S. college setting, it is possible to see where this may actually be one social setting wherein these two groups of women can help each other. Since their individual group numbers are so small, their collective voice will make a stronger statement on the concerns of women in color in academia. Together, they may be better able to name discrimination and its marginalizing effects and collectively, they may be less likely to view problems historically directed toward women of color as challenges to be overcome by individual responsibility. Applying Jordan's line of reasoning, if these two groups of Black women can identify what they can do for each other, then they'll find the connection.

As Collins (2000) points out, transnational coalitions among women of color remain difficult, but they are necessary for a more effective approach to addressing the challenges women of African ancestry face throughout the Diaspora. In the study we see some evidence of transnational coalitions, although for most women these did not extend beyond Caribbean nationals. This community was an important base from which participants dealt with the challenges they faced. Many students valued spaces within the educational structure that reinforced their cultural diversity. This finding is consistent with Tierney's (1993) critical perspective and demonstrates how students' resistance incorporated their cultural values for their own survival.

Another remarkable finding in this work is the strong positive notions of home that some participants expressed. There is no evidence in the data of participants' concerns with current Caribbean realities, such as social problems and limited economic opportunities, which may have been push factors in their or their parents' decision to migrate. This finding is consistent with many narrative studies of immigrants that have found the immigrant's need to redefine home is consistent with their psychological adjustment. For example, Das Gupta (1997), who examined identity construction among second-generation Indian immigrants, found this process to be influenced by her participants' reaction to their first-generation immigrant parents' message of what it meant to be an 'authentic' Indian. Das Gupta writes, "What is 'Indian,' then, is not automatically what is preserved but is what is *constructed* as preserved" (p. 580). She points out this view is not necessarily indicative of ignorance of change in the home country, rather their view of authenticity is grounded in the knowledge that things at home are no longer as they used to be, and their need to hold on to the value of how things were. Das Gupta makes the important point that the dominant paradigms of ethnicity and assimilation fail to account for this dynamic process of invention.

The current findings add to the body of work that underscores the complexity of cross-cultural adjustment within social contexts and emphasizes the effects of intersecting social identities on personal and interpersonal experiences. Advocating a global analysis of Black women's experiences, Collins (2000) uses the term "transnational matrix of domination" to describe how patterns of intersecting oppressions may be organized differently from society to society, and still retain their challenging effects.

The current analysis is significant because it focuses on Caribbean-born women only, thus facilitating a close consideration of gender, social class, ethnicity, racial identity, age, nationality, and other personal characteristics on the process of cross-cultural adjustment and the pursuit of success for first-generation immigrants who are college students.

Research shows that these dynamics of intersection, including generational status, are even more complex when second-generation immigrants and their children are considered (Waters, 2001; Kasinitz, Waters, Mollenkopf and Holdaway, 2009). As these inextricably interwoven identities define insider *and* outsider status for those who hold them (targets), they do the same for those with whom they interact (observers). It is, therefore, important to simultaneously recognize the difficulty of negotiating these lines of social demarcation, while identifying and enhancing those processes that minimize perceptions of exclusion for foreign-born, ethnic minority women. As America continues to examine its response to immigrants (Bueker, 2009; Abrahams, 2010), this knowledge needs to influence the revision of (or formation of new) policies and the provision of services related to this group.

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