

**DARTMOUTH COLLEGE
SOCY 91 CULMINATING PROJECT**

BLACK BRILLIANCE *INTERRUPTED*

PROPOSING A MENTORSHIP PROGRAM TO PROMOTE
BELONGING FOR BLACK STUDENTS AT DARTMOUTH



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The experience as a Black student at Dartmouth can be difficult navigating a predominantly white institution of affluence. While programs exist to support Black student at Dartmouth, there is a lack of mentorship available for Black students. Consequently, the present study analyzes the role of mentorship and student involvement in the relationship between ethnic identity and belonging.

The purpose of this study is to answer two primary research questions: (1) What is the relationship between ethnic identity and belonging? (2) How do mentorship and student involvement impact the relationship between ethnic identity and belonging?



KEY FINDINGS

Through our survey and focus groups, we find the following:

- There are no significant differences in feelings of institutional Belonging across ethnic identity.
- When it comes to ethnic identity and community belonging, Afro-Caribbean students feel the strongest connection to the boarder black community.
- There are ethnic differences in mentorship — both having a mentor and mentorship success.
- Mentorship may improve institutional belonging and community belonging, but race plays a significant role in this relationship. The role of mentorship also helps us understand the ethnic differences in institutional belonging.



KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on our findings, we recommend the creation of a **peer mentorship program** for Black students at Dartmouth.

Specifically, we recommend three features for the program:

1. Black peer mentors: we recommend pairing Black students with Black peer mentors.
2. Gender identity: we recommend pairing mentor-mentee pairs of the same gender.
3. One-on-one: we recommend pairing mentors with mentees on a one-on-one basis.

INTRODUCTION

Motivation for Study and Significance

This study was inspired by the reflections of Black, upperclassman students at Dartmouth reflecting on the secluded nature of Dartmouth's campus in addition to their experiences of being Black on a majority white, affluent campus. From this reflection with other Black Dartmouth students, Jelinda Metelus — one co-author of this report — proposed the present study to understand feelings of belonging among Black students with respect to their ethnic identity.

Our Variables

Our independent variable in this study is ethnic identity, which we operationalized and manually categorized as the intersection of race, ethnicity, and nationality. Our dependent variable is belonging, including institutional and community belonging. Institutional belonging refers to feelings of belonging to Dartmouth as a larger institution. Community belonging refers to feelings of belonging to the Black student population at Dartmouth. With the relationship between ethnic identity and belonging, we are also interested in the impact of the variables of student involvement and mentorship. Student involvement is participation in ethnic identity-based student organizations. Mentorship is defined in two ways: mentorship rate (the percent of students in an active mentorship relationship) and mentorship success (rating success of their mentorship relationship).

Previous Research

Upon researching this topic, we discovered that our focal relationship between ethnic identity and belonging is not widely researched. The extant literature suggests that white students at predominantly white institutions are more likely to feel like they belong than non-white students. However, there is no research on belonging (institutional or community) to an institution like Dartmouth based on ethnic identity.

RESEARCH FRAMEWORK

Research Questions:

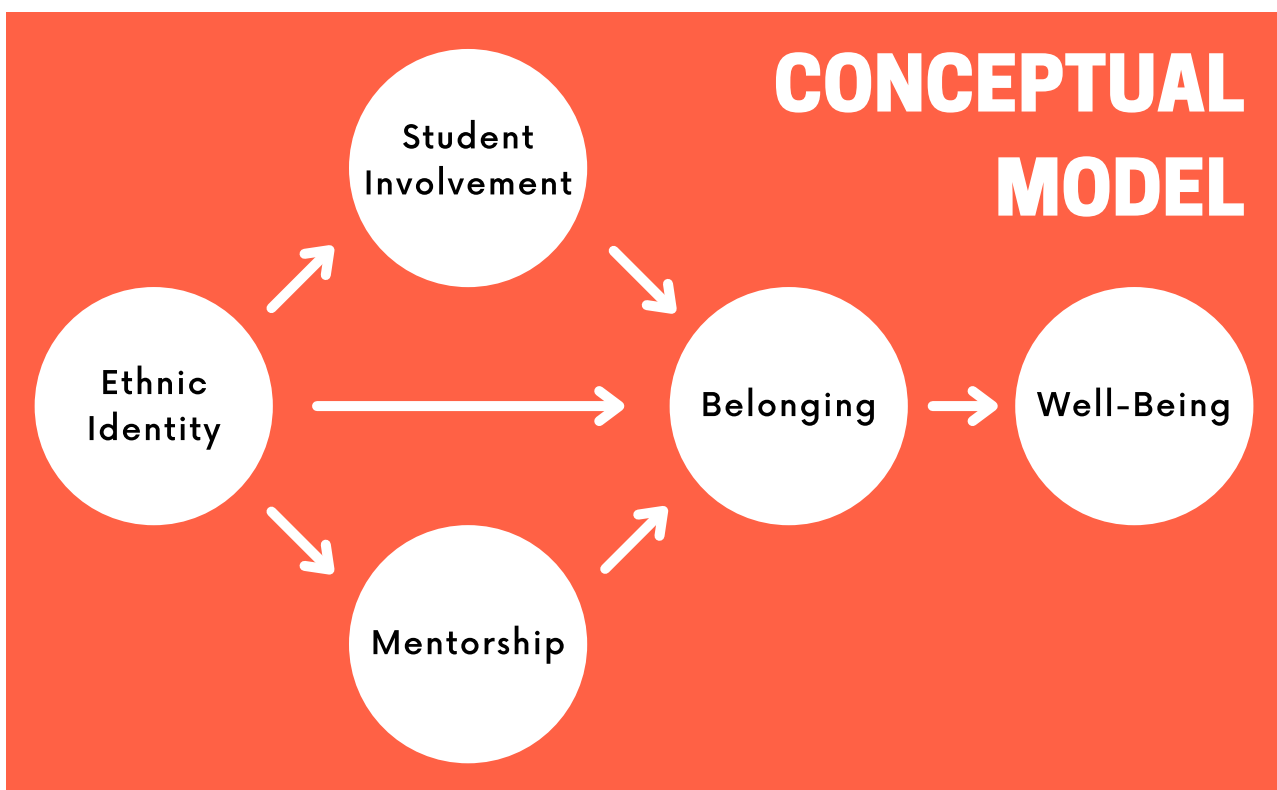
Using our aforementioned variables, we constructed the following research questions to guide our study:

- RQ1: What is the relationship between ethnic identity and belonging?
- RQ2: How do mentorship and student involvement impact the relationship between ethnic identity and belonging?

Hypotheses:

Based on our research questions, the following hypotheses predict the outcomes to the aforementioned questions:

- H1: We hypothesize that there are differences in both institutional and community belonging across ethnic lines.
- H2: We hypothesize that student involvement and mentorship will mediate the relationship between ethnic identity and belonging.



METHODS

01 — Survey



54 students at Dartmouth who identified as being Black or of African descent were surveyed utilizing convenience sampling. They were offered Amazon gift cards as an incentive for their participation. We measured ordinal-level variables using existing Likert scales from the literature, such as the Mentorship Effectiveness Scale, Institutional Belonging Scale, and a modified version of Ryff's Psychological Well-Being Scale.

02 — Focus Groups



We conducted two in-person focus groups consisting of 13 students in sum who expressed interest in participating through the survey. They were compensated with Amazon gift cards for their participation. Two moderators obtained consent to record and explained the study's purpose. Within the focus groups, participants were asked about their knowledge of the Afro-American Society, experiences of belonging and exclusion from the greater Dartmouth community, unity and belonging within the Black community, comfortability with Shabazz, and their ideal and previous mentorship experience.

03 — Data Analysis



Data was analyzed using comparison of means on the quantitative data analysis software STATA. To conduct the quantitative analysis, we manually categorized participants into four ethnic groups based on their responses to questions of race, ethnicity, and nationality.

We also recoded our variables to consolidate students into dichotomous groups: those who had strong agreement or success (rating 4+ or measuring within the top quintile) for a given measure and those who did not. Consequently, we created dichotomous categorizations for the majority of our variables, including institutional belonging, community belonging, and mentorship success.

RESULTS

What is the relationship between **ETHNIC IDENTITY** and **BELONGING?**

There are no significant differences in feelings of institutional Belonging across ethnic identity.

The surveyed Black students at Dartmouth had a mean sense of institutional belonging of 3.37 on a scale of 1-5 from low to high feelings of belonging, respectively. This is unsurprising given that prior research finds low ratings of institutional belonging among Black students at other PWIs. Consequently, a mean score approximate to the true mean of the measure (or a 3 on the 1-5 scale). There was an average agreement of 3.28 with the statements: "I would choose the college over again" and "My college is supportive of me." Students can learn to navigate campus enough to feel comfortable, but this does not mean that they feel the support of the institution through programming or supplemental resources.

The following are the means for sense of institutional belonging for each ethnic group: Afro-Caribbean (3.08), Multiethnic (3.36), African American (3.45), and African (3.60). There was weak evidence of a statistical difference of means in institutional belonging by ethnic group. If Black students are treated as a monolithic group by the institution, then the lack of stark differences in belonging outcomes is not surprising. The focus groups indicate that the institution and broader community of non-Black peers may not be interested in comprehending the different cultural backgrounds of Black Students. It is noteworthy that Afro-Caribbean students had the lowest mean and rate of institutional belonging. There may be cultural differences in seeking help and resources.

Regardless, none of these means are above a 4. Most students, within each ethnic group, do not agree to having a strong sense of institutional belonging. Table 1 indicates the percentage of students within an Ethnic group who agree to having a strong sense of institutional belonging.

RESULTS

When it comes to ethnic identity and community belonging, Afro-Caribbean students feel the strongest connection to the boarder black community.

After conducting the quantitative survey and gathering the data, we found that Afro-Caribbean students have the strongest sense of community belonging with 69.2% having strong feelings of community belonging. This category includes Afro-Caribbean American students. We attribute this strong sense of community belonging to Afro-Caribbean students being in a position where they can identify with international African students who are coming from a background where this may be their first time having to associate themselves with race rather than just their cultural identity. At the same time, however, they are able to identify with African American students because many of them have been raised in America by immigrants.

African students have the next highest since of belonging at 60% followed by African American students, and multiethnic students who felt similarly to one another at 45%. Although we did not expect for African students to feel a higher sense of belonging than African-American students, given the multiple ways in which coming to Dartmouth could be more difficult for an international student. We attribute this to OPAL's effort to mentor international students through the International Students Association (ISA).

Overall, Black students had an average feeling of community belonging of 3.76, meaning the Black community at Dartmouth does not feel excluded by one another but acknowledges the lack of unity among Black students.

TABLE 1: ETHNIC IDENTITY, MENTORSHIP & BELONGING

ETHNIC IDENTITY	HAVE A MENTOR	MENTOR SUCCESS	COMMUNITY BELONGING	INSTITUTIONAL BELONGING
African	60.0%	3.944	60.0%	30.0%
African American	57.9%	4.258	45.0%	35.0%
Afro-Caribbean	30.8%	4.208	69.2%	23.1%
Multiethnic	36.4%	4.292	45.5%	27.3%

RESULTS

How does **MENTORSHIP** impact the relationship between ethnic identity and belonging?

There are ethnic differences in mentorship — both having a mentor and mentorship success.

We have described the relationship between ethnic identity and belonging — both within the Black student population and Dartmouth as an institution. In this particularly study, we were interested in the impact of mentorship on this relationship. Consequently, we hypothesized that different ethnic identities would have different mentorship experiences that would subsequently influence their feelings of belonging.

One dimension of mentorship relevant to this study is mentorship rate, or the percentage of students with an active mentorship relationship. Table 1 demonstrates the ethnic differences in mentorship rates. African and African American participants had the highest rates of mentorship while Afro-Caribbean and Multiethnic participants had almost half the mentorship rate. We predict these ethnic differences may be the result of formalized institutional programming offering support for these groups, such as the International Students Association for African students and Shabazz, which is primarily composed of African American students.

We also analyzed mentorship success with respect to ethnicity and found that only African students had lower mentorship success. The other three ethnic groups had similar means in mentorship success. We can attribute the lower mentorship success to a lack accurate/successful pairing between students. As a result, we find it important to ensure that students are paired with mentors who can relate to them ethnically rather than just being paired with a student just because they are international.

“I don’t think there’s unity in African American students. It’s their perception of Blackness that makes it difficult to be their friends” -'24

RESULTS

Mentorship may improve institutional belonging and community belonging, but race plays a significant role in this relationship. The role of mentorship also helps us understand the ethnic differences in institutional belonging.

One of our key findings described previously is that Black students on campus feel like they neither strongly belong nor feel strongly excluded from Dartmouth as an institution. In this study, we were interested if mentorship programs may help increase feelings of belonging on campus, and therefore, we hypothesized that students with mentors may be more likely to feel like they belong on campus.

Table 2 proves this hypothesis by demonstrating higher feelings of institutional belonging for students with mentors. Students with mentors had a higher mean score of institutional belonging and larger percentage of strong institutional belonging. When looking by ethnic group in Table 1, African and African American students had higher mentorship rates and strong institutional belonging compared to Afro-Caribbean and Multiethnic students.

Conversely, having a mentor led to higher feelings of community belonging, but high mentorship success had the reverse effect. Community belonging may be lower for those with highly successful mentorship because of the mentorship success of non-Black mentors. Participants with Asian and white mentors rated below the mean community belonging score among those with high mentorship success. Although non-Black mentors may highly successful mentorship, their mentorship fails to help Black students increase their feelings of belonging in the broader Black student population.

TABLE 2: MENTORSHIP AND BELONGING

	INSTITUTIONAL BELONGING		COMMUNITY BELONGING	
	MEAN	% HIGH	MEAN	% HIGH
Have a Mentor				
Yes	3.521	32.0%	3.830	56.0%
No	3.243	28.6%	3.661	50.0%
High Mentorship Success				
Yes	3.800	57.1%	3.714	42.9%
No	3.400	21.1%	3.921	63.2%

RESULTS

How does **STUDENT INVOLVEMENT** impact the relationship between ethnic identity belonging?

Organizational involvement is insufficient in supporting Black students in their belonging.

All participants in the study were in some way involved in a race or ethnic identity-based student group. We hypothesized that student involvement in Black student organizations and other identity-based groups may mediate the relationship between ethnic identity and belonging since literature demonstrates that affinity spaces can also provide increased feelings of belonging and informal mentorship. In the focus groups, participants explain the multitude of different Black student organizations based on subgroups, such as Black Girls are Magic and Dartmouth Caribbean Connection. This may contribute to the lack of solidarity within the Black student population with such a large emphasis on ethnic identity. This may also explain lower feelings of community belonging for Multiethnic students because of the multiplicity of their identities within the broader body of Black student organizations. The results help us understand that organizational involvement is simply insufficient in supporting Black students in their belonging as we see poor outcomes in belonging among Black students at Dartmouth, which suggest the necessity for alternatives to support Black students, such as a mentorship program.

What is the relationship between **BELONGING** and **PSYCHOLOGICAL WELL-BEING**?

Higher feelings of institutional belonging correlate with better psychological well-being.

While psychological well-being is outside the scope of the primary focus of this study, we incorporated measures of psychological well-being in our survey. We measured psychological well-being to understand how belonging may impact students' well-being. While community belonging had no clear relationship with well-being, institutional belonging had a statistically significant correlation with psychological well-being. This difference may be attributed to Dartmouth's status as a predominantly white, elite institution, which creates a culture of stereotype threat and increased awareness of one's identity as an Ivy League student.

TABLE 3: FOCUS GROUP THEMES

THEME	DESCRIPTION	QUOTES
Lack of full institutional belonging	Participants felt that while they were not being actively excluded from the broader campus, they were still treated as separate from larger Dartmouth.	<p>"It's not like an immediate, 'hey you don't belong here, but it's a little subtle thing that I keep a note of."</p> <p>"I feel like the general rules and the way Dartmouth sets up its policies are made towards tolerance and acceptance, but at the same time, people can still do what they do....You can't be racist or be sexist, but at the same time, you don't have to be friends with the people that you don't have the same interests as."</p>
Feelings of acceptance from the broader Black community	Participants generally said they felt comfortable and accepted by the Black community. However, they acknowledge that there were certain subgroups they felt most comfortable around.	<p>"It wasn't hard for me to find acceptance in the Black community. It might be because there aren't many of us here to begin with."</p> <p>"The Black community is one of the only spaces where I truly feel comfortable on campus."</p> <p>"I feel more comfortable speaking and connecting with female Black upperclassmen than men."</p>
Preference of peer mentorship	Students communicated that they would rather have a Black, upperclassman peer mentor because they are more likely to relate to them given they have gone through similar things and have found some ways to navigate Dartmouth.	<p>"I do have a mentor who is a Black student-athlete on the football team who is a '22 and he made my experience at Dartmouth so much better."</p>
Mentor success	Students with mentors felt that having a mentor helped their sense of belonging, specifically a peer mentor.	<p>"There are certain things that I'm interested in socially that you don't find too often... and he's like 'here's where you can find that, like if you're interested in this, we do this' and then he also helps me with internships and like resumes and all that other stuff."</p> <p>"I had a really important call with these execs and I knew nothing about consulting and he like gave me a list of 10 questions to ask them."</p> <p>"I think overall having that friend, but also that professional aspect to it made me feel like I really do belong to the broader Dartmouth community."</p>

CONCLUSIONS



SOCIAL REALITIES

Black students accept the situations presented to them at predominantly white institutions as social realities. They acknowledge the shortcomings of the college and



STEREOTYPE THREAT

In academic settings Some students experience a pressure to not confirm any stereotypes that may be held by peers and faculty. They are uncomfortable being seen as a representative for their ethnic group.



UPPERCLASSMEN

They can assist younger peers in navigating the institution, social spaces, and Dartmouth cultural norms. They have an understanding of current campus dynamics and processes that Alumni nor Faculty could guide them through.

FUTURE RESEARCH

While we looked at larger trends in mentors' racial identity, we did not study the relationship between ethnic identity, and it would be interesting to look at the potential role of mentor ethnic identity and how it impacts students feeling of belonging. Future research could also involve looking at intersectional identities as social identities can advantage some more than others and make it easier for them to feel like they belong.

RECOMMENDATIONS

OUR RECOMMENDATION: CREATE A MENTORSHIP PROGRAM

Based on our findings, we recommend the creation of a mentorship program to support Black students at Dartmouth. In the formation of a mentorship program, we also recommend the following:



BLACK PEER MENTORS

According to our survey results, 87% of participants preferred a peer mentor. In this study, we found that race matters in mentorship's impact on community belonging. Participants with Black peer mentors had an average community belonging score of 3.792 while participants with non-Black peer mentors rated an average of 3.250. The paralleling and shared experiences of Black students at Dartmouth are instrumental in facilitating community belonging. However, the impact of ethnic identity in peer mentorship is unknown, but further research may find trends across ethnic lines. Thus, **we recommend pairing Black students with Black peer mentors.**



GENDER PAIRING

Although gender identity was excluded from our primary research questions, participants in both focus groups expressed an explicit preference for mentors of the same gender. Both male and female participants described the unique gender dynamics among Black students that make maintaining platonic relationships across genders difficult. Consequently, **we recommend pairing mentor-mentee pairs of the same gender.**



ONE-ON-ONE MATCHING

Based on our focus group findings, students are seeking individual relationships with mentors. Rather than providing support as a monolithic Black student community, Black students prefer individualized advice and support. Moreover, participants in the focus groups acknowledged the burden on mentors of managing multiple mentees. As a result, **we recommend pairing mentors with mentees on a one-on-one basis.**

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