**Part I - A Sense of Belonging and Ethnic Insights from First Year College Students –
Chapter 6**

1. How does Strayhorn define "sense of belonging" and its impact on college students?

Strayhorn asserts that belongingness constitutes a fundamental human emotion, integral to our basic physiological needs. It encompasses a feeling of connection, signifying our importance and significance to others. When this sense of belonging is absent, feelings of alienation and social isolation emerge, with far-reaching negative consequences for college students. These repercussions extend to areas such as diminished self-esteem, heightened susceptibility to depression, increased risk of substance abuse, and even contemplation of suicide. Importantly, the absence of belonging also poses a threat to academic performance and factors significantly into a student's decision to persist in their college journey or not. In essence, Strayhorn underscores the profound impact of belonging on the holistic well-being and academic trajectory of college students.

2. How did the theories/conceptual frameworks inform the findings in the study?

In Chapter 6 Strayhorn skillfully integrates various theories and conceptual frameworks to inform and enrich the study's findings. One key theoretical framework explored is Tinto's Model of Student Departure, which posits that social and academic integration significantly impact a student's decision to persist or leave an institution. Strayhorn utilizes this framework to analyze how students' sense of belonging influences their academic success and retention.

Moreover, Astin's theory of involvement is employed to understand the impact of students' engagement in both academic and social aspects of college life on their sense of

belonging. Strayhorn adeptly applies Astin's concept to unravel the intricate relationship between student involvement, belonging, and overall success.

Critical Race Theory (CRT) is another lens through which Strayhorn examines the experiences of minority students, particularly focusing on how systemic inequalities affect their sense of belonging. CRT informs the study's nuanced exploration of how race and ethnicity intersect with other factors to shape students' perceptions of belonging.

The Social Integration Theory, for instance, contributes to the examination of how students' interactions with peers and faculty members impact their sense of belonging. By applying this theory, Strayhorn delves into the importance of inclusive social networks in fostering a supportive academic environment.

Furthermore, Strayhorn incorporates the Identity Development Model, shedding light on the intersectionality of identity and how it intersects with the sense of belonging. This conceptual framework deepens the analysis, revealing how students' diverse backgrounds and identities influence their perceptions of belonging within the college context.

By integrating these diverse theoretical frameworks, Strayhorn not only enhances the depth and breadth of the study of summer bridging programs but also provides a more comprehensive understanding of the intricate dynamics influencing students' sense of belonging. This approach allows for a nuanced analysis of how various factors intersect and contribute to the complex landscape of college students' experiences, ultimately enriching the findings of the study in Chapter 6.

3. What recommendations would you make to your current employer based on the findings of the chapter and your own personal experiences?

Similar to Strayhorn, I am grateful for the chance to contribute to an institution that requires an examination of its students' sense of belonging. Our primarily two-year program has been grappling with establishing a collegiate culture, stemming from a deficiency in fostering a sense of belonging. In Chapter 6, Strayhorn discusses students' mental readiness for the challenges of college, a parallel concern in my institution where many students heavily rely on remedial programs, particularly in STEM areas. Despite extensive efforts with high schools in our federation, a significant percentage of students arrive unprepared, leading to discouragement and, in approximately 35% of cases, major changes or dropout.

In alignment with Strayhorn's insights, I would propose a well-structured summer bridging program to acquaint students with the demands of our institution. During the orientation, we should highlight the college's strengths, emphasizing the positive impact on university preparation. The program's duration would be collaboratively determined, with flexibility introduced through online, asynchronous sessions to accommodate students' summer plans. Implementing this bridging program aligns with our Board of Governors' strategic pillar to nurture a collegiate culture and prepare students effectively for their college experience.

4. Challenging the notion that students have one identity, how might you challenge unidimensional practices and policies that impact students?

Challenging the notion of a singular student identity involves recognizing and embracing the multifaceted nature of individuals. To challenge unidimensional practices and policies, educational institutions must adopt a more inclusive approach that acknowledges the diversity of students' identities. This requires reformulating policies that may inadvertently favor one particular identity or overlook intersectionality.

Firstly, institutions can implement inclusive curriculum design that reflects diverse perspectives and experiences. This not only validates students' varied identities but also enriches the educational experience for everyone. Secondly, policies should be flexible and accommodating, recognizing that students may navigate multiple identities simultaneously. This flexibility could extend to academic accommodations, cultural celebrations, and inclusive language.

Moreover, fostering a collegiate culture that celebrates diversity and actively promotes inclusion is crucial. This involves creating safe spaces, organizing events that highlight different cultures, and ensuring that institutional messaging reflects a commitment to embracing all identities. By challenging unidimensional practices and policies, educational institutions can create environments that validate and support the diverse identities of their students, fostering a sense of belonging for everyone.

5. What are the implications for student affairs and academic affairs practice?

The study holds significant implications for both student affairs and academic affairs practices. The integration of various theories, such as Social Integration Theory, Tinto's Model of Student Departure, and the Identity Development Model, provides a nuanced understanding of factors impacting students' sense of belonging.

For student affairs practitioners, the emphasis on social interactions and the importance of inclusive social networks especially in summer programs underscores the need for intentional community-building initiatives. Creating spaces that facilitate meaningful connections among students and between students and faculty becomes paramount.

In academic affairs, the insights from Tinto's Model highlight the institutional role in student persistence. Academic support structures, mentorship programs, and an overall supportive environment are crucial for fostering a sense of belonging and promoting student success.

6. What are the implications for educational policies?

Chapter 6 carries significant implications for educational policies. The emphasis on social integration and the impact of institutional practices on student persistence calls for policies that prioritize and facilitate inclusive environments. Educational institutions should consider implementing policies that promote community-building initiatives, foster positive social interactions, and encourage mentorship programs.

Tinto's Model of Student Departure underscores the need for policies that support academic success through institutional commitment. Educational policies should prioritize resources and programs that enhance student support services, academic advising, and mentorship to create an environment conducive to student persistence.

Additionally, acknowledging the intersectionality of identity, as outlined in the Identity Development Model, suggests the importance of policies that promote diversity, equity, and inclusion. Institutions should adopt policies that celebrate and accommodate

the diverse backgrounds and identities of students, ensuring that the educational experience is welcoming and supportive for all. In essence, the implications underscore the necessity for comprehensive and inclusive educational policies that address the multifaceted aspects of students' sense of belonging.

7. What are the implications for research?

The implications for research are profound. The integration of theoretical frameworks provides a roadmap for researchers to explore and measure the nuanced dynamics of students' sense of belonging. This chapter encourages scholars to delve into the effectiveness of community-building initiatives, mentorship programs, and institutional commitments on fostering belonging. Additionally, it prompts researchers to investigate the intersectionality of identity and its impact on students' perceptions of inclusivity. Future research should explore innovative methodologies to capture the intricate interplay of social, institutional, and identity factors influencing students' sense of belonging across multiple institutions, contributing to a more comprehensive understanding and guiding the development of targeted interventions and support structures in higher education.

8. A concluding summary of chapter 6 – "A Bridge to Belonging"

In Chapter 6 of "College Students' Sense of Belonging" by Terrell Strayhorn, the author delves into the critical exploration of theories and conceptual frameworks that underpin the understanding of students' sense of belonging in higher education by focusing on a summer bridge program. Strayhorn synthesizes and applies several influential theories, including Social Integration Theory, Tinto's Model of Student Departure, and the

Identity Development Model, to analyze the intricate dynamics shaping students' experiences.

The chapter emphasizes the role of social interactions in fostering a sense of belonging, drawing on Social Integration Theory to illuminate how students' connections with peers and faculty significantly impact their overall academic experience. Tinto's Model is employed to underscore the institutional factors that contribute to student persistence, emphasizing the importance of a supportive environment in promoting a sense of belonging and thereby influencing students' decisions to stay in college.

Furthermore, Strayhorn integrates the Identity Development Model to explore the intersectionality of identity and belonging, revealing how students' diverse backgrounds influence their perceptions of inclusivity within the college community. This comprehensive theoretical framework provides a robust foundation for understanding the complex interplay of factors influencing students' sense of belonging and contributes valuable insights to educators, administrators, and policymakers seeking to create inclusive and supportive academic environments.

PART II – Interview with a recent University of Cambridge graduate on her sense of belonging at Cambridge

I had the privilege of engaging in a **ZOOM** conversation with Jennie O, my interviewee who recently completed her studies at the University of Cambridge. Our discussion centered on her sense of belonging during her academic journey at two markedly different universities—New York University for her undergraduate studies and the University of Cambridge for her graduate studies. To guide our conversation, I prepared a set of questions aimed at exploring and understanding her experiences at these two prestigious institutions.

1. Please share a comparison of your sense of belonging between NYU and Cambridge University.

2. Did you join Clubs and Organizations while studying at both colleges?

3. What was your experience of a sense of belonging at Cambridge?

4. Were there any specific group activities that you were involved in to try to gain a sense of belonging while at Cambridge?

5. Did you have any discussions with your fellow colleagues about your lived experiences while at Cambridge and how were they coping?

6. How were the diversity and inclusion activities at Cambridge?

7. For persons who were trying to fit in, did you see a lot of code switching to achieve this while at Cambridge?

8. In situations where you felt like you didn't belong, how did you cope through those times?

9. Were you in the dorms or off campus while at Cambridge?

10. How was the sense of belonging with your colleagues?

11. If you were to speak to someone, a POC coming into your experience at Cambridge, what would you suggest to them to help them cope in a similar lived experience knowing what you have been through?

12. Do you have any questions for me?

Following my conversation with Jen and reflecting on Strayhorn's text, I am convinced that this work is indispensable for examining a student's sense of belonging in college. It offers comprehensive insights into the multifaceted factors influencing this crucial aspect of the academic journey. Strayhorn, by addressing the roles of institutional leaders and faculty in fostering supportive environments, provides pragmatic strategies for promoting inclusivity. Jen, drawing from her experience at NYU, affirmed the significance of this focus in cultivating a sense of belonging, highlighting the institution's commitment to diversity and personal connections. Regrettably, her contrasting experience at Cambridge underscored the negative impact of a lack of belonging. Strayhorn's emphasis on belonging as pivotal to educational success enriches the broader conversation on student retention, guiding educators to create environments where all students can flourish. Jen's parting advice, based on her contrasting experiences, underscores the critical role of belonging in ensuring that college is not an isolating environment.

References

Strayhorn, T. L. (2019). *College students' sense of belonging : a key to educational success for all students*. Routledge, An Imprint Of The Taylor & Francis Group.