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# Racial/Ethnic Identity Expression at Trinity College: An Exploration of the P.R.I.D.E. Program

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Racial/Ethnic Identity Expression at Trinity College:

An Exploration of the P.R.I.D.E. Program

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Trinity College

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment for the Bachelor's Degree in Psychology

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### **Abstract**

Previous research has focused on how students of color are enculturated on college campuses, and particularly how ethnic subcultures on campus may facilitate adjustment into the larger campus community (Museus, 2008). Additionally, research has focused on how ethnically-oriented social groups affect intergroup attitudes and behaviors within ethnic classes (Sidanius et al., 2004). P.R.I.D.E. is a student organization at Trinity College that focuses on creating a supportive environment for all students, with an emphasis on students of color. In order to better understand how this organization affects students' sense of racial/ethnic identity and sense of belonging on campus, I conduct five focus groups with students who had varying levels of exposure to P.R.I.D.E. to examine the following questions: (1) To what extent do theories of student departure and identity development manifest in students at Trinity? (2) To what extent do students of color on campus utilize the P.R.I.D.E. program as an extension of their ethnic identity? (3) In what ways does P.R.I.D.E. promote a sense of belonging on campus and facilitate the process of meshing home culture with Trinity culture? My analysis of the focus group data suggested three major themes (Racial/Ethnic Identity, Campus Experiences, and Impact of P.R.I.D.E.) and various subthemes subsumed under these larger themes that characterize a student of color's experience on Trinity's campus. These themes were loosely aligned with the Theory of Student Departure, and not very well aligned with the Expanded Nigrescence Model. Implications of these findings for the design of future programming will be discussed.

Racial/Ethnic Identity Expression at Trinity College:  
An Exploration of the P.R.I.D.E. Program

Higher education has been the cornerstone of American opportunity, with 17-24-year-old applicants around the nation looking forward to new environments and experiences each year. Colleges and universities have increasingly placed a larger emphasis on promoting diversity throughout their institutions, hoping to better represent the national demographic within their microcosms. Numerous schools such as Trinity College, Yale University, and Smith College have promoted initiatives to increase interest from students of underprivileged backgrounds, such as the removal of an application fee. Currently, approximately 40% of college and university students self-identify as non-White, which is an increasing statistic nation-wide. Regardless of initiatives and increased diversity, institutions have still demonstrated poorer retention rates for students of color (SOC) for numerous reasons relating to individual psychology and culture, as well as campus climate and environments (McClain & Perry, 2017). Indeed, student retention among students of color has proven to be lower than the retention of white students, with a 24% gap in completion rates between black and white students and a 17.5% gap between Hispanic/Latinx and white students (Shapiro et al., 2017).

With the increase in diversity at many universities and colleges, attention has turned to the disparity between both the retention and completion rates of white students and students of color. One of the main factors leading to student departure lies in the disconnect between the student and the campus, where the culture does not actively promote or demonstrate inclusivity and where students self-segregate within the community (McClain & Perry, 2017). Predominantly White Institutions (PWI's), as opposed to Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU's), may lead to sentiments of disconnection between students of color and

the institution, mainly due to the campus culture. PWI's generally cater to white students because this racial/ethnic group tends to dominate many important positions in organizations that promote student social life on campus. As a result, students of different backgrounds and ethnicities often feel compelled to form and join their own cultural organizations.

Cultural organizations serve an important role on many PWI campuses for students of color. Mainly, these organizations provide a space where students can learn more about their own identities along with the identities of other students. Harper and Quaye (2007) found that students developed better cross-cultural communication through discussion and interaction because these organizations provided the opportunity for them to do. Importantly, cultural organizations do not promote "self-segregation" between students of color and the other members of the community (Hurtado, Milem, Clayton-Pedersen, & Allen, 1999). Organizations that are predominantly made up of students of color hold the appearance that they are inaccessible to White students, but Harper and Quaye (2007) found that students appreciated the opportunity to learn from backgrounds different than their own. These experiences demonstrate not only the value of cultural organizations, but also struggles organizations may face in terms of perception on campus.

Trinity College, a small liberal arts college in Hartford, Connecticut, continually attempts to achieve a number of goals related to diversity and inclusivity. The most recent endeavor has been to reduce the psychological burden of re-applying for financial aid yearly for Pell Grant eligible low-income students (Jaschik, 2018). The College, however, continues to explore new initiatives to improve retention rates for all students. While there are ideas and workshops, it is challenging to understand the campus climate, particularly racial and ethnic relations among students, and how administrators can best cultivate an inclusive climate where students of color



feel a sense of community. Understanding and improving campus climate in regard to race and ethnicity for students of color is essential to understanding the well-being of these students. This task is sometimes relegated to organizations, as opposed to all members of the community, not limited to faculty, staff, students, and administrators. With respect to the retention of students of color, the main issue lies in how to evenly balance support and resources, and better represent all students across campus. Accordingly, the goals of this thesis are to determine whether cultural organizations, specifically the P.R.I.D.E. program, provide a sense of ethnic identity and belonging for students from diverse ethnic backgrounds. I am interested in whether P.R.I.D.E. realizes its goal of using programming to create a supportive environment in an effort to improve retention rates for this population of students. The exploration of this program led to the following research questions: (1) To what extent do Trinity students' descriptions of their racial/ethnic identity map onto theories of racial/ethnic identity, as well as theories exploring campus culture and ethnic culture? (2) To what extent do students of color on campus utilize the P.R.I.D.E. program as an outlet to explore and enhance their ethnic identity? (3) In what ways does P.R.I.D.E. promote a sense of ethnic identity within students, sense of belonging on campus, and facilitate the process of meshing home culture with Trinity culture?

## **Background**

### **Race and Ethnicity**

Race is a human characterization based on physical and social qualities and is generally based on phenotypical traits, most often skin color. The most common race categories are "Black", "White" and "Asian". Black is typically used to denote individuals from African, Caribbean, or Latino ethnicity; White typically refers to individuals of European descent; and Asian usually refers to individuals of South and East Asian descent. Since the formation of the

United States, race has been a crucial and divisive social construction that has guided almost every norm in American society. “Coloreds Only” water fountains and activist Ruby Bridges speak to a time where skin color determined your value in society. “Black”, “White”, and “Asian” became categories that were normed in society to indicate race and further add a complex layer of ideology to skin color and ethnicity (Kloos et al., 2012). Race has always permeated the academic sphere since the official end of slavery; a few broad examples being *Brown vs. Board of Education* (1954), where segregation in public schools was deemed unconstitutional, affirmative action as a means to promote equal access to education, and the general disparity in the quality of education between schools in affluent neighborhoods and schools in disadvantaged neighborhoods. Today, race is still a contributing factor in admission to colleges and universities. The Standardized Aptitude Test (SAT) has been under fire for decades as a result of demonstrating racial bias, among numerous other biases (Moss, 1989). To combat the association of importance to the SAT in tandem with the accusations of inequality, academic institutions within higher education have decided to be test-optional. Trinity followed the test-optional route in 2015 to provide more opportunities for students who believe that standardized tests represent who they are as a student (Campbell, 2015).

In contrast to race, ethnicity refers to commonality based on nationality, language, culture, and ancestry. Ethnicity is a more complex concept because it defines an individual's cultural identity and can often be ambiguous at first appearance. The United States has a history of ethnic migration since its conception, yet there is a clear distinction between preferred and less preferred ethnicities. Ethnic groups, as well as ethnic diversity, are important on a larger scale because they hold the customs and traditions of one's background. Ethnicity is an interesting social construction because it can help an individual to feel a sense of P.R.I.D.E.; one can go so

far to say that it is the foundations of one's own sense of identity (Kloos et al., 2012). The ambiguity of ethnicity tends to define its conflict with race, because physical appearance often determines others' perceptions. Ethnicity is usually tied to the cultures and nationalities passed down from an individual's parents and ancestry, which is often not restricted to skin shades and colors.

In the current study, I sought to understand Trinity College's campus climate through the eyes of students from a wide range of ethnicities and racial backgrounds. Trinity mentions the notion of diversity within their mission statement, hoping to form a "diverse community of learning" (Trinity College, 2016). Within the community of higher education, it is becoming increasingly important to foster a sense of community for students of color who are coming from backgrounds that may be markedly different with respect to economics, family structure, and customs, than their majority classmates. Race and ethnicity are important in these contexts because, as a response to living in a new environment and being expected to blend into the fabric of that institution, students of color use student organizations as a vehicle of familiarity and community.

Within these student organizations, race and ethnicity become compelling constructs with the potential for becoming a positive source of community, P.R.I.D.E., and identity (Johnston, 2014). The ability to represent themselves by way of holding Chinese New Year dinner or a Black History Month celebration with peers from similar and diverse backgrounds brings a piece of comfort to an altogether foreign environment. For campus integration to work seamlessly for every student, it seems as though cultural organizations play a part in providing a recognizable space that may be reminiscent of home (Museus, 2008).

### **Theory of Student Departure**

Institutions carry their own norms and ideas about their culture; students who matriculate at Trinity learn numerous traditions passed down from the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Institutional culture, however, is a complex blend of its own and every student's background. Kuh and Love (2000) proposed that student retention for institution is dictated by the relationship between "preculture", or the student's home culture, and the "culture of immersion", namely campus culture. Further, this model proposes that the gap between the institution's culture and the student's culture leads to decreased retention rates and increased dissatisfaction with the institution. Museus (2008) found that ethnic student organizations provided tools to build smaller communities within the larger culture, as well as allowed for crucial bonds to be built between peers. These bonds help tie students both to the institution and to their own culture, further strengthening their sense of belonging.

Kuh and Love's (2000) theory may be particularly useful when generating ideas on how to move towards a campus that is more inclusive, respectful, and considerate of all cultures. This theoretical model dictates that students are intrinsically aware of the division between their own personal culture and the culture that they choose to be a part of on campus, in addition to the larger campus culture. Specific organizations indicate a creation of smaller subcultures, and it is relevant to look at cultural organizations as an extension of the larger culture because they are most often created as a response to the institution.

### **Expanded Nigrescence Model**

The expanded Nigrescence model focuses on the development of African-American identity. It is relevant to understanding student departure from higher education because it discusses the processes by which people of color develop a secure sense of identity and feel comfortable within their community. Cross and Vandiver (2001) developed three themes that

encompass what they propose as the development of a secure identity. The three categories are: Pre-Encounter, Immersion-Emersion, and Internalization. The Pre-Encounter phase refers to negative attitudes towards being African-American. The Immersion-Emersion phase focuses on a developing or transitioning identity. In this stage, it is common to note anti-White sentiments and intense involvement within the African-American community. The last stage, Internalization, refers to the final process of being secure in one's identity, as well as comfort with one's race/ethnicity (Harper & Quaye, 2007). This model's importance to the study lies within the Immersion-Emersion stage, due to the suggestion of a transitioning identity through intense ethnic community involvement. In the contexts of being on a college or university campus, Museus (2008) found that many students often develop a greater sense of their own identity through student-led organizations.

A limitation of the expanded Nigrescence model, though, is that it only focuses on the development of identity among members of the African-American community. Accordingly, in the current study, I aimed to discern whether students of all "minority" ethnicities follow a similar pattern of identity development presented by Cross and Vandiver (2001) through involvement with the community. It is my belief that backgrounds not limited to African Americans also rigorously participate in cultural organizations as a way to understand their ethnic identities. A second limitation lies in the assumption that identity development progresses in a linear fashion, and that it only happens through the use of ethnic community involvement. It is understood that there are ethnic students who may never participate formally and intensely within their communities and organizations, but still hold a strong sense of identity within their group.

By expanding this model to encompass students of color from a wide range of races and ethnicities, I aimed to hear differing voices and opinions regarding conceptions of the campus climate. Trinity College is an institution that aspires to reflect the changing demographics of American society; in this same vein, through this research, I aspire to reflect a range of opinions related to undergraduate students' identity and their experiences of oppression and racism. Many students of color begin to freely understand their own racial and ethnic identities during their time in higher education, so it is highly relevant for institutions to understand that these are important formative years for identity development.

### **Organizations for Students of Color**

Student organizations, particularly those focused on race/ethnicity, serve as a comfortable space within a predominant culture for students of color to retreat to and feel at home within primarily White institutions. In a more general sense, involvement in extracurricular activities for students of color has shown to have positive effects on their college experience. Inkelas (2004) conducted a study evaluating the extent to which student involvement on campus had any effect on ethnic awareness for 184 Asian Pacific American (APA) students. They found that student organizations significantly related to perceived APA awareness, as well as university sponsored events focused on diversity (not limited to APA cultural events) aided in greater understanding of these students' ethnic identity. This study's findings suggest that other ethnic groups benefit from wider representation of their cultures and use these opportunities to learn about other groups.

In a similar study, Sidanius, Van Laar, Levin, & Sinclair (2004) sought to explore how membership in a cultural or Greek organization influenced intergroup attitudes of belonging and identity. Focusing on 2,132 students from the four largest ethnic categories (Black  $n=144$ , White

$n=764$ , Asian  $n=758$ , and Latino  $n=466$ ). They found that participation in ethnic organizations led to positive personal effects within students of color such as an increased sense of ethnic identity and ethnic activism. Additionally, Sidanius et al. (2004) noted that participation in ethnically oriented organizations was not associated with higher sense of belonging to the larger institutional culture.

These studies demonstrate that while involvement in student organizations largely is associated with positive outcomes for students of color, there are still apparent limitations to the benefits provided. Taken together, this research raises questions about the function of these organizations, whether they are specifically designed to enhance self-identity and development, or whether these outcomes simply arise as a function of being a member of that organization. The students that participate in these organizations, as well, tend to effect change on the perceived benefits. It is important to consider whether organizations that have a goal of promoting diversity and inclusivity fill the gap found by Sidanius et al. (2004), increasing a perceived sense of belonging to the larger institutional culture. Additionally, it is important to consider whether organizations with these specific goals have similar positive effects as programs that promote community and resource building due to the inherent focus on identity and self-awareness.

### **Campus Climate**

The campus climate is important to consider when discussing student experiences at PWI's because the institution becomes a small reflection of the outside world. Mwangi, Thelamour, Ezeofor and Carpenter (2018) argue that an analysis of societal racial climate and campus racial climate are missing from understanding the experience for students of color. They believe that this is important to consider because racial and ethnic hostility, microaggressions,

and overt discrimination not only occur outside the confines of the school gates but within the institution as well. Because these contexts influence daily life outside of colleges and universities, Mwangi, Thelamour, Ezeofor, and Carpenter (2018) suggest that these contexts play an important role within campuses. Through an online survey ( $n=351$ ) and follow up interviews ( $n=25$ ), they found four themes that shape interactions between racial/ethnic groups: perceptions between groups, campus climate mirroring societal racial climate, experiencing movements on campus, and desires to represent the community positively. The findings from this study suggest that the racial climate both on and off campus has a great impact on how students express their identities, as well as relate to other ethnic groups.

Similarly, Linley (2018) sought to understand the importance of campus climate when considering ethnic student socialization. The study examined how students of color experienced the campus climate in relation to their racial identities and their positions as student leaders. Linley (2018) conducted two semi-structured interviews with 11 participants who identified as students of color and discussed four themes that are important to consider when looking at campus climate: institutional legacy, structural diversity, psychological dimensions, and behavioral dimensions. Institutional legacy focuses on who, specifically which social categories, were allowed access to higher education. Structural diversity indexes the school's demographics as well as the ways diversity is sought after in problematic ways by the institution. Students discussed the psychological dimension as the experiences of marginalization, discrimination, and other negative racial experiences related to being on campus. The behavioral dimension involved how students interacted with each other within and outside of their own ethnic groups. This study suggested that students were highly attuned to how their campus environment reflected larger societal constructs and impacted their sense of belonging to the institution.



**Promoting Respect for Inclusive Diversity in Education**

The P.R.I.D.E. program is a year-round initiative that aims to build an inclusive community for all first-year students through pre-orientation Welcome Weekend, varied programming, and P.R.I.D.E. Leaders. Welcome Weekend is a series of programs that allow students to become acquainted with the Trinity community and downtown Hartford, in addition to meeting the P.R.I.D.E. Leaders prior to the arrival of all students. The P.R.I.D.E. Leaders are quintessential to the program because they are the ambassadors of the organization. Leaders are expected to be a resource for all first-year students, which is not limited to knowing contacts for the Counselling Center, LGBTQ+ resources, or being a good listener to a peer in need. P.R.I.D.E. Leaders also are responsible for promoting or creating a wide range of events that cater to a diverse demographic of students, but also create opportunities for meaningful conversation.

The program began only as a pre-orientation tool under the name Black, Asian, Hispanic Orientation (B.A.H.O.) in 1998. Leaders were expected to be a resource for students during the short period of time before school officially began, yet they found that students would come to them throughout the year for assistance or they would gravitate towards those students just to check-in. The program expanded to encompass a year-long initiative in order to give the leaders more structure and support to better assist students in need, as well as build a stronger community between P.R.I.D.E. Leaders. The initiative includes training twice a year, team-building exercises, bi-weekly meetings with both the group and individual supervisors, and family dinners. Many of the community building traditions that began two decades ago persist within the P.R.I.D.E. program today and strengthen the bonds between P.R.I.D.E. students and leaders.

### **Current Study**

The purpose of this study is to explore the development of racial and ethnic identity at Trinity College through the exploration of a specific student organization focused on promoting inclusivity and diversity on campus. As previously explained, the P.R.I.D.E. program is a resource for all students at Trinity, but there is an explicit focus on three particular goals. The first goal of P.R.I.D.E. is to use a diverse range of programming to build and maintain a supportive environment for students at a predominantly White institution. The second goal is to provide social and economic support through these programs. Lastly, P.R.I.D.E. aims to promote higher retention rates by providing an available and accessible community for all students, but specifically students of color. In this social climate, there is still a necessity for an effective and acceptable space for students of color to feel comfortable at PWI's, and P.R.I.D.E. is a resource that sets out to do just this. My main goal of this study is to discover whether P.R.I.D.E. in practice lives up to its bold mission. The Expanded Nigrescence Model spearheaded by Cross and Vandiver (2001), in tandem with the Cultural Perspective of Student Departure conceptualized by Kuh and Love (2000), was used as a way to conceptualize student responses to focus group questions and determine whether ethnically driven programs foster any benefits for students in terms of personal development and identity development. The current study will examine the following research questions:

1. To what extent what extent are Trinity students' experiences on campus consistent with the TSD or ENM models and to what extent is their racial/ethnic identity development similar to students at other PWIs?
2. To what extent do students utilize the P.R.I.D.E. program to foster/explore their racial/ethnic identity?
3. In what ways does P.R.I.D.E. promote a sense of belonging at Trinity and a marrying of home-Trinity cultures?

## Method

### Participants

Participants included 18 students from Trinity College (Hartford). Most ( $n=14$ ) students identified as female and 4 students identified as male, between the ages of 18-21. Participants were recruited through the P.R.I.D.E. Leader program, the Office of Institutional Research, and Introduction to Psychology courses. Students affiliated with the P.R.I.D.E. program were recruited as a separate group through an email. Students recruited through the Office of Institutional Research and Psychology courses were classified into one of three groups (i.e., little/no exposure, moderate exposure, and P.R.I.D.E. Leaders) based on their previous affiliation with the P.R.I.D.E. program. Affiliation with the program was determined through the recruitment survey; participants indicated the types of P.R.I.D.E. events they partook in over their time at Trinity. The sample comprised of 44% first-years, 28% sophomores, 6% juniors, and 22% seniors.

### Measures

**Pre-focus group discussion questionnaire.** Participants were asked to complete the Expanded Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure (MEIM) prior to the focus group discussion (Appendix D). The Expanded MEIM is an adaptation of the original measure developed by Phinney et al. (1992); this measure includes religion and nationality as additional factors of identity and allows individuals to reflect upon their own identities through those additional lenses, in addition to race. The MEIM is a 12-item measure; these questions were developed to examine ethnic attitudes of belonging or affirmation (Phinney et al., 1992). A higher mean score indicates higher feelings of belonging and affirmation. One sample question was: "I am active in organizations or social groups that include members of my own (race) (religion) (nationality)."

Responses were recorded on a 5-point Likert scale (1=*strongly disagree* – 5=*strongly agree*). No items were reverse scored.

**Focus group script.** Data collection consisted of semi-structured focus group questions for each of the three conditions (little/no exposure, moderate exposure, and P.R.I.D.E. Leaders; Appendix C). Each group was asked to identify specific demographics relating to their age, racial/ethnic identity, and class standing. In addition to demographic questions, I inquired about four different concepts. Three concepts (i.e., ethnic identity expression, university identification, and perceived group conflict), explored by Sidanius, Van Laar, Levin, and Sinclair (2004), were adapted from a Likert scale to an open-ended question format to allow for participant discussion and examples. Questions such as “How important is your ethnicity to your identity?” and “How close do you feel to other members of your ethnic group?” were designed to assess ethnic identity expression. University identification was measured through questions such as “How often do you think of yourself as a Trinity student?”, and “To what degree do you experience a sense of belonging or a sense of exclusion at Trinity?”. Lastly, prompts were used to explore perceived group conflict, such as “I feel discriminated against because of my identity”, as well as a prompt to explain how well these statements define students’ experiences at Trinity.

The last concept addressed in the focus group questions was derived from Museus (2008), relating to the role that student organizations play in daily student life. Questions related to this concept included: “What types of organizations are you involved with?” and “what are some campus organizations that facilitated your adjustment to campus and why?”. Questions were adapted from their original sources in order keep focus group sessions within an hour and to allow for students to expand and reflect on their personal experiences on campus. P.R.I.D.E. Leaders were presented with an additional set of questions created to reflect the nature of being a

student leader and their experiences with the program. These questions included, “Why did you become a student leader? Why P.R.I.D.E.?” and “What are some things you expected to gain from becoming a P.R.I.D.E. Leader?”

### **Procedure**

In each focus group, participants met in a private, on-campus space as a consistent research location for the study. For P.R.I.D.E. Leaders, 6 participants were invited to the focus group sessions; eight participants were invited to the No Exposure focus group sessions, and four participants were invited to the Moderate Exposure focus groups. To determine the difference between exposure groups, participants who indicated that they were involved in 4 or more P.R.I.D.E. events during their time at Trinity were placed in the Moderate Exposure group. Participants who were involved in 3 or less events were categorized as No Exposure.

Before providing consent forms, participants were told that the study was about personal conceptions of racial and ethnic identity expression as students of color at Trinity college; they were encouraged to consider whether they wished to participate once more before receiving consent forms. Participants were instructed to review and sign consent forms before the focus group interview was conducted (Appendix B). It was also explained that students may cease participation at any time during the focus group but were also encouraged to share as much as they were comfortable in order for the data to reflect a wide range of student experiences. After confirming that each consent form was signed and permission was given to record the session, each focus group member was instructed to complete the MEIM individually and anonymously.

Once all participants completed the MEIM, the purpose of the study was reiterated, and we began the recorded session. At the start of each recorded session, it was reiterated that their responses would remain anonymous and the importance of intergroup confidentiality.

Participants in each group were asked a series of questions relating to the concepts mentioned previously (i.e., ethnic identity expression, university identification, perceived group conflict, and student organization function), and were encouraged to respond as explicitly as possible. One Trinity student (thesis author) conducted the focus groups. The leader followed the script almost exclusively; however, there were instances when the leader asked additional questions for clarification or probing based on ideas put forth by either the interviewer or participants. Focus groups lasted approximately one hour, and all sessions were recorded for transcription and coding later. All recordings were transcribed, de-identified, and exported to AtlasTi, a program that facilitates qualitative data analysis.

### **Data Analysis**

Data collected through each focus group were analyzed according to Clarke, Braun & Hayfield's (2015) phases of thematic analysis; their framework (Table 1) provided an organized method for qualitative analysis which helped to maintain structure throughout the process of data analysis. In the present section, I will describe the approach taken to analyze data, as well as the implementation of thematic analysis specified by Clarke, Braun, & Hayfield (2015).

Both a deductive and semantic approach were used to code the five focus group transcripts. Clarke, Braun, and Hayfield's (2015) deductive approach is described as, "existing theoretical concepts inform coding and theme development, and the analysis moves beyond the obvious meanings in the data" (p. 225). The focus group questions largely were driven by the two organizing theories (Theory of Student Departure and Expanded Nigrescence Model); therefore, the data associated with these theoretically grounded questions were analyzed deductively.

The deductive method allowed a clear guide when analyzing data; responses to focus group questions such as “Do you feel a sense of belonging or exclusion on campus” were coded as such. The deductive method was a useful framework for these focus group sessions because students often discussed topics that were relevant to the theoretical analyses.

The semantic approach was also valuable throughout each focus group session. Clarke, Braun, and Hayfield (2015) describe this approach as taking participant responses as they are explicitly stated without much interpretation (p. 225). Group questions such as, “How well do these statements relate to your experience here?” and “I feel discriminated against because of my ethnicity...” required participants to explicitly respond without need for much interpretation, particularly because participants tended to elaborate their answers.

Clarke, Braun, and Hayfield (2015) offer a 6-step method (Table 1) for thematic analysis, which was followed during the present study. The first step was to listen to audio recordings, transcribe, and become familiar with all of the focus group data. During the initial transcription of the focus group recordings, notes were taken to capture similarities and differences between each group, and across P.R.I.D.E. exposure categories.

**Coding process.** The second step in thematic analysis is the process of coding, which is to identify patterns within the data and label them accordingly. I created codes using the deductive and semantic approach. Throughout each focus group script, direct responses to the question were first code. For questions such as “Do you feel a sense of belonging or exclusion on campus,” responses such as “I feel a sense of belonging...” were coded semantically as a “belonging to Trinity”. There were many instances, however, during elaboration, where their explanations were coded deductively according to larger themes of identity or relation to campus. Responses to questions about identity and finding a group on campus presented

opportunities for deductive analysis. Codes of “communication”, for example, followed when participants made statements such as “there’s a language barrier” or “English is not my first language, so I had to adjust a bit”.

**Theme/subtheme identification.** The third phase of analysis involved identifying potential themes and subthemes in order of relevance to research questions and interest. This process was an iterative one, in that I refined my themes and subthemes numerous times during the process of data analysis. In order to identify overarching themes, I was largely guided by the research questions. My identification of subthemes was driven more by the context of discussion and a semantic approach. I created webs of possible themes, which helped me to assess how distinctive the individual themes were that I had identified initially. In addition, I placed relevant subthemes under the overarching themes to assess their fit with the larger theme. This phase of analysis involved a primary level of defining useful groups of codes, or patterns, as well as identifying ways in which these patterns could relate to one another.

The fourth phase of thematic analysis involves reviewing the themes and subthemes developed; this reevaluation was to determine the importance of each topic discussed to ensure the data were represented accurately. In doing so, I re-examined the codes along with their representative quotations to assure their relevance to the themes and subthemes. Codes were combined with others if they were deemed to be overlapping or redundant, and codes were grouped further under subthemes and reviewed as a whole set. Similar to my approach of examining the codes, if the codes categorized under one subtheme were closely related to another subtheme, they were combined. Codes such as “acceptance” or “support”, for example, were combined into a more encapsulating code of “belonging” to Trinity’s campus.



Clarke, Braun, and Hayfield (2015) describe the fifth level of analysis as the final determination of overarching themes and subthemes. These themes were largely connected to the research questions posed; as expected, I identified major themes that paralleled my line of questioning, such as “Racial/Ethnic Identity”; subthemes such as “struggles with identity” or “centrality of identity” emerged as prevalent patterns in discussion and ultimately resided within the larger theme of racial/ethnic identity. In this last stage, I examined associations between each theme, subtheme, and my original research questions in order to determine how much my findings aligned with previous literature on this topic. I also examined novel suggestions made by participants regarding ways in which on campus programming could better support students who engage with the P.R.I.D.E. program.

### Results

**Ethnic identity.** The overall mean MEIM score was 4.17 ( $SD=0.50$ ). On the five-point scale, this overall mean denoted a generally positive sense of racial/ethnic identity. Because of the small sample size and my desire to understand whether participants made distinctions in how they endorsed the items, I examined mean scores for each individual question on the MEIM. Table 2 displays the means and standard deviations associated with each question.

For question 2, “I am active in organizations or social groups that include mostly members of my own ethnic group,” participant responses reflected a mean of 3.28. For question 3, “I have a clear sense of my ethnic background and what it means for me,” these responses reflected an average of 3.89. Question 5 states, “I am happy that I am a member of the group I belong to,” for which participants reported an average 4.94 out of 5. Participants reported an average of 3.56 for question 8, “In order to learn more about my ethnic background, I have often talked to other people about my ethnic group.” Both question 9 and question 12, “I have a lot of

P.R.I.D.E. in my ethnic group,” and “I feel good about my cultural or ethnic background,” held high participant averages comparable to question 5; participants responded 4.83 and 4.78, respectively. Responses to the MEIM seem to denote that students are not explicitly within a “transitioning” period as denoted by the expanded Nigrescence model; their responses demonstrate that overall, participants felt comfortable within their identities in spite of the fact that many participants were first-year college students.

### **Themes and Subthemes**

**Major themes.** After analyzing transcripts from the five focus group sessions, three overarching themes emerged after identification of the subthemes. These themes were as follows: (1) Racial/Ethnic Identity, (2) Campus Experiences (associated with racial and ethnic identity), and (3) Impact of P.R.I.D.E. Racial/Ethnic Identity represented 31% of the total utterances (Table 5) throughout all focus groups. Campus Experiences was a more salient theme, representing 45% of all utterances (Table 6). Lastly, Impact of P.R.I.D.E. represented 27% of utterances (Table 7). The occurrence of these major themes was expected, as these themes were suggested by the structure of the focus group interview questions.

**Racial/ethnic identity.** In terms of Racial/Ethnic Identity, three subthemes were identified: Centrality of Identity, Hyperawareness of Identity, and Struggles with Identity. Across all groups, P.R.I.D.E. Leader (PL), No Exposure (NE), and Moderate Exposure (ME), students expressed similar feelings of importance towards their identities (42%, 31%, 27%, respectively). Phrases such as, “I’d consider that a big part of my life,” “I’m really proud of my ethnicity and I wear it every day,” or, everything about the way I’ve lived my life and navigate the world is intrinsically connected to that,” reflected Centrality of Identity as a subtheme.

All groups evidenced a similar number of utterances reflecting Hyperawareness of Identity, a subtheme (31%, 35%, 33%, respectively). Phrases such as, “it’s just me being conscious about my place here, being a black student,” “I think of myself as a minority student on a campus that’s majority white,” or, “I’m reminded every day...I’m on the basketball team and... there’s only three of us” demonstrated feelings of constantly being aware of their identities.

Lastly, Struggles with Identity emerged as a subtheme, although more infrequently for P.R.I.D.E. Leaders than the other two exposure groups (13%, 53%, 33%, respectively). Phrases such as, “it’s not something that’s very prevalent for me,” “I don’t think I would even be able to say what my identity is,” or, “I don’t understand where I’m really from” capture these feelings of uncertainty. In the Moderate Exposure focus group, participants further discussed struggles with identity and perception. This sentiment was expressed through statements such as the following, “I’m from the suburbs of [city], but I don’t stay around there. So, like, for me, when people identify me as suburban, that kind of triggers the identity of the legacy students of like the old institution that I went to. And I was like, no, that’s not me.” This response demonstrates that outer perception of identity has an effect on how students deal internally with these struggles.

***Campus experiences.*** Campus experiences emerged as the most salient theme throughout. This theme was comprised of three subthemes: Sense of Belonging, Sense of Exclusion, and Extracurriculars. Sense of Belonging, across all groups, was discussed heavily between P.R.I.D.E. Leaders and the NE focus groups, but less so within the ME focus group (36% PL, 51% NE, 12% ME). Participants expressed sentiments such as, “I feel a pretty strong feeling of inclusion but not because of the school, but because I know who my people are, and I surround myself with the people that I am comfortable with...” or, “I have really good friend

groups, so I never felt like I didn't belong because everyone's just so welcoming and loving."

These phrases demonstrate the importance of others playing a role in students feeling as though they belong, sentiments that other participants shared throughout the focus group sessions.

Participants expressed that the visibility of their ethnicity also affected their sense of belonging on campus. This sentiment can be seen through the following: "All of the experiences that I have or have had are affected by what I look like; the fact that I am visibly Black and also visibly Muslim. So that's why I'm very... That's why I'll always feel like I belong in my group." In this instance, both themes of Belonging and Hyperawareness have a role in this student's experiences on campus.

The second subtheme, Sense of Exclusion, captured negative campus experiences as both a sense of personal exclusion and a sense of group exclusion. P.R.I.D.E. Leaders demonstrated the fewest utterances (8%), whereas both Exposure groups discussed these experiences more frequently (38% NE, 50% ME). Statements such as, "is it really important for me to be in this environment because there's this sense of 'you don't belong here'..." or, "as a person of color, I can feel it too because if I don't have like, a nice looking backpack or like, if I'm not dressed a certain way, you can definitely see people looking at you wondering if you go here." The participants' specificity of not belonging reflect a general sentiment of exclusion on Trinity's campus. When looking at specific utterances for personal discrimination, the following statements demonstrate its prevalence on Trinity's campus: "they [white students] would avoid eye contact or never really talk to me," or, "I think that I do, on a daily [basis] get discriminated at Trinity." Participants also referenced anecdotes when discussing personal discrimination on campus; instances of waiting in line for fraternity parties and being turned away or simply walking and having a water bottle thrown at them reflect these sentiments. Participants'

utterances reflect feelings of group discrimination on campus as well. Statements such as, “I’ve heard of people ripping down our flyers, and it’s just the racist stuff that’s what makes me feel not welcomed at Trinity,” or, “two Black History Month’s ago we had like flyers and someone wrote ‘nigger’ on one of the flyers in the bathroom...” demonstrate instances of discrimination against their, or other, cultural groups.

Lastly, Extracurriculars was an interesting subtheme most commonly discussed by the No Exposure focus groups and P.R.I.D.E. leader focus groups, as compared to the Moderate Exposure focus group (48% NE, 45% PL, 7% ME). P.R.I.D.E. leader groups mainly discussed their experiences within P.R.I.D.E. and other organizations as spaces “to find a space to belong and to feel happy on this campus”. Phrases such as, “it was promoting diversity, so... Yeah, that kind of appealed to me and I decided to go for it,” exemplify reasons why students decide to join P.R.I.D.E. as an extracurricular activity. Participants within the No Exposure focus groups described other outside organizations as venues for personal expression, such as “I joined TCBWO [Trinity College Black Women’s Organization] and I thought it’d be great”, or, “I’m in the Quirks [acapella singing group]... they’re cool and we get along and I really enjoy that space a lot more than being in MoCA [Men of Color Alliance]”.

***Impact of P.R.I.D.E.*** In discussing the impact had by the P.R.I.D.E. program on participants, four subthemes emerged, namely: Facilitation of Inclusion, Bridging Gaps, Over-discussion (of race and ethnic identity), and Alienation. As expected, the No Exposure focus groups did not discuss P.R.I.D.E. facilitating their feelings of inclusion on campus; their focus was on other student organizations or activities that did so (see: Extracurriculars). Participants in the P.R.I.D.E. Leader focus groups discussed the program facilitating inclusion in far greater frequency than participants in the Moderate Exposure focus groups (72%, 28% respectively).

Phrases such as, “you start with a group of people that you can bond with, and it seemed so seamlessly easy to bond with,” as well as, “I’m glad that P.R.I.D.E. allowed me to kind of find my space and a circle of friends,” demonstrated how the program helped these students to find a space on campus where they feel a sense of belonging and connection.

In terms of Bridging Gaps, this too was not discussed at length within the No Exposure groups but came up more often in the other two groups (0% NE, 55% PL, 45% ME). Responses such as, “now I’ve been exposed to international students, whether European, African, Caribbean...” and, “the best that P.R.I.D.E. gave me was a network, and that network persists beyond the program.” Students noted, with high frequency, on the benefits of building a network between a range of students; being able to “experience different cultures” allowed them to ground themselves within the community.

In addition to these positive subthemes attributed to the P.R.I.D.E. program, students also noted the last two subthemes (Over-discussion and Alienation) as negatively impacting their adjustment to campus. Over-discussion was mainly discussed amongst the Moderate Exposure group (88%); one participant discussed, “after first semester it’s just exhausting because it’s like every conversation we have there’s race.” For other students, the “conversation is exhausting” and “some of them [P.R.I.D.E. leaders] put the lens on your experience because there’s so much about the race topic...” These conversations, seemingly, work against students using the program as an extension of their ethnic identities due to the frequency in which they occur. The subtheme of Alienation was also only discussed within the Moderate Exposure group. Participants stated, “I’m not enough of a minority to be in that group,” and, “I feel like it didn’t allow me to make a lot of friendships,” which allude to the premise of alienation when being moderately exposed to the program. Many of the consequences of the program were discussed within the Moderate

Exposure focus groups, which references the question of P.R.I.D.E. facilitating adjustment for students who aren't directly involved as leaders (84% ME, 13% PL, 3% NE).

## **Discussion**

### **Racial/Ethnic Identity Development**

One of the aims of this study was to compare the extent of racial/ethnic identity development of Trinity students to other students in PWIs. The results of the MEIM suggest that students at Trinity college have a strong and present sense of their ethnicity and the role it plays in their lives. For questions regarding ethnic identity and active searching for information about identity, students reported scores that demonstrate a solid understanding of their own identity. This result is similar to that of Phinney et al. (1992), where students of color generally reported higher ethnic identity scores; this indicates that even as first-year students, there is a generally positive awareness of ethnicity that these students bring to their campus experiences. Additionally, the MEIM explored feelings of belonging towards students' own ethnic identity, as well as feelings of affirmation from their ethnic community. The results from the current study demonstrate that students have a particularly high sense of belonging and affirmation towards their own ethnic group. These findings are also consistent with the research conducted by Phinney et al. (1992), where they found that ethnic students consistently expressed a strong sense of belonging within their study. The results of the current study are also comparable with research conducted by Pugh and Bry (2007). In their study, participants' mean score over 12-items was reported as 3.84 and suggest that there was a very good sense of ethnic identity and belonging amongst those students of color. Within the present study, the overall mean score of participant responses reflected a notable sense of ethnic identity, affirmation, and belonging. A limitation here, however, is the small sample size within my study; these participants may have

demonstrated a high sense of belonging and awareness of ethnic identity, but I believe that the average overall mean would look similar to the mean reported by Pugh and Bry (2007) if my sample included more students.

Their personal sense of identity as reported on the MEIM can also be related to the Expanded Nigrescence Model (Cross & Vandiver, 2001), which assumes that racial identity maps on to psychosocial wellness. The present study focuses on the “Immersion” or transition stage of identity development, and “Internalization” or comfort within own identity stage of development. The results from this study show that while there are students who struggle to connect to their ethnic backgrounds due to a number of factors, many students still believe that they understand who they are racially and ethnically. Participants noted the centrality of their ethnicity across all focus groups, stating that it was of the “utmost importance” and it is how students governed their daily interactions. Relating back to Cross and Vandiver’s (2001) model, it was hypothesized that a majority of students would fall within the “Immersion” stage; this, however, was not necessarily the case as most students fell within the “Internalization” stage. Participant responses during the focus group sessions demonstrated that most students, particularly P.R.I.D.E. Leaders, had a strong sense of ethnic/racial identity awareness. P.R.I.D.E. Leaders attributed their awareness to the number of conversations, modules, and training programs they participate in, which is also consistent with Harper & Quaye’s (2007) findings that ethnic student organizations offered opportunities to interact and communicate cross culturally. The ability to communicate and learn about other identities and cultures helped participants within this study understand their own position within the world as students of color.

Returning back to the “Immersion” stage of Cross & Vandiver’s (2001) theoretical model, participant responses did tend to reflect some uncertainty towards their sense of identity.



Participants within the Moderate Exposure focus groups most often posed responses of uncertainty towards their identity and their understanding of their ethnicities/race. When asked “How important is your ethnicity to your identity” students, particularly international students related their ethnic uncertainty to being born in a country different from their family’s ethnicity and being enculturated in that new country. Along similar lines, domestic students related their uncertainty to being bi-racial, White-passing, and living in a mostly White neighborhood, or simply growing up without a strong emphasis on race and ethnic culture within their household. While these are challenges to students’ understanding of their identities, describing these students as being a part of the “Immersion” stage would be mis-labelling; the conceptualization of the participants, through their transition, of having extreme anti-White sentiments and throwing themselves into their own ethnic culture is an outdated assumption. The “transition” towards a better understanding of their racial/ethnic identity, for these students, does not come at the cost of rejection of “White” and staying within their own culture, but through a gradual understanding of their own identities from interactions with other students of all demographics.

Overall, these results suggest that students of color in this sample likely arrived at college with a relatively strong understanding of their ethnic identity, which is important for interpreting their college experiences and involvement in organizations on campus.

### **Campus Experiences**

The overall campus experiences discussed by participants respond to the question of whether Trinity students of color experience both a meshing of campus culture with home culture and a sense of belonging on campus. The degree to which these two experiences relate derives from the Theory of Student Departure (Kuh & Love, 2000), and participant responses reflected an overall sentiment of a general disconnect between the two cultures for students within the No

Exposure focus groups. Statements such as, “I live in a place where everyone’s black, it’s not that special. Coming here, you’re reminded that you’re black, or you’re this, or that,” call to question their ability to comfortably blend both the home and campus culture due to a heightened focus on physical differences within the new campus culture. Additionally, “I went to a high school that had no white people,” also reflects a reality for some students that attend Trinity. For these students, being in an environment where the college culture and values are extremely distinct from what they’ve known previously can be mentally taxing. Students such as these have to maneuver a new system and new rules almost instantaneously, which would make it difficult to make connections with new peers and branch out early on.

The interview question of “How often do you think of yourself as a Trinity student?” had the intention of exploring how well students felt connected to the school, as well in which contexts they felt most connected to the school, if any. One response in particular was extremely salient throughout all focus groups: when discussing the different environments where students felt most connected to being a “Trinity student”, a distinction between the greater Hartford area and Trinity’s physical campus emerged. The idea of being in the surrounding Hartford neighborhood, but not being able to proclaim that you are a Trinity student because of perceived stereotyping against Trinity students, creates a disconnect between feeling comfortable claiming that identity. Along the same lines, the participant referenced the same concept but in reverse; when on Trinity’s campus, “as a person of color, if I don’t have like, a nice looking backpack, or like if I’m not dressed a certain way, you can definitely see people look at you wondering if you go here, and I’ve heard stories of campo asking you to check your ID.” This response in particular demonstrates that even on campus, it becomes difficult to blend both home culture and Trinity culture when the environment does not feel welcoming. The subtheme of

Hyperawareness also demonstrates how aspects of racial and ethnic identity have a strong influence on perceptions of campus culture and affect student's experiences here. It can be seen through the previous quote, "you're reminded that you're black," as well as, "...but in like America...it like kind of reminds you all the time what ethnicity you are." Students who feel as though their identity is always called into question expressed that they were most dissatisfied with the campus culture and their ability to blend with other, non-POC Trinity students. These results are similar to the findings put forth by Harper & Quaye (2007), where participants indicated that their experiences on campus provided a heightened awareness of discrimination and social injustice at their university, a sentiment well expressed by participants in this study.

These responses do, however, reflect that students will find ways to feel comfortable on campus and actively search for those spaces that allow them to express themselves according to whatever identity they prefer. Participants within all groups expressed the subtheme of Belonging to Trinity's campus as important to their student development; regardless of instances of discrimination or prejudice on campus, students disparately discussed finding ways to feel comfortable on campus and feel as though they belong. Statements such as, "I have a really good group of friends that are welcoming and loving," or experiences in clubs and organizations such as Rugby (club), Trinity College Black Women's Organization (TCBWO), or the Quirks (Acapella group) demonstrate spaces where certain non-P.R.I.D.E.-Leader participants felt a sense of belonging here at Trinity. The current participants, along with participants in Flowers' (2004) research study, acknowledge that their experiences in outside organizations allowed for their continued attendance within those institutions. Many P.R.I.D.E. Leaders discussed the P.R.I.D.E. program itself as having a major impact on student's sense of belonging on campus, but this will be examined later in the discussion. Through the subtheme of Belonging, this

additional theme of Extracurriculars arose within mainly the No Exposure focus groups. This finding demonstrates that, while students may experience ethnic/racial hardships on campus, they will find spaces that are not necessarily ethnically driven or culturally specific. Participants often discussed their involvement within organizations that are majority White and found that their race or ethnicity was less of a salient piece of their identity within these spaces. The ability to communicate with peers external to their ethnic groups, as in their own development of cross-cultural communication skills, allowed these students to feel comfortable in a space where they would have otherwise had a harder time adjusting (Museus, 2007). In many ways, student experiences at Trinity can be related to the Theory of Student Departure (Tinto, 1993); students who feel as though they are unable to relate their home (pre-) culture with the campus culture had a much harder time adjusting and finding spaces that made them feel as though they belonged on campus.. These responses demonstrate that students who were able to find a club or organization during their first year found more experiences to branch out and participate comfortably within the college environment.

### **Impact of P.R.I.D.E.**

The last major aim of this study was to determine the extent to which the P.R.I.D.E. program fostered racial/ethnic identity development, a sense of belonging, and a marrying of home culture and Trinity culture.

***P.R.I.D.E. leaders.*** The P.R.I.D.E. program was discussed as one of the most influential experiences for these student leaders in terms of their exposure to a PWI and the ways in which they developed their identities in college. For many of the student leaders, they discussed P.R.I.D.E. as being the first point of contact for experiencing other races and ethnicities, as well as the first open opportunity (for some) to actively explore their race/ethnicity. This statement in

particular, “It gave me the platform to learn more about my race and my ethnicity and my history, and to be better connected to the culture and what it means to be a part of that culture,” demonstrates that the program was seen as a tool to promote this form of exploratory learning of oneself. Additionally, a participant stated “It placed me in a position where I had to look into my own heart and mind and look at things from that [international student] perspective because I wanted to bring it to the table and present it for everyone else. So, I think in terms of connecting myself to my own identity, I’m kind of exploring that more. P.R.I.D.E. did play a huge part in that...” Similar to findings from Garcia, Huerta, Ramirez, & Patrón (2017), where they found ethnic student organizations promoted leadership development through allowing students to comfortably explore their identities, the P.R.I.D.E. program too places a strong emphasis on student’s abilities to learn about themselves in a safe environment. Similar to other bodies of research as well, the P.R.I.D.E. program also places a strong emphasis on developing leadership skills, which has shown to be a common practice among ethnic student organizations (Garcia, Huerta, Ramirez & Patron, 2017; Guiffrida; 2003; Linley, 2018).

P.R.I.D.E. Leaders overwhelmingly discussed the program as a contributing factor to their sense of belonging on campus; participants commonly referred to Welcome Weekend (as a P.R.I.D.E. student) or their participation in the organization as a Leader as a reason why they felt comfortable on campus. For these participants, P.R.I.D.E. has been stated to provide a strong network, create the space for having tough conversations, and provided a lasting friend group for almost all PL participants. One participant stated, “I think it was less so the conversations we would have... but it was more the activities we were doing where I was like I’m having fun here, I’m not having to make my own fun, I’m having fun because of an extension of something going on at Trinity.” These statements reflect that the P.R.I.D.E. program allowed these students to feel

comfortable and belong on campus because they were able to participate in an event as an ethnic student and just have fun. Along the lines of the research conducted by Museus (2008), ethnic student organizations, and P.R.I.D.E. in particular, positively impacted students of color by creating venues for cultural familiarity and validation. In these spaces, students are able to express themselves freely and simply enjoy themselves without fear of judgment or feeling as though they do not belong within the space.

For P.R.I.D.E. Leaders, the role of ethnic student organizations serves to create these spaces of validation and learning for students who may not feel comfortable within the larger institutional community. In terms of marrying home culture with Trinity's culture, the P.R.I.D.E. program has demonstrated the ability to allow students to create a home, family even, within Trinity's gates. The Theory of Student Departure, within the context of student leadership on campus, does not account for the creation of a new "home", and simply refers to the student's actual residence; this, however, should be considered as a strong limitation of the theory. Throughout the focus groups with P.R.I.D.E. leaders, there was an overwhelming agreement that, even if students did not feel like their home culture meshed with Trinity's, they were able to blend into this exploratory family created by a diverse group of people. The program works to develop a strong sense of communication and familiarity within the P.R.I.D.E. Leader group, so much so that students tend not to worry about how their home culture blends with the larger culture, but about how they are able to utilize their differences to create a more inclusive institutional culture.

*Non-leaders' experiences.* Students who were not involved with P.R.I.D.E. as leaders had slightly different experiences in terms of identity development, a sense of belonging, and the facilitation of adjustment on campus. For many, if not all participants within the No Exposure

and Moderate Exposure focus groups, they did not really utilize the P.R.I.D.E. program as a way to understand or develop their identities. These participants mostly discussed struggles with understanding who they were as they arrived in college, while others within both exposure groups described already having a sense of who they were before arriving into college. For the students that already had a strong sense of identity, this tended to be a result of parents with a strong ethnic P.R.I.D.E. or living in communities of similar ethnicities. For students who had challenges with their racial/ethnic identity, as stated previously, these tended to be causes of racial ambiguity or ethnic displacement. In terms of an organization's role in facilitating an understanding of racial/ethnic identity, it is clear that for P.R.I.D.E. Leaders, aspects of the program assist students in better understanding themselves; for students not involved or moderately involved, the program's outreach does not seem to affect identity development in the same manner.

The role of the P.R.I.D.E. program appears to be better suited for providing a better campus experience for students of color at Trinity; students who were involved with the program discussed the subthemes of Facilitation of Inclusion and Bridging Gaps as positive outcomes. Students that were in the Moderate Exposure focus group mainly discussed the opportunity for creating a space and providing them with a close circle of friends. For these students, feeling included within a small, consistent network of friends has been beneficial to their wellbeing at Trinity and has been essential to their growth as a student. As it seems, for many of the students, the P.R.I.D.E. program is useful when it comes to allowing students to branch out and make connections with not only first-years, but students of all class years. Consistent with previous research, the P.R.I.D.E. program has also created a space for cross-cultural communication; this

skill has helped participants feel included within other organizations and spaces, simply by being able to have certain conversations and discussing tough topics (Harper & Quaye, 2007).

In terms of Bridging Gaps, participants discussed the ability to have a network itself as being one of the major contributions from the P.R.I.D.E. program. Many within the Moderate Exposure group believed that, without the program, their experience at Trinity would have been completely changed. Looking back to whether the program has facilitated a sense of belonging students felt that the ability to have a strong support system and resource facilitated their growth and adjustment to campus. The program, according to participants, has a persisting network that could be called upon for any reason which allowed students to feel comfortable as they learned to live in a new environment.

While the program does have many beneficial aspects, participants within the Moderate Exposure groups named two aspects of the program that did not facilitate their sense of belonging to campus, namely, Over Discussion of Race and Ethnic Identity and Alienation. In terms of over discussion, participants described a strong limitation within the P.R.I.D.E. program itself. Participants agreed that many of the events and discussions held a heightened focus on race or social structure within every conversation. The goals of the P.R.I.D.E. program are to create inclusivity and awareness across campus, but it appears as though the message is being stated all too frequently. Participants within this group agreed that older P.R.I.D.E. Leaders, especially when discussing race and ethnicity challenges within Trinity's campus, altered student's views about the realities of campus. One participant in particular discussed an experience of this nature; hearing stories about fraternity parties and negative experiences on campus led to the expectation of these negative experiences happening all of the time. While this doesn't foster a sense of belonging within students, it does demonstrate a need to check in with



P.R.I.D.E. Leader's sense of belonging on campus. Alienation, too, was discussed as a negative subtheme for P.R.I.D.E.'s impact on students. Mainly the conversation focused on how the program could have a tendency to alienate students from other groups, activities, or students. For these participants, it was important that they did make such a close circle of friends, but they felt unable to meet new people because the program is highly all encompassing. While this was a smaller subtheme, it still demonstrates that the program has a potential to work on balancing student expectations during the first few weeks of school.

In terms of participants within the No Exposure focus groups, the P.R.I.D.E. program did not really have an impact on their daily growth and understanding of their identities, or their sense of belonging at Trinity. These participants did, however, make distinct contributions to understanding how students of color facilitate adjustment on campus without much assistance from P.R.I.D.E.. As stated previously, organizations that are both ethnically focused and non-ethnically focused provided spaces of comfort and inclusion for these students. Additionally, their contributions were best noted in their ability to provide suggestions for the P.R.I.D.E. program going forward, mainly in terms of promoting awareness and program efficacy which will be discussed in Implications.

### **Limitations**

Limitations to this study include a few important notes. Primarily, this study was based at Trinity College, a small liberal arts institution in New England, and focused on a specific organization with a model/approach not readily seen at every institution. The findings within this study are highly specific to the college and look at ethnic student development solely through the lens of the P.R.I.D.E. program. While other ethnic student organizations are mentioned within the

study, there was not a strong focus on the benefits of those programs specifically towards racial/ethnic identity development, a sense of belonging, or facilitation of adjustment.

Additionally, the sample size consisted of 18 students, and not all focus groups were of equal size. The study may have been more representative of students' ethnic attitudes across campus for both the MEIM and the focus group discussions had there been an equal number of students within the two exposure groups. While the responses for the focus groups were insightful and rich, it cannot be said that the opinions of these students represent all student of color across campus. Due to the nature of this study, students may have felt uncomfortable sharing details due to their position on campus or general discomfort with sharing personal information to a group. The study also did not have an equal distribution of students across class year. The majority of participants were first-years, which makes it equally difficult to generalize sentiments of discomfort or belonging to all students.

Lastly, the presence of mostly freshman may have altered the frequencies of a sense of belonging or exclusion to the campus. I anticipate that students' responses to questions of belonging would have been more detailed if there were more seniors and juniors.

### **Future Research**

In furthering research about the P.R.I.D.E. program, there are many suggestions that would better understand the mechanisms of the program and the extent to which students fully utilize P.R.I.D.E. First, had more students participated, it may have better reflected the attitudes about inclusivity and identity development on campus. Additionally, future research could focus on the *specific skills* learned by each P.R.I.D.E. leader, and how they apply these skills to their position and campus life. This would potentially explain why certain students of color rarely interact with P.R.I.D.E. program and how the Leaders can better utilize their time and efforts.

Relatedly, subthemes of challenges to ethnicity, alienation from Trinity, and centrality of ethnicity could hopefully inspire future research on student attitudes before arriving at Trinity and afterwards. These subthemes allow for research to explore how the college can better understand and help all students adjust during their first year at Trinity, as well as how their identity can be strongly connected to their psychosocial wellbeing, and how students change during their time at Trinity.

### **Implications**

The implications of this study mainly lie in the directions that the P.R.I.D.E. program could take from here. During each focus group, participants were asked, “What suggestions would you make to the P.R.I.D.E. program to ensure that it is accessible and effective for students?” This question was asked because, while the program has been largely successful at providing thorough assistance for P.R.I.D.E. Leaders, it appears as though there is still a disconnect between a majority of first-year students. The following are a few suggestions posed by students that would potentially assist in the program’s development and growth.

- “Address the middle perspective.” There tends to be a distinct perspective that students believe can be detrimental to the program’s efficacy. This participant believed that if there were more opportunities for voices to be heard without judgement, students would feel more comfortable.
- “Do you have to be of color to be in P.R.I.D.E.?” While this was not necessarily a suggestion, this statement that resonated with other students in the group demonstrates that there is a strong perception that you have to be a student of color to participate as a P.R.I.D.E. leader. Getting rid of this stigma by trying to attract other non-POC students would add to the inclusive mission set forth by the program.
- “Doing more events that would attract a wide-variety of people.” As it is currently done, students create events based on their interests or the interests of their dorm. As it stands, many P.R.I.D.E. Leaders find that it is difficult to attract a large audience to certain

events. It was suggested that maybe these events do not actually cater to a larger group of students; events such as Japanese animation nights or small potlucks provide opportunities for affordable and accessible events with educational value.

- “Wednesday meeting open-houses.” For many of the students within the No Exposure focus groups, they did not really have a strong grasp on the P.R.I.D.E. program and what it does. One participant suggested that the program hold open-house meetings a few weeks before the P.R.I.D.E. Leader application opens; this would allow the students to get a sense of the program’s dynamics and the work that really goes into being a student leader.

With these suggestions, it is important to understand that the P.R.I.D.E. program is a dynamic process which always undergoes a form of change as a result of the previous P.R.I.D.E. years.

The program can be relatively versatile and allow for a range of possibilities to occur that would benefit students of color, both international and domestic. This study should be beneficial to the P.R.I.D.E. program in the future as it provides insight into the lives of students of color on campus, as well as the experiences they face when they are here.

In conclusion, many students discussed challenges with the current campus culture that would account for difficulties bringing their home culture to Trinity, however, students also found that there were many outlets and resources that to help them feel as though they belonged on campus. It also appears as though the P.R.I.D.E. program is one that promotes a sense of belonging and identity awareness for mainly students who become leaders. For participants in the Moderate Exposure focus groups, their affiliation with the program helped their adjustment and helped students build an early network of peers; other organizations that were not exclusively ethnically oriented, however, also posed as great resources for these students (i.e. being an RA, joining the Quirks, etc.). For students who had no affiliation to the program, they discussed slightly more challenges to identity than other groups, but this could be a result of less

time spent at Trinity and younger ages. While the program is beneficial, there does seem to be room for improvement and growth in terms of student outreach.

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Table 1

*Phases of Thematic Analysis*

Phase	Process
1. Familiarizing yourself with data;	Transcribing data, reading/re-reading data, taking notes on initial ideas and patterns.
2. Generating initial codes;	Coding interesting information within data in a systematic manner across all focus groups.
3. Searching for themes;	Collecting patterns within codes into potential themes, gathering of all data relevant to each potential theme.
4. Reviewing themes;	Checking if themes work in relation to codes and in relation to entire dataset.
5. Defining and naming themes;	Analysis of each theme to refine and review the specifics. Generating clear names and definitions for each theme.
6. Producing report;	Generating report of selected extracts, themes, and examples. Relate back to overarching research questions and literature.

*Note:* Reproduced from Clarke, Braun, and Hayfield, 2015.

Table 2

*Means and Standard Deviations for MEIM Questions*

Question	Mean	Standard Deviation
1. Spent time to learn more about ethnicity	4.11	.83
2. Active in organizations with members of my own ethnic group	3.28	1.53
3. Clear sense of ethnic background	3.89	.96
4. Think about how life will be affected due to membership in ethnic group	3.94	1.06
5. Happy member of group	4.94	.24
6. Strong sense of belonging to ethnic group	4.00	1.19
7. I understand what e.g. membership means to me	4.17	.62
8. In order to learn about ethnic group, I've talked to other people about my ethnic group	3.56	1.42
9. Have P.R.I.D.E. in ethnic group	4.83	.38
10. Participate in cultural practices	4.28	.83
11. Strong attachment to my ethnic group	4.22	.65
12. Feel good about cultural/ethnic background	4.78	.55

Table 3

*Overall Themes and Subthemes*

Theme	Subtheme	Sample Quote
Racial/Ethnic Identity	Hyperawareness of Identity	“But thinking about myself everyday as a black student, and as a black man and as a future member of the workforce...”
	Challenges with Identity	“I don’t even think I would be able to say what my ethnicity is... I try and develop my identity outside of ethnicity because I feel like being confused culturally makes it hard to base it off my nationality...”
	Centrality of Identity (importance)	“My ethnicity is super important, it’s probably of the utmost importance to me. I P.R.I.D.E. myself on it and that’s how I identify with other people, how I build my social circles...”
Campus Experiences Associated with Racial/Ethnic Identity	Sense of Belonging	“I feel like I belong at Trinity”, or “I have a really good friend group, so I never really felt like I didn’t belong because everyone’s so welcoming and loving.”
	Alienation/exclusion from Trinity	“When I came here, I was like, oh no, I am definitely, definitely minority and I have to really find my place here because I am black, I’m African and I’m not really a citizen of this country.”
	Extracurriculars	“I’m a part of the Quirks”

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Impact of P.R.I.D.E.	Facilitation of Inclusion	“I’m glad that P.R.I.D.E. allowed me to kind of find my space and a circle of friends...”
	Bridging Gaps	“The best P.R.I.D.E. gave me was a network, and that network persists beyond the program.”
	Over discussion of race/ethnic identity	“It’s like every conversation we have, there’s race. It has to be brought up. Yes, we sit together in Mather.... So, it’s like 90% of the time we’re there and it’s some issue about race or something like that and I get it.... But sometimes the conversation gets too exhausting...”
	Alienation	“I feel like it didn’t allow me to make a lot of friends”

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Table 4

*Overall Frequencies and Percentages for Themes from Focus Groups*

Theme	Frequency	Percentage
Racial/Ethnic Identity	168	30%
Campus Experiences Associated with Racial/Ethnic Identity	242	43%
Impact of P.R.I.D.E.	150	27%

Table 5

*Total Frequency of Racial/Ethnic Identity Subthemes from Focus Groups*

Racial/Ethnic Identity	Frequency	Percentage
Hyperawareness of Identity	48	29%
Struggles with Identity	36	21%
Centrality of Identity	48	29%

Table 6

*Total Frequency of Campus Experiences Subthemes from Focus Groups*

Campus Experiences	Frequency	Percentage
Sense of Belonging	33	14%
Sense of Exclusion/Alienation from Trinity	63	26%
Extracurricular Activities	39	16%

Table 7

*Total Frequency of Impact of P.R.I.D.E. Subthemes from Focus Groups*

Impact of P.R.I.D.E.	Frequency	Percentage
Facilitation of Inclusion	32	21%
Bridging Gaps	12	8%
Over discussion of Race/Ethnicity	22	15%
Alienation	22	15%



Appendix A

# Research Participation Opportunity

**I invite you to participate in a 1-hour conversation about race and ethnicity at Trinity College:**

I am interested in understanding the role the P.R.I.D.E. program plays, if any, in students understanding their own identity in addition to being students at a rigorous institution.

If you are interested in discussing your experience here with the P.R.I.D.E. program in a confidential focus group, please consider participating. **Students with no experience with the program are highly encouraged to participate!**

In order to participate, you must complete a 2-3-minute survey. *\*Please note that not all students who complete the survey will be contacted for participation in focus groups.*



[https://trinity.az1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV\\_1AgFTmpMyg89S4Z](https://trinity.az1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_1AgFTmpMyg89S4Z)

Contact: Joanne Chambers '19, [joanne.chambers@trincoll.edu](mailto:joanne.chambers@trincoll.edu)  
Thesis Advisor: Professor Holt, [laura.holt@trincoll.edu](mailto:laura.holt@trincoll.edu)

## Appendix B

CONSENT FOR PARTICIPATION IN A RESEARCH PROJECT  
TRINITY COLLEGE

Study Title: Racial and Ethnic Identity Expression at Trinity College: An Examination of P.R.I.D.E.

Principal Investigator: Joanne Chambers

Invitation to Participate and Description of Project

You are invited to participate in a research study designed to understand if the P.R.I.D.E. program has facilitated an understanding towards your race/ethnicity, as well as other themes regarding the efficacy of the program. You are being asked to participate because of your previously expressed interest in the study, and because you are a student attending Trinity College. I will be conducting several recorded focus groups, with a total of 15-20 student participants. These will consist of students with little/no exposure to the program, moderate exposure, and P.R.I.D.E. Leaders. It's critical to note that in signing this form you are allowing these sessions to be tape-recorded.

In order to decide whether or not you wish to be a part of this research study, you should know enough about its risks and benefits to make an informed judgment. This consent form gives you detailed information about the research study, which a member of the research team will discuss with you. This discussion should go over all aspects of this research: its purpose, the procedures that will be performed, any risks of the procedures, and possible benefits. Once you understand the study, you will be asked if you wish to participate; if so, you will be asked to sign this form.

Description of Procedures

If you agree to participate in this study, you will be asked to complete a questionnaire (MEIM), which should take no more than 5 minutes to complete. This will be followed by focus group of 2-3 participants that should last no longer than two hours.

The focus group will meet at a selected time that will accommodate all its members. Both will follow structured and scripted questions designed to ascertain the presence or absence of various attitudes surrounding race, ethnicity, and the P.R.I.D.E. program. The questionnaire will ask about your background (e.g., gender), attitudes towards ethnicity/race, and your attitudes about diversity at Trinity College.

Risks and Inconveniences

Risks, discomforts and inconveniences associated with this study are limited to slight emotional and/or social discomfort. Slight emotional or social discomfort can arise from answering broad questions in the interview or focus groups, and more personal questions in the questionnaire. At no point during the interview or focus group should you feel compelled to disclose any personal circumstances. I do, however, ask that you be willing to disclose information you believe would clarify the dynamics of race and ethnicity on campus; the information will be kept entirely confidential, in that your questionnaire will be identified by a code rather than your actual name.

Benefits

The issues I will examine have the potential to contribute to the understanding of contemporary attitudes on both P.R.I.D.E. and diversity on campus. I expect this research will

inform future iterations of the P.R.I.D.E. program in both practice and goals. I believe that the information gained from this research has the potential to shape Trinity College by shedding light on contemporary attitudes on the ability to express racial/ethnic identity as a student. In the future, research findings from this study may be further explored on Trinity's campus in an effort to further align P.R.I.D.E.'s goals with practice.

By participating, you will be eligible to receive research participation credit (or extra credit), depending on whether this research activity has been formally approved by your instructor. Focus group participants will be provided with food during the group. Course-related research credit (or extra credit) will not be offered unless you participate in both components of the study.

#### Confidentiality

Any identifiable information that is obtained in connection with this study will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission. If you are participating in a focus group, by signing this contract you are also agreeing not to disclose any information regarding other's responses in the group discussions. Sharing information from the focus groups would be a violation of this contract. If you decide to take part in this research study, you will be required to give us information about your racial/ethnic attitudes solely in the beginning questionnaire, which will remain entirely confidential through codes of identification.

If you are going to discuss your participation in this study with friends or members of your family, you should ensure that they keep it confidential. This means that you, your friends, and your family members must actively protect your own privacy.

Confidentiality of your responses may be compromised only if you provide information indicating that you are immediately dangerous to yourself or others. If you indicate any intention of harming yourself or others, I will have to report these findings to an outside health professional.

Right to privacy for participation in this research will be protected through anonymous coding and proper storage of all data, including data encryption and password protection. At the start of the project, a list that matches participants' names with identification codes will be prepared by the investigator and will be kept in a computer file that can only be opened with a password, accessible only by Joanne Chambers and Laura Holt. This list is necessary only in order to assign identification codes to data that derive from other sources (such as connecting the questionnaire and focus group/interview responses), and will be destroyed (along with the recorded sessions) following the conclusion of data collection and analysis in this study.

When the results of the research are reported, no information will be included that would reveal your identity.

#### Voluntary Participation and Withdrawal

You do not give up any legal rights by signing this form.

Your participation in research is voluntary. You may refuse to participate or withdraw from participation at any time without jeopardy to future medical care, employment, student status, or other entitlements. However, previously obtained data will be included in the final data analysis. The researcher may withdraw you from the research at his/her professional discretion.

#### Questions

If at any time you have any questions regarding the research or your participation, you can contact either one of the main researchers, who will answer your questions. The researcher's contact information is: Joanne Chambers, [joanne.chambers@trincoll.edu](mailto:joanne.chambers@trincoll.edu) (516)-

220-2073. I have used some technical terms in this form. Please feel free to ask about anything you don't understand and to consider this research and the consent form carefully – as long as you feel is necessary – before you make a decision.

Authorization

By placing an 'X' in the box below you indicate that you have read and understand the above Consent Form, that its general purposes, the particulars of involvement and possible hazards and inconveniences have been explained to your satisfaction, and that you have decided to participate in the project.

Your placing an 'X' in this box, along with writing your full name and date in the spaces provided, represents your informed consent to participate in this data collection.

By placing an X in this box: [ ] and printing my name and date below I consent to participate in this data collection.

Name of Participant(print): \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Participant Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Research Investigator

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

## Appendix C

## FOCUS GROUP SCRIPT

No Exposure

## Measures of Ethnic Identity

- How important is your ethnicity to your identity?
- How close do you feel to other members of your ethnic group?
- How often do you think of yourself as a member of your ethnic group?

## University Identification

- How often do you think of yourself as a Trinity student?
- To what degree do you experience a sense of belonging or a sense of exclusion at Trinity?

## Perceived Group Conflict

- How well do these statements relate to your experience at Trinity College? Please elaborate if possible
  - I feel discriminated against because of my ethnicity.
  - Other members of my ethnic group experience discrimination on campus.

## Kuh and Love (2000)

- What types of organizations are you involved in?
- Why mainstream student organizations over ethnic student organizations (if more people resonate with MSO, opposite if more resonate with ESO)
- What has helped you bridge the gap between your home culture and Trinity's culture?
- What are some campus a

Do you have any suggestions that would make the P.R.I.D.E. program more accessible for students?

Moderate Exposure

## Measures of Ethnic Identity

- How important is your ethnicity to your identity?
- How close do you feel to other members of your ethnic group?
  - To what extent do you believe that P.R.I.D.E. has facilitated your feelings of closeness?
- How often do you think of yourself as a member of your ethnic group?

## University Identification

- How often do you think of yourself as a Trinity student?
- To what degree do you experience a sense of belonging or a sense of exclusion at Trinity?
- How has P.R.I.D.E. played a role in this sense of belonging/exclusion?

## Perceived Group Conflict

- How well do these statements relate to your experience at Trinity College? Please elaborate if possible
  - I feel discriminated against because of my ethnicity.
  - Other members of my ethnic group experience discrimination on campus.

## Kuh and Love (2000)

- How did you get involved in ethnic student organizations?
- Why did you get involved in ESO instead of mainstream SO's?
- What, if any, role did P.R.I.D.E. play in helping you bridge the gap between your home culture and Trinity's culture?
  - [Can you provide a program/example?](#)
- What role did P.R.I.D.E. play in your adjustment to Trinity?

Do you have any suggestions that would make the P.R.I.D.E. program more accessible for students?

### P.R.I.D.E. Leaders

#### Measures of Ethnic Identity

- How important is your ethnicity to your identity?
- How close do you feel to other members of your ethnic group?
  - [To what extent do you believe that P.R.I.D.E. has facilitated your feelings of closeness?](#)
- How often do you think of yourself as a member of your ethnic group?

#### University Identification

- How often do you think of yourself as a Trinity student?
- To what degree do you experience a sense of belonging or a sense of exclusion at Trinity?
  - [Did P.R.I.D.E. have a role in this sense of belonging/exclusion?](#)

#### Perceived Group Conflict

- How well do these statements relate to your experience at Trinity College? Please elaborate if possible
  - I feel discriminated against because of my ethnicity.
  - Other members of my ethnic group experience discrimination on campus.

#### Kuh and Love (2000)

- How did you get involved in ethnic student organizations?
- Why did you get involved in ESO instead of mainstream SO's?
- What, if any, role did P.R.I.D.E. play in helping you bridge the gap between your home culture and Trinity's culture?
  - [Can you provide a program/example?](#)
- What role did P.R.I.D.E. play in your adjustment to Trinity?

#### Leader Specific

- Why did you become a student leader? Why P.R.I.D.E.?
- Was there anything to gain from becoming this specific leader?
- Tell me some things you expected to gain from becoming a PL
- Do you believe your engagement on campus reflects who you are as an ethnic student at Trinity?

Do you have any suggestions that would make the P.R.I.D.E. program more accessible for students?

## Appendix D

*MEIM-Expanded*

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Items
1. I have spent time trying to find out more about my (race) (religion) (nationality), such as its history, traditions, and customs.
2. I am active in organizations or social groups that include mostly members of my own (race) (religion) (nationality).
3. I have a clear sense of my (race) (religion) (nationality) and what it means for me.
4. I think a lot about how my life will be affected by my (race) (religion) (nationality)
5. I am happy that I am a member of the (race) (religion) (nationality) I belong to.
6. I have a strong sense of belonging to my own (race) (religion) (nationality).
7. I understand pretty well what my (race) (religion) (nationality) means to me.
8. In order to learn more about my race, I have often talked to other people about my (race) (religion) (nationality).
9. I have a lot of P.R.I.D.E. in my (race) (religion) (nationality).
10. I participate in cultural practices of my own (race) (religion) (nationality), such as special food, music, or customs.
11. I feel a strong attachment towards my own (race) (religion) (nationality).
12. I feel good about my (race) (religion) (nationality).

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*Note:* Reproduced from Gaines, Jr., Marelich, Bunce, Robertson, & Wright, 2013.