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Sense Of Belonging Of Undergraduate African American Students At PWIS

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PWIS

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Dedication

To my family and friends who have supported and believed in me every step of the way. I could

not have done this without you!

SENSE OF BELONGING OF UNDERGRADUATE AFRICAN AMERICAN STUDENTS AT

PWIS

by

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Despite policies such as Brown v. Board of Education in 1954, there are still racist systems that lay the foundation of higher education institutions that serve as barriers to the educational attainment of African American students (Harper et al., 2009). The racist nature of education systems causes the constant use of deficit lenses to view African American people. Consequently, African American people have always been viewed as less than and not as smart as White people. This has created and shaped the past and present inequities that serve as barriers to the educational attainment of African American students. These inequities are highlighted through the experiences and lack of retention of undergraduate African American students at predominantly White institutions (PWIs). Consistently, PWIs receive low enrollment of undergraduate African American students, and many who attend report experiencing racism and discrimination on campus (Harper et al., 2009).

Unlike Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs), PWIs have a difficult time retaining undergraduate African American students as it requires an extreme level of commitment to the process of ensuring African American students feel welcome, accepted, and safe (Harper et al., 2009). The racism that is ingrained in PWIs has the power to negatively alter and diminish the sense of belonging of undergraduate African Americans who attend PWIs (Harper et al., 2009). A sense of belonging is the degree to which students feel socially connected at their university (Freire & Hurd, 2023). In this paper, I argue that institutional racism negatively impacts the sense of belonging of undergraduate African American students at PWIs. To do so, I use previous studies to examine how racial microaggressions and stereotypes immensely contribute to a lack of sense of belonging among undergraduate African American students at PWIs. Then, I provide strategies to support undergraduate African American students.

The studies and findings are analyzed in the following sections. However, first, I will explain the methods I used to collect my data for this narrative literature review. Then, I will introduce the theoretical frameworks informing this research topic. Afterwards, I move on to present the findings of my literature review, which have been divided into three major themes: "Sense of Belonging at PWIs," "Sense of Belonging at HBCUs," and "Strategies to Increase Sense of Belonging at PWIs."

Chapter 2: Methods

A narrative literature review compiles the information and findings from a plethora of research on a specific topic (Baumeister & Leary, 1997). I conducted a narrative literature review to review, critique, and synthesize the literature I researched to analyze the negative impacts of institutional racism on the sense of belonging of undergraduate African American students at PWIs. Before I explain the data collection and analysis process, it is important that I address my positionality, as it is in big form how I came to inform my research topic.

2.1 Positionality

It is important to acknowledge my positionality as a biracial, African American, and White female. My upbringing in a middle-class family provided me with the opportunity to pursue a bachelor's degree after I graduated high school. I earned a bachelor's degree in Inclusive Early Childhood Education from Bowling Green State University (BGSU) in Bowling Green, Ohio. The majority of the enrolled student population at the university is White students.

Unfortunately, as a person of color who was an undergraduate student at a PWI, I experienced and witnessed institutional racism along with some of the negative impacts it has on the sense of belonging of undergraduate African American students at PWIs. In my education courses, I was one of the few students of color, which caused me to crave a space with people who looked like me and shared similar experiences. This propelled my roommate and me to start the student organization Inclusive Culturally Responsive Educators (ICRE) to promote culturally responsive teaching and educate faculty and preservice teachers on the topics of diversity, equity, and social justice, which we saw a lack in our courses. This also provided a space for preservice students of color to share their experiences and feel seen and heard at BGSU. Many students across the College of Education and Human Development showed interest and joined ICRE.

As a result, my roommate and I were empowered to take the next step in the direction of change. We engaged in difficult conversations with the dean of the college and other faculty members to discuss the need to implement this information in education courses. Despite the conversations feeling like an uphill battle due to the continuous pushback, we continued to persist and not give up. For example, we assisted in the development of and were teaching assistants for the course Problems in Education. Post-graduation, I was offered a position with BGSU as a researcher and curriculum developer position. I collaborated with faculty to create a diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) curriculum for professors to embed in their education courses to better prepare preservice teachers. There were many times I did not feel as though I belonged at BGSU. However, when I began to advocate for myself and other students of color, make my presence known, and respectfully challenge the dominant culture, as I did this, I felt my sense of belonging increased. Despite the challenges, my experiences at BGSU fueled my passion for and commitment to social justice.

My personal experiences, academic journey, and professional work have informed a big part my development of this narrative literature review. In the next section, I address how I collected the data that was used in this narrative literature review.

2.2 Methods for Data Collection

To conduct my research, I utilized The University of Texas at El Paso (UTEP) library search engine. The terms that aided in my search were "retention," "African American," "undergraduate," "predominantly White institutions," "historically Black colleges and universities," "students of color," "campus culture and climate," "microaggressions," "racial microaggressions," "stereotypes," "stereotype threat," and "sense of belonging." Generating various phrases utilizing the terms listed above helped drive the research process. The phrases

that were beneficial were: "retention of African American undergraduate students at predominantly White institutions," "effects of microaggressions on the retention of African American undergraduate students at predominantly White institutions," "effects of campus culture and climate at predominantly White universities on the retention of African American undergraduate students," "retention of African American undergraduate students at predominantly White institutions vs. historically Black colleges and universities," "retention of African American undergraduate students at historically Black colleges and universities," "effects of stereotypes on the retention of African American undergraduate students at predominantly White students," "effects of the stereotype threat at predominantly White institutions," "sense of belonging at predominantly White institutions," and "sense of belonging at historically Black colleges and universities."

As I inputted these phrases into the UTEP library search engine, each one further helped narrow down my search. This allowed me to dive deep into the research on the negative impacts of institutional racism on the sense of belonging and retention of undergraduate African American students at PWIs. As a result of the numerous research studies completed on this topic, I found 30 empirical peer-reviewed articles that would become a critical part of my literature review. The time frame of the published works I found is between 1992 and 2023, which makes it evident that this topic has been researched over many years. I chose articles within these dates to show changes and consistencies within the literature on this topic over the years. The databases I used were EBSCOHost, JSTOR, SAGE Journals, ProQuest, Taylor & Francis Online, Science Direct, Wiley Online Library, Project Muse, and Emerald Insight. EBSCOHost and JSTOR are the databases that house the majority of the 30 articles. Eight out of 30 articles came from EBSCOHost, and seven out of 30 came from JSTOR. ScienceDirect, Wiley Online

Library, Project Muse, and Emerald Insight housed the least amount of the 30 articles. Each

database houses one of the 30 sources. Table 1.1 shows the UTEP library search engine, the

name of each database used, and the articles found.

Table 1.1 Databases and Articles

Database	Articles
EBSCOHost	• Cabrera, A. F., Nora, A., Terenzini, P. T., Pascarella, E., & Hagedorn, L. S. (1999). Campus racial climate and the adjustment of students to college: A comparison between White students and African American students. *The Journal of Higher Education, 70*(2), 134. https://doi.org/10.2307/2649125
	• Chavous, T. M., Harris, A., Rivas, D., Helaire, L., & Greens, L. (2004). Racial stereotypes and gender in context: African Americans at predominantly Black and predominantly White colleges. *Sex Roles*, *51*(1–2), 1–16. https://doi.org/10.1023/b:sers.0000032305.48347.6d
	• Foxx, K. (2021). Cultivating a sense of belonging: Black students at a predominantly White institution. *The Negro Educational Review*, *72*(1–4), 107–165.
	• Harper, S. R., Patton, L. D., & Wooden, O. S. (2009). Access and equity for African American students in higher education: A critical race historical analysis of policy efforts. *The Journal of Higher Education (Columbus)*, *80*(4), 389–414. https://doi.org/10.1080/00221546.2009.11779022
	• Lee, J. A., & Barnes, A. R. (2015). Predominately White institutions: Transition programs to address academic underpreparedness and experiences of discrimination. *Translational Issues in Psychological Science*, *1*(4), 401–410. https://doi.org/10.1037/tps0000043
	• Mills, K. J. (2020). "It's systemic": Environmental racial microaggressions experienced by black undergraduates at a predominantly White institution. *Journal of Diversity in Higher Education*, *13*(1), 44–55. https://doi.org/10.1037/dhe0000121
	• Morales, E. (2021). "Beasting" at the battleground: Black students responding to racial microaggressions in higher education. *Journal of Diversity in Higher Education*, *14*(1), 72–83. https://doi.org/10.1037/dhe0000168
	• Worthington, R. L., Navarro, R. L., Loewy, M., & Hart, J. (2008). Color-blind racial attitudes, social dominance orientation, racial-ethnic group membership and college students' perceptions of campus climate. *Journal of Diversity in Higher Education*, *1*(1), 8–19. https://doi.org/10.1037/1938-8926.1.1.8

JSTOR

- D'Augelli, A. R., & Hershberger, S. L. (1993). African American undergraduates on a predominantly White campus: Academic factors, social networks, and campus climate. *The Journal of Negro Education*, *62*(1), 67. https://doi.org/10.2307/2295400
- Lee, W. Y. (1999). Striving toward effective retention: The effect of race on mentoring African American students. *Peabody Journal of Education*, *74*(2), 27–43. https://doi.org/10.1207/s15327930pje7402_4
- Price, G. N., & Viceisza, A. C. G. (2023). What can historically Black colleges and universities teach about improving higher education outcomes for Black Students? *The Journal of Economic Perspectives*, *37*(3), 213–232. https://doi.org/10.1257/jep.37.3.213
- Johnson-Ahorlu, R. N. (2013). "Our biggest challenge is stereotypes": Understanding stereotype threat and the academic experiences of African American undergraduates. *The Journal of Negro Education82*(4), 382–392. https://doi.org/10.7709/jnegroeducation.82.4.0382
- Solorzano, D., Ceja, M., & Yosso, T. (2000). Critical race theory, racial microaggressions, and campus racial climate: The experiences of African American college students. *The Journal of Negro Education*, *69*(1/2), 60–73. http://www.jstor.org/stable/2696265
- Harper, S. R. (2013). Am I my brother's teacher? Black undergraduates, racial socialization, and peer pedagogies in predominantly white postsecondary contexts. *Review of Research in Education*, *37*, 183–211. http://www.jstor.org/stable/24641961
- Jones, V. A., & Reddick, R. J. (2017). The heterogeneity of resistance: How Black students utilize engagement and activism to challenge PWI inequalities. *The Journal of Negro Education*, *86*(3), 204–219. https://doi.org/10.7709/jnegroeducation.86.3.0204

SAGE Journals
- Campbell, S. D., Carter-Sowell, A. R., & Battle, J. S. (2019). Campus climate comparisons in academic pursuits: How race still matters for African American college students. *Group Processes & Intergroup Relations*, *22*(3), 390–402. https://doi.org/10.1177/1368430218823065
- DeCuir-Gunby, J. T., McCoy, W. N., & Gibson, S. M. (2023). The compounding impact of racial microaggressions: The experiences of African American students in predominantly White institutions. *Teachers College Record: The Voice of Scholarship in Education*, *125*(5), 43–55. https://doi.org/10.1177/01614681231181798
- Freire, D. S., & Hurd, N. M. (2023). Discrimination and mental health outcomes among underrepresented college students: The role of sense of belonging at predominantly White institutions. *Emerging Adulthood (Thousand Oaks, CA)*, *11*(3), 654–668. https://doi.org/10.1177/21676968231166967
- Lewis, J. A., Mendenhall, R., Ojiemwen, A., Thomas, M., Riopelle, C., Harwood, S. A., & Browne Huntt, M. (2019). Racial microaggressions and sense of belonging at a historically White University. *American Behavioral Scientist*, *65*(8), 1049–1071. https://doi.org/10.1177/0002764219859613
- Williams, J. L., Palmer, R. T., & Jones, B. J. (2021). "Where I can breathe": Examining the impact of the current racial climate on Black students' choice to attend historically Black colleges and universities. *Journal of Black Studies*, *52*(8), 795–819. https://doi.org/10.1177/00219347211039833
- Griffith, A. N., Hurd, N. M., & Hussain, S. B. (2019). "I didn't come to school for this": A qualitative examination of experiences with race-related stressors and coping responses among black students attending a predominantly white institution. *Journal of Adolescent Research, 34*(2), 115-139. https://doi-org.utep.idm.oclc.org/10.1177/0743558417742983
- Wittrup, A., & Hurd, N. (2021). Extracurricular involvement, homesickness, and depressive symptoms among underrepresented college students. *Emerging Adulthood*, *9*(2), 158-169. https://doi-org.utep.idm.oclc.org/10.1177/2167696819847333

ProQuest
- Allen, W. (1992). The color of success: African-American college student outcomes at predominantly White and historically Black public colleges and universities. *Harvard Educational Review*, *62*(1), 26–45. https://doi.org/10.17763/haer.62.1.wv5627665007v701
- Strayhorn, T. L. (2023). Estimating differences in the effects of living-learning community participation on Black students' sense of belonging at predominantly White and historically Black colleges and universities. *Journal of College Student*

	Development, *64*(2), 225–230. https://doi.org/10.1353/csd.2023.0019
Taylor & Francis Online	● Franklin, J. D. (2019). Coping with racial battle fatigue: Differences and similarities for African American and Mexican American college students. *Race Ethnicity and Education*, *22*(5), 589–609. https://doi.org/10.1080/13613324.2019.1579178
	● Smith, W. A., Mustaffa, J. B., Jones, C. M., Curry, T. J., & Allen, W. R. (2016). 'You make me wanna holler and throw up both my hands!': Campus culture, Black misandric microaggressions, and racial battle fatigue. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, *29*(9), 1189–1209. https://doi.org/10.1080/09518398.2016.1214296
ScienceDirect	● Aronson, J., Fried, C. B., & Good, C. (2002). Reducing the effects of stereotype threat on African American college students by shaping theories of intelligence. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, *38*(2), 113–125. https://doi.org/10.1006/jesp.2001.1491
Wiley Online Library	● Francois, S., Blakey, J., Stevenson, R., Walker, T., & Davis, J. (2023). Navigating COVID-19 and racial trauma as a Black student at predominantly White institutions. *American Journal of Community Psychology*. https://doi.org/10.1002/ajcp.12668
Project Muse	● Mills, K.J., Stone-Sabali, S., & Parler, B.A. (2023). Responding to racial microaggressions: Resilience among black undergraduate students. *Journal of College Student Development 64*(6), 630-646. https://doi.org/10.1353/csd.2023.a917020
Emerald Insight	● Brezinski, K. J., Laux, J., Roseman, C., O'Hara, C., & Gore, S. (2018). Undergraduate African-American student's experience of racial microaggressions on a primarily White campus. *Journal for Multicultural Education*, *12*(3), 267–277. https://doi.org/10.1108/JME-06-2017-0035

2.3 Methods for Data Analysis

The data analysis consisted of a thorough analysis of each of the 30 empirical peer-reviewed articles I found using the UTEP library search engine. After completing each analysis, I underwent the coding process. Coding is the term used to describe collecting data, segmenting, and organizing it into categories based on common characteristics or patterns (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Saldaña, 2021). First, I did line-by-line initial coding. Line-by-line initial coding is also known as open coding (Saldaña, 2021). I utilized this form of coding to complete an annotated bibliography for each article. Next, focused coding allowed me to gather categories and themes. I performed one round of line-by-line coding and focused coding, which helped me extract the following codes: "PWIs," "HBCUs," "stereotypes," "stereotype threat," "African American student experiences at PWIs," "African American student experiences at HBCUs," "African American student experiences at PWIs and HBCUs," "extracurriculars," "campus racial climate," "racial sensitivity," "academics," "social networks," "racial microaggressions," "racial trauma," "racial battle fatigue," "policies," "retention," "living learning communities," "mentoring," "transition programs," "academics," discrimination," "beasting," "coping strategies," "color-blind racial attitudes," and "activism."

The codes led to the development of five categories: "undergraduate African American student experiences at PWIs," "undergraduate African American student experiences at HBCUs," "the effects of stereotypes on undergraduate African American students at institutions," "the effects of racial microaggression on undergraduate African American at institutions," and "the comparison of undergraduate African American experiences at PWIs and HBCUs." Then, I dove deeper into the analysis of these categories to surface broader patterns (Creswell & Creswell, 2008). These broader patterns formed the three overarching themes:

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"Sense of Belonging at PWI," "Sense of Belonging at HBCUs," and "Strategies to Increase Sense of Belonging at PWIs." I used these themes to guide the development of the body of my narrative literature review.

The first theme, "Sense of Belonging at PWIs," consists of data found from articles that have dissected the sense of belonging that undergraduate African American students have when attending PWIs. Under this theme, I explore the effects that stereotypes and microaggressions have on the sense of belonging of African American students. Also, I reveal resistance strategies that undergraduate African American students use to confront and combat stereotypes and racial microaggressions. Later in the paper, the concepts of sense of belonging, racial microaggressions, stereotypes, and stereotype threat will be defined, and an analysis of their impact on the sense of belonging of undergraduate African American students at PWIs will be provided. The second theme is "Sense of Belonging at HBCUs." I analyze the experiences of undergraduate African American students who attend HBCUs and compare them to the experiences of those who attend PWIs. The final theme is "Strategies to Increase Sense of Belonging at PWIs." Within this theme, I analyze strategies that can be used to increase the sense of belonging of undergraduate African American students at PWIs. Each theme, section, subsection, and topic will be further explained and analyzed in the findings section of this paper. However, before presenting the findings, I will explain the theoretical frameworks guiding my data analysis and discussion of the articles.

Chapter 3: Guiding Theoretical Framework

One theoretical framework will be used to guide the narrative literature review. The theoretical framework is Critical Race Theory (CRT), which is defined and explained below.

3.1 Critical Race Theory

CRT has become a controversial and divisive topic in the United States. It disrupts the power and privilege that is held within White privilege and White supremacy as it provides a different lens through which race and racism are viewed. It seeks to analyze and uncover the racist systems that are ingrained in the United States (DeCuir-Gunby et al., 2023; Lewis et al., 2019; Solorzano et al., 2000). According to Solorzano et al. (2000), there are five tenets of CRT: "(a) the centrality of race and racism and their intersectionality with other forms of subordination, (b) the challenge to dominant ideology, (c) the commitment to social justice, (d) the centrality of experiential knowledge, (e) the transdisciplinary perspective" (p. 63). CRT will be used to analyze African American students at PWIs in regard to their experiences and psychological processes (Harper et al., 2009). This will help provide answers to the effects of stereotypes and racial microaggressions on undergraduate African American students at PWIs. It will demonstrate how these effects negatively impact the sense of belonging of these students. I will present my findings in the following sections and analyze the three themes that emerged: "Sense of Belonging at PWIs," "Sense of Belonging at HBCUs," and "Strategies to Increase Sense of Belonging at PWIs."

<div align="center">**Chapter 4: Findings**</div>

4.1 Sense of Belonging at PWIs

      Institutions all over the world foster the sense of belonging of their students on and off campus. As mentioned earlier, a sense of belonging is the degree to which students feel socially connected at their university. It addresses whether they feel accepted, included, and valued by the people, including faculty, staff, and other students (Freire & Hurd, 2023). An undergraduate African American student's sense of belonging at the PWI they attend is vital to their success (Holmes et al., 2000). Racism and discrimination that students experience can quickly alter and diminish their sense of belonging (Freire & Hurd, 2023). Therefore, in this section, I will present the articles that surface the effects of stereotypes and the stereotype threat, the effects of racial microaggressions, and resistance strategies to analyze the negative effects of institutional racism on the sense of belonging of undergraduate African American students at PWIs. This first section will be evidence of the centrality of race and racism and their intersectionality with other forms of subordination that African American students experience at PWIs.

4.1.1 Effects of Stereotypes and Stereotype Threat

      In this section, I will define stereotypes and the stereotype threat and explain the negative effects they have on undergraduate African American students and how this contributes to their sense of belonging at PWIs. Before I move on to present the findings under this theme, I provide a brief definition of stereotypes and stereotype threat, as they serve as foundational concepts to this section.

4.1.1.1 Stereotypes

      Stereotypes are generalizations about a group of people (Johnson-Ahorlu, 2013). They create assumptions and biases as it is quicker to refer to stereotypes prior to taking the time to get

to know someone. There are many negative stereotypes of African Americans. For example, they are often viewed as being unintelligent. These negative stereotypes can be harmful and detrimental to the academic performance of undergraduate African American students at PWIs. This can negatively impact the sense of belonging and retention of undergraduate African American students at PWIs.

4.1.1.2 Stereotype Threat

The stereotype threat was brought about by Steele and Aronson in 1995. The stereotype threat analyzes stereotypes and further explains how the knowledge and awareness of negative stereotypes have the ability to negatively impact an individual's perception and performance in a given context. The stereotype threat is used to examine the impact of the awareness of stereotypes on the sense of belonging and academic performance of undergraduate African American students at PWIs. In turn, it will reveal how this can affect the retention of these students (Aronson et al., 2002; Chavous et al., 2004).

Now that I have briefly presented a working definition of stereotypes and the stereotype threat, I present the study by Johnson-Ahorlu (2013) that serves to exemplify the effects of stereotypes and the stereotype threat on the sense of belonging experienced by undergraduate African American students at PWIs.

Johnson-Ahorlu (2013) performed a qualitative study to show how stereotypes and the stereotype threat negatively impact undergraduate African American students and strongly encourage universities to disrupt stereotypes that are present in their intervention programs that are in place. The qualitative study was conducted through interviews with students who were a part of focus groups formed by the Diverse Learning Environments project. The focus groups consisted of racially diverse (African American, Asian American, Latino/a, Native American,

and white) undergraduate students who attended two and four-year public universities in California and one in Arizona. The theoretical framework used was the stereotype threat.

The findings revealed that African American students expressed that stereotypes, as well as the stereotype threat, negatively impacted their education (Johnson-Ahorlu, 2013). This was the result at three different universities. Common stereotypes that all students voiced experiencing or seeing at their institution are that African Americans are not intelligent and do not belong in higher education settings. This was displayed by faculty and peers. For example, some were questioned if they were supposed to be in a higher-level class and experienced rejection from their peers when it came to group work. They found it difficult to address the situations and stand up for themselves in the classroom because of the authority held by the faculty member. The stereotypes placed on them produced a variety of feelings of anger, sadness, pressure, and anxiety. The threat of not living up to these stereotypes also produced these feelings and instilled more stress, hindering their academic performance. They constantly felt as though they had to prove themselves. It is evident that stereotypes and the stereotype threat negatively impact the academics and sense of belonging of undergraduate African American students (Johnson-Ahorlu, 2013). Yet, despite the negative effects that stereotypes cause on African American students, the study by Aronson et al. (2002) presents strategies that can help combat it.

Aronson et al. (2002) performed a qualitative study to analyze how having a different perception of intelligence can impact African American college students. The qualitative study was conducted through laboratory sessions with 79 undergraduate students who attended Stanford University. Of the 79 students, 42 were Black and 37 were White. The theoretical framework used was the stereotype threat. The students were put into three different groups. Two

out of the three groups participated in the intervention program, in which they engaged in pen pal writing. The purpose of one of the pen pal groups was to demonstrate the malleability of intelligence.

The findings showed that having the perspective that intelligence is malleable is beneficial to African American students and the confidence they have in their own intelligence (Aronson et al., 2002). There was a greater increase in their academic achievement and attitude towards education after they experienced the intervention surrounding advocating the malleability of intelligence compared to their white peers (Aronson et al., 2002). After a change in the students' perception of their intelligence and working through the stereotype threat, African American students still fell behind their white peers academically and were not as engaged with their academics. It is evident that the stereotype threat has a greater negative impact on African American college students and their academics than white college students.

In conclusion, stereotypes and the stereotype threat negatively impact the sense of belonging of undergraduate African American students who attend PWIs. As a result, it is critical for PWIs to educate African American students on the stereotype threat, the ways in which it can impact their education, and the feelings that tend to arise from it. This can help students combat these feelings and improve their academic performance. As indicated before, faculty and peers have a huge influence over the perceptions that African American students create about themselves. Therefore, intervention and support need to come in different forms. For example, through the curriculum, students need to be given the tools to navigate and change the perceptions they have of their own abilities and those of others. Encouraging students to see intelligence as something that can change and instilling in them confidence in their academic abilities will help them combat the negative stereotypes about their racial and ethnic group

(Aronson et al., 2002). It is important for African American students to know this as these stereotypes frequently come to life when interacting with faculty, staff, and peers on campus and can take the form of subtle yet pervasive acts against their persona. In the following section, I address the pervasive nature of microaggressions and their effects on African American students.

4.1.2 Effects of Racial Microaggressions

From a bird's eye view, university systems and environments may seem equal, fair, and just. However, racial microaggressions that are often slight or hidden often occur for many students of color, making the university unequal, unfair, and unjust. A campus climate is not always positive because it appears to be (Solorzano et al., 2000). Therefore, in this section, I will explore the effects of racial microaggressions on African American students' academic and personal lives. To begin this section, I first provide a definition of racial microaggressions and present a few articles that provide evidence of the constant remarks that African American students experience and how it affects their sense of belonging. I then move forward with the analysis by showing how racial microaggressions affect other areas of the lives of African American students, including their mental health.

4.1.2.1 Interpersonal and Environmental Racial Microaggressions

Racial microaggressions are racist remarks that are covert, meaning they are subtle and discrete (Mills, 2020). Mills (2020) explains that there are two types of racial microaggressions. The first type is interpersonal racial microaggressions, which are those that take place through interactions and conversations between people. An example of interpersonal racial microaggressions is racist jokes. The second type is environmental racial microaggressions, which are conveyed through systems, cultures, and policies. Even though they do not single out individuals, they indirectly reveal and communicate the racist thoughts and ideas that are

embedded in an institution. An example of environmental racial microaggressions is the lack of representation in a course curriculum. Interpersonal racial microaggressions and environmental racial microaggressions lead to a decrease in the sense of belonging of undergraduate African American students at PWIs.

Environmental racial microaggressions are evident in a qualitative study completed by Mills (2020) to determine if Black college students experience environmental microaggressions and, if so, what types they experience. The qualitative study was informed by interviewing 17 Black undergraduate students who attended a large PWI in the Midwest. The theoretical framework used to guide the study was the resilience theory framework, which addresses risk factors and analyzes how protective factors and positive adaptations are used to navigate experiences that result from risk factors. The resilience theory framework, in regard to the study, sought to understand the role that environmental microaggressions play in the college experiences of Black undergraduate students at a PWI.

Mills (2020) noted there were six common types of environmental microaggressions that the participants reported experiencing while attending the PWI: (1) segregation, (2) lack of representation, (3) campus response to criminality, (4) cultural bias in courses, (5) tokenism, and (6) pressure to conform. Segregation happened as the university advertised the on-campus housing that was made up of predominantly White students more often than other on-campus housing. A lack of representation was noticed in many areas of the university, such as faculty, student organizations, and certain majors. The campus response to criminality was more so in favor of the White students and against and not supportive of the African American students. Cultural bias was present in courses through no or surface-level content on topics such as race and faculty, and students got uncomfortable when having conversations surrounding those

topics. Tokenism was sensed among students who did not feel as though the university cared about them as a student, but rather if they were athletic and got them the diversity numbers they needed. Students felt the need to conform to the dominant culture and hide pieces of themselves to fit in and be seen as successful.

Contributing to the understanding of the effects of racial microaggressions, Mills (2020) reported that Black women addressed the cultural bias in the courses, and Black men addressed the lack of representation in the faculty members and leaders on campus. The variances in experiences are important to note, as they remind us that when analyzing and studying different types of environmental microaggressions, we need to use not only a racial lens but a gendered critical approach as well. Overall, these findings are evidence that Black students at PWIs are susceptible to experiencing environmental and racial microaggressions on the campus they attend. (Mills, 2020).

The study by Brezinski et al. (2018) also serves as an example of the effects of environmental racial microaggressions on African American students' sense of belonging. Brezinski et al. (2018) conducted a qualitative study to determine if racial microaggressions were a direct cause of retention of African American students at a PWI. The quantitative study was informed by surveying 53 Black/African American students who attended a PWI. Of the 53 students, three were multiracial. The racial microaggressions scale was used to determine the frequency of specific racial microaggressions. Also, the Likert Scale was used to determine the perspectives that students had about staying at or leaving the university.

Overall, the students did not feel as though they belonged on campus due to their race (Brezinski et al., 2018). This was a result of not seeing many people who looked like them. Also, African Americans were seen through a negative lens. For example, many students were seen as

a threat to others. Finally, they felt invisible and dismissed by people around them. These racial microaggressions contributed to the many reports by Black/African American students of having thoughts of leaving the school.

While the studies by Mills (2020) and Brezinski et al. (2018) serve to exemplify environmental racial microaggressions, the study by Lewis et al. (2019) serves to illustrate interpersonal racial microaggression. Lewis et al. (2019) sought to address interpersonal racism at PWIs through a qualitative and quantitative study that was informed by surveying 1,710 students at a PWI. Out of the total number of students, 21.8% were African American, 45.6% were Asian/Asian American, 25% were Hispanic/Latino, 0.4% were American Indian/Alaska Native, 0.5% were Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander, and 6.7% were multiracial. The results from the study reveal the effects it has on a student of color's sense of belonging on campus.

Among the target racial groups, it was found that African American students experienced racial microaggressions more frequently, and Latinx students felt the greatest sense of belonging (Lewis et al., 2019). Also, a negative correlation was found between the frequency of microaggressions experienced by a student of color and their sense of belonging on campus. More microaggressions led to not feeling as if they belonged. For example, many students felt left out or excluded on campus. Also, one student's sense of belonging decreased after a peer's presentation, implying that African American students were inferior to their White peers. Racial microaggressions validate that racism is still present within higher education (Lewis et al., 2019). Therefore, it is critical that PWIs implement initiatives to make students of color feel welcomed and included on campus and not invisible.

I would like to expand the analysis of the effects of racial microaggressions outside the academic life of African American students. I do so to show the severity and urgency of

addressing this matter at a grassroots level. In the following paragraphs, I present various articles that show how microaggressions have negative psychological, physiological, and academic effects on the lives of African American students.

4.1.2.1.1 Psychological Effects

Racial microaggressions negatively affect African American undergraduate students psychologically. Smith et al. (2016) performed a qualitative study to demonstrate the effects of racial microaggressions on African American male students and how they contribute to racial battle fatigue. Racial battle fatigue describes how racist environments and structures, as well as white supremacy, affect the health of people of color. The qualitative study was informed through the experiences of 36 male students who identified as Black and attended seven historically White research-1 institutions that are considered prestigious.

Black students reported experiencing racial microaggressions and stereotyping as well as hyper-surveillance and control (Smith et al., 2016). For example, they related having problematic interpersonal interactions, being subject to racial slurs, and being treated as if they did not belong or as if they were criminals. In addition, Black students were stereotyped as criminal/predator, ghetto, athlete, and unintelligent. Faculty, students, and police officers enforced these racial microaggressions and stereotypes on African American male students. These were people in positions of power, which resulted in the students feeling as though Black males were more targeted and treated unfairly than other groups on their respective campuses. It also negatively affected them psychologically. For example, many experienced fear, anxiety, shock, and anger as a result. African American males were oppressed in the PWIs. As a consequence, racial microaggressions and hate towards African American males contributed to low graduation rates and racial battle fatigue.

A similar study was conducted by Freire and Hurd (2023), who sought to discover the negative impact of discrimination on college students' sense of belonging after a year of attending the university. This was done through a longitudinal study that was informed by surveying students who identified as a first-generation college student, a participant in the Pell Grant, or a racial or ethnic minority at a PWI. 28% of the students were African American, 17% were Asian, 11% were Hispanic/Latinx, 21% were multiracial, and 23% were White. The theoretical frameworks used were the minority stress theory by Meyer and the student departure theory by Tinto in 1987. The minority stress theory proposes that stressors arise from experiencing discrimination and prejudice, and the responses are similar to those of everyday stressors. It also seeks to understand how discrimination and prejudice impact a person mentally. The student departure theory proposes that the way in which a student adapts academically and socially at an institution contributes to their success and retention.

Students experiencing discrimination during their first semester led them to feel a lack of sense of belonging after one year of enrollment and depression and or stress after two years of enrollment (Freire & Hurd, 2023). This explicitly shows that students who experienced discrimination during their first year at college had negative long-term effects for the following years as it affected their sense of belonging. This proves that if minority students experience discrimination in their first year at a university, it can cause their sense of belonging to decrease in the next years. This can negatively impact a student's academics and social life, which can lead to a decrease in involvement in student organizations and other programs on campus.

It is also important to note that COVID-19 added to the negative effects that African American students experienced because of racial microaggressions (Francois et al., 2023). Francois et al. (2023) sought to examine the impact of COVID-19 and racial trauma on African

American students at PWIs through a quantitative study. It was informed through surveying 217

African American undergraduate students at PWIs working towards a degree in social work,

public health, or psychology. The theoretical framework used was the stress-strain-coping

theory. Stress-strain-coping theory seeks to examine and become aware of coping strategies

people of color use to manage and confront their personal, racial trauma.

The findings showed that stress and negative impacts of COVID-19 added to the stress

that undergraduate African American students already carried as a result of their racial trauma

from experiences with racial microaggressions on their PWI campus (Francois et al., 2023).

Consequently, the students had an average sense of belonging in their respective programs. It

was evident that many African American students were negatively impacted by COVID-19 and

racial microaggressions. Both COVID-19 and racial microaggressions inflicted stress that is

detrimental to the well-being and academic success of African American students at PWIs.

The three studies presented above show the psychological impact that racial

microaggressions and stereotyping cause on African American students attending PWIs

(Francois et al., 20223; Freire & Hurd, 2023; Smith et al., 2016). It is important to note that the

fear, anxiety, depression, racial battle fatigue, and other psychological effects experienced by the

students can have long-term consequences that can lead to students deciding to drop out of the

university. At the same time, external circumstances, such as the pandemic, contribute to the

added stress. This can also lead to physiological problems, a topic that is addressed in the

following section.

4.1.2.1.2 Physical Effects

To shed light upon the drastic effects of racial microaggressions on African American

students' physiological well-being, I address DeCuir-Gunby et al.'s (2023) qualitative study. It

was informed through interviews with 15 African American students who attend PWIs. CRT was

used to guide the process. The results revealed how racial microaggressions diminished the students' physical and emotional health and did not make them feel welcome on their campus.

All the participants in the study reported experiencing racial microaggressions at the PWI they attended (DeCuir-Gunby et al., 2023). Also, they said that it made them feel as though they were not welcome on campus. Students had different ways of coping with their experiences with racial microaggressions. For example, some resorted to violence, binge eating, therapy, and just avoiding the issues. This led to several of the students gaining weight, not being able to focus on their homework, and being depressed. It is evident that racial microaggressions negatively impact African American students at PWIs physically, emotionally, and academically.

Another study conducted by Franklin (2019) explored the negative effects of racial microaggressions on African American and Mexican American students. The quantitative study was informed by surveying 1,261 students who attended universities in various places across the United States. The students were a mix of undergraduate and graduate students and had varying demographics. African American students made up 239 of the submitted responses. It emphasized racial battle fatigue as it focused on the impact it has on their psychological, behavioral, and physiological health. Additionally, it examined the impact of coping on the racial health of these students. The quantitative study found that racial microaggressions resulted in a negative perception of the campus culture and climate of a university.

It was evident that African American students were impacted behaviorally and psychologically by racial microaggressions (Franklin, 2019). However, the results did not find that African American students were directly affected physiologically by racial microaggressions, despite what other literature has found in the past. As a result, it is suggested that the students may not have been completely aware of the physiological effects they may have

experienced from racial microaggressions, such as an increased heart rate and interrupted sleep. An important distinction from DeCuir-Gunby et al.'s (2023) study was that Franklin (2019) noted that among those African American students who decided to address the racial microaggressions, it lightened the weight of the negative impacts associated with racial microaggressions. This was proven to be true for African American students in regard to their behavioral and psychological health. The coping mechanisms that were most common amongst the students were acceptance and emotional support. Specifically for African American students, more students gravitated towards the coping mechanisms of religion, spirituality, and emotional support. More African American females coped with religion and spirituality. More African American males strived to take action when experiencing racial microaggressions. It is evident that a campus racial climate can negatively impact the health of African American students, yet their agency to address such injustices brought peace to their lives.

I want to make one last point regarding the effects of racial microaggressions, and that is that racial microaggressions transcend the students and can negatively impact a whole institution's culture, as exemplified below.

4.1.2.1.3 Institutional Corrosion

Solorzano et al. (2000) dove into a qualitative study to discover the impact of racial microaggressions and the stereotype threat on the academics of African American students. This qualitative study was informed through 10 focus groups with 34 African American students who attended predominantly White research institutions. CRT was used to analyze the results of the study that reveal how racial microaggressions and the stereotype threat negatively impacted African American students.

African American students addressed feeling invisible in their classes by faculty who held low expectations, by the lack of representation in the curricula, and by their peers who

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segregated them during group work (Solorzano et al., 2000). The racial microaggressions continued outside the classroom through racial tensions and not feeling welcomed in different buildings of the university. Racial microaggressions in classes were overall implicit, and racial microaggressions in social spaces were overall explicit. Racial microaggressions affect the racial climate in a negative way and cause African American students to think of themselves negatively and not do well academically. Despite the negative feelings caused by battling racial microaggressions, African American students encountered counter-spaces where students of color were able to surround themselves with people who looked like them and helped them navigate their academic experience. Actions, such as purposefully creating counter-spaces, need to be taken to address racial microaggressions. This will ensure students of color feel as though they belong and are supported, as racial microaggressions often negatively impact their college experience and academics. I will return to this latter point later in this paper. But first, I want to continue the discussion of how racial microaggressions impact the institutional climate.

Cabrera et al. (1999) explored the perceptions that African American and White students have on the racial climate of their campus and how it will impact how well they adjust and persist at the institution. This qualitative study was informed by 1,454 first-year students who participated in the National Study of Student Learning (NSSL). Of the total number of students, 1,139 were White and 315 were African American. The authors used the student adjustment model as well as the perceptions of the prejudice-discrimination model in their study. The student adjustment model seeks to understand the social and academic experiences students have at an institution.

The results revealed similarities and differences between White and African American students. A major similarity is that African American and White college students perceived

prejudice and discrimination the same (Cabrera et al., 1999). African American and White students had perceptions of a hostile campus culture and climate, which led to negative feelings about their college experience. As it has been presented before in this narrative literature review, it is found that a hostile campus culture and climate negatively affects African American students socially and their overall commitment to the institution. What is also relevant to note, though, is that a hostile campus culture and climate negatively affects the overall commitment that White students have to the institution. The results show that the adjustment to college is similar for students of color and students who are White. African American and White students are more likely to persist when they are well prepared and have family support, academic success, and positive experiences. A hostile campus culture and climate that consists of racism and discrimination decreases how committed students are to the university.

Although Cabrera et al. (1999) reported similar perceptions between White and African American students, the next study by Worthington et al. (2008) showed something different. Worthington et al. (2008) explored how color-blind racial attitudes and social dominance orientation differ between students who are White and those of color. This quantitative study was informed by 144 students who attended a PWI. The students varied in race and educational level. 18.1% were African American, 15.3% were Asian/Pacific Islander, 1.4% were Middle Eastern, 1.4% were Native American/Alaskan Native, 4.9% were Chicano/Latino/Hispanic, and 65.3% were White/Caucasian. There were 111 undergraduate students, 12 graduate students, and 21 professional students. The authors used the Color-Blind Racial Attitudes Scale (CoBRAS). The CoBRAS is used to analyze the degree to which students are aware of racial privileges, institutional racism, and blatant racism. This resulted in different perceptions of the general campus climate and the campus climate for students of color and White students at the PWI.

Students who were White had a more positive perception of the campus climate than students of color (Worthington et al., 2008). However, the authors offered a plausible explanation. Color-blind racial attitudes impacted the perceptions that White students had about the general campus climate and the campus climate. Students had more positive perceptions of the campus climates if they lacked the awareness of privilege attained by race, which can result in not being aware of microaggressions and interpersonal and systemic racism. Consequently, the perceptions of race-related issues on campus differed between students who were White and students of color. The authors recommended that universities stay far away from color-blind approaches. A student's race and ethnicity are critical in the way they view the campus climate, which is evident that race and ethnicity, as well as a variety of student perceptions, need to be considered when assessing a campus climate.

The last study presented in this section was done by D'Augelli and Hershberger (1993) and presented findings similar to those of Cabrera et al. (1999). D'Augelli and Hershberger (1993) sought to determine how academics, social settings, and the campus culture and climate impact African American students' experiences at a PWI. The quantitative study was informed by surveying 146 undergraduate students who attended a rural PWI. Of the 146 students, 73 were White, and 73 were African American. The theoretical framework used is Tinto's model from 1975. Specifically, Tinto's model considers a student's family background, prior experiences in high school, their social involvement in college, and their own personal beliefs.

There were stark differences between the experiences of the White students and African American students (D'Augelli & Hershberger, 1993). More African American students addressed awareness of discrimination faced than their White peers. African American students viewed the school in a more negative light compared to their White peers. The majority of the

African American students expected racism to be prevalent on the campus. One-third of the African American students experienced racism from faculty members. A great number of African American students experienced racism from White peers or knew someone who experienced it from White peers. African American students who experienced racism tended to have negative perceptions and feelings about the campus.

Conclusively, it is evident that many undergraduate African American students who attend PWIs are negatively impacted by racial microaggressions. This results in a decrease in their sense of belonging on campus. It is important for PWIs to take action to ensure undergraduate African American students feel as though they belong on the campus (Brezinski, 2018; Cabrera et al. 1999; D'Augelli & Hershberger, 1993; DeCuir-Gunby et al., 2023; Francois et al., 2023; Freire & Hurd, 2023; Lewis et al., 2019; Mills, 2020; Smith et al., 2016; Solorzano et al., 2016, Worthington et al., 2008). To do so, PWIs need to address racism, discrimination, and harassment (D'Augelli & Hershberger, 1993; Mills, 2020). Also, faculty and students need to be aware of the power and privilege they hold as well as the power and privilege held by others (Worthington et al., 2008). Additionally, PWIs need to prioritize the mental health of African American students. For example, they need to ensure students have access to resources and strategies to help them improve their mental health. Universities need to be adamant in making sure African American students have access to mental health resources, especially when additional stress is inflicted by racial tensions on and off campus (Francois et al., 2023). Finally, a variety of student perceptions need to be considered when assessing a campus climate. It is critical to stir away color-blind approaches for the commitment to advocating and working to foster a just, equitable, and inclusive campus climate (Worthington et al., 2008).

4.1.3 Resistance Strategies

In this section, I want to go back to an earlier point that addressed the ways in which African American students have resisted racial microaggressions through the organization of counter-spaces (Solorzano et al., 2000) or by finding emotional and spiritual support (Franklin, 2019). As such, I now shift focus. In this section, I will analyze the different types of strategies that undergraduate African American students have used to resist and cope with racial microaggressions.

Mills (2023) conducted a qualitative study to analyze the responses that Black undergraduate students have used to racial microaggressions. The qualitative study was conducted through interviews with 17 students. Of the 17 students, all were Black undergraduates and attended a public research institute. The theoretical framework used was the resilience theory.

One strategy the students used was taking the time to try to understand the perspective and intentions of people who used racial microaggressions (Mills, 2023). For example, one student thought about the fact that not everyone grows up and thinks the same way. Also, students became more aware of racial microaggressions, which prepared them to confront and deal with experiences with racial microaggressions. Another strategy students used was increasing their academic efforts. This helped them redirect their focus away from the racial microaggressions they experienced. One student used the anger and frustration from racial microaggressions as fuel to drive their academic performance because they believed that some people do not like to see Black people be successful. Another strategy students used was becoming more assertive. Experiences with racial microaggressions encouraged students to speak and stand up for themselves. Finally, students resisted cultural discontinuity, which is

when they refused practices that stripped away parts of their culture and identity. An example of one of these practices is code-switching, which describes when a person changes the way they speak based on the environment they are in. Specifically, the women who participated in the study explained how their choice to resist cultural discontinuity allowed them to gain confidence in their identity and culture as they did not diminish parts of themselves.

Another study that serves to exemplify resistance strategies on the side of African American students was conducted by Morales (2021). Morales performed a qualitative study to analyze how Black students used beasting to confront and combat racial microaggressions. Beasting is a strategy to combat and confront racial microaggressions through the development and use of counternarratives. Counternarratives work to address and challenge racial microaggressions and stereotypes while simultaneously educating the aggressor by providing a different perspective. The qualitative study was informed by interviewing 62 undergraduate students. All of the participants were Black who attended a research institute in California. The theoretical framework used is resistant capital. Resistant capital explains the benefits of people of color challenging the status quo.

The results found beasting to be an effective strategy for African American students to combat and confront racial microaggressions (Morales, 2021). Beasting provided students with the avenue to address the problem of racial microaggression and bring to light their experiences and stories. The counternarratives emphasized their intelligence and focused on Black history, culture, and experiences, as well as the differences in experiences within the Black community. For example, a student used beasting to combat racial microaggressions experienced by a professor regarding a grade received on an assignment. The student used counternarratives to address and challenge each comment from the professor, which resulted in a grade change.

Resistance capital is useful in analyzing how African American students combat racial

microaggressions by instilling confidence in themselves and the knowledge they possess. PWIs

need to implement training centered around racial microaggressions. Additionally, the need to

closely examine the curriculum being used for biases and lack of diversity and make the

necessary changes. Also, it is critical that they analyze the systems and policies in place to ensure

they are supportive and inclusive of African American students. African American students

should be encouraged and challenged by universities to tap into and utilize their resistance

capital.

Similarly, Jones and Reddick (2017) noted that activism serves to disrupt systems of

oppression and take actionable steps to find and implement solutions. In other words, student

activism is critical to help drive change at institutions. Jones and Reddick (2017) performed a

case study to analyze the barriers Black student leaders encounter as they participate in activism

and try to make changes on campus. The study was conducted through interviews held with ten

Black students at a PWI. These students were identified as leaders through their involvement and

roles within student organizations, both predominantly White and predominantly Black. These

students were also making conscious efforts to drive change on the campus. The theoretical

framework used is the social identity theory. The social identity theory examines how one's

identity is influenced based on their membership in a group.

Despite their leadership and involvement in predominantly Black student organizations,

the students realized the necessity of also being involved and leaders in predominantly White

student organizations (Jones & Reddick, 2017). This required them to be uncomfortable as they

worked to disrupt systems of oppression in place. They addressed issues such as tokenism. The

students saw and understood the need to occupy White spaces so that the voices of the Black

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community would be heard. Although their voices were heard and their presence noticed, the students realized a lack of effort and action toward making institutional changes. For example, racist incidents with predominantly White student organizations were often swept under the rug. Also, predominantly Black student organizations were handed money but no true support. It should be noted here that this fight for change was exhausting for Black students as they are fighting an uphill battle, all while working to keep up with their academics and relationships with others. Thus, it is imperative to have the support of the institution to help battle racial injustices.

In conclusion, undergraduate African American students used a variety of positive strategies to resist racial microaggressions (Franklin, 2019; Mills, 2023). One way to do this is through counternarratives. Counternarratives, through strategies like beasting, are helpful in combating and confronting racial microaggressions (Morales, 2021). Additionally, engaging in activism allows students to use their voices to help disrupt systems of oppression on campus and help drive institutional change (Jones & Reddick, 2017). However, I must highlight the need for institutions to actively monitor systems in place that serve to marginalize African American students. In other words, PWIs need to ensure people are held accountable for their racist and discriminatory actions, which will, in turn, allow undergraduate African American students to feel seen and heard (Foxx, 2021; Jones & Reddick, 2017). Thus, in the next section, I explore the ways in which HBCUs have supported the academic journeys and sense of belonging of African American students. I do so to try to provide some strategies that PWIs can use to better the racial climate at their institutions and consequently enhance the sense of belonging of African American students in PWIs.

4.2 Sense of Belonging at HBCUs

HBCUs have been designed and built to educate and support African American students (Harper et al., 2009). Consequently, their practices have served to retain undergraduate African American students at higher rates than most PWIs. In the majority of cases, HBCUs provide African American students with an equitable education as opposed to PWIs, where African American students are the minority (Harper et al., 2009). As a result, students tend to do better academically at HBCUs (Price & Viceisza, 2023). In this section, I will present the articles that analyze the experiences and sense of belonging undergraduate African American students have at HBCUs compared to the experiences and sense of belonging undergraduate African American students have at PWIs.

The study completed by Campbell et al. (2019) sought to determine the impact of racial sensitivity on an African American student's college experience at an HBCU and PWI. The qualitative study was informed by results from the African American Daily Life Experiences (AADLX) study. This included 352 African American students from PWIs and HBCUs. Two hundred forty-six of the students attended a PWI in either the South or the Midwest. The remaining 106 students attended an HBCU in the Southeast. The theoretical framework used was the universal context of racism (UCR). The UCR seeks to explain that groups who often experience racism and discrimination are hyper-aware of the fact that there is a good chance they will be treated unfairly due to the color of their skin.

Using a cultural lens when examining the world increases the chance for an African American student to perceive a situation as racially motivated (Campbell et al., 2019). For example, African American students at the PWI tended to not feel like they belonged on the campus. In contrast, students who attended the HBCU had stronger racial identities and higher

GPAs. Regardless, even when attending different university campuses, students showed to engage in behaviors to detect, interpret, and avoid racism. What is more, it was evident that many African American students experience racial discrimination on or off campus despite the school they attend.

Racial tensions in the outside world influence the college experience that undergraduate African American students have (Williams et al., 2021). Williams et al. (2021) conducted a qualitative study to analyze the negative impact Donald Trump had on the racial climate of the United States, which caused more African American students to enroll in HBCUs as opposed to PWIs. The qualitative study was informed by interviewing 80 students. Each student identified as Black or African American and began at one of four chosen HBCUs in the year 2017 or the year of 2018. The authors used social constructivism. Social constructivism describes the process of researchers presenting with participants of the study in their given environment. It allows the researchers to gain insight into how the participants view their world based on those they are surrounded by.

Common themes arose from the participants of the study as to why they chose to attend an HBCU (Williams et al., 2021). Even though they were accepted into a PWI, many expressed that they did not feel welcomed when touring the campus as they could feel the tension. They also mentioned how their experiences in high school with microaggressions from teachers and peers in high school and the conversations surrounding Trump's election and presidency made them not want to have those experiences again when attending a PWI. Stories in the media of riots and other African American students attending PWIs made many participants reconsider their decision as they feared they would feel unsafe at a PWI because they were African American. They perceived HBCUs to be a safer place for African American students as the

majority of faculty and staff would look like them. Many participants perceived HBCUs as places where they could unapologetically be themselves and embrace their race and culture. It would also provide them with the opportunity to learn about their culture and experience being a part of the majority instead of a minority. Family members or other people they looked up to having attended an HBCU impacted the choice of some of the participants to attend, too. Williams et al. (2021) concluded that PWIs need to implement continuous opportunities for staff and students to participate in implicit bias training. Additionally, they need to be diligent in recruiting and retaining faculty of color.

To provide an explanation for why African American students at HBCUs tend to be more successful academically than those at PWIs, Price and Viceisza (2023) conducted a qualitative study. This qualitative study was informed through the analysis of data and information from numerous previous studies. The findings demonstrated the systems and structures in place at HBCUs that support African American students.

The continuous activism and fight for justice from HBCUs instill a sense of purpose and belonging in African Americans inside and outside of the classroom (Price & Viceisza, 2023). In turn, this has led to graduates assuming government, university, and activist roles. African American students are the majority, providing them a safe space to embrace and express themselves and their culture as they are less prone to the stereotype threat and the need and pressure to suppress their culture and identity for the dominant culture. More students report feeling supported by faculty members and participating in paid internships than their peers at PWIs. African American culture is included in the curriculum that students receive, especially during their freshman year. Price and Viceisza (2023) suggest that PWIs need to ensure African American students see themselves in the curriculum and faculty so that they can feel a great

sense of belonging with opportunities in which they can freely express themselves and their culture.

Similarly, the qualitative study conducted by Allen (1992) also found the weight that faculty involvement in African American students' lives has towards supporting their sense of belonging. Allen (1992) examined how individual characteristics like previous academic experiences and ambition, as well as the academics, relationships built, and the culture and climate on campus, impact an African American student's academics in college. The quantitative study was conducted through questionnaires over two years. 2,531 Black students participated in the questionnaires. Nine hundred fifty-three of the students attended HBCUs, and 1,578 of the students attended PWIs and HBCUs.

The study found that African American students performed better academically if they felt confident in their college decision, really wanted to earn a degree, and positively interacted with faculty members on campus (Allen, 1992). These factors, as well as having positive relationships with peers who are African American and White, increased student involvement socially. African American students at HBCUs overall performed better academically and had better relationships with faculty members despite not having the best grades in high school compared to those students who attended PWIs. Students had more confidence in themselves if their career choice was in a field that would increase power and privilege. Compared to African American males, African American females tend to be more confident in themselves. They also tend to perform better academically in high school. There is evidence that African American students' college experience and academics were impacted by campus culture and climate along with their personal characteristics. African American students tend to feel more accepted, welcomed, and valued at HBCUs. HBCUs provide a safer and more supportive space and

environment for African American students than PWIs. This highlights the need for universities to foster an environment where everyone feels welcomed and valued.

An additional study that takes note of the effect that gender has on African American students was the qualitative study completed by Chavous et al. (2004). The authors addressed the impact of stereotypes and gender on African American students who attend an HBCU as well as a PWI. The quantitative study was informed by surveying a total of 277 African American undergraduate students. One hundred forty-three of the students attended a PWI in the Midwest. The remaining 134 students attended an HBCU in the South. The theoretical framework used is the stereotype threat.

The findings prove that stereotypes have different impacts on African American men and women students as well as African American students who attend PWIs and HBCUs (Chavous et al., 2004). For example, students who attended the PWI experienced more stereotypes in their classes than the students at the HBCU. Students at both institutions experienced the same stereotypes in their majors despite their gender. Men who attended the PWI and did not often anticipate racial stereotypes tended to have greater academic success. African American men and women responded differently to their experiences on campus. There tended to be more African American women on campus, which could have caused African American men to be more impacted by stereotypes because they did not have as much support from people who looked like them and shared similar experiences. African American women tended to be more invisible as opposed to African American men, who tended to be more visible at PWIs. Women who attended the HBCU and did not often anticipate racial stereotypes tended to have greater academic success. African American students at PWIs tended to have an experience with race at the center. However, African American students at HBCUs tended to have an experience with

race and gender at the center. This implies that the impact of racial stereotypes on African American students is affected by their gender and the institution they attend.

Conclusively, the experiences of African American students at PWIs and HBCUs are not the same for all African American students. Consequently, PWIs need to collaborate with HBCUs to know how to better support and improve the academic performance of African American students. As a starting point, it is important to be aware of stereotypes and the impacts they have on African American men and women (Chavous et al., 2004). It is critical to survey the campus climate and involve faculty and students in the conversation around the racial climate on and off campus to drive a campus action plan to be implemented to ensure all students feel safe and welcome on campus (Campbell et al., 2019, Chavous et al., 2004, Williams et al., 2021). PWIs should ensure that the African American culture is implemented into courses that students take during their freshman year. Students and faculty need to be educated and trained on diversity, equity, and inclusion topics to ensure everyone is working to foster a sense of inclusion and belonging for everyone (Price & Viceisza, 2023; Williams et al., 2021). Finally, students need to be given opportunities to engage in social justice and activism (Price & Viceisza, 2023). Table 1.2 below summarizes the significant differences between PWIs and HBCUs presented so far. The last section of this narrative literature review will seek to further the discussion on how to increase the sense of belonging at PWIs.

Table 1.2 PWIs vs. HBCUs

PWIs	HBCUs

• Racist systems in place
 • Deficit lens is often used to view African American students
 • Barriers for undergraduate African Americans to attain an education
 • Lack of representation in curriculum and among faculty
   o Struggle to retain undergraduate African American students
 (Harper et al., 2019)
	• Built to support African American students
	 • Asset-based frameworks used for continuous activism and fight for justice
	 • African American students tend to perform better academically
	 • Representation in curriculum and among faculty
	   o Retain undergraduate African American students at higher rates than PWIs
	 (Price & Viceisza, 2023)

4.3 Strategies to Increase Sense of Belonging at PWIs

Based on the results from the peer-reviewed studies above, I have shown the urgency that PWIs need to commit to institutional and systemic change. I have also noted that PWIs need to ensure that undergraduate African Americans who are enrolled have a stable and consistent sense of belonging throughout the duration of their college educational journey. The following section seeks to extend the conversation on resistance strategies and provides specific ideas and recommendations for PWIs to implement and finetune current systems to help increase the sense of belonging of undergraduate African American students. I present articles that highlight the findings of faculty-to-student and peer-to-peer mentoring, as well as extracurricular involvement. It is important to remember that CRT has as its tenets the challenge to the dominant ideology, the commitment to social justice, and the centrality of experiential knowledge (Solorzano et al., 2000), which will become evident in the following articles.

4.3.1 Mentoring

Up to this point, I have shown some of the strategies that African American students have taken. Yet, it is important to highlight the shared responsibility of faculty and peers towards creating an inclusive and welcoming campus. Thus, in this section, I focus mainly on mentoring. This is because a major step to helping African American students build a sense of belonging at PWIs is through mentoring. In this section, I will address the need for validating faculty-to-student mentoring and peer-to-peer mentoring experiences.

4.3.1.1 Faculty-to-Student Mentoring

First, I address the significance of faculty-to-student mentoring on African American students' sense of belonging at PWIs. Lee (1999) conducted a qualitative study to demonstrate that the need for informal and formal experiences with faculty on campus is critical to retaining

African American students at PWIs. This qualitative study was conducted by interviewing 120 undergraduate African American students who were a part of the Transition Program at North Carolina State University. The theoretical framework used is Tinto's retention model.

The findings revealed the benefits of mentoring on African American students at PWIs (Lee, 1999). Lee considered that African American students have an added layer to their transition onto the campus of a PWI as they have to learn the campus culture and climate that reflects the dominant race and culture. In doing so, Lee argued, African American students need to not lose and diminish parts of their own culture. Thus, an African American student can benefit from having a faculty member as their mentor. Lee found that the race of the faculty member was not critical. Instead, having quality, positive, and meaningful interactions is critical to helping African American students be successful. African American students expressed that they would prefer a mentor who is in their career field.

On the other hand, a more recent study found benefits to undergraduate African American students having a mentor of the same race (Griffith et al., 2019). A qualitative study by Griffith et al. (2019) analyzed how Black students at a PWI coped with stressors that stemmed from race and what role a mentor played in this process. The study was conducted by interviewing 12 students who were Black. Of the 12 students, eight were African American, two were Nigerian, one was Kenyan, and one was African American and White. Interviews were also conducted with ten adults who were Black and served as mentors to one of the students on topics surrounding race and ethnicity.

Students experienced a variety of stressors related to their race (Griffith et al., 2019). One of the stressors was the stereotype threat. They were aware of negative stereotypes about Black people, and they were mindful of their actions so they would not be perceived as living up to

those stereotypes. Another stressor was explicit discrimination, such as exclusion from parties and the use of the N-word. The last stressor was microinsults. Microinsults are forms of microaggressions that are slight and not purposeful. Regardless of the intent, they still address a racial group in a negative way. Students coped with these stressors in a few ways. However, most students used the strategy of finding someone to support them. Students expressed that having a mentor of the same race was critical to helping them navigate and process their experiences with racism. They wanted someone who shared similar experiences and values as them, whether it was someone on campus or off campus. The students also utilized resources on campus, such as student organizations. Having support from people who understood and could relate to what they were going through made them feel validated in their experiences and emotions.

Similarly, Foxx (2021) conducted a qualitative study to analyze the impact of institutional agents of PWIs on establishing a sense of belonging for Black students. The qualitative study was conducted through interviews and demographic data of five self-identified Black undergraduate students at a PWI. One student was a third-year student who transferred to the school, three students were freshmen, and one was a sophomore. The theoretical framework used is the socio-ecological model created by Allen et al. in 2016. It is centered around Brofenbrenner's ecological model of education in 1979 to explain how the various aspects of a school system contribute to the level at which students feel as though they belong at the school they attend.

It was found that safe spaces and a sense of belonging were cultivated in the people they interacted with positively on campus (Foxx, 2021). This caused feelings of belonging to be dependent on the people at the specific campus location and not the actual location itself. All

students found a sense of belonging in the student organization they were a part of. Three students made connections in their residence hall. All students expressed the need for acceptance and support from their peers as it allowed them to be heard and be themselves. Additionally, all students wanted support regarding academics, finances, and social aspects. Validation and acknowledgment from people with whom they interacted on campus made them feel supported. The need and want for tools and resources related to academics and finances inclined three students to connect with faculty and organizations. Some students gained support through professors who looked like them and counselors who were from the Multicultural Center. However, it is important to note that the support they experienced was based on the interactions they had with the people and not their race. More than anything, the students appreciated it when people at the institution checked in, contacted, and offered them resources. Interacting with and finding others who could relate to them and understand their culture made the students feel understood. Four students highlighted the value and importance of the Black community on campus due to shared culture and experiences. This led to the students being inclined to connect with peers who looked like them as support and care came with people who shared their culture and experiences. Peer-to-peer mentoring is further explored in the following section.

4.3.1.2 Peer-to-Peer Mentoring

Now, I seek to address peer-to-peer mentoring relationships and how they support the increase of the sense of belonging of African American students at PWIs. Harper (2013) conducted a qualitative study to analyze the ways in which Black undergraduate students educate and help their peers persist at a PWI. The study was informed through the National Black Male College Achievement Study. This study revealed data from interviews with 219 participants. All the participants were Black men and undergraduate students at PWIs and HBCUs. A few shared

qualities of the participants were that they were student organization leaders, earned

scholarships, and had a GPA that was higher than 3.0. The study highlights the results of the

students who attended PWIs. The theoretical framework used is the anti-deficit achievement

framework. The anti-deficit achievement framework seeks to analyze the positive aspects of the

college experiences of Black men despite the challenges they face.

Students played a significant role in educating their peers on how to survive at the PWI as

students of color (Harper, 2013). Having peers do this for them inspired them to do it for others.

This was evident in the leadership roles they acquired in residence halls and student

organizations. Participants highlighted the importance of ethnic student organizations. It was

critical that time was dedicated to allowing members to share their experiences on campus. This

gave members the opportunity to connect and relate to one another. They were able to

collaborate and educate each other on ways to respond and combat their racist experiences.

Many expressed the value of having their peers open their eyes and help them persist through the

challenging times at the university.

Overall, mentoring, either faculty-to-student or peer-to-peer mentoring, extends beyond

finding mentoring relationships based solely on racial parity and seeks to include validation,

empowerment, and understanding of African American students' unique lived experiences. Thus,

in the following section, I address one additional way to support the increased sense of belonging

of African American students at PWIs.

4.3.2 Extracurricular Involvement

Extracurriculars provide undergraduate African American students at PWIs with

opportunities to become more involved and connected on campus (Wittrup & Hurd, 2021).

Wittrup and Hurd (2021) conducted a quantitative study to examine the benefits of

undergraduate minority student involvement during their first year on a PWI. The study was informed by surveying 340 students who attended a PWI. It was their first year at the PWI. Of the 340 students, 29% were Black/African American, 23% were White, 20% were Multiracial, 17% were Asian, 10% were Hispanic/Latino, and less than 1% were American Indian/Alaskan Native.

Students with higher involvement in extracurricular activities did not have as many symptoms of depression in the fall (Wittrup & Hurd, 2021). They also did not have as many feelings of homesickness. The results show that if students of color get involved in extracurricular activities, such as intramurals and ethnic organizations, during their first year, it can help improve their sense of belonging as they transition to a PWI campus (Wittrup & Hurd, 2021).

4.3.2.1 Transition Programs

Transition programs target students from underrepresented groups to help them create a strong foundation through things like building connections, setting goals, and managing their time (Lee & Barnes, 2015). The authors sought to show how African American students benefit academically and socially at PWIs from being a part of a transition program by examining two previous studies on the impact of Summer Bridge Programs at PWIs on students of color, with a greater number of African American students.

The results found that participation in a transition program positively impacted undergraduate African American students at PWIs (Lee & Barnes, 2015). First, it increases involvement on campus and academic success for these students. Also, they tend to increase a student's self-efficacy in regard to academics (Lee & Barnes, 2015). However, it does not necessarily increase a student's sense of belonging on campus and help them deal with racism

and discrimination. Consequently, it is critical that PWIs rework their transition programs. It implies that it is important to implement a culturally responsive curriculum and discussions centered around how African American students are impacted by racism and discrimination. Universities need to be aware of racist and discriminatory practices and ideologies. Faculty and students need to participate in diversity, equity, and inclusion training. High expectations need to be placed on faculty members to ensure they are creating safe and inclusive environments for African American students. There are many benefits to transition programs at PWIs. However, they need to make the necessary changes to ensure African American students know they are welcomed and valued at the university.

4.3.2.2 Living Learning Communities

Living learning communities are beneficial in helping African American students establish a sense of belonging at a PWI, where students are provided with the opportunity to live in close proximity to peers who have some of the same interests (Strayhorn, 2023). For example, they could all be the same major. Strayhorn (2023) conducted a quantitative study that sought to determine if participating in living learning communities impacted the sense of belonging of Black students who attended PWIs differently than Black students who attended HBCUs. The study was informed by some of the results from a previous study completed through the National Study of Student Engagement (NSSE) that involved 44,000 students and 650 campuses in the United States. However, this specific study included 17,326 students who were Black and attended a PWI or HBCU.

It was evident that living learning communities were beneficial in helping African American students establish a sense of belonging at a PWI (Strayhorn, 2023). Overall, Black students who participated in living learning communities had a greater sense of belonging than

Black students who did not participate in living learning communities. This was evident at both PWIs and HBCUs. More specifically, Black students who participated in living learning communities and attended PWIs showed to have the greatest sense of belonging.

In conclusion, faculty and staff at PWIs should encourage undergraduate African American students to form validating mentoring relationships and get involved in extracurriculars on campus as they can help improve their sense of belonging. Mentoring from faculty and peers of the same race is beneficial for students. At the same time, it is important that African American students have mentors who are able to relate to or who share similar experiences. This is critical to help them navigate the thoughts and feelings that arise from experiencing racial microaggressions (Harper, 2013; Griffith et al., 2021). Another way is for students to engage in transition programs, as they tend to increase the academic and social involvement of African American students. These programs need to be culturally responsive. That is, there needs to be discussions centered around how African American students are impacted by racism and discrimination. Universities need to be aware of racist and discriminatory practices and ideologies. Faculty and students need to participate in diversity, equity, and inclusion training. High expectations need to be placed on faculty members to ensure they are creating safe and inclusive environments for African American students (Lee & Barnes, 2015).

All in all, the above studies show the importance of strategies being implemented as early as African American students enter college and the active role faculty, staff, and other students must take to enhance the sense of belonging of African American students and, consequently, their academic success.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

In this narrative literature review, I argued that institutional racism has negative effects on the sense of belonging of undergraduate African American students at PWIs. I used previous studies to examine how stereotypes and racial microaggressions immensely contribute to a lack of sense of belonging of undergraduate African American students at PWIs. I revealed strategies undergraduate African American students use to resist racial microaggressions. These strategies were creating counternarratives, and activism. Then, I analyzed the sense of belonging of undergraduate students at HBCUs. This was done through a comparative analysis of the experiences and sense of belonging of undergraduate African American students at HBCUs and the experiences and sense of belonging of undergraduate African American students at PWIs. After distinguishing between the sense of belonging of undergraduate African American students at PWIs and HBCUs, I provided strategies for implementation at PWIs to increase the sense of belonging of undergraduate African American students. The implementation strategies are dependent on the faculty members at PWIs. As a result, it is important that faculty members, including those of color, feel a sense of belonging at PWIs so they can then ensure undergraduate African American students feel a sense of belonging as well. Since the sense of belonging of many undergraduate African American students at PWIs is negatively impacted by institutional racism, it is important to analyze the negative impacts of institutional racism on the sense of belonging of faculty members of color. However, further research is needed as the sense of belonging of faculty members of color at PWIs is outside of the scope of my research.

This narrative literature review is needed for several reasons. First, it provides insight into the experiences of undergraduate African American students at PWIs. Also, it surfaces institutional racism that is present at PWIs and the negative impacts it has on undergraduate

African American students psychologically, physically, and academically. Third, it highlights the importance of addressing institutional racism present at PWIs. Finally, it provides ways for educators to better support and advocate for undergraduate African American students at PWIs. Additional research is needed as it is evident that there is a dire need for structural changes to occur to ensure that undergraduate African American students at PWIs have a consistent and stable sense of belonging. For example, institutions need to reassess and make changes to their student and faculty recruitment processes. PWIs continuously put action on the back burner and turn a blind eye to institutional racism to protect white supremacy and white fragility at the expense of undergraduate African American students.

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Vita

My name is Kate Jefferson. I am a licensed general and special education elementary school, Pk-3 teacher and have been teaching for three years. I earned my bachelor's degree in Inclusive Early Childhood Education from Bowling Green State University (BGSU), in Bowling Green Ohio. I graduated Summa Cum Laude in May of 2021. Currently, I am a third-grade general education teacher in Ohio. In addition to my position as a classroom teacher, I have also assumed various leadership roles. For example, I am a member of the Building Leadership Team and Tier 2 team. Additionally, I lead Poetry Club for fourth through sixth grade students and I have been the site liaison and Girls on the Run coach for third through fifth grade students. Finally, I head the Black History Month Committee and help drive diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) initiatives throughout the school.

While pursuing my undergraduate degree at BGSU, I co-founded the student organization Inclusive Culturally Responsive Educators (ICRE) in 2019. The purpose is to promote culturally responsive teaching and educate faculty and preservice teachers on the topics of diversity, equity, and social justice. Also, I assisted in the development of and was a teaching assistant for the course Problems in Education. Post graduation, I assumed the role as a researcher and curriculum developer position with BGSU. I collaborated with faculty to create a DEI curriculum for professors to embed in their education courses to better prepare preservice teachers. My colleagues and I presented our innovation and findings at the Ohio Council for Social Studies Conference (OCSS) at Capital University. My K-12 and higher education inspired me to pursue my Master's in Education with a Concentration in Diversity, Equity, and Social Justice in Education from the University of Texas at El Paso.

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